

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Twenty-Eight
Acts 22:10-23:8

Day One

10 "What shall I do, Lord?" I asked. "Get up," the Lord said, "and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do." 11 My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. 12 "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

v. 10 – Paul recounted his Damascus Road experience for the crowd. It is always interesting to me that the Lord did not tell Saul what he was to do. He instructed Saul to go to the city and someone would be sent to tell him what to do. There are many people who want a word from the Lord, so to speak, and they want it directly from him. But God will deliver His word to you by whatever means He chooses, and that could be through someone else.

Also note that Paul uses the word “assignment.” Other translations use the word “appointed.” But both words carry the sense that Paul had something that God wanted him to do. That was his purpose and it was predetermined activity that only Saul could have done. Now if Paul had declined or disobeyed, God could have raised up someone else. But Saul had a purpose and the Lord confronted him with it; Saul didn’t go looking for it. It (his purpose) came looking for him. **What comes looking for you? What assignment has the Lord given you? Do you know? My assignment is to create order out of chaos and increasingly I am doing that in Africa.**

v. 11 – Paul was blinded by the brilliance of the light. Again I ask: What happened to these companions of his? Did they come to know Jesus? They saw this light and what it did to Saul. Did they seek its affect for themselves as well? Or did the light scare them off, back into the legalistic bonds of Judaism? You assume that someone will see what God is doing in your life and want the same for their own. That isn’t always the case.

Saul was confronted with the reality of his spiritual condition. He thought he knew where he was going: to Damascus to persecute believers. But in his certainty, he was confronted with his ignorance and “lost-ness.” He found that he needed new insight is he was going to serve God, as was his intent.

v. 12 – Paul now implicated another person from the story, one perhaps that some of the crowd would have heard of. Ananias was instructed by the Lord to go, lay hands on Paul and pray for him. God had blinded Saul but would open his eyes through another servant. Every once in a while the answers you need are carried by another person and not by God Himself.

v. 13 – Saul’s eyes were opened! They were blinded by the Law but opened by the grace of God in the name of Jesus! Legalism always blinds you; fellowship and prayer always opens your eyes to see things that you could not ordinarily see. **Do you have regular contact with the saints of God? Are you in a place to receive from them what God has assigned them to give you?**

Day Two

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.' 17 "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'

v. 14 – Paul was chosen by God to see and hear. Often God had to open the eyes of men and women to see what they could not see in the natural. He must do the same for you and me. That is the meaning of this seemingly straightforward verse from Proverbs:

Ears that hear and eyes that see — the LORD has made them both (Proverbs 20:12).

Ask God to open your eyes and ears to see and hear what you aren’t at this point in your life. Be ready for Him to answer your request.

v. 15 – Once your eyes and ears are opened, then God requests that you bear witness to what you’ve seen and heard. I have often found that when I learn some lesson or something new about the Lord that I am going to have a chance to share that with someone soon. I have found that when I share it, then God gives me something new and the process repeats itself. But this requires that you are in fellowship or contact with other believers in such a way that you can receive and give to them of what God is giving to you. Are you in such fellowship? Remember the warning from Hebrews:

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:26).

v. 16 – That is the million-dollar question that God is still asking us today: What are you waiting for? So I’ll ask you: **What are you waiting for? What is stopping you from being more productive in your assignment from God? Is it money? Education? Fear? Time? Opposition? Relationships? What are you waiting for?**

Saul was a righteous Jew, but Ananias directed him to enter the kingdom of God the same way everyone else has entered and is to enter: to be baptized in the name of Jesus.

vs. 17&18 – This is the fourth of six instances in Acts where the Lord appeared to Saul to direct him concerning his purpose. The previous ones can be found in Acts 9:1-9, 16:9-10 and 18:9-11. The other two are found in 23:11 and 27:24. We don't have any recorded instance of God appearing to Saul when He wasn't talking about his assignment. The assignment was everything for Saul; it was his consuming passion. **What is your assignment from God? Are you paying attention to His attempts to encourage you in that assignment, just as he did Saul?**

Day Three

19 "'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. 20 And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' 21 "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" 22 The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"

vs. 19&20 – It's obvious that Paul thought he understood how God was going to use him. When the Lord said that the Jews would not receive his purpose, Paul was incredulous. He thought it would make perfect sense to his fellow Jews. After all, they knew of Saul's former life and practice, which included hunting down and persecuting believers. Certainly they would know that something radical had happened to him, or so he thought. But purpose isn't a matter of common sense. Yes, it would have appeared that Saul would have had an impact on the Jews, but he never did. Why? Because the Jews weren't part of his assignment from God. The Gentiles were his assignment and no amount of wishing or praying would make him effective to the Jews.

Paul never had effective ministry to his people. Even when he went to the synagogue, it was to find the God-fearing Gentiles that were his most successful field of labor. You can't pick or choose your purpose or where you will be most effective. That is God's decision. I am writing this in Zimbabwe. That is a fruitful field for me, chosen by God. I wish it would be the United States or someplace closer to home, but it isn't. Why? Only God knows in His infinite wisdom and providence.

So where is your most fruitful field? Are you resisting it or have you embraced it? Ministry and service aren't matters of choice; they are an assignment. And only God can grant you success; our job is to be faithful and obedient.

v. 21 – God wasn't moved by Paul's perspective or explanation of where Paul thought he could be more effective. God had already been chosen that field for him, and God was sending him to the Gentiles. This also made as much sense as going to the Jews, for an outreach to the Gentiles had been predicted throughout the Old Testament. From this point forward, it seems that Paul embraced and understood this call. He mentioned his purpose to the Gentiles in every one of his letters, using many different Old Testament verses to verify his purpose. Here is the list of Paul's references so you can study them yourself: Romans 1:5, 13, 16, Romans 15:7-29, 1 Corinthians 1:17,24, 1 Corinthians 3:5-

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15, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, 2 Corinthians 10:12-18, Galatians 1:15-16, Galatians 2:2, 7-9, Ephesians 3:1-10, 7-12, Philippians 1:12-18, Colossians 1:27-29, 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 2:16, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-4, 1 Timothy 2:5-7, 2 Timothy 4:17, and Titus 1:1-3.

Do you have a biblical outline or theology for what you do? For your purpose? If not, perhaps you can begin to develop one, drawing on Bible verses and experience. This assignment or purpose is your field, so to speak, and God wants you to work it.

He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty (Proverbs 28:19).

I see people all the time chasing after what they think God wants them to do and it is simply a fantasy. Therefore, they bear no fruit. Where do you bear fruit? That is where you are to devote your time and energy. God isn't only after good intentions; He's after results!

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name (John 15:16).

v. 22 – As soon as Paul mentioned the Gentiles, the crowd resumed their clamor for his death. The Jews obviously had no room in their heart for what was on God's heart. They were religious and ethnic bigots, who attempted to preserve what they considered to be their superiority as compared to the Gentiles. They consistently ignored what the Lord had tried to tell them: That their choice wasn't based on their merit, but His grace.

It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people (Deuteronomy 9:4-6).

What is your attitude? Do you think God's blessings have come to you because you earned or deserved them, or because of His sovereign grace?

Day Four

23 As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. 25 As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" 26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."

vs. 23&24 – The commander could not make sense of the crowd’s vehement behavior, so he ordered Paul to be interrogated. Their method of interrogation was to have Paul beaten and then questioned. In some sense, the commander assumed that Paul had to be guilty if so many people were so angrily against him. But that is a common fallacy. When a lot of people agree with you, that doesn’t mean you are right. And when many people oppose you, that doesn’t mean that you are wrong. At the end of the day, it only matters what God thinks. Someone once said that you and God always comprise a majority.

There are times when God has required His servants to stand alone, against the crowd. Athanasius was a bishop of the early church who was exiled on several occasions when it seemed like the entire world opposed his orthodox views. Martin Luther had many enemies in the established church. Martin Luther King was violently opposed for his stand on civil rights. I have seen that I want to make a difference in the world, but I want everyone to like me as I do that. And that is absolutely impossible!

Whenever you want to do something for God, you will run into someone else’s vested interests. And they will usually oppose you as you carry out your purpose and God’s will.

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets (Luke 6:26).

Who is speaking ill of you at this time? No one? Then you must ask what you aren’t doing that is causing men to ignore or speak well of you. I have come to the conclusion that if you aren’t making someone angry, then you probably aren’t pursuing or achieving God’s assignment for you. Jesus was the holiest man who ever lived and He made a lot of people angry, and they said mean things about Him. Are you nicer than Jesus?

Your job today, as I see it, is to make someone angry for Jesus’ sake!

"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!" (Matthew 10:24-25).

vs. 25&26 – Paul once again appealed to his rights as a Roman citizen, as he had done in the past. And of course, this stopped the commander in his tracks, for he could not flog a Roman citizen as they had flogged Jesus before His crucifixion. Paul had more rights than Jesus and most of his fellow Jews when it came to Rome! There is nothing wrong with taking advantage of your national rights as a citizen of the country in which you live. But those rights aren’t your source of protection or salvation. God can use them, but God can withdraw them.

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases (Proverbs 21:1).

Day Five

27 The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. 28 Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. 29 Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. 30 The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

v. 27&28 – The commander had purchased his citizenship, which was an option then for those with money who met the requirements. But Paul was born a citizen and there is no agreement on how this was possible. Perhaps Saul's father had earned this right for some meritorious service to Rome. Many believe that Tarsus was granted imperial rights as a city as a reward for special work for Caesar. But ultimately, God had granted Paul this privilege so that he could preach the gospel in the Gentile Roman world.

I am always amazed when I look back on my life and see the little things that God did to prepare me for what I am doing today. I didn't even realize He was involved, but He was directing and guiding my parents and me to prepare me for what I am doing today. When I was 14, my father forced me to go to summer school so I could learn to type. I resented having to give up my summer to do that, but I have used that skill for the last 40 years! God was in it. Sometimes parents must do things that make them unpopular with their children. But in the long-run, it is for the child's preparation for service to others and God.

I can even remember getting lost as I drove once, only to use the route that I discovered that day at a later date. God was directing me, even when I was lost! And God has done the same for you. Spend some time today reflecting on the things that you now see were God's hand that you could not recognize at the time. **Is it possible that there are some things happening now that you don't understand, but that you can accept in faith as preparation for the future?**

v. 29 – The commander was concerned because he had not been diligent to find out all the facts. He had assumed that Paul wasn't a citizen and had proceeded accordingly. How often I have gotten myself into trouble because of what I assumed to be the facts. I have also made assumptions about God, and what He liked and didn't like. I have been sincere in my assumptions, but I have been sincerely wrong! **Are you making any assumptions today that are hurting you or affecting your decisions and direction?** Ask God to show you where that may be true.

v. 30 – The commander couldn't understand how one man could be making so many people so angry. So he assembled the Jews again and brought Paul in before them. What was going on here? God was the one assembling the Jews and in His mercy giving them another opportunity to respond to the truth. They didn't see it that way, but we can look back and see it from God's perspective. These Jewish leaders would have no excuse when they stood before God. God had been faithful to send them His messengers to deliver the truth. They just couldn't receive it because they had made certain assumptions about God and His will that were wrong. They knew the Scriptures but they were wrong. The problem was that they had constructed a system that contained God instead of a mindset to respond to God.

If you have a system that explains God or if there are principles that God must follow, then you are in danger of your beliefs or system controlling God. Then that belief or system becomes God, replacing His sovereignty with your predictability. **Do you have such a system? Are you willing to subject that system to God, and allow Him to be supreme in your life? Can you allow God to do a new thing that you didn't conceive as possible in your old system of beliefs? I hope you can, for our God is bigger than any system you can construct. If you can't, then you run the danger of being like these Jews who were about to hear the truth but could not receive the truth because it didn't fit with their concept of God or reality.**

Day Six

23:1 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." 2 At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" 4 Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?"

v. 1&2 – Paul still considered the Jewish leaders his “brothers.” He did not look away from them, but faced them directly and spoke honestly. And for this, they struck Paul for insolence. Why would this statement warrant a slap? Because obviously Paul was saying that his Christian beliefs were one of conscience and he wasn't going to change. Perhaps he was also insinuating that the leaders had not served God in all good conscience, which of course would have infuriated him. Remember, this is the same group that had Stephen stoned when he preached to them and called them stiff-necked. And this group of leaders didn't follow conscience but rather did what was politically, economically and religiously expedient.

The high priest showed what spirit the whole group had when he ordered Paul to be slapped. Who did he think he was to have the apostle slapped? He thought he outranked Paul and therefore had the right to punish this “child” for his insubordination. One must feel that they have great power and authority to order someone else slapped. And you must be under bondage to obey the order! I have an article entitled *Sinners in the Hands of An Angry Leader* at <http://www.purposequest.com/articles.htm> where I point out that

the hallmark of authoritarian leadership is anger. When you feel you own something—a title, a position, a doctrine—and hold it as a right, you will be angry when someone offends or threatens what you own. I have found much anger with leaders in the Church who are insecure but who try to maintain what they have—respect, position, money, staff—through their anger. It is a form of manipulation and control. Jesus, on the other hand, maintained what He had through love, service and faith. Jesus didn't even manifest anger with Judas, and He knew all along what Judas was to do. **So if you are a leader, are you angry? Do you use anger to control your situation? I'm not implying that you should never be angry, but have you learned to use anger as a means to get what you want or maintain order? If so, then you are guilty of misusing your anger.**

If you aren't a leader, then I urge you to learn how to lead without the benefit of anger. There are other godly ways to maintain order and discipline without resorting to anger.

v. 3&4 – I am a bit confused here as to why Paul would not have known that it was the high priest who ordered him to be struck. There is no clear explanation for this, other than Ananias was standing in for the high priest. But Paul let him have it, so to speak, and told him the truth. Here was “God’s” high priest ordering Paul to be struck and Paul was doing more of God’s work than the high priest had ever done in his life. So who should strike whom? Yet the other leaders in the room were indignant, and challenged Paul that he would dare strike “God’s man.” Authoritarian leaders cannot maintain their control without the help of other people, who want the ruler to rule with authority.

There are those who feel like they must protect “God’s man” from people like Paul who would profane the office of their leader. Little did these men know that they were less than 20 years away from their whole system being torn apart by Rome with God’s sanction. And Paul’s movement would reach far beyond the influence of Judaism. These leaders were more concerned with maintaining their system than they were in doing God’s will of reaching the Gentiles. What a sad state of affairs for Israel to be in the hands of leaders like these!

Day Seven

5 Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'" 6 Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." 7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8(The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)

v. 5 – Again, Paul addressed the group as “brothers.” Paul saw his work as an extension of the work of Abraham, with the focus shifting to the Gentiles. Of course, the Sanhedrin did not see it like this. There is great debate as to how Paul could have been unaware of

who the high priest was. It would have been like a priest not knowing who the bishop was. Ananias was a scoundrel and perhaps Paul was being sarcastic, stating that he didn't know Ananias was high priest since his behavior was so corrupt and politicized. Then Paul quoted the Law to show his respect for it and to indicate that he still governed his life by the rules of the Law, even though he was the apostle of the gospel of grace.

v. 6 – Paul caught the Roman commander off guard when he stated that he was a citizen, and now he caught the council off guard when he declared that he was a Pharisee and was on trial for his hope in the resurrection of the dead. Paul was a brilliant man, who had a sharp lawyer-like mind. I am glad I am on the same side as Paul was on, for it was certain to be the winning side.

Paul got the council arguing among themselves with his claim. And of course his claim was true, in a sense. Since Paul preached the resurrection and had put his faith in the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead, he was in a sense on trial because of that doctrine. Paul had obviously thought through his life's work and concluded that it was a continuation of his work and theology as a Pharisee, only then his theology focused on Jesus.

Keep in mind here that Paul knew he could not get a fair trial from the Sanhedrin and was simply trying to convince the Roman commander of his innocence. If he could get the Council arguing among themselves, he would show how divided and confused they truly were.

vs. 7&8 – The Sadducees and Pharisees had philosophical differences and Paul took advantage of this to divide the group against one another. The Sadducees took a literal approach to Scripture, not believing in any supernatural work apart from the Word. They could be likened to some evangelicals today. The Pharisees were much more open to the things of the spirit-world, and could be likened to modern charismatics.

The word of God is such a magnificent work. It is so multi-faceted and lends itself to a breadth of meaning and interpretation. I am always fascinated as group after group insists that their insight and interpretation is correct. I am currently reading a book where the writer makes certain assumptions about the prophetic work in the Old Testament. While I'm not sure I agree with him, he has opened me up to new ways of looking at some things that are very helpful to me.

Why do we fight over so many issues that are nonessential? Why don't we see that the Word is much bigger and complex than anything we can get our minds and spirits to comprehend. I want to know what I believe, but hold the Word in awe as a work of the Spirit that always has new things for me to learn and see. I recently listened to RC Sproul, the Reformed theologian and thought, "If we could get RC to talk to the charismatics and have the inner healing counselors talk to RC and the intercessors talk to the noncharismatics, the body of Christ would be better for it."

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How about you? What doctrinal “camp” are you part of? Are you willing and open to learn from others who don’t think like you? I hope you are!