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Conducted by  
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“Could you please account for the fact that in the recording of Paul’s conversion it is said (in Acts 9:7) that his companions who journeyed with him ‘stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no man.’ But in Acts 22:9 it is said that they ‘heard not the voice of him that spake’; and in Acts 26:14 Paul says ‘And when we were all fallen to the earth.’ In the first case his companions were *standing and heard*, and in the latter case his companions *heard not and were fallen to the earth.*”

FIRST it should perhaps be explained to any who are unfamiliar with the above quotations that in Acts 9 the writer of the Acts, Luke, is giving us a general narrative of the incidents surrounding Paul’s eventful journey to Damascus, a journey on which he saw the light in more senses than one. Acts 22 records Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem, and his speech to the people from the stairs of the castle prison in which speech he gives his own account of what transpired on the way to Damascus. In Acts 26, Paul makes his “defence” speech before king Agrippa, in which he recounts his life history and refers to the events which occurred on the way to Damascus. It is often alleged that as these three accounts differ and appear even to contradict there can be no evidence that any of them is true. And if some part of the bible is untrue how do we decide which parts are true?

#### Hearing and not Hearing

With reference to the “heard and heard not” part of the question I think the context reflects the fact that Saul’s companions did not see Christ, but Saul did: they heard the voice of Christ speaking with Saul but they did not hear what was said. The following analogies are comparable with the situation in the question: a visitor to Hyde Park “Speakers’ Corner” finds himself on the edge of a huge crowd and is keen to hear the speaker addressing this crowd. He is too far away however to hear what the speaker is saying. We have a situation therefore where the visitor can “hear” the speaker but cannot get close enough to “hear” the speaker’s words. Saul’s companions similarly could hear the voice of Christ and yet could not hear His words. We have probably all had the annoying experience of a telephone conversation on a “bad” line. We can “hear” the person on the other end of the line but we yell, “Speak up please; I can’t *hear* you.” How do we know someone is speaking to us at the other end of the line? because we can “hear” them talking to us. Why do we get infuriated? because we cannot “hear” them. It is not a question of being able to *understand* them (after all they are speaking in English) but a question of not being able to “hear” them (although “hear” in many instances means “to understand”). Saul’s companions would have *understood* what Christ was saying to Saul if they had been able to “hear” him, because we know that Jesus spoke to Saul in Hebrew. Saul had no trouble in understanding Jesus because, unlike his companions, he could hear what Jesus was saying. Even in a busy restaurant we might be able truthfully to say that we can “hear” everybody talking, yet are unable to say that we can “hear” what any of them are saying.

#### Meaning Explained by Scripture

This, of course, is because of the different shades of meaning attached to the word “hear.” The original Greek word is always “akouo,” but the context governs the meaning we are attaching to the word in each case. The three main shades of meaning are (1) to have the capacity or faculty to hear; (2) to understand or perceive the sense

or purport of what we hear; and (3) to give earnest heed. We have a verse in Matt. 13:13 which uses these three senses of the word, where Jesus says "Therefore I speak to them in parables because seeing they see not, and *hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.*" We know ourselves from experience that it is possible that while we hear the word of God read, we at the same time hear it not, neither do we understand.

Sometimes the translators of the King James version have translated "akouo" as "understand" where they have considered it necessary by the context. With reference to speaking in tongues 1 Cor. 14:2 says, "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto me but unto God: for no man understandeth (margin: "heareth") him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries." The word "understand" therefore is really our old friend "heareth" and if the translators had left it as "heareth" the verse would have read, "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men but unto God: for no man *heareth* him . . ." The congregation would "hear" him speak in an unknown tongue but God alone would hear (understand) what he said. This is the identical position to that in the question in the Acts of the apostles.

The translators doubtless used the word "understand" in 1 Cor. 14:2 because of the fact that, although the hearers of one speaking in tongues could hear each word clearly enunciated, they still could not understand the meaning of the words without an interpreter. In the case of Saul's companions, however, they could merely hear Christ speaking but could not hear what he was saying, albeit he spoke not in an unknown tongue, but in Hebrew. We have a fairly similar situation in John 12:28 which describes the reaction of some of the people after Jesus had prayed "Father glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven saying, I have both glorified it and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by and heard it said that it thundered: others said an angel spake to him." Like Saul's companions they "heard" the voice from heaven but they did not "hear" what was said. They heard not the articulate words.

### No Discrepancy or Contradiction

With reference to the second portion of the question—one statement in Acts 26:14 saying that Saul's companions had all *fallen to the earth* and another, in Acts 9:7 that they *stood speechless*.

Obviously the men had to be standing before they could fall down, and we can be sure that they did not remain prostrate on the ground but eventually got up. I think a close examination of the two accounts leads us to suppose that, although they *all* initially fell to the earth, the companions of Saul arose of their own accord and stood speechless watching Saul as he remained there prostrate on the ground. This is surely borne out by the two accounts: Acts 26:14 says that it was *after* they had all fallen to the earth that the conversation took place between Jesus and Saul. Acts 9:7 says that it was *after the conversation was over* that "the men which journeyed with him stood speechless." The time interval, therefore, is very important between the two statements and of such duration as to disallow any claim being made that a discrepancy or contradiction exists here.

There are no real contradictions in God's word, although there are many apparent contradictions. *i.e.* things which on the surface and at first glance appear certainly to be out of harmony but, as the morning mists melt with the rising of the sun, so usually do these apparent discrepancies fade when further light and closer examination and scrutiny are brought to bear upon them.