CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
MAY022026

Scripture Story: Acts 25:1-12.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 39-42.

lasting loyalty



Photo by Colleen Cahill

keytext

"Then Paul made his defense: 'I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.'"

(Acts 25:8, NIV)

flashlight

"When the darkness is deepest, the light of a godlike character will shine the brightest. When every other trust fails, then it will be seen who have an abiding trust in Jehovah. And while the enemies of truth are on every side, watching the Lord's servants for evil, God will watch over them for good" (*The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 432).

what do you think?

Either/Or—Which is more frustrating or infuriating to see: (1) someone who is unmistakably guilty but gets set free on a technicality, or (2) someone who is completely innocent but gets convicted and punished for someone else's crime? Which scenario is more unjust in your mind? Why? How should Christians respond when they are falsely accused and misrepresented? Which is more of a value to human freedom? Making sure people who are guilty are punished or ensuring that those who are innocent are not falsely condemned?

did you know?

The apostle knew that he could not look for justice from the people who by their crimes were bringing down upon themselves the wrath of God. He knew that, like the prophet Elijah, he would be safer among the heathen than with those who had rejected light from heaven and hardened their hearts against the gospel. Weary of strife, his active spirit could ill endure the repeated delays and wearing suspense of his trial and imprisonment. He therefore decided to exercise his privilege, as a Roman citizen, of appealing to Caesar."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 430.

INTO THE STORY

"Three days after arriv- ing in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. They requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. Festus answered, 'Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there.'

"After spending eight or ten days with them, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them.

"Then Paul made his defense: 'I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.'

"Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, 'Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?'

"Paul answered: 'I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!'

"After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: 'You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!'"

(Acts 25:1-12, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

How would you describe the attitude and behavior of the chief priests and the Jewish leaders in this story?

How do you think the Jewish leaders could justify a plot to murder Paul before he was even tried?

How would you describe Festus in this episode? (Read chapter 40 in *The Acts of the Apostles* for more insight into this exchange between the Jewish leaders, Paul, and Festus.)

What do you think is the key phrase or verse in this passage? Why?

Paul would rather be tried by a judge that was not a believer than by the Sanhedrin. What does that say about the integrity of the Jewish leaders? Why do you think Paul would trust a secular judge?

What qualities of Paul are brought to light as he is treated so unfairly? If it is true that adversity reveals your true colors, what are Paul's?

What lessons for life do you see growing out of this story?

punch lines

"You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute" **(Exodus 23:1-3).**

"The righteous lead blameless lives; blessed are their children after them" **(Proverbs 20:7, NIV).**

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the Lord your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God is giving you" **(Deuteronomy 16:18-20).**

"In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" **(1 Peter 5:5-7, NIV).**

further insight

"And while the enemies of truth are on every side, watching the Lord's servants for evil, God will watch over them for good. He will be to them as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 432

Sabbath

Read Deuteronomy 17:8-13.

Read and respond to the ranking exercise in the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson. Whether the guilty go free or the innocent get punished, the core principle that binds these two scenarios together is the idea of justice. In this week's story Paul experiences the judgment of corrupt leaders as well as the justice of an honest ruler. Throughout the whole ordeal Paul stands tall as a man of character and integrity. Read Deuteronomy 17:8-13 and ask yourself: "How do I obey God's Word when the leaders who are supposed to uphold justice are not obeying it?" How should Christian believers respond?

Sunday

Read Proverbs 20:7.

Read the *Into the Story* section and use the questions in the *Out of the Story* section to guide your study. As you read and respond to the questions, think of some times in your life when you might have been falsely accused or misunderstood by people who thought they were doing what is right. What examples from Paul's experience can you apply to your life? Also, think about the times when you were wrong but never received what you deserved—justice. In this story, Paul is a model of integrity, but he also stands up for himself. When should Christians stand up for themselves and when should they appeal to a higher court, the court of heaven? Think of some scenarios where this might apply.

Monday

Read Acts 25:8.

The *Key Text* to memorize this week comes from Acts 25:8. Think of some people in Scripture and in history, as well as in your own life, who have taken a stand for themselves declaring their innocence in humility.

The Bible	History	My Life
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

_____ _____ _____

How does their trust in God help them to be brave and at peace in times of persecution?

Tuesday

Read 1 Peter 5:5-7.

Read the quote from *The Acts of the Apostles* in the *Flashlight* section and read it expressively out loud. Try to imagine what it would be like to hear Esther, Daniel, or Joseph say these words. The woman who anointed Jesus' body (Mark 14) easily could have said these words after that night she was mistreated. Ellen White said of John the Baptist that in his final hour he could stand tall before kings because he had bowed low before God. Determine today how you will stand when you are mistreated, falsely accused, or misunderstood. How will your character be revealed? Is there someone you know who has experienced adversity in this way that you could ask to pray for you? The time to prepare for trials is in your walk with God today.

Wednesday

The *Punch Lines* in this week's lesson remind believers of God's plan for truth, justice, and integrity. Read all the verses and then *highlight* or *underline* the phrases or words in each verse that you think are especially important. If you could live by one of these passages during the course of this week, which verse do you think would make the biggest difference in your life? Pray to encounter someone this week who may not know much about God's idea of justice or Paul's story with whom you might share what you have discovered.

Thursday

Read Deuteronomy 16:18-20.

This week's lesson captures one of many court scenes in the latter part of Paul's life as an apostle. He would go on to face soldiers, lawyers, governors, and kings before his time on earth would come to an end. Before your life is over, you will encounter many people who may be influenced for or against Christ simply by the way you live as a Christian. Think about the people you know you will interact with and write down one word that describes the impression you want to leave with them. If you are going to meet a friend, maybe you want them to experience "joy," or if it is a fellow student who is struggling alone you may want them to feel "companionship." Perhaps there is someone you do not get along with that needs to experience "mercy." Identify five people and write a word next to their name, praying that God will help you bless their life when you are with them.

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Friday

Read Luke 12:11, 12.

We are told that as the world comes to a close, authorities and individuals will seek to do injustice to Christians. Knowing Christ and practicing a life of devotion and loyalty to Him builds the kind of character that will be courageous in trials. Jesus said: "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say" (Luke 12:11, 12, NIV). As you reflect on the end, remind yourself about what you might do today to walk faithfully with Christ, as Paul did long ago.

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 39-42.

**Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles,* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net /article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books# .URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.