



## LESSON VIII.—MAY 24.

Acts xxvi., 19-29.

## Golden Text.

Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day.—Acts xxvi., 22.

## Home Readings.

Monday, May 18.—Acts xxvi., 9-32.

Tuesday, May 19.—Acts xxv., 1-12.

Wednesday, May 20.—Acts xxv., 13-22.

Thursday, May 21.—Acts xxv., 23; xxvi., 7.

Friday, May 22.—Acts xxvi., 8-18.

Saturday, May 23.—Acts ix., 1-9.

Sunday, May 24.—Acts ix., 10-22

(By R. M. Kurtz.)

19. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

20. But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

21. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

22. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come;

23. That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.

24. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice: Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

25. But he said: I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

26. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

27. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

28. Then Agrippa said unto Paul: Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

29. And Paul said: I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

Paul remained a prisoner at Cesarea two years, until Felix the governor was succeeded by Porcius Festus. Three days after Festus came into his office he went up to Jerusalem, and the leading Jews at once saw him and sought to have Paul brought up to that city, their plan being to waylay and kill him. The new governor effectually checked these plans by announcing that the Apostle would be kept in Cesarea, that he himself was soon to return there, and that, if they had any charges to bring against Paul, some of their number should go back with him and make their accusation. The Jews accepted this suggestion, and certain of them went with Festus, and made many charges against him, 'which they could not prove,' and which Paul denied. Festus was, however, willing to favor the Jews somewhat, and asked Paul if he would return to Jerusalem for trial, but Paul appealed to Caesar. As a Roman citizen he had a right to make this appeal, and Festus declared that he should go as he desired. Shortly after this Festus was visited by King Agrippa and his

wife Bernice. This was Herod Agrippa II., the brother-in-law of Festus. His capital was Cesarea Philippi, not to be confused with the Cesarea where Paul was now a prisoner. He had authority to appoint the high priest and is said to have incurred the ill-will of the Jews by his fickle exercise of this power. He sided with the Romans in the war that saw the close of Jewish national life, and died finally at Rome in the fifty-third year after he became king.

Festus, the new governor, was a better man than Felix, and, though his rule was brief, he exercised his authority wisely and justly. He sought the advice of Agrippa, explaining that the charges against Paul concerned questions of Jewish belief, and were not such as concerned his relation to the state, yet Paul had appealed to Caesar. What, therefore, was Festus to write to the Emperor concerning a charge against his prisoner?

So far as Agrippa had any religion he was a Jew, and, when Festus had thus laid Paul's case before him, he desired to hear the latter for himself. So the next day, with great pomp, the king, his wife, the governor, the soldiers and the chief men of the city, entered the judgment hall, and at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in, with his shackles upon him. Paul expresses his satisfaction at being permitted to speak before the king, who was fully informed in Jewish customs and questions. He then shows how inconsistent is the case against him, and outlines his religious life. The events of this lesson occurred A.D. 59 or 60, at Cesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea. Though we have only a portion of Paul's address in this lesson, it is possible to subdivide it for purposes of study.

1. Paul's obedience to the Call. Verses 19-21.

2. His Preaching was Scriptural. 22, 23.

3. Festus Interrupts Paul. 24.

4. Paul's Reply. 25, 26.

5. Paul and Agrippa. 27-29.

Paul has just described his conversion and related what the Lord spoke to him on that eventful day, years before, when he was on his way to Damascus. He has told that he was commanded to preach to the Gentiles, and now tells King Agrippa that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but that he has proclaimed the Gospel at Damascus, at Jerusalem, in Judea and among the Gentiles. He indicates also what he preached: That men should turn to God, and that they should 'do works meet for repentance.' He does not go into detail and say that he taught that men could come to God only through Christ, the Mediator. Paul was a preacher of Christ, not of merely good morals and good works. The good works he mentions last, as you notice, indicating that they were the fruits of a Christian life.

'For these causes' the Jews sought to kill him. In the first place, he called upon the self-righteous Pharisees to repent, thus offending their pride, and then, as we have seen, he preached to the Gentiles, thus arousing the fanatical hatred of his own race. In our lessons during the first quarter we learned that Paul met Jewish opposition also when among the Gentiles.

How was it possible that Paul could endure what he had passed through, and escape all the dangers that had beset him? He answers this question that might naturally rise in the minds of his audience by saying, to quote the Revised Version, 'Having therefore obtained the help that is from God, I stand unto this day, testifying both to small and great,' etc. The Apostle now proceeds to show that he had said nothing except what Moses and the prophets said should come. They had foretold the coming of the Messiah, and Paul had showed how Christ fulfilled these prophecies. It had been prophesied that he must suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and show light to the people and unto the Gentiles. In Isaiah xlix., 6, as an example, we read, 'I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou may-

est be my salvation unto the end of the earth.'

At this point the governor exclaimed in a loud voice, interrupting the Apostle, 'Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.' The idea of the resurrection and the spread of spiritual truth among the Gentiles was more than Festus could comprehend. In astonishment and perhaps disgust at what seemed to him a fanatical faith, he broke in upon the Apostle in this way. By much learning Festus perhaps meant a constant pondering over the Scriptures. The more literal rendering of 'much learning' is 'many writings.' Paul had just been referring to the writings of Moses and the prophets.

The Apostle does not make a counter-charge, but in a dignified way answers, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.' He then calls the attention of Festus to the fact that the king at his side knew of these things. This was, whether intentional or not, a good way of preventing further interruption from Festus. King Agrippa was learned in all matters pertaining to the Jews, and could therefore vouch for the correctness of the Apostle's statements of facts, whether he understood their spiritual significance or not. The words of Christ and the great facts of his life were talked of all over the country, by both the friends and enemies of the Saviour. Now he turns to the king himself and puts a question to him, as though to further corroborate his statements. The king was asked directly if he believed the prophets. Then, knowing what his answer would be, and wishing perhaps to avoid a further interruption, Paul answers for the king, 'I know that thou believest.' Immediately the force of Paul's argument strikes Agrippa, as it would seem, and he exclaims that he is almost persuaded to become a Christian. Paul's answer would indicate that he took Agrippa's answer literally. 'I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.'

Paul was standing in chains, yet, except that those before him were free, he saw nothing to desire in their position, wealth, or power. Knowing the joys of a true Christian, he rather longed that his auditors might experience the spiritual joy and peace that were his. He looked upon the king, but remembered that for himself there was an incorruptible crown laid up, which he should enjoy eternally.

Paul's address was thus closed, and at once King Agrippa, the governor and others went aside to consider the case. It was decided that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or bonds, and that he might have been liberated had he not appealed to Caesar. Now, however, he must go to Rome. Thus the very hatred of his enemies, and their persecutions were bringing about the fulfillment of the promise that he should go to Rome, and were aiding the Apostle to spread the Gospel more than ever.

Next week we take up the first fourteen verses of the 8th chapter of Romans.

## C. E. Topic

Sunday, May 24.—Topic—Power and Prayer. Acts i., 13, 14; ii., 1-4, 41.

## Junior C. E. Topic

JESUS' TEACHINGS ON PRAYER.

Monday, May 18.—Praying alone. Matt. vi., 6.

Tuesday, May 19.—Praying with others. Matt. xviii., 19, 20.

Wednesday, May 20.—Praying boldly. Heb. iv., 16.

Thursday, May 21.—Praying humbly. Luke xxii., 42.

Friday, May 22.—Praying in sorrow. Ps. cxlii., 1, 2.

Saturday, May 23.—Praying constantly. I. Thess. v., 17.

Sunday, May 24.—Topic—What Jesus teaches me about prayer. Matt. vi., 9-13; vii., 7-11; Mark xiv., 38.