

Week Eight

Conversations with God

ACTS 21–28

READ

In this week's reading of Acts, there's a significant moment easily missed.

The commander came up and arrested [Paul] and ordered him to be bound with two chains. (Acts 21:33)

The significance of this moment goes beyond the fact that Paul is being arrested. It is significant because from this day forward, we never know Paul again as a free man, physically speaking. To the final verse in Acts, Paul is in custody. What's fascinating about this, though, is that the years that follow this arrest are some of Paul's most interesting ministry. Yes, he's under arrest, but he will now proclaim Christ before the Jewish ruling Sanhedrin and before Governor Felix, Governor Festus, and King Agrippa. Even more, although Scripture does not record the actual event, Paul was sent to Rome where he would stand before Caesar and no doubt proclaim Christ to him as well.

The entire imprisonment lasted for years. In one place, we get the following time marker:

When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison. (Acts 24:27)

The final verses of Acts give us another time marker where Paul is under house arrest, awaiting his trial before Caesar. We read:

For two whole years Paul stayed there... (Acts 28:30)

This was no quick weekend in jail. This was a multiyear confinement that would threaten Paul's very life. What's fascinating about this is that it was these years that fulfilled an earlier prophecy concerning Paul...

This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. (Acts 9:15)

That to say, these events were no surprise to God. They were part of God's divine orchestration. Yes, it was uncomfortable for Paul, and no doubt he often shook his head in bewilderment over his circumstances, but Paul himself seemed to acknowledge the presence of God in the midst of it all. From prison, Paul once wrote:

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. (Philippians 1:12-13)

Paul sees it. He gets that God has not forgotten him to let him rot in prison. To the contrary, God is using these very events to advance his kingdom. Prison is not a derailing of God's plan, but at the center of God's plan.

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As you read the final chapters of Acts, consider the circumstances of your own life. Are you in a situation you'd much prefer to be out of? God may change these circumstances, but he may also have you there for a reason. Participation in the body of Christ may involve participation in unwanted or unexpected circumstances. In your conversations with God this week, talk to him about your own circumstances, and ask that he open doors of opportunity and that he give you eyes to see what he may have uniquely positioned you to do.

MEMORIZE

This week's memory verses:

James 5:20 *"Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."*

Haggai 1:9 *"What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. 'Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with is own house.'"*

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your Conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



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