CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
MAY 02 2026

lasting loyalty

Scripture Story: Acts 25:1-12.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 39-42.
Key Text: Acts 25:8.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This week's lesson features one trial scene of many that the apostle Paul faced during the last two years of his life. While Paul knew that going to Jerusalem would be dangerous, he did not know the plan God had for him to go to Rome, where he would write and encourage believers as well as citizens and leaders in Rome to follow Christ. In fact, Paul was ready to die in Jerusalem if that would awaken more to the gospel. In this lesson Paul stood before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. He was falsely accused by the leaders of the Jews. When the Jewish leaders seemed to be losing influence and their false accusations did not convince those judging Paul, they organized a plot to have him assassinated. Furthermore, when Paul was before Festus he appealed to the authority of Caesar, and with those words he was set on a journey away from the tyranny of the Jews to the secular court of Rome. This journey taken by land and sea offered many moments where God's hand guided and covered His servant, demonstrating the truth that God has a plan and no ruler or king can thwart His cause.

Nevertheless, there is also the theme of personal integrity and character that emerges in this lesson as well. Young people are challenged to face the uncertain future of trials by preparing today by living a life devoted to Christ. As their character is shaped by their faithful walk with God, they will be able to stand as Paul did, with the conviction and peace that transcends human power.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Discover the way character is revealed in trials. *(Know)*
- Sense the camaraderie with others who take their stand for God. *(Feel)*
- Determine to practice their faithfulness today so they can stand tomorrow. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Great Controversy, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 8

"All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. . . . To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation" (Gen. 3; 6-8; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Rev. 12:4-9).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Either/or activities call for students to take a side and defend it. More often than not, the theme is such that either point of view is true, but taking a side helps to see deeper into the issues than simply agreeing or disagreeing. In this lesson the activity calls for students to evaluate what is worse: unjust punishment or unimaginable mercy. Some students may struggle with the idea that *just because criminals miss the judgment of men does not mean they escape the judgment of God.* However, arguably *when innocent people suffer unfairly God knows and will hold others to account as well as reward those who suffer.* Some may even say, "*We all have sinned and deserve death."* And while we wouldn't argue that point, we do feel unsatisfied by justice when it is given solely by human wisdom.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

"If there are two truths that are embedded deep within our human experience, they are our need for justice and our love of mercy. We love justice when someone who deserves it gets it, and we embrace mercy when we, who need it, receive it.

"For example, consider a few convicted felons now walking the streets today: Gregory Wallis served 17 years of a 50-year sentence; Michael Anthony Williams served 23 years of a life sentence; and Alejandro Fernandez served 10 years of a death sentence.

"How does it make you feel to know these men were convicted of violent crimes and only served less than half their time?

"They are currently out on the street walking free today, and free they should be. These men were released, not prematurely, but much later than they should have been because they were convicted based upon mistaken identity and, in some cases, false testimony. It was only after new technology with DNA testing and the earnest effort of an organization called the Innocence Project that they were exonerated. Recently, more than 200 people who were falsely convicted, sentenced, and served time in prison have been set free.

"How do you feel when the guilty go free and the innocent get punished? Very few emotions are stronger than our sense of justice. How do you feel when you don't get what you deserve—whether it is good or bad? How do you feel when you or others get mercy when they don't deserve it?" (from Troy Fitzgerald, *Twenty Questions God Wants to Asks You*).

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

We all long for mercy when we need it and are terribly passionate about justice when it has to do with bad people receiving their punishment. In this week's story, Paul was falsely accused and mistreated by people who were supposed to be leaders of God's people. This petty, self-absorbed behavior revealed their true character, as it also showed what kind of man Paul was. Read the following story of Paul's trial and answer the questions that guide you through the study.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- 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 do you see Paul's confidence in God's leading in this story?
- What lessons for life do you see growing out of this story?

Extra Questions for Teachers:

- What other stories in Scripture display people who are doing evil, thinking they are doing what is good? How do those stories compare with this one?
- 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 were brought to light as he was treated so unfairly? If it is true that adversity reveals your true colors, what were Paul's?
- When Paul appealed to be tried by Caesar, as

was his right as a Roman citizen, he chose a path that would take his case to Rome. How did Paul know he was doing the right thing?

- How should we regard human authorities who are entrusted with the awesome responsibility of meting out justice? How do you know when to submit to authorities or stand up and call for a higher authority?
- In what ways have you noticed the way trials expose the true nature of our character?

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today's story: Psalm 26:1-3; Proverbs 11:3-5; Proverbs 21:3; Acts 24:1-9, 22-27; Acts 26.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

This lesson features one courtroom scene but covers chapters 24-28 in the book of Acts. The primary focus of the lesson is on Paul's character in trials and his appeal to be tried as a Roman citizen by Caesar. However, the names of some of the other people are obscure and may not be well known, so a brief description of who they are as background is given below.

Chief priests—Levites from the line of Aaron who served God in the Temple and were key leaders of Israel and political power brokers in the Sanhedrin, the legal ruling body of the Jews.

Ananias—The Jewish high priest who was corrupt and tried to falsely accuse Paul of sedition. Ananias had been tried for unlawful violence to Samaritans in Rome, but was acquitted through his relationship with Agrippa. Ananias was eventually murdered by a Jewish mob at the outset of the Jewish War around A.D. 67.

Tertullus—A professional speechmaker hired by the Jewish leaders to prosecute Paul. He tried flattery in Acts 24:1-4. This was false, however, because Felix was a bad man and everyone knew it.

Felix—A Roman procurator (like Pilate) of the region of Judea. Felix was a horribly immoral man and an evil ruler. He had three wives and believed he was capable of doing whatever he wanted because he had so much influence with the authorities. It was during the time of Felix that the *Sicarri* or the Zealots multiplied because justice was nowhere to be found during his rule.

Festus—Festus replaced Felix as procurator of Judea. Felix had put Paul in prison where he remained until Festus came to rule. Festus had scruples and a sense of law. He did not allow the Jews to conspire to assassinate Paul and, instead, sent Paul to be tried by Caesar upon Paul's request.

King Agrippa II—His father was the same Agrippa I who persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem, and his grandfather was Herod the Great. Agrippa II desired to see Paul before Paul was sent to Rome.

True to form, the Jews broke their own vows and laws to try to beat, prosecute without witnesses, and even assassinate Paul, whose message of Christ threatened their position among the Jewish people. It was against Jewish law even to bring charges without

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite students to share the Key Text *with the class if they have committed it to memory.*
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Acts of the Apostles. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Paying Attention Pays

It is a well-known fact that learning increases when the attitudes and perceptions of the class environment are open and warm. The either/or exercise in this lesson encourages students to take a side and defend it. It promotes discussion, and when students are talking, everyone is learning. Keep in mind that many things are happening in the minds of young people when their peers are talking. They are also observing the behavior of the teacher as you respond to their dialogue. With your body language (eye contact, posture, etc.) seek to convey your genuine interest in what they are saying. As this occurs they will come to trust that they can offer input that will be valued.

witnesses. It was against the law to assault or physically harm anyone who had not been proven guilty. It was well beyond the spirit of Jewish law to kill someone who was acquitted. In fact, Jewish law was designed to protect the innocent even if it let the guilty go free. There was a sense that God would judge and issue punishment when man's efforts fell short.

It is also important to note that Paul remained in prison in Caesarea for more than two years, between the time of Felix and Festus (A.D. 57-60). The voyage to Rome happened in A.D. 60, and Paul remained in Rome for another two years in prison there before he was executed.

III. CLOSING

Activity

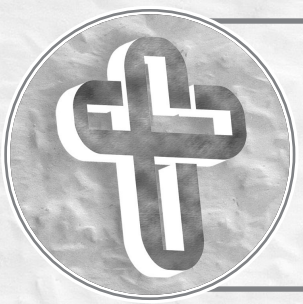
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Choose three people in the Bible who are beyond reproach. Ask the question: "What would be a ridiculous charge to put against this individual?" For example, you could never question in court Esther's love and courage on behalf of her people. It would be hard to say about Joseph that he was not faithful when life went against him. It would be false to say about Peter, "He was quiet and should have spoken up more." Celebrate your own court where you affirm the character and life of people in spite of accusations. The goal of this activity is to demonstrate how character and the way you live can speak to your defense the way it did for Paul in his season of trials.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The more you watch Paul in action, the more you admire his devotion and wisdom. Under the duress of persecution it seemed that Paul was alone in his defense of the gospel—not to mention his own life. But Paul stood tall before authorities who used every ounce of energy available to convict him and put him to death. Although his accusers were liars, they were powerful. And in our world when it seems as though the people in power are determined to follow their own evil desires, God is still in control and His plan will not be thwarted. In fact, this story urges us to be devoted to Christ and let God be our Judge. While we submit to earthly authorities, people are often selfish and wrong and they do not always follow the promptings of God's Spirit. Only by our continual trust in God's grace and His promise to lead us through our trials will we emerge victorious. It has everything to do with how you choose to relate to Christ today! People who are true in the peaceful times are victorious in persecution, even in death. Paul was willing to stay faithful to God whatever the outcome. Are you?



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders),* chapters 39-42.

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

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STUDENT LESSON

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?

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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.

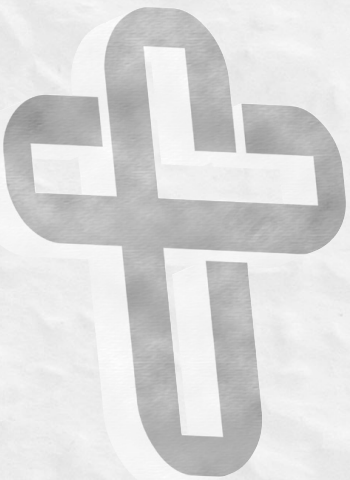
"Then Paul made his defense: 'I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.'

"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?

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

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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.)

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

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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?

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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?

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

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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.