



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

LESSON 19 – STUDY QUESTIONS ACTS 26:1-32

DAY ONE

1. During the Spiritual Reflection on Lesson 18 (Acts 24 and 25), what did you hear that made an impression on you?

Read Acts 26:1-8

2a. As today's passage began, Festus brought Paul before King Agrippa and asked Agrippa to question Paul. In verse 1, what did Agrippa say to Paul and how did Paul respond?

NOTE: Paul was probably educated in Tarsus in Greek rhetoric, including rhetorical hand gestures. When a Greek spoke before an audience he would often begin by reaching up and toward the audience with one hand, in which the thumb and middle finger were touching, and the other three fingers were raised. (American Journal of Biblical Theology) The first statues of Jesus and Buddha were done by Greeks using this same gesture of preaching.

b. Paul began his defense by flattering the king. What words indicate this from verse 2?

3. Paul then begged the king to listen to him patiently (verse 3). He started by talking about his early life. Paul followed the formal pattern of Greek oration, including a requirement to show the speaker's character or credibility (ethos). Record the things he said about himself (verses 4 and 5).

4a. Paul then described the reason for his trial in verse 6. For what does Paul say he is being tried?

b. Read and record the following two passages which help to clarify Paul's statement regarding his hope for the resurrection of the body and the restoration of Israel.

Hosea 6:1-2

Ezekiel 37:12

5. In verse 8, Paul asked a question of Agrippa. What was the question and why would he pose this question?

6. CONNECTION: The message of "hope" in the resurrection is the foundation of Paul's message. For Paul, hope refers to the expectation that the promises and prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus and will continue to be fulfilled through Jesus. Our hope is also rooted in these promises, and all that is implied by the resurrection of Christ: redemption, forgiveness, victory over sin and death, eternal life, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. What is a situation in your life right now where you are holding fast to hope against all odds or appearances, believing in God's promises? Briefly describe how *hope* carries you forward - toward God - in this situation.

Read and record Hebrews 10:23 and let those words lead you into prayer.

DAY TWO
Read Acts 26:9-11

7. Paul continued his lengthy discourse before King Agrippa. At one time, according to verse 9, of what was Paul convinced?

8. According to verse 10, what two things did Paul say he did in Jerusalem under the authority of the chief priests?

9a. Paul stated that he “often” punished the followers of Jesus in the synagogues, trying to force them to blaspheme (the first part of verse 11). Describe what Paul was trying to get them to do.

b. Another translation of the word for blaspheme is “recant.” Can you think of any similar persecutions taking place in your community or in the world today? Briefly describe.

10. In the closing line of this passage, Paul confessed that he went to even further extremes to punish these people. What did he do and what was his motivation?

11. Paul was not just angry with the followers of Jesus; he was enraged. In spite of being a devout Jew, it seemed he was crossing the line into evil behavior. Later Paul stated in The Letter to the Romans that the end does not justify the means. Read Romans 5:8 and restate it as it might be said today.

12. CONNECTION: In this passage, we see Paul lay bare the cruelty of his past behavior toward Christians. In his quest to destroy the growth of the Christian religion, Paul let his anger move into murderous rage. Yet Paul was given the opportunity to repent by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and to regret the damage he had done. Surely it was repentance which made Paul the great evangelizer that he was. Sometimes the mistakes we make help us to be better messengers of God’s mercy. Describe a situation in which you or someone you know made a mistake which was hurtful to another, yet was given the grace of repentance, allowing both parties to heal and God to be glorified.

Read and record Titus 3:5 and let thoughts of forgiveness for ourselves and others lead you into prayer.

DAY THREE
Read Acts 26:12-18

13a. Paul continued his testimony giving the story of his life. How did he describe his trip to Damascus in verse 12?

b. In verse 13, what did Paul see on the road to Damascus?

14a. Paul recounted in verse 14 that he and his group fell to the ground, and that he heard a voice asking him a question in a Hebrew. What was the question?

b. Review Acts 9:4-6 and note which statement was added in verse 14 of Acts 25 which was not included in the previous recounting.

NOTE: To "kick against the goads" was a Greek proverb regarding futile resistance. Goads were sharp sticks specifically used to move cattle or oxen along.

15. In verse 15, Paul asked "Who are you Lord" and the Lord answered "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." It is interesting to note that in today's passage, Paul did not mention that he was unable to see. Instead, Paul immediately recounted the Lord's command: "get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose." What is the purpose?

16a. According to verse 17, what else will the Lord do for Paul?

b. For what reasons was the Lord sending Paul to the Gentiles, according to verse 18?

17. CONNECTION: Earlier in Acts, we learned that Paul was temporarily struck blind at his conversion. In today's passage we read many words relating to the same theme: *light brighter than the sun, open eyes, turn from darkness to the light*. All of these references relate to conversion - turning from the darkness of sin to the light of goodness, the light of God. Each of us has at different times walked in the darkness and then "a light bulb came on" and we were able to "see" the futility of our particular situation. Recall one such time when you wandered around "in the dark" and then suddenly "saw the light." Explain what circumstances, what place, who, where, or what contributed to your "enlightenment."

Read and record the first sentence of John 8:12 (Good memory verse). Aware that in any place of darkness God's light is just around the corner, begin your prayer.

DAY FOUR
Read Acts 26:19-23

18a. As today's lesson begins, Paul stated, "After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (verse 19). According to verse 20, Paul carried the message first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles. What was his crucial message?

b. What were the consequences for Paul, according to verse 21?

19a. In the first phrase of verse 22, Paul makes a marvelous statement about God. Record it here.

b. How do you think Paul is able to make this statement considering all the "bad" things that have happened to him?

20. According to the end of verse 22, why did Paul feel that the testimony he gave should have been easily accepted by the Jews who were accusing him of blasphemy?

21. In verse 23, Paul proclaimed the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy through Jesus Christ. What did he proclaim?

22. CONNECTION: Twenty five years have passed since Paul had his vision on the road to Damascus. How many beatings, rejections, and hardships had he undergone since that day? Yet he could say that "to this day I had help from God." Consider the hardships you have undergone in your life. Can you, like Paul, say that in spite of bad things that have happened, God has cared for you and never failed you? Look back on your life and think of the ways God has helped you. Choose one to share with your small group.

Read and record Deuteronomy 31:8 and write of prayer of thanks for God's goodness and steadfastness.

DAY FIVE

Read Acts 26:24-28

23a. As we read today's passage, Festus rudely interrupted Paul's defense to Agrippa. Record his words from verse 24.

b. Remember that Paul was a well educated Roman citizen, who had become a social outcast, speaking of visions, sin and repentance, and salvation from a resurrected Lord. As a Roman official, Festus' reaction is not surprising. How would you characterize his reaction?

24. In verse 25, with what words did Paul defend himself?

25a. Once again, Paul turned his attention away from Festus and again addressed himself to King Agrippa. What reason did he give for doing so in verse 26?

THINK: When Paul says "for this was not done in a corner," he was referring to the growth of Christianity across the Roman Empire. Reread Jesus' words to the apostles concerning the restoration of the kingdom in Acts 1:6-8 and consider all that has happened.

26a. In verse 27, Paul asked the king a rhetorical question and then answered it himself. What was the question and the answer?

b. King Agrippa was a Jew, albeit a Hellenized Jew raised in the court of the Emperor Claudius. He would have been familiar with Moses' messianic prophecy in Deuteronomy as well as the "suffering servant" passage from Isaiah. Read these passages and select ONE prophetic verse from each that is most meaningful to you.

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (Moses, then the Lord speaking):

Isaiah 53:1-12

27. What was King Agrippa's answer to Paul's question according to verse 28?

28. CONNECTION: Festus accused Paul of insanity for turning away from his Roman privileges and accepting Christianity ... embracing the cross of Christ. Paul turned to Agrippa as a witness to the prophets' foretelling of the coming of the Messiah. Through this witness Paul could show how the spreading of Christianity was the inevitable unfolding of salvation history. His part in this history required him to attempt to evangelize even those who had life and death power over him. For those who believe in the reality of the One, True God, and the good news of His great love for us, evangelizing is a great privilege. Who is your role model for evangelization? (This can be a current or historical evangelist).

Read and record Mark 16:15 (Good memory verse) and let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

DAY SIX

Read Acts 26:29-32

29. As today's lesson begins, Agrippa has cagily dodged Paul's attempt to convert him. What is Paul's heartfelt response to Agrippa in verse 29?

30a. What happened after Paul's remark (verse 30)?

b. What thought was exchanged between the king and those with him according to verse 31?

31. What did Agrippa say to Festus according to verse 32?

32. Agrippa and Festus agreed that Paul could have avoided not only this confrontation with them but his impending trip to Rome in chains. However, this was Paul's ordained mission. Refer back to Acts 25:6-12 to review the circumstances when it was decided that Paul would appeal to the emperor (Caesar). Do you think Paul's appeal to see the emperor was a mistake? Explain your answer.

33. CONNECTION: Oh no! It looks as if Paul made a mistake to invoke the emperor! He could have been a free man. How terrible! Hindsight is most often so much clearer than foresight; looking back in retrospect, we can see how God's Spirit has been at work directing and guiding us through the maze of life's choices. Even when things look bleak or even hopeless after a seemingly "wrong choice" - if we wait and watch for God's plan to fully unfold, we can have faith all will be well. Share an example of a wrong choice made right by God's providence in your life.

Read and record Romans 8:28. Let this promise give you hope. Pray today for the grace to trust in the God of the impossible to do the improbable.

After completing this lesson, read Chapter 26 (refer to pages 139-141 in the edition copyrighted in 1992 by Our Sunday Visitor or pages 181-184 in the edition reprinted in 2013 by Saint Benedict Press) in the *Meditation and Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* by Alfred McBride, O. Praem. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.