

The Sunday-School.

SECOND QUARTER,
LESSON VIII.—May 24.

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA.

ACTS 26: 19-29.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day.*—Acts 26: 22.

The Lesson includes Acts 25 and 26.

Learn by heart Vs. 27-29.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.*—Summer of A. D. 59 or 60.

Place.—Caesarea, the Roman capital of the province of Judea.

Place in the History.—The Roman trials preparatory to Paul's being sent to Rome.

Rulers.—Nero, emperor at Rome; Porcius Festus, governor of Judea; Herod Agrippa II, king of Abilene, Trachonitis, and the regions southeast of the Lebanon Mountains.

Paul and the New Governor, Festus. Acts 25: 1-12. *The New Governor.* After Paul had lain in prison for two years, Felix was removed. In order to conciliate the Jews as far as possible, he was base enough to leave in prison an innocent man whom they hated.

The Attempt of the Jews to Gain Possession of Paul. Immediately on the arrival of the new governor, the Jews sought to have Paul taken to Jerusalem for trial for there they had more power over the courts, or could secretly assassinate their enemy.

The Appeal to Cesar.—Paul well knew that there was no justice for him in the court of the Sanhedrim, where the judges were already committed against him, and had plotted to murder him. He therefore objected. He therefore appealed to Cesar, that is, he carried his case to the royal court in Rome.

Note 1.—Note how these various forces in men who were seeking their own object were made to work out God's wise plan for Paul—Felix, the Jews, Festus, the Roman law of appeal.

Note 2.—Paul used his civil rights and every proper means to escape from the toils of his enemies.

Note 3.—Paul, though pursued to the death by the Jewish rulers, never abused his nation.

THE ROYAL COURT ASSEMBLED AT CAESAREA.—Acts 25: 13-27. *The Visit of Herod Agrippa II to Festus.* Soon after these things, Herod Agrippa II, the brother-in-law of Festus, with Bernice, made Festus a visit.

Herod Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I, who beheaded the Apostle James and imprisoned Peter, and whose tragic end at Caesarea is described in Acts 12: 23. He was king of Chalcis, Trachonitis, Abilene, Tiberias, Tarichea, and neighboring towns. His capital was Caesarea Philippi.

He made himself peculiarly obnoxious to the Jews. He died at Rome, A. D. 99 or 100, at the age of seventy, in the fifty-third year of his reign.

Bernice. The sister of Agrippa, and of Drusilla, the wife of Felix. She was first married, when very young, to her Uncle Herod, and after his death she lived with her brother, King Agrippa II, as his wife. Bernice has earned a place of infamy in the gallery of historical portraits of the first century. Both Agrippa and Bernice were Jews in religion.

The Scene at the Royal Assembly.—Paul, in his fetters, was ready to speak, all the pomp and splendor of Oriental

Before him were Festus and his court, King Agrippa and Queen Bernice, in royalty. Near them were the principal officers of the troops quartered at Caesarea, and the most influential of the civil magistrates.

The Question Stated.—Festus arose before his brilliant assembly, and stated the object of their coming together. The prisoner had been accused as one worthy of death. He had appealed to Cesar and must be sent to Rome. But Festus, not being well acquainted with Jewish laws and customs, could not make out any definite charge against him that would send him to Rome. "Now," he said, "you who are well acquainted with these things, find out what charges should be made against him."

PAUL AND THE GOSPEL. HIS DEFENSE BEFORE THE ROYAL COURT.—Vs. 1-23.—Paul began his address with his usual polished courtesy. Then for the third time in the Acts is related the story of his conversion.

Note 1.—That this is an example of one of the most effective ways of preaching the gospel. The best preaching grows out of personal experience. 2. Paul stood before them a living miracle, an "incarnate argument." Jesus Christ must be living and divine to work such a change. 3. Paul's plea was for the Romans as well as for the Jews. He set before them a glorious hope of deliverance from sin and Satan, and a glorious inheritance among them that are sanctified.

Whereupon (after hearing the call) . . . *I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.* He did not ask his audience to do what he had not been willing to do himself. *But showed first unto them of Damascus.* Immediately after his conversion. *And at Jerusalem.* For a brief time, going there from Damascus. He also visited there, and preached at other times. *Throughout all the coasts* (borders, regions) *of Judea.* The three stages of the spiritual life are accurately noted. (1) *That they should repent.* This is the first duty of every one. (2) *And turn to God.* Hating sin is not enough. There must be a turning to God, against whom we have rebelled, to be his obedient and loving subjects. (3) *And do works meet for repentance.* The fruit is the proof of the tree. Faith and works go together. They are inseparably joined. *For these causes,* not because of the charges made against him, but (1) because he called on these Jews to repent. (2) Especially because he delivered the gospel message to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews, placing them on an equality before God. These were the reasons why the Jews went about to kill me. *Having therefore obtained help,* God was Paul's powerful ally. *Saying none other things, etc.* He was true to the Jewish Scriptures, showing how they were fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah. *That (the) Christ* (the promised Messiah) *should suffer.* Jesus suffering on the cross was in accordance with the Scripture teaching concerning the Messiah. *That he should . . . rise from the dead* a living Saviour and teacher, and by this resurrection should proclaim light even unto the Gentiles. By the resurrection of Christ, life and immortality were brought to light.

FESTUS AND THE GOSPEL.—Vs. 24, 25. *As he thus spake,* was speaking. *With a loud voice,* raising his voice, and no doubt with impatience. *Thou art be-*

side thyself, insane, raving. Much learning. Probably referring to the sacred Scriptures to which Paul had been referring. *Doth make thee mad, insane.*

I am not mad. Paul speaks for himself. *But speak forth the words of truth and soberness.* What Paul had said was not fancy, but solid fact.

AGRIPPA AND THE GOSPEL.—Vs. 26-29. *For the King* (Agrippa) *knoweth,* because he was trained in the Jewish Scriptures, and having lived on the borders of Galilee and Judea, must have known something of Jesus, and of the gospel since his resurrection. *This thing was not done in a corner.* Obscurely, known but to a few. *King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?* Agrippa, as a Jew, had been instructed in the Scriptures. *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

Agrippa's better nature was touched, and that he spoke sincerely, saying in effect, if you speak many more such words, you will persuade even me.

I would to God. I earnestly desire of God. *Were both almost, and altogether,* in everything. *Such as I am, except these bonds.* The chains he had upon him while he was speaking.

That Paul's appeal had some effect upon Agrippa is seen in the fact that "from this time a kindly feeling seems to have sprung up in the king's heart, towards that strange Nazarene sect.

THE DECISION OF THE COURT.—Vs. 30-32. The court decided that Paul was innocent, and might have been set at liberty had he not appealed to Cesar; but that the appeal must stand. But this decision was the means of bringing him safely to Rome. It made a favorable impression on the Roman officer who took him there, and upon the Roman authorities after his arrival.

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