



## "REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

### "RIDING THROUGH"

## THE BOOK OF ACTS-LESSON 26

In this week's lesson, Paul is allowed the opportunity to present his defense before King Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus. We need to remember that Paul was not on trial. He was merely there to satisfy the curiosity of King Agrippa and provide Festus with some information to write an accusation to send to Rome. It is possible that Paul could have refused this meeting, but instead he used the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. This is Paul's longest speech recorded in the Book of Acts.

It's amazing that the man who was in chains seemed to be the one who was in control of the situation. Abraham Lincoln once said, "My great concern is not whether God is on my side; my great concern is to be on God's side." Truly, Paul was on God's side. Romans 8:31 says, "If God is for me, who can be against me?"

### First Day

1. Read Acts 26:1-32. Write down any questions you have.
2. What are the key words or phrases? What is the main point? What would you title this chapter?
3. Who is doing most of the speaking? Who's he speaking to? Where is he? How did the speaker present himself? (Confident? Assured? Fearful?)
4. Before studying any further, what application do you immediately find for yourself?

5. Read verses 1-3 again. What was Paul's attitude toward King Agrippa?

I imagine that Paul was very happy to finally be allowed to speak for himself, and respond to the accusations of the Jews. Paul begins his speech with a respectful salute.

6. What does Paul call Agrippa in verse 3?

Paul was genuinely pleased to speak to Agrippa rather than Festus. Being half Jew, King Agrippa was much more knowledgeable about the affairs of the Jewish people. It is said that the Herods had a tremendous fascination with the Jewish traditions and customs. They studied them, they read Jewish history, and were intrigued by their culture. He understood much more than Festus, who was basically ignorant of the Jewish religion.

Although Agrippa was familiar and intrigued, it was this same man who helped Titus destroy Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. His interest was obviously more intellectual than heartfelt.

7. Why did Paul ask Agrippa to be patient?

8. What fruit of the Spirit was Paul showing by how he handled himself at this meeting? (Galatians 5:22-23)

This ends our lesson for today. As we again read Paul's testimony, I pray that we all are reminded about God's forgiveness and love. Let's pray and ask God to use Paul's testimony this week to teach us something about ourselves, and about Him.

**Memory Verse of the Week:** "... that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles." Acts 26:23

## Second Day

**Review your memory verse. Meditate on it today. What does it mean to you?**

1. Read Acts 26:1-11. Reread verses 4-11.

Paul does not hesitate to share his sinful past with his audience. Some people think that their past will affect how people view them in the present. But Paul risks the embarrassment of what others will think, for the opportunity to give God the glory He deserves. He was not afraid to confess who he once was.

In his commentary on Acts, William Barclay shares the following story: "There was a famous evangelist called Brownlow North. In his early days, he lived a life that was anything but Christian. Once, just before he was to enter the pulpit in a church in Aberdeen, he received a letter. This letter informed him that its writer had evidence of some disgraceful thing which Brownlow had done before he became a Christian, and it went on to say that the writer proposes to interrupt the service and to tell the whole congregation of that sin if he preached. Brownlow took the letter into the pulpit, he read it to the congregation, he told of the thing he once had done, and then told them that Christ had changed him and that Christ could do the same for them. He used the very evidence of his shame to turn it to the glory of Christ."

2. Have you ever been embarrassed of who you were before you knew Christ?  
Has it ever hindered you from sharing with someone who knew you then?  
How can YOU use your testimony for God's glory? What can we learn from Paul?

It's clear to us in this chapter that the whole key of Paul's message was the resurrection. Jesus was not only the one who lived and died, but the one who is present and alive forevermore! Paul celebrated Easter every day.

In verses 4-11, Paul begins to tell of his past life as a Pharisee.

3. Why was it important to Paul that Agrippa knew that he was a Pharisee?

4. In verse 6, what does Paul say that he is being accused of?

Paul begins by establishing some common ground between their beliefs. The Pharisees and the Christians both believed in a resurrection of the dead. This was one of the most common beliefs of Judaism, and it was the very heart of their accusations against him. He was not rejecting their belief, as they claimed, but was proclaiming Jesus as that long-awaited Messiah. All twelve tribes of Israel were united in having a distinct hope that set them apart from mankind. That hope was that someday God would send a Savior into the world that would redeem His people from the power and penalty of sin. Paul claims that the "hope of the promise made by God" is Jesus Christ.

Israel's hope lay in the promise of a coming Kinsman Redeemer to be mankind's Savior. In the New Testament, the word "hope" is magnified and centered in the Lord Jesus, whose second coming is now the "blessed hope" of the church (Titus 2:13).

Paul's argument in verse 8 was that the Jews were accusing him of something they believed themselves.

5. Who are the twelve tribes that Paul is referring to? Read Genesis 35:22-26, 49:1-28, and Numbers 1:1-46. Please write a brief summary of who they are. (Please study further if you have additional questions.)

We read in Revelation 7:1-8 about the twelve tribes. During the last days, 144,000 righteous Jewish men will be chosen from these twelve tribes to be sealed on their foreheads, to be servants of God. We are not told exactly what they will do, but most likely they will be witnesses to the world for Christ.

6. Read Paul's statement in verse 9. What was he trying to do? Why was he saying so much about how he persecuted the church?

Paul was using the testimony of his past to relate to his audience. King Agrippa had come from a long line of Christian haters. Paul was using wisdom as he chose to elaborate on the thing that they once had in common.

7. Has God ever had you share your testimony with someone who experienced some of the same things as you? Can you share it with the group?
  
8. What does Paul say about our experiences in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7?
  
9. Can our testimony still be used if we have never experienced what the person is going through? (Here's a hint: Did Jesus have to be a drunk to share with a drunkard?)
  
10. Have you ever been hindered in sharing because you didn't feel like you could relate? What should we remember? What is the thing that changes lives -- our testimony, or the power of God?

This ends our lesson for today. Is the Resurrection the central theme when you share with others? Isn't that the most important "**Reason to Rejoice**"? I'll say it is. We live only because He lives!!!! Amen!

### Third Day

**Review your memory verse.**

Paul now shares his testimony, which is the most dramatic conversion recorded in history. No wonder he likes to tell it so much!

1. Read Acts 26:12-18. What was Paul on his way to do when he met Jesus on that road to Damascus?

2. What were you doing, or on your way to do, when you met Christ?

3. At what time of day did this happen? (Paul's experience)

It's interesting that Paul brings out what time of day it was. Most people rested during the midday because of the severe heat. This shows us the intensity in which Paul was after the Christians. He wouldn't rest until he found them.

4. Do you remember what a goad is? (verse 14) Refer back to lesson 9.

5. How were you kicking against the goads? Can a believer still kick against the goads? Are you?

In verses 16-18, Paul tells Agrippa about his God-given destiny to proclaim the Gospel to the entire world, including the Gentiles. These verses combine his commission on the Road to Damascus (9:6, 22:10), the charge to him by the Lord through Ananias (9:15, 22:14), and the divine command given to him in the temple (22:17-18).

6. In verse 16, what is the first thing Jesus told Paul to do?

7. Who else was summoned in this way when receiving his commission?  
Read Ezekiel 2:1.

8. Jesus tells Paul the purpose for appearing to him in verse 16. What was it?  
How would this be accomplished?

9. Verses 17 and 18 give a great summary of five things Christ did for man. What are they?
  
10. How was Christ able to do this for man?
  
11. Meditate on the five things that Christ did for you. Do you understand each one? Would you be able to explain them to someone? These are crucial to know and understand. If you have any questions, see your group leader, or do some studying!

This ends our study for today. It's not hard to find something to rejoice about in today's lesson, is it? Belonging to God instead of Satan is a biggie! What about the forgiveness of sin, or the inheritance we have? **Psalm 111:9 says, "Holy and awesome is His name."** Amen to that!

#### Fourth Day

**What's your memory verse? This is an important one to remember.**

Paul now begins to tell his audience how God changed his life. He basically describes his life as a Christian in a nutshell, saying that he could not ignore the voice of God, and that he had to be obedient to what God called him to do.

1. Read Acts 26:19-23
  
2. In verse 20, what three things are included in Paul's message to the people? Can you find additional Scriptures that teach these commands?

The Greek word for repent literally means to "change one's mind and actions." Barclay says that it involves sorrow for what we have been and it involves the resolve that by the grace of God we will be changed.

3. What are "works befitting repentance"? (vs 20)
  
4. Does your life show "works befitting repentance"? Have you made the changes that God desires? Are you continuing in a sin that God has clearly told you to repent from? What does that tell you?
  
5. Paul tells Agrippa that he couldn't ignore the voice of God. Can you? Are you ignoring it because you don't like what He's saying, or because you're not listening? Maybe you don't even hear Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart on this matter. I believe we often ignore the voice of the Almighty. God forgive us ...
  
6. Does repentance mean that we'll never repeat the same sin again? Why or why not?

To repent, I believe that we need to see sin just as God does. He hates it -- He abhors it. William Barclay said, "The man who has come to know the love of God in Jesus Christ knows that if he sins, he does not only break God's law, he breaks God's heart."

Repentance has never been a popular message, has it? Noah preached as he built the ark. Amos was threatened because he was preaching. Jeremiah was cast into a dungeon. Daniel spent the night with some lions. John the Baptist was beheaded. Paul was persecuted. Jesus was crucified. What were they all preaching? You got it! Repentance!



7. Why is repentance such an important issue? Why should it be a key point as we share with people? Can you give Scriptures to support your answer?
8. Do you include "repentance" when you share with others? What reaction do we sometimes get? Should it matter?

In verse 22, Paul says that it was his dedication to the message of Christ, based upon the Old Testament Scriptures that caused the horrible trouble in Jerusalem. And it was the Old Testament and the prophets that foretold the Messiah's suffering and resurrection.

9. Paul gives the Gospel in verse 23. Why does he call Jesus the "first to rise"? Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-23 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18. Who else will rise?

If we don't believe in the Resurrection, what's the point? Paul says that "if we only have hope in Christ in this life, we are of all men the most pitiable"! The resurrection is what we stand on!

10. How does the fact of the resurrection affect how you live your life? (Or does it?) How does it give us hope?

We will end here for today. Tomorrow Paul brings it on home. He brings Agrippa face to face with a decision. Have you made a decision yet for Christ?

### Fifth Day

**Write your verse by memory. Spend some time thanking Him for rising from the dead!**

1. Read Acts 26:24-32.
2. What was Festus' reaction to Paul's message?

Paul very eloquently answers Festus, and puts the ball back in the court of Agrippa. He doesn't allow Festus to take the stage! By the way, who was the real madman there?

3. How does Paul bring Agrippa face to face with a decision? What does he ask him?
4. What was Agrippa's response?

His response has been interpreted many ways by commentators. It is unclear how he said this and what exactly he meant by it. Some think his statement was a trivial jest; some say it was bitter sarcasm, a grave irony, a burst of anger, or maybe an expression of sincere conviction.

5. Read Paul's response in verse 29. How does this statement reveal Paul's heart? Did it matter to him what Agrippa meant?

This was enough for the King. Paul's arguments were too good, and I'm sure that the King wanted to hear no more. Was he beginning to be convicted? Was he angry? Was he just tired of listening? We don't know for sure, but we know that he didn't heed the voice of the Holy Spirit. He missed an opportunity to be forgiven of all his sins. What a sad thing to have the Gospel presented so clearly, yet still leave unchanged.

6. What conclusion did they come to? Did Agrippa, Festus, and Bernice think Paul was guilty? What did they think might have happened if he hadn't appealed to Caesar?

People today still try to explain away the Resurrection. There are many theories and proposals about what happened at that time. Maybe you have heard

some of them yourself from people you have shared with. Let's look at some of them so we might be aware and ready for some possible arguments people may give us.

**A.** Some believe that Jesus did not die on the cross. After hanging on the cross, He fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. Once placed in a cool damp tomb, He was resuscitated and eventually restored to health. But a mortally wounded Jesus could not unwrap Himself, roll away an extremely large stone, and overcome Roman guards.

**B.** Some suggest that the disciples stole His body after the burial and created legends of a risen Master to further their cause. That theory falls short in explaining how a group of men struggling with depression and cowardice could suddenly become so bold and optimistic shortly after the crucifixion. And would the apostles be willing to die a martyr's death for a lie?

**C.** Some suggest that hallucinations or visions explain the resurrection appearances of Jesus. More than 500 people in various circumstances and of various states of mind cannot be deluded with the same vision. Those disciples not only claimed to see Jesus, but they claimed to have eaten with Him and conversed with Him over the course of many days.

**D.** It has been suggested that the disciples went to the wrong tomb. But if this was true, the Jews and the Romans could have easily produced the body and stopped the great storm of faith that arose in the early church. But they did not, because they could not find the body themselves.

There are many reasons people give for not believing the Resurrection. We need to remember that we can offer arguments, have debates and discussions, and do our best to present the truth to others, but it's God Himself that removes the scales from people's eyes in His time. Don't be frustrated as you share with others. It's God's job to save them. Our job is found in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved". And "Be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you." 1 Peter 3:15.

**7.** Are you studying to show thyself approved?

8. What did *God* speak to your heart this week through the lesson?

9. What changes do you plan on making as a result?

**Let's rejoice together this week, shall we? Let's thank Him every day for all He's done for us, and all He continues to do!**