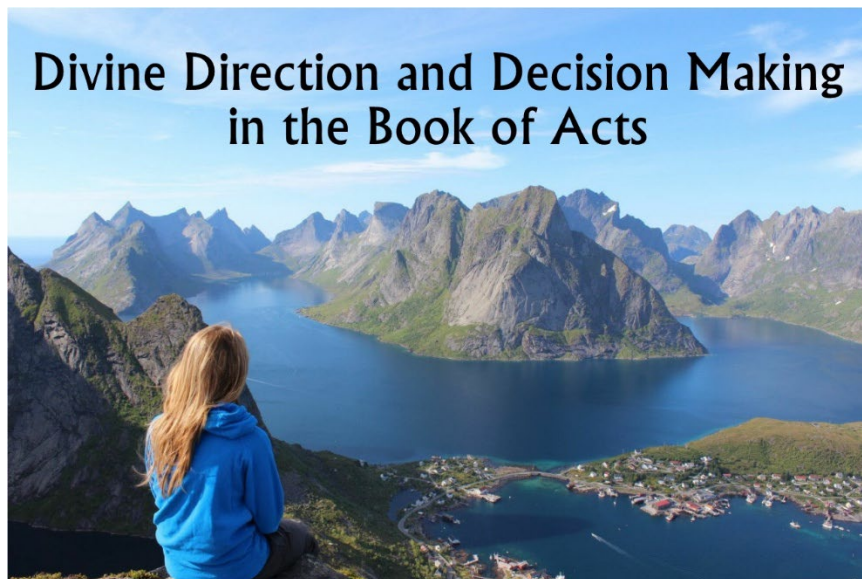


Does God Whisper to Us Today?

Divine Direction and Decision Making in the Book of Acts

GREG KOUKL

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See what can be learned about how the Apostles and early Christians sought God's guidance.

Below are all the occasions I could find in the book of Acts (16 total) in where God gave personalized direction in the thirty years that elapsed during that period. In each of these examples, God communicated His specific desires to the recipient. Note, though, that not all 16 are examples of the kind of guidance ("assignments") we usually have in mind when we're seeking God's will.

TWO TIMES BEFORE PENTECOST

- Jesus tells the disciples to wait for the coming Holy Spirit.

[Acts 1:4](#) And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised.

- The apostles cast lots to choose Judas' replacement.

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[Acts 1:24, 26](#) And they prayed, and said, “Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen.”... And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

FOURTEEN TIMES AFTER PENTECOST



- Two were jailbreaks.
- Two were at Saul’s conversion.
- Two were about Cornelius’ conversion.
- Two was about Ethiopian eunuch’s conversion.
- Two were about Paul in Jerusalem (“Don’t enter,” and “Get out.”)
- Four were about Paul’s missionary journeys (initial commission, directed away from Asia, directed to Macedonia, told to preach boldly in Corinth).

MEANS OF REVELATION

- Visions—5
- Appearance of angel—3
- The Spirit—2 or 3
- Prophecy—1 or 2
- Heard the voice of Jesus—1
- No indication—1

WHO?

- Paul—7
- Peter—2
- Philip—2
- The apostles—1

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➤ Cornelius—1

➤ Ananias—1

1. *An angel rescues the apostles from prison.*

[Acts 5:19–20](#) But an **angel** of the Lord during the night opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, “Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.”

2. *Philip is sent to the Gaza road by an angel.*

[Acts 8:26](#) But an **angel** of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.”

3. *Philip is directed to the Ethiopian eunuch by the Spirit.*

[Acts 8:29](#) And **the Spirit** said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”

4. *While traveling on the Damascus road, Saul hears the audible voice of Jesus directing him to go to Tarsus.*

[Acts 9:4–6](#) And he fell to the ground, and **heard a voice** saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who art Thou, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do.”

5. *Ananias has a vision in which the Lord instructs him to visit Saul.*

[Acts 9:10–16](#) Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a **vision**, “Ananias.” And he said, “Behold, {here am} I, Lord.” And the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.” But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

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6. *Cornelius is instructed by an angel in a vision to send for Peter.*

[Acts 10:3–6](#) About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a **vision** an angel of God who had just come in to him, and said to him, “Cornelius!” And fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.” “And now dispatch some men to Joppa, and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a certain tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea.”

7. *Peter is instructed by the Spirit to visit Cornelius.*

[Acts 10:19–20](#) And while Peter was reflecting on the vision, **the Spirit** said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. But arise, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings; for I have sent them Myself.”

8. *Peter is ordered by an angel to follow him out of prison.*

[Acts 12:7–8](#) And behold, an **angel** of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter’s side and roused him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and put on your sandals.” And he did so. And he said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.”

9. *Paul and Barnabas are sent out by the Holy Spirit on their first missionary journey.*

[Acts 13:2](#) And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the **Holy Spirit said**, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

10. *The Holy Spirit forbids Paul to speak the word in Asia.*

[Acts 16:6–7](#) And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.

11. *Paul is directed through a vision to Macedonia.*

[Acts 16:9–10](#) And a **vision** appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when he had seen the vision, immediately

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we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

12. *Jesus appears to Paul in a vision and tells him to preach the Gospel in Corinth.*

[Acts 18:9–10](#) And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a **vision**, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”

13. *Paul is told through prophecy not to enter Jerusalem.*

[Acts 21:4](#) And after looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.

14. *Jesus tells Paul in vision to leave Jerusalem.*

[Acts 22:18, 21](#) “And **I saw Him** saying to me, ‘Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

SUPERNATURAL PREDICTIONS THAT WERE NOT DIRECTIVE:

There are five other examples of supernatural revelations that were predictive in nature, but did not dictate any direction—they gave no assignments. In fact, in one case—Agabus’ prophecy of imminent famine—the Christians determined on their own to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren in Judea. These examples, found in [Acts 11:27–30](#), [20:23](#), [21:11](#), [23:11](#), and [27:22–26](#), are listed below.

- [Acts 11:27–30](#) Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.
- [Acts 20:23](#) except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

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- [Acts 21:11](#) And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"
- [Acts 23:11](#) But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."
- [Acts 27:22–26](#) "And yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on a certain island."

IMPORTANT DECISIONS THAT WERE NOT SUPERNATURALLY DIRECTED

All together there are at least 70 such instances since Pentecost in the book of Acts alone, contrasted with the 14 occasions of specialized direction.

1. Peter preaches at Pentecost. ([Acts 2:14–40](#))
2. The disciples sell their property, hold everything in common, and share with those in need. ([Acts 2:44–45](#), [4:34–35](#))
3. Peter heals the lame man. ([Acts 3:1–10](#))
4. Peter preaches at the temple. ([Acts 3:12–26](#))
5. The disciples resolve the complaint about the Hellenistic widows. ([Acts 6:1–6](#))
6. Philip begins to proclaim Christ in Samaria. ([Acts 8:5](#))
7. Peter and John are sent to join Philip in ministry. ([Acts 8:14](#))
8. Paul begins to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus. ([Acts 9:20](#))
9. Paul is smuggled out of Damascus. ([Acts 9:25](#))

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10. Out of concern for Paul's life, the apostles in Jerusalem (?) send him away to Tarsus. ([Acts 9:29–30](#))
11. The leaders in Jerusalem send Barnabas to Antioch. ([Acts 11:22](#))
12. Barnabas leaves for Tarsus in search of Saul. ([Acts 11:25](#))
13. Barnabas and Saul go to Antioch and establish a teaching ministry for a year there. ([Acts 11:26](#))
14. The disciples determine on their own and according to their means to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. ([Acts 11:29](#))
15. Paul and Barnabas go to Iconium and teach a long time there. ([Acts 13:51–14:3](#))
16. Paul and Barnabas flee to Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe to preach the gospel there. ([Acts 14:6–7](#))
17. The apostles return to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen the disciples there. ([Acts 14:21–22](#))
18. The apostles appoint elders in the new churches. ([Acts 14:23](#))
19. Paul and Barnabas and others are sent to Jerusalem to resolve the problem with the Judaizers. ([Acts 15:2–3](#))
20. The Jerusalem council is convened. ([Acts 15:6](#))
21. The Jerusalem council resolves the problem with the Judaizers through debate and appeal to Scripture. ([Acts 15:7–29](#))
22. Paul and Barnabas depart Jerusalem for Antioch. ([Acts 15:30](#))
23. Paul and Barnabas embark on their second missionary journey. ([Acts 15:36](#))
24. Barnabas and Mark split off and go to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas depart for Syrian and Cilicia. ([Acts 16:39–41](#))
25. Paul chooses Timothy as a disciple and traveling companion. ([Acts 16:3](#))
26. Paul has Timothy circumcised out of sensitivity to the Jews. ([Acts 16:3](#))
27. Paul casts out a spirit from the slave girl in Philippi. ([Acts 16:16–18](#))

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28. Paul chooses to stay in the jail even though the doors were miraculously opened. ([Acts 16:26–28](#))
29. Paul decides to preach in Thessalonica. ([Acts 17:1](#))
30. Paul and Silas flee to Berea for protection. ([Acts 17:10](#))
31. Paul and Silas choose to preach to the Jews at Berea. ([Acts 17:10](#))
32. Paul flees Berea. ([Acts 17:14](#))
33. Silas and Timothy choose to remain in Berea. ([Acts 17:14](#))
34. Paul decides to have Silas and Timothy join him in Athens. ([Acts 17:15](#))
35. Paul preaches at the Areopagus. ([Acts 17:19](#))
36. Paul leaves Athens for Corinth. ([Acts 18:1](#))
37. Paul sets up shop as a tentmaker in Corinth and evangelizes on the Sabbaths. ([Acts 18:3](#))
38. Paul abandons tent making and devotes himself solely to the ministry. ([Acts 18:5](#))
39. Paul abandons the ministry in Corinth and departs for Syria. ([Acts 18:18](#))
40. Paul embarks on his third missionary journey. ([Acts 18:23](#))
41. Paul spends three months witnessing publicly at the synagogue in Ephesus. ([Acts 19:8](#))
42. Paul sets up a discipleship training program for two years at the school of Tyrannus. ([Acts 19:9](#))
43. Paul sends Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia. ([Acts 19:22](#))
44. Paul decides to stay in Asia for a while. ([Acts 19:22](#))
45. Paul goes to Macedonia. ([Acts 20:1](#))
46. Paul goes to Greece and ministers for three months. ([Acts 20:2–3](#))
47. Paul travels through Macedonia to avoid a plot set for him by the Jews. ([Acts 20:3](#))

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48. Paul sends a band of disciples ahead to wait for him in Troas. ([Acts 20:4–5](#))
49. Paul goes to Troas and stays for a week of ministry. ([Acts 20:6](#))
50. Luke is sent ahead by Paul to Assos, where Paul joins him aboard ship. ([Acts 20:13–14](#))
51. Paul decides to hurry past Ephesus to Miletus. ([Acts 20:15–16](#))
52. Paul summons the Ephesian elders for a meeting. ([Acts 21:17](#))
53. Paul finds passage to Tyre. ([Acts 21:1–3](#))
54. Paul visits the disciples in Tyre and stays with them a week. ([Acts 21:4](#))
55. Paul departs for Ptolemais. ([Acts 21:7](#))
56. Paul greets the brethren in Ptolemais and stays with them a day. ([Acts 21:7](#))
57. Paul departs for Caesarea. ([Acts 21:8](#))
58. Paul visits Philip the evangelist. ([Acts 21:8](#))
59. Paul leaves for Jerusalem. ([Acts 21:17](#))
60. The leaders in Jerusalem strategize on how to deal with the local Jewish leadership ([Acts 21:20–25](#))
61. Paul addresses the mob who had been beating him. ([Acts 21:40](#))
62. Paul sends his nephew to warn of the commander of a plot to take Paul's life. ([Acts 23:17](#))
63. Paul makes his defense before Felix. ([Acts 24:10–21](#))
64. Paul preaches the gospel to Felix and Drusilla. ([Acts 24:24](#))
65. Paul appeals to Caesar. ([Acts 25:11](#)) (It's possible that this appeal was not done on Paul's own initiative, but in response to Jesus' comments in [Acts 23:11](#).)
66. Paul makes his defense before Agrippa. ([Acts 26:1–29](#))
67. Paul visits the father of Publius and heals him. ([Acts 28:8](#))

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68. Paul has a healing ministry on the island of Malta for three months. ([Acts 28:9–11](#))

69. Paul calls a meeting with the Jewish leaders in Rome. ([Acts 28:17](#))

70. Paul preaches the gospel to the Jewish leaders in Rome. ([Acts 28:23](#))

71. Paul sets up a ministry of preaching and teaching in Rome for two years. ([Acts 28:30–31](#))

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