

**AMAZING ACTS—
act two**

Acts 9:32 to 18:23

Follow the battles and blessings of the early church

by Gerard Chrispin



EP BOOKS

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Welwyn Garden City, UK, AL7 1TS

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EP books are distributed in the USA by:

JPL Fulfillment

3741 Linden Avenue Southeast,

Grand Rapids, MI 49548

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Tel: 877.683.6935

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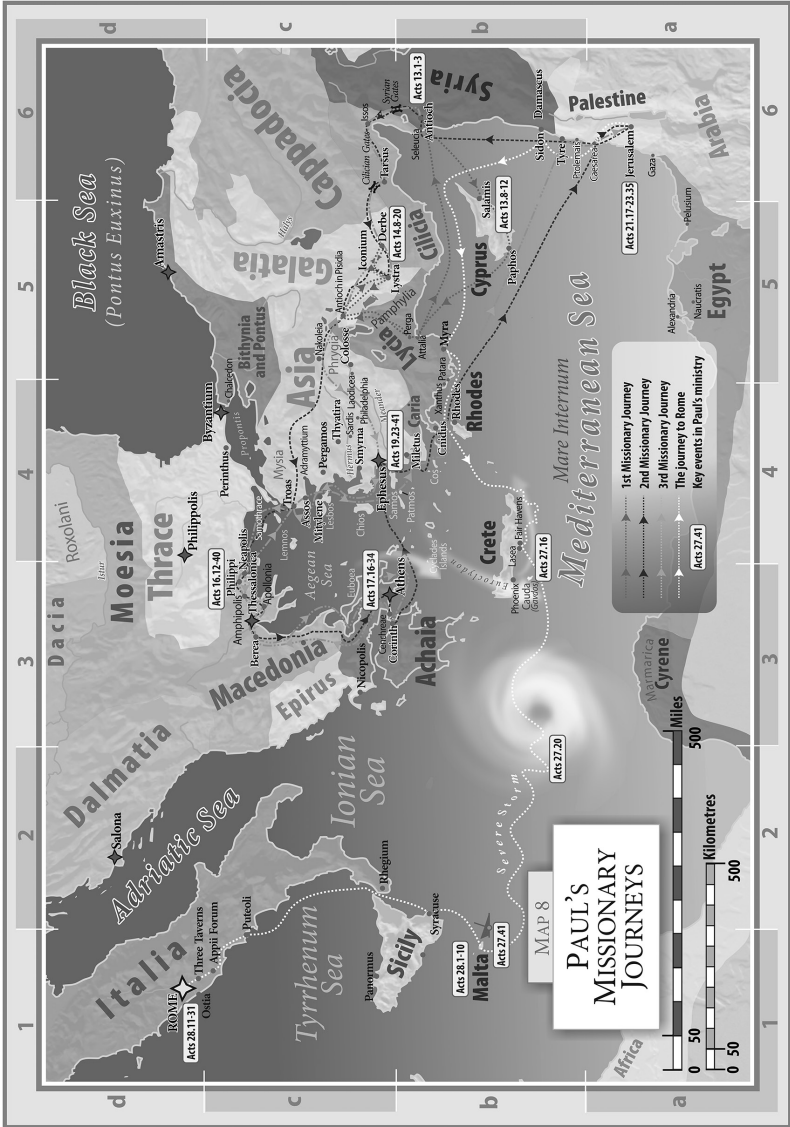
First published in 2015

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available

ISBN: 978-1-78397-130-5

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This book is dedicated to my team of helpers who are such an encouragement to me in producing the *Amazing Acts* trilogy.



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CHAPTER I

Back to Peter: three very different people

ACTS 9:32–43

32 Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. 33 There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.’ Then he arose immediately. 35 So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

36 At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. 37 But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.

39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40 But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. 41 Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. 43 So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

Acts 9:32–35

After eight years paralysed and bedridden

The spotlight moves back from Saul to Peter and from Jerusalem to Lydda. Peter travels to teach believers God’s word and to preach the gospel to those who have not yet heard. He now comes to the Christians in Lydda, twelve miles or so from Joppa, the port from which Jonah sailed,¹ and about twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. Lydda is on the main Jerusalem to Joppa road.

Peter finds a paralysed man, Aeneas by name, who has been bedridden for eight years. Peter at once tells him that Jesus Christ is healing him, and instructs him to get up and make his bed! He rises ‘immediately’.

Again, the authority of Christ’s messenger and the authenticity of Christ’s message are confirmed. This time ‘all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon’—the surrounding plane—see the healing of Aeneas and turn ‘to the Lord’. We are not told the details of Peter’s message, but doubtless he makes it clear again that Jesus Christ died for sinners and rose again, and forgives all who come to Him. We are not told of any other physical healings at Lydda and Sharon, but just that all the residents turn to the Lord. For

Aeneas, how wonderful to be made well physically! It is always good to be healthy during the relatively few years of your life on earth. But it is more important still to know that your ever-living soul is saved and ready for eternity. Aeneas ‘turned to the Lord’ along with ‘all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon’ at the time of his healing, if not before it. So he benefits from the spiritual and eternal blessing of being saved by turning ‘to the Lord’, as well as from his physical healing that triggers off all this spiritual interest and blessing.

Acts 9:36–42

The charitable ‘Gazelle’

‘Gazelle’ is the translation of the name of the lady we now meet at Joppa. In Aramaic her name is *Tabitha* and in Greek, *Dorcas*. We will call her *Tabitha*, though the passage uses both her Aramaic and Greek names.

Tabitha was a lovely, kind, Christian woman. This disciple of Jesus was ‘full of good works and charitable deeds’. She was just the sort of next-door neighbour everyone would like to have. But she has died after an illness. She has been washed and laid in an upstairs room, presumably awaiting an imminent burial in that hot climate.

Because Lydda is ‘near Joppa’ two disciples are despatched to Peter, whose presence at Lydda is common knowledge. They ask him to go with them without delay. He goes, and is met by a very sad scene when he arrives at the upstairs room. Grieving widows, to whom Tabitha was so loving and caring, show Peter ‘tunics and garments’ that she has made for them.

Peter clears the room, kneels down and prays. He turns to Tabitha’s corpse and simply says, ‘Tabitha, get up’. She opens her eyes, sees Peter and sits up. Peter gives her his strong

fisherman's hand and helps her up. He then calls the 'saints and widows'—meaning respectively the Christians and friends of Tabitha. He shows them she is alive! What happens to Tabitha physically mirrors what happens spiritually when any sinner trusts Jesus as Saviour. New life is given and eyes are opened spiritually. The newly 'born-again' Christian 'sees' with a renewed understanding the truth about God, life, death, sin, forgiveness, Heaven, Hell, and especially about the Lord Jesus Christ who bore our sins and the punishment for them on the cross. New 'eyes' of understanding confirm that new life in Christ has been received. The new Christian, now spiritually alive, 'sees' Jesus as the living and caring Saviour who strengthens and helps those who trust Him.

'All who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon', where Aeneas was healed, 'turned to the Lord'. Now 'in Joppa' we learn that 'many' believe 'on the Lord'. When God works in the lives of even a few, the blessing can spread as others turn to Christ. Even if only one person had trusted Christ, that would have caused the 'joy bells of Heaven' to ring!²

The Joppa Christians know that Tabitha has eternal life in Christ and that death holds no fear for her. Yet they must be thrilled to have their valued sister back with them again. Hopefully the widows she loves to help are among the 'many' who now believe in the Lord. Her death has reminded them that life is short and death comes unexpectedly. They will have learned from her that only Jesus Christ is the answer. Tabitha herself has gone through the trauma of death and the miracle of being brought back to life! That glorifies her Saviour and causes others to trust Him too.

Just a couple of questions remain. If death claims you suddenly, as it claimed Tabitha, will you be going to Heaven? Can you

honestly say that already you belong to the *many* who have ‘believed in the Lord’?

If not, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’.³

Acts 9:43

Simon the tanner

Peter now stays at Joppa with ‘Simon, a tanner’. Although grateful and encouraged to have seen God’s recent blessing in Joppa, his work of sharing the gospel there is not over yet. This passage refers to believers in Christ as ‘saints’ and ‘disciples’.⁴ As Simon the tanner is identified neither as a ‘saint’, nor as a ‘disciple’ we may assume that he does not know Christ. If that assumption is wrong, Simon’s hospitality will enable Peter to enjoy fellowship with him.

Orthodox Jews despise tanners and reject them from their synagogues. Most Bible commentators claim that there are two reasons why this may be so. First, in a very dirty and smelly process, tanners make leather from the bodies of dead animals. Rightly or wrongly their contact with dead animals is said by some to cut right across the Jewish view of cleanness and uncleanness.⁵ Not all scholars agree with that view.⁶ Second, the repulsive smell of a tannery abides with the tanner, and is seen as unhygienic and disgusting. For that reason, the putrid odour of tanning causes some to refuse to have contact with stinking tanners. The second view explains why tanners are well down the social scale. But Peter decides to stay with this tanner for ‘many days’. He wants to tell all sinners, whether or not they are despised, rejected, foul-smelling, dirty, unhealthy, non-religious or ceremonially unclean, that there is a Saviour whose blood ‘cleanses’ them ‘from all sin’.⁷ If they turn from their sins and trust Jesus, God forgives and accepts them freely. Perhaps Peter shares with Simon

that Jesus Christ is ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’⁸ By Jesus’ death as the sacrificial Lamb, sinners are cleansed and receive eternal life immediately, as a current but everlasting possession.⁹

Peter’s excellent example to Christians is to act as a bridge for the gospel for society’s outcasts. Without sharing in the sin, or compromising a holy walk with God by following the world’s constantly falling moral standards, we must be in a position to introduce lost sinners to Jesus. He can forgive, cleanse, restore, and save them and give them eternal life.

Peter is devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. His life constantly underlines two needs today for us.¹⁰ First, if we know Jesus we need continually to be helping others to come to know Him. Second, if we do not know Him, we urgently need to ask Him to forgive us, turn us from self and sin, and come into our lives to reign as our loving Lord.

Which of these two needs apply to you right now? Every person is either a missionary or a mission field. If you know Jesus as your Saviour, do you make it your duty, privilege, and pleasure to help others to come to know Him? If you do not know Him, will you turn from your sin and trust in Him now?

Questions on Chapter 1

Acts 9:32–43 Back to Peter: three very different people

- A. What similarities and what differences are there between the healing of Aeneas in Acts 9:32–35 and the raising to life of Tabitha in Acts 9:36–42.

Acts 9:32–35, Acts 9:36–42, Acts 4:29–30, Acts 16:16–17, 1 Corinthians 9:19

B. From this passage, what qualities do you see in Peter as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ? How do you measure up to those qualities?

Acts 9:32–43, 2 Corinthians 12:10, Ephesians 1:15, Philemon 1:7, Hebrews 6:10, John 15:20

C. Consider the kind of person Tabitha was before she died. Is there a godly example to follow?

Acts 9:36–39, Matthew 5:16, 1 Timothy 5:25, Titus 2:14