

August 16, 2026

“Saul of Tarsus, the Unlikely Apostle”
Lesson 3

Acts 22:3-15

Intro

In about AD 58, Paul returned to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey. He had spent nearly 3 years in Ephesus, during which time he was faced by many controversies. Upon his arrival back in Jerusalem, Paul met with leaders of the Jerusalem church and reported on his ministry. These leaders warned Paul of danger coming to him if he stayed in Jerusalem. The danger materialized, with Paul being arrested on a false charge of defiling the temple. Roman troops came and restored order from the chaos that accompanied Paul’s arrest. If they hadn’t show up, Paul likely would have been killed. After his rescue, Paul did a surprising thing. He asked to address the mob which had just threatened to kill him. The Roman commander gave him permission; his address is what today’s study deals with.

Read Acts 22:3-15

1. vs. 3: Paul says he is a Jew, but born in Tarsus of Cilicia
 - Cilicia was a Roman province, so being born there allowed Paul Roman citizenship
 - The city was thoroughly Greco-Roman, which presented numerous pressures on a Jew
 - Paul hints that he has not been drawn into that culture
 - He says he was “brought up in this city (Jerusalem)”
 - He has been and is a faithful Jew
 - “The law of our ancestors” is more commonly known as “the Law of Moses”
 - Paul says he was trained in the law, not a little bit, but “thoroughly”
 - He says this to show a connection to the Jews in the crowd
 - Paul says he was “zealous for God”, just like they are; they desire to follow God
2. vs. 4: Paul now tells them of what he has done with his Jewish upbringing
 - He tells them he “persecuted the followers of this Way”
 - He is referring to the growing movement of people following Jesus—“The Way”
 - This admission shows that he has thought about Jesus and his followers in a similar way
 - They disliked Jesus and his disciples; Paul disliked them enough to persecute them
3. vs. 5: Paul here offers proof of what he has just said
 - In other words, “don’t take my word for it; ask the following people”
 - He says the high priest and the Council (the Sanhedrin) will say the same about his actions
 - He was given official authorization to go after people in Damascus
 - Damascus was over 130 miles away, showing Paul’s zeal to stop “the Way”
 - An obvious question, not stated here, comes to most minds:
 - If Paul once persecuted “The Way”, why is he now one of its most prominent defenders?
4. vs. 6: Paul begins to tell them of his experience that changed the view he shared with the Jews
 - He says a bright light came from heaven
 - The light came “about noon”, which shows how bright the light must have been to be seen

5. vs. 7-8: After the light came a voice

Paul has fallen to the ground because of the light's brightness, with the voice following
The voice asks Paul why he is persecuting him—it does not identify himself
So Paul asks, "Who are you, Lord?"

"Lord" here doesn't mean God, but more likely "Sir", a person to be respected
"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting"—Jesus identifies himself

There is no record of Saul having ever met Jesus prior to this encounter
So Paul persecuting Christians is the same as persecuting Jesus Himself
Jesus saying this here shows He identifies Himself with His people

6. vs. 9-10a: Paul next relates the experience of his companions to this divine revelation

They saw the light; they saw something bright enough to be different from daylight
They heard the voice, but did not understand it

However Jesus spoke to Paul, the message was for Paul alone

The companions hear sound (a voice) but they don't understand what it's saying
Paul is speaking to a hostile audience here; they wanted to kill him (see 21:40)

He tells them he asked Jesus, "What shall I do, Lord?"

Paul is emphasizing Jesus' personal revelation to him, and his own obedience to Him

7. vs. 10b-11: Paul next tells them what Jesus told him which no one else could understand

Paul is to go to Damascus (where he was going anyways—to arrest Christians!)

There he will "be told all that you have been assigned to do"

Jesus has a mission / purpose for Paul

He is led into Damascus by his companions

They lead him by the hand, as he has been blinded by the bright light

8. vs. 12: Next Paul is visited by a man named Ananias

Paul says Ananias is "a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews"

This description is aimed again at those who want to kill him—people who are Jews

Paul tries to reassure the crowd that a Jew above reproach can testify to Paul's story

9. vs. 13: Ananias restores Paul's sight, no doubt at Jesus' direction, and by His power

Paul notes that Ananias calls him "Brother Saul"

This address shows he has accepted Jesus' revelation to Paul; Paul is now on God's side!

10. vs. 14: Paul tells the crowd what Ananias said to him

"The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will"

This obviously is a reference to God as known by Jews throughout the OT

God's will referred to here is the revelation of his "Righteous One"

This is a clear reference to the long-awaited Messiah

Ananias says Paul has been chosen by God "to see the Righteous One, and to hear words
from His mouth"

These descriptions are of the Messiah, the one these Jews claim to be waiting for

11. vs. 15: The final words here are Ananias repeating what God told him about Paul's ministry

"You will be His witness to all people of what you have seen and heard"

This shows that Paul has the same commission, the same purpose, as the other apostles

They told others what they had "seen and heard" during their time with Jesus

Paul has now seen and heard Jesus in this revelation as well; he will tell others of it

Application: Jesus' appearing to Paul and talking with him isn't a goal in and of itself. The purpose for any appearance of God to people is to certify something or someone as being of God, or from God. For disciples today, we have the completed witness of the New Testament. We don't need God to appear to us to motivate us in doing our duty to witness. The New Testament itself is there to encourage us in our Christian walk. God calls His people to align themselves with His path as revealed through His Word. As we align ourselves with God's way, the Holy Spirit transforms our lives as we serve God. We become witnesses of the gospel in our worlds.

Prayer: Father God, You are the God of our spiritual ancestors. Please help us to daily align ourselves with Your way, so that we may be witnesses to others, so that they may know Your salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.