

The Book Of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

Acts 9:10-15

Following his experience with Jesus, Paul is staying at the home of a man named Judas. It has been three days since his Damascus Road conversion, and he hasn't regained his sight.

In that time he hasn't eaten any food or had anything to drink. He is, from hour to hour, praying to God, awaiting the directions that Jesus said would be forthcoming.

In the meantime, God is speaking to a man named Ananias. Now I should mention that there are three men in the Bible that are identified as Ananias. Each one plays a role in the New Testament book of Acts.

Ananias was a fairly common name among first-century Jews. It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Hananiah", which means, "Yahweh has been gracious."

The first Ananias in the Book of Acts, was, of course, the Ananias we saw in chapter 5. He and his wife, Saphira, tried to deceive Peter about the full purchase price of a piece of land they sold in order to donate to the Church.

We'll skip the second Ananias for just a moment and talk about the third Ananias in the Book of Acts.

The third Ananias in Acts was Israel's high priest in Jerusalem during much of Paul's early ministry.

According to Josephus, Ananias was appointed by Herod Agrippa II in approximately AD 48. Known for his harshness and cruelty, Ananias appears in Acts 23 during Paul's trial in Jerusalem before the Sanhedrin council.

Enraged by Paul's defense, Ananias ordered him to be struck on the mouth (Acts 23:1–2). Paul objected, saying, “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!” (verse 3).

When Paul realized that he was addressing the high priest, he apologized. As Paul continued his defense, a near riot broke out in the Sanhedrin over the issue of the resurrection of the dead—a point of theology that the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed about.

The Roman guard took Paul into protective custody, but Ananias was probably involved in the plot to murder Paul on his way back to court. The plot was averted when the Roman commander found out about it and transported Paul under heavy guard to Caesarea.

Five days later, Ananias traveled to Caesarea and continued to pursue his case against Paul before Governor Felix. Ananias and other Jewish leaders considered Paul to be the ringleader of a Nazarene sect that was stirring up riots among the Jews.

Ananias was both ruthless and corrupt. He was assassinated by an angry mob of anti-Roman revolutionaries.

That brings us back to the Ananias we are looking at. William Barclay once wrote that Ananias was “one of the forgotten heroes of the Christian church.” Today, we will see why Barclay says that about him.

Let’s read verses 9-10:

“In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

Ananias was a native of Damascus – not one of the Hellenistic believers who was forced to flee from Jerusalem during the diaspora.

It’s interesting that Luke describes him one of Jesus’ disciples. I say that, because it tells us that the gospel had already made it to Damascus independent of Saul’s conversion. Scholars suggest that the gospel had come to Damascus through northern Galilee.

Another thing I want us to note is that Ananias receives God’s directions through a vision. While Jesus appeared to Saul in person, Ananias is getting his marching orders in a vision. Now, I think we are to understand it was Jesus who spoke to Ananias in this vision.

If you have a Bible that does the words of Christ in red, you’ll notice that the conversation appears to be Jesus speaking to Ananias. This is further supported by Acts 9:17 where Ananias says,

“Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” V. 17

There is a dramatic contrast in Jesus’ appearance to Ananias and to Saul. In Saul’s case, he is blinded by a supernatural light, knocked to the ground, and blinded. As one commentator put it, “Saul had a bold, almost violent confrontation from God.”

In the case of Ananias, Jesus spoke to him in a vision, asking him to go see Saul and pray for him. Ananias heard Jesus’ voice without the need of a blinding light and violent confrontation. His response is the one all of us should strive for. He simply said, “Here I am, Lord”.

An article I read on Biblereference.com brings out another great characteristic of Jesus’ appearance to Ananias. That is the fact that the vision was very specific. Jesus told Ananias about:

- A specific street (the street called Straight).
- A specific house (the house of Judas).
- A specific man (Saul of Tarsus).
- A specific thing Saul was doing (he is praying).
- A specific vision Saul had (a vision of a man named Ananias).

This specificity was important to Ananias’ task. Why? Given what Saul’s mission to Damascus had entailed, Jesus was asking Ananias to do something dangerous! How does Ananias know that he won’t be arrested and taken to Jerusalem if he does what Jesus is asking?

Jesus tells Ananias, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

Luke gives us a specific location in his account. “Straight Street”, where Saul’s host lived, got its name from the Latin, Via Recta, known as “The Street called Straight”. It is the old, Decumanus Maximus” – meaning, the main Roman road. It runs from east to west through the old city. That street still exists. It’s called Darb al-Mustaqim.

Before we look at Ananias’ initial response to Jesus’ instructions, let me point out that this chapter has two visions that are interconnected.

First, Jesus tells Ananias that Saul has had a vision in which a man named Ananias comes to see him, place his hands on him, and restore his sight.

Second, Jesus is appearing to Ananias, telling him what Saul has seen, and instructing him to go see Saul. Now, here’s a great insight into God’s planning. He gives Saul a vision of Ananias and he gives Ananias a vision of His plans for Saul.

How important is it that we obey the impulses of the Holy Spirit when we sense them? Who is waiting on us to be obedient so that God can move his plan forward for them?

Let’s look at verses 13-14:

Ananias must have been surprised by Jesus’ request. Notice his first response: “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the

harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

Although Ananias had not met Saul, he knew how dangerous he was. Despite the fact that Damascus was 150 miles from Jerusalem, the word had spread about Saul’s brutal treatment of Christians. It is apparent that Saul’s trip to Damascus had sounded alarms in the Damascene Church.

There is another simple reason Ananias would have thought twice about going to see Saul. As F.F. Bruce points out, “To go to Saul would be tantamount to giving himself up to the police” – F.F. Bruce

Remember, Saul is hunting down all who are part of The Way. John MacArthur offers a very interesting guess about Ananias role in this story. Here’s what Mac Arthur says:

“And I just think – and I may be wrong, but this is a risky guess – but it may well be that Ananias was a leader, if not the leader, of the church in Damascus, that he was a primary kind of person there. And in fact, when all the records are done and we get to heaven it may be that if we chat with Ananias, we’ll find out that it was really him that Saul was after, that he was the head guy that Saul wanted to get at, which then brings an interesting flavor to this whole thing.”

In verse 14, Ananias describes believers as “all who call on your name”. That’s interesting because it gives us yet another first-century title for Christians. The background of that expression is Joel 2:32, where the prophet writes, “Everyone who invokes the Lord’s name will be saved”.

Peter quoted Joel's prophecy in his Day of Pentecost sermon. (See: Acts 2:21).

When Jesus hears Ananias' protest, here's what he says to him in verse 15: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Let's dig down a little in those two verses. First, there is Jesus' direct command. It's only one word, but it packs a punch. He tells Ananias, "Go!". Now notice there is an exclamation point after that short word, "Go!" Jesus is telling Ananias, "Don't delay, don't linger; get to what I asked you to do."

There's an immediacy here, isn't there?

If you follow that word, "Go" throughout the Scriptures, you're going to find that God very often demanded immediacy on the part of those He was directing. Let me give you some examples:

- Noah: Genesis 7:1

"The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation."

- Abraham: Genesis 12:1

"The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

- Moses: Exodus 8:1

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.’”

- David: 2 Samuel 2:1

“In the course of time, David inquired of the LORD. “Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?” he asked. The LORD said, “Go up.” David asked, “Where shall I go?” “To Hebron,” the LORD answered.”

- The Rich Young Ruler: Mark 10:21

“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.”

- Blind Bartimaeus: Mark 10:52

“Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.”

- The Disciples: Mark 16:15

“He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”

Ananias’ natural reaction to Jesus’ directive might have been to delay. He is sure that God is asking him to do something dangerous. Jesus, however, is telling him to obey immediately.

John MacArthur says that God must have a huge file in heaven with quotes under the heading, “Someday”. It contains the records of all the times his children have said, “Someday, I’ m going to obey God and do that ministry he’s been speaking to me about.”

Coming back to Ananias' protest, Jesus tells him,

“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

Notice that phrase, “chosen instrument”. In some other versions it will be, “chosen vessel”. The Greek wording is closer to “a vessel of election.”

Paul will use that same phrase at least four times in his epistles. In Romans 9 he will use it to talk about “vessels of honor” and “vessels of mercy”. In 2 Corinthians 4, he will use it to describe “earthen vessels”. In 2 Timothy 2 he uses it to talk about “vessels fit for the Master's use”.

There is something about this “vessel of election” that we need to understand. God is telling Ananias, “I have chosen Saul as my instrument to carry my name to the Gentiles and their kings”.

This is a good place to talk about the theology of election. There are two schools of thought when it comes to election. One, touted, to some degree, by John Calvin and his followers is predestination theology. According to eternal security theologians, this is how salvation works. We call it the TULIP principle:

- TULIP Calvinism:

• Total Depravity:

Mankind is completely sinful and cannot do anything to contribute to his salvation. As a result, we are totally dependent upon God to initiate salvation for us.

- **Unconditional Election:**

In eternity past, God chose to save some, without any condition or merit on the part of those whom He chose.

- **Limited Atonement:**

God sent Jesus to die specifically and only for the sins of those whom He had chosen so that they might have eternal life.

- **Irresistible Grace:**

Those whom God has chosen, and for whom Christ died, will be irresistibly drawn by God's grace into God's family.

- **Perseverance Of The Saints:**

Since God's will cannot be thwarted, no one whom God has chosen for eternal salvation can be lost. The evidence of God's choosing will be seen through perseverance in faith and good works.

- **"Free Will" Theology:**

The other theological position on salvation has been loosely called "Free Will". Now it's important to understand that "Free Will" has its limitations. No human can say that he or she is totally free from all external and internal influences. In that sense, only God has complete free will.

However, there are many scriptures – and I mean many – that directly indicate that humans can and do

genuinely exercise their wills when it comes to spiritual matters.

Let's look at just two examples – one from the Old Testament and one from the New:

- **Joshua 24:14-15**

“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; cast aside the gods your fathers served beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if it is unpleasing in your sight to serve the LORD, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD!”

- **Romans 10:9-10**

“And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.”

Here's an interesting point to consider: The Bible clearly teaches that God is sovereign, but that does not eliminate human free will. In other words, God can be in complete control, but still allow for the choices of humans – even eternal salvation choices.

Two things surface in this understanding:

1. The Bible never associates election with damnation. In other words, there isn't a single passage in the Bible that says, "God decided that so-and-so would go to hell." None! Every scripture that deals with hell associates that final determination with human will – not God's will.

2. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus died for everyone's sins and that everyone is able to be saved if they will place their faith in Christ. What does John 3:16 tell us?

- **John 3:16**

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

The Bible clearly states the ability of a person to make decisions and act. It also clearly states that humans are responsible for the decisions that they make. For example, Jesus told his disciples ... "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." – Mark 16:15-16

Has God predestined anyone to an eternity without him? There is no evidence of that, especially in the New Testament. On the other hand, we have verses like these:

- **2 Peter 3:9**

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not

wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

- 1 Timothy 2:1-4

“... I urge you to offer to God petitions, prayers, intercessions, and expressions of thanks for all people, 2 for kings, and for everyone who has authority, so that we might lead a quiet and peaceful life with all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to know the truth fully.”

Let's wrap up this look at Calvinism and Free Will.

God knows everything, therefore He cannot be surprised by anything. He remains omniscient and omnipotent, regardless of anything that humans do. Nonetheless, God does not “send” anyone to hell, but he does allow humans to reject the gospel.

On the other hand, no one can take credit for their salvation. Paul says we are “saved by grace through faith ... it is the gift of God so that no one can boast.”

Our salvation began with God's work in eternity past and was finished on Christ's Cross. We were dead in trespasses and sins until the moment God made us alive in Christ.

Next time: How do we understand God's Sovereignty and Saul's salvation?