QUESTION:

Shalom servant of God, please help me understand something. In the book of Acts, three different passages—Acts 9:3–7, Acts 22:6–9, and Acts 26:12–14—describe Paul’s encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. But when I read them, they seem to say different things, especially about whether the people with Paul heard the voice or not. How can that be?

ANSWER:

This is an excellent question and one that many Bible readers have struggled with. At first glance, the accounts seem contradictory—but once we look deeper, we find they are not conflicting but complementary.

1. The Apparent Contradiction

The main confusion comes from these two verses:

Acts 9:7

> “And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.”

Acts 22:9

> “And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.”

So, one says they heard the voice, and the other says they did not. Which one is true?

2. The Key: Hearing vs. Understanding

The resolution lies in understanding how Scripture uses the word “hear.” In Greek, the word *akouō* (ἀκούω) can mean to hear a sound or to understand what is being said, depending on the context.

- In Acts 9:7, the men heard a sound—they were aware that something supernatural was happening.
- In Acts 22:9, Paul clarifies that they did not understand the voice that spoke to him.

It’s the difference between audible hearing and comprehending the message. This is a biblical concept seen throughout Scripture.

3. God’s Voice as Thunder

Compare Paul’s experience with the account in John 12:28–30

> “Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not mine.’”

Here, God audibly speaks from heaven. Some people recognized it as a voice, but others only heard thunder. They all heard something, but not all understood what was said.

The same is true of Paul’s companions—they heard the sound, but did not understand the words Jesus spoke to Paul.

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4. Jesus’ Teaching on Hearing

Jesus often emphasized that true hearing involves understanding. He said:

Matthew 11:15

> “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Luke 8:18

> “Take care then how you hear…”

These verses teach us that spiritual hearing is more than just sound—it’s about discernment and reception of God’s truth.

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5. Why Only Paul Understood

According to Acts 26:14 Paul heard Jesus speak to him in Hebrew:

> “And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’”

It’s likely that the others:

- Heard the sound, but
- Did not understand the language, or
- Were spiritually unprepared to comprehend the divine message.

Jesus was speaking directly and personally to Saul. The others were not the intended audience.

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6. No Contradiction—Just Different Emphases

There’s no contradiction—just different angles of the same miraculous event.

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7. Application: Be Careful How You Hear

Paul urged Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:13

> “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”

This wasn’t just about casual reading. It meant deep, prayerful study, guided by the Holy Spirit. Without this, we might misread or misunderstand the Bible.

Jesus warned about this in Matthew 13:14–15

> “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull... lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”

CONCLUSION:

The people traveling with Saul on the road to Damascus heard a supernatural sound but didn’t understand what Jesus was saying. Only Paul, who was the intended recipient, understood the message.

This story reminds us that hearing God is not just about listening with the ears, but receiving His Word with a heart that is ready and open.

> *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Matthew 11:15)*

May God open our spiritual ears to truly hear and understand His voice.

- Be blessed.

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