

Saul's Conversion! Peter Raises the Dead!

~ See also "[A Rabbis Sees the Light](#)", which tells this same story in an interesting way ~

V 1-2 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

“Saul, still breathing threats and murder.” Saul was the Apostle Paul’s original name. Born in Tarsus, Asia Minor (now Turkey), he later studied under Gamaliel and became a Pharisee. Although born Jewish, he had Roman citizenship. Paul refers to this shameful period of his life in 1Corinthians 15:9 and in 1Timothy 1:12-13, where he says, “*I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*”.

“Damascus.” Capital of Syria 160 miles northeast of Jerusalem. It had a large population of Greek Jewish believers who had fled persecution in Jerusalem.

“The Way.” The first time we hear this label for Christianity, derived probably from Jesus’ description of Himself as “*the way, the truth, and the life*”. (John 14:6)



V3-4 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

“Why are you persecuting Me?” To persecute Jesus' followers is to persecute Jesus Himself; we're His bride.

V 5 And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

“Who are You, Lord?” The word “Lord” here is a term of respect, and at this point Saul probably thought it was an angel appearing before him. His worst fear is realized, however, when the Heavenly Being identifies Himself and firmly but lovingly reprimands Saul, saying, **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”**

“Goads” are used to prod oxen to move faster or in the right direction. Oxen don't like them and often try to kick against them in vain. Saul was like a stubborn ox kicking against the truths and testimonies and people who were challenging his old, outmoded belief system.

V 6-7 **So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”** Then the Lord said to him, **“Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”**

And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

After witnessing the power of God and realizing he was on the wrong side of the Lord's displeasure, Paul was left **“trembling and astonished”**. As was the case with Simon the sorcerer, the Lord certainly knew how to show this strong-willed man who was boss. This remarkable turning point in Saul's life could be compared to Moses' experience at the burning bush. Both men met the Lord, each in a different way, and each one's experience resulted in a major advancement of God's work in the earth.

V 8-9 **Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.**

And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Saul physically blinded by his experience. Very likely it was meant to underline the fact that he had become spiritually blind.

V 10-12 **Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.”** And he said, **“Here I am, Lord.”**

So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.

“And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.”

Because Ananias was an open and practiced channel, the Lord was able to send him on this important mission. He first had to receive some very specific instructions about what Saul had seen in vision (**“a man named Ananias coming in. . . that he might receive his sight”**) and then the address of where Saul was staying.

“The street called Straight” ran from the east to the west gate; it still exists in modern Damascus and is called Darb el-Mustaqim.

“Tarsus.” Saul's birthplace, a key city in the Roman province of Cilicia,

on the Cydnus River near the border of Asia Minor and Syria. A commercial and educational center. Its university ranked with Athens and Alexandria as among the finest in the ancient world. A busy port city as well.

V 13-14 Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.

And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

“How much harm he has done.” Ananias had good reason to be concerned since, as a disciple and active in the Damascus church, he might have been one of Saul’s main targets. There was nothing wrong with Ananias’ expressing his reservations to the Lord about carrying out this task. In fact, it was good that he did because then the Lord could reassure him with the answer he needed, thus giving him more faith to do what the Lord was asking.

V 15-16 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

“Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” Saul started his ministry trying to reach the Jews, but the Gentiles, mentioned first in this list, ended up being the main focus of his missionary efforts.

V 17-19 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

Ananias prays for Saul who gets healed of his blindness and gets baptized. Suffering this physical punishment was likely God’s way of underlining for Saul the fact that this was serious business, and he needed to truly repent; otherwise, Saul might have been tempted to brush

the whole thing off. Also, to feel handicapped, weak, and dependent on God like this was a useful experience for Saul since he had for too long become accustomed to barreling along in his own strength.

Besides gaining a healthy fear of God, Saul also experienced the mercy of God through Ananias' prayer and restoration of his sight. It must have been a tremendous relief for Saul to know he had been spared from a life of permanent blindness.

V 20 Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

“Immediately he preached.” Witnessing is an essential ingredient in the life of new believers.

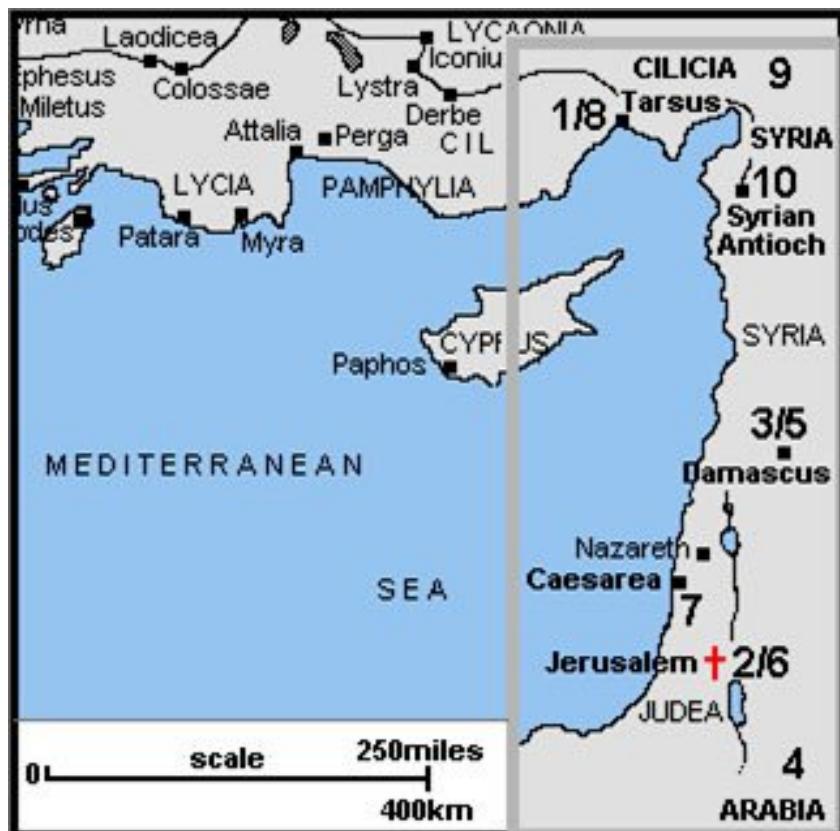
“Christ. . . is the Son of God.” This meant a great deal; the “Son of God” was pictured in the Old Testament as a great heavenly being who had “established all the ends of the earth” and to Whom God would someday give “the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession”. (Proverbs 30:4, Psalm 2:6-12) The New Testament elaborates further on the great majesty and power of Jesus Christ (as for example, in John 1:1-16 and Hebrews 1).

V 21-22 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?”

But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

Paul's testimony of conversion from persecutor to proclaimer of the faith *“confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus”*.

“Proving that this Jesus is the Christ.” Jesus was the One, the Messiah, that their Scriptures had predicted was to come.



Map showing the cities where Paul went after his conversion

V 23 Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.

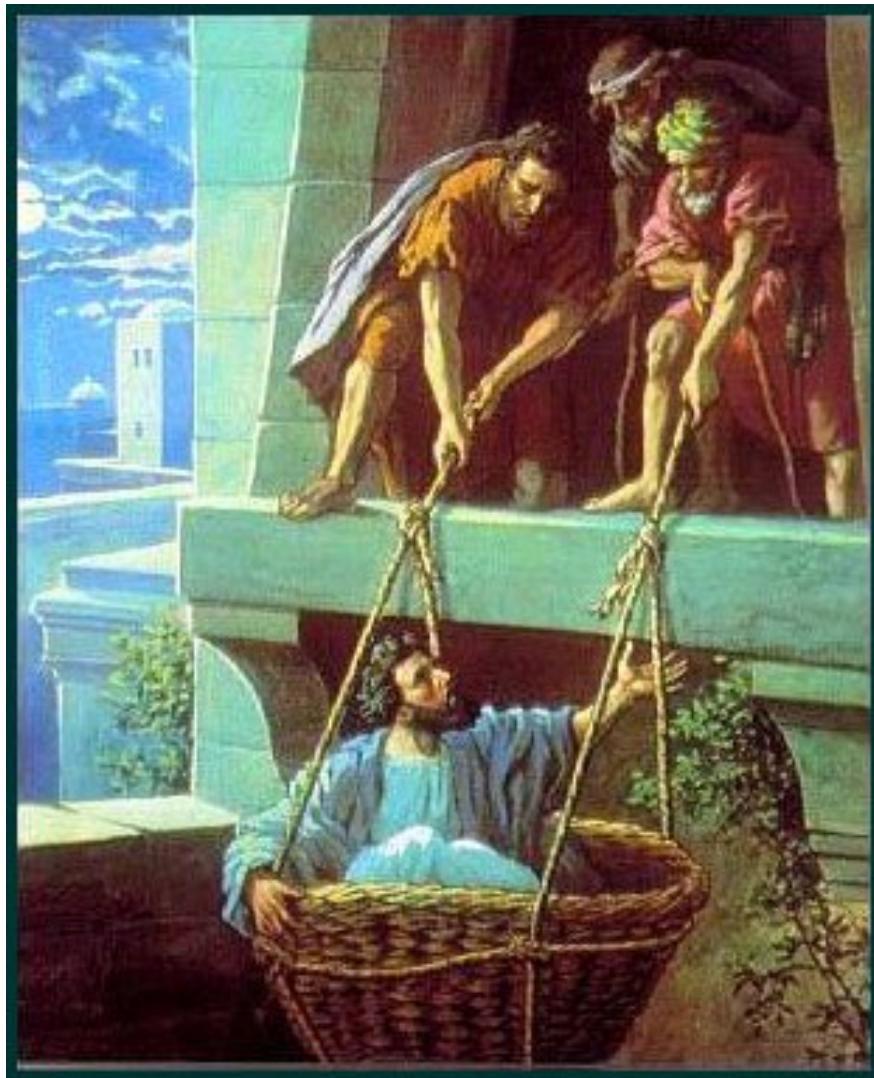
“Many days.” 3 years. During this time Saul also preached in the area south of Damascus as far as Nabatean Arabia, which is now more or less where the modern nation of Jordan is located. (Galatians 1:17) Eventually, the rejecting Jews couldn’t handle Saul’s preaching of the truth anymore and **“plotted to kill him”**.

V 24-25 But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him.

Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.

“They watched the gates.” Like all cities in those days, Damascus was a walled enclosure, so the only way to escape was **“down through the wall in a large basket”**. In 2Corinthians 11:32 Paul refers to this time and the

king of the city, “Aretas”, and its “governor” who were “guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me.”



V 26-28 **And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.**

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.

Even after three years the disciples “*were all afraid of him (Saul), and did not believe that he was a disciple*”. The lingering memory of his persecution could not easily be forgotten. As a result Barnabas had to bring Saul to the Jerusalem church’s leadership – “*to the apostles*” – to get their authorization of him as a *bona fide* disciple.

Saul spent 15 days with the apostle Peter according to Galatians 1:18-19. This must have been a tremendous opportunity for Saul to gain firsthand knowledge of the teachings and experiences gained by the apostles during Jesus’ public ministry on earth.

V 29 **And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.**

“*Hellenists.*” Jews influenced by Greek culture. This was likely the same group that Stephen had disputed with. It seems they hadn’t changed much for, as with Stephen, “*they attempted to kill him*”.

V 30 **When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.**

“*They brought him down to Caesarea.*” Paul’s second escape from persecution. Caesarea was “*down*” from Jerusalem because of its much lower elevation on the coast. It was an important port city, 30 miles north of Joppa. As capital of the Roman province of Judea and home of the Roman procurator, it headquartered a large Roman garrison. Hence the disciples there had less concern about persecution from the Jews. Philip was last heard of in Caesarea (Acts 8:40), so it’s possible Paul may have met him there. After Caesarea Saul went to his home town of Tarsus. Little is known of what he did there for the next eight years (A.D. 37-45 approximately).

V 31 **Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.**

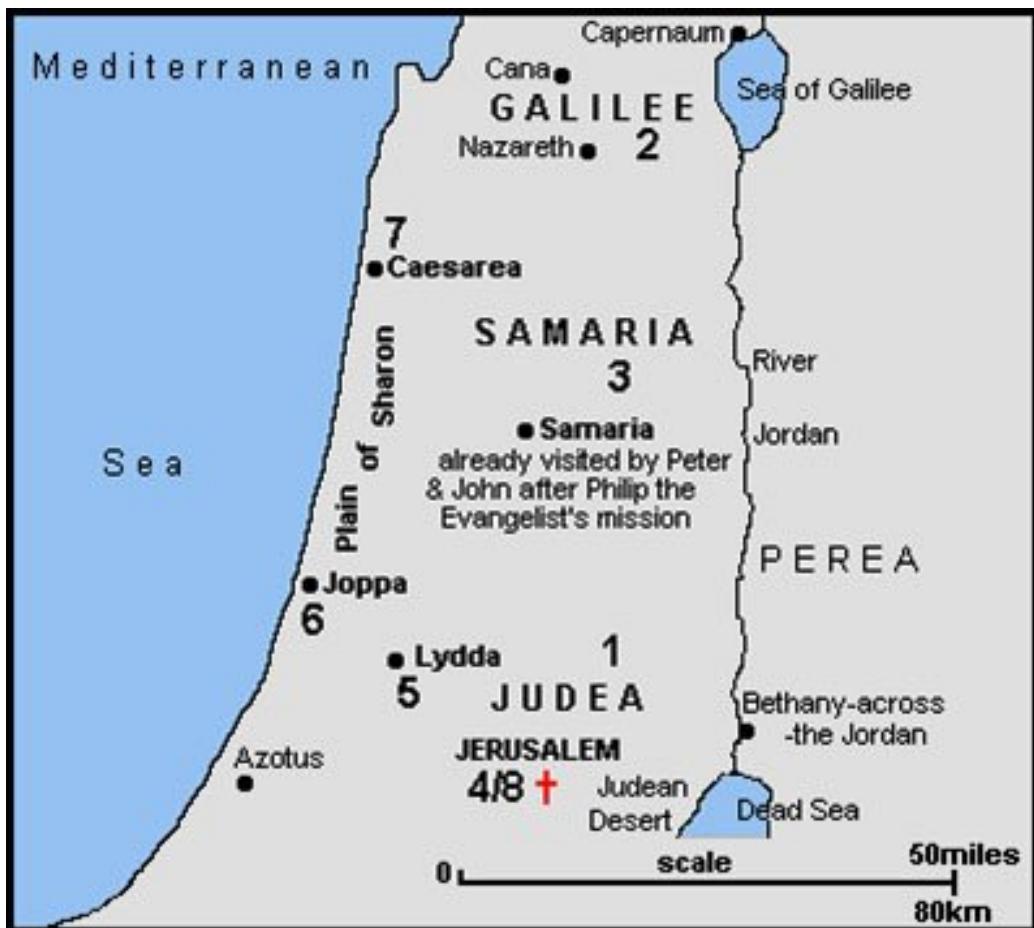
“*Then the churches. . . had peace.*” Saul’s conversion some three years earlier had, of course, already stopped his persecution of the Church. In addition, now there were two more reasons why “*the churches. . . had*

peace" : firstly, his abrupt departure from Jerusalem helped stay this new wave of persecution that was brewing. Secondly, a stricter Roman governor, along with an expansion of Herod Agrippa's authority in the land, had helped to restrict the activities of the chief priests.

At this point chapter 9 changes its focus to the exploits of the apostle Peter. Again we read about Peter, encouraged perhaps by Saul's visit, working miracles now in Samaria. It seems he had to get away from Jerusalem where, as Saul had just finished finding out, not much could be done anymore because of the hardened attitude of the Early Church's enemies.

V 32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

"Lydda." 10 miles southeast of Joppa. It was a sort of transportation hub servicing roads from Egypt to Syria and Joppa to Jerusalem.



Map of Peter's travels to Lydda and Joppa

V 33-35 **There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.**

And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately.

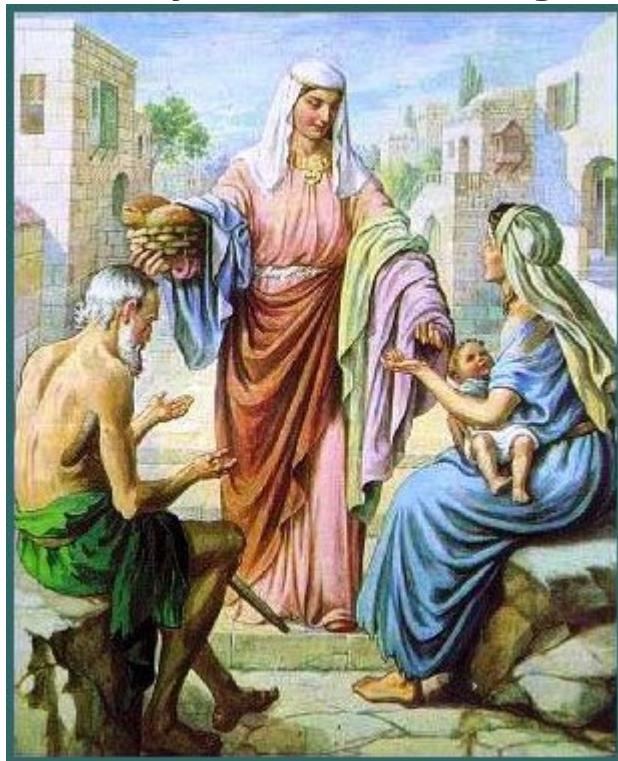
So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

“All who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon.” This covered a lot of territory, it seems; “Sharon” was the plain surrounding Lydda and Joppa and extended north all the way to Caesarea. The healing of Aeneas had attracted a lot of attention.

V 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.

"Joppa." A seacoast town now known as Jaffa, south of modern Tel Aviv, the same place that Jonah sailed from. **"Tabitha"** was this disciple's Hebrew name and **"Dorcas"** her Greek name, by which she was more commonly known; it means "gazelle".



V 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.

They had already "washed her" and "laid her in an upper room", so there was no question that she was dead. It was customary to bury a body immediately, but they had faith to wait a bit and see what Peter might be able to do.

V 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.

"Near Joppa." Lydda was only 10 miles southeast of Joppa, so Peter was requested "not to delay in coming to them".

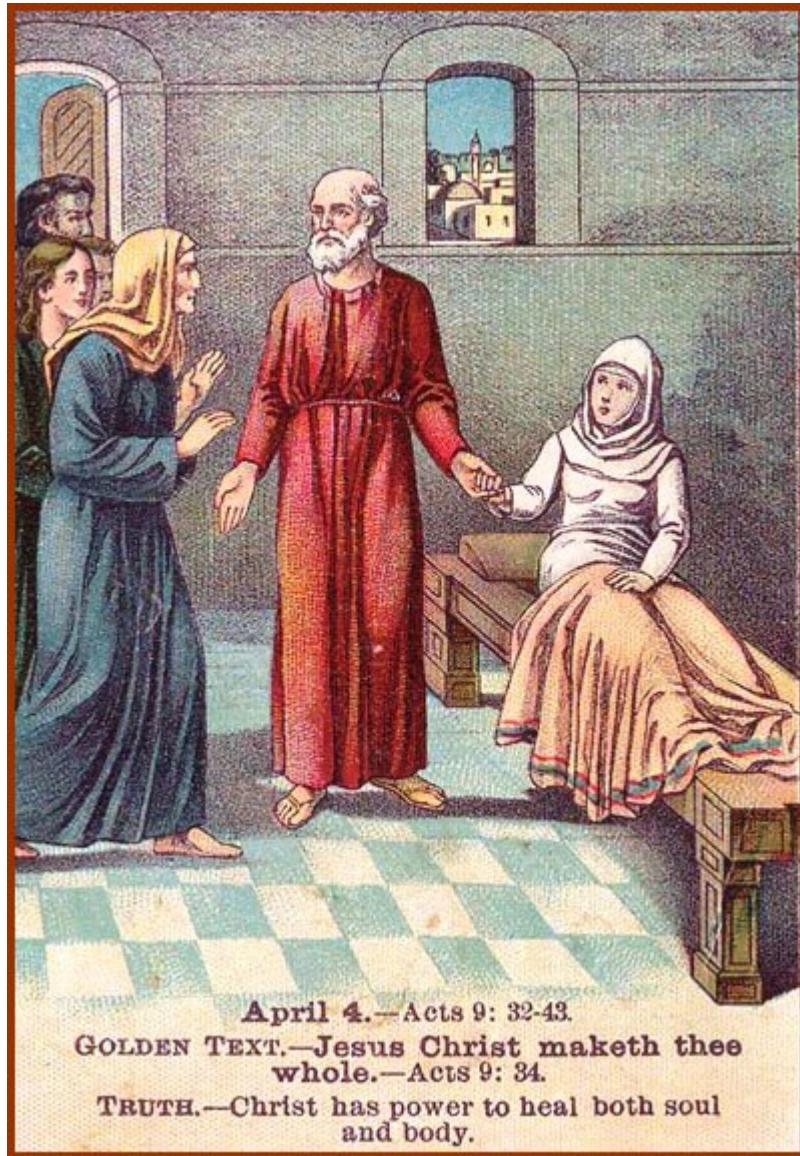
V 39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

"Tunics and garments." Close fitting undergarments and long outer robes.

V 40-42 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.

Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.



“Peter put them all out.” With so much commotion going on with all the showing of the garments and the weeping, Peter needed a little quiet time so he could **“focus on the power”**, a practice or habit he would have picked up from observing the Master in operation during His ministry on Earth. During this bit of quiet time Peter was enabled to perform the outstanding miracle of raising Tabitha from the dead. He had to block out all the crying voices and surrounding confusion in order to focus on the power of God that he knew would bring the supernatural solution to this tragic situation he was being confronted with.

V 43 So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

“Simon, a tanner.” Peter broke through a Jewish cultural barrier by staying with this man. Jews looked down on tanners because in that occupation they had to handle the skins of dead animals. Simon was likely an outcast from the local synagogue. Peter stayed with him, probably because it was better to steer clear of the traditionalist Jews. Like Jesus, Peter was a “*friend of tax collectors and sinners*”. (Matthew 11:19)

Thoughts on “Common” Folks (like Dorcas)

There is generally a desire on the part of many people to get out of the commonplace, to do something great, and they forget the cooking, washing, mending, sewing, farming, nursing the sick, doing little kindnesses, and child-training. All of these things that come in the everyday round of the commonplace are great things in God’s sight, and God created them as He did the great things.

You know, there is an economic necessity for the love of the commonplace. There’s real character building in washing dishes and doing cooking and raising your own garden, and a man doing carpentry. I love to see a woman who loves cooking and washing and mending, and I like to see a man who delights in his plows and his teams and his produce. For these things are divine. ... God made the commonplace. I don’t know why it is that it seems like the very grind of it gets into people’s souls, and they begin to feel like they’re nobodies and that they don’t amount to anything in man or in God’s sight. Well, Dorcas was of more value than Bernice, the society daughter of Herod, and you’ll find many characters in God’s Word who lived amongst the commonplace. Acts 9:36-42; Acts 25:13, 23; 26:30

I wonder when we’ll ever learn the lesson that it’s doing some little duties of life faithfully, punctually, thoroughly, reverently, not for the praise of men, but for the “well done” of Jesus Christ, not for the payment to be received, but because God has given us a little place of work to do in His great world. Not because we must, but because we choose, not as slaves of circumstances, but doing it with the Lord in mind, doing it “as unto the Lord and not unto men,” doing it as Christ’s freed ones. Colossians 3:23

It's a greater thing to do an unimportant thing with a great motive for God and for truth and for others, than to do a great, important thing and do it with a complaining spirit. An obscure life really offers more opportunities for the nurture of a loftier type of character, the growth of Christian graces, more opportunities than any greatness, such as men call greatness. We sometimes will go down the story book of history and say, "Oh, if we could have been Grace Darling or Florence Nightingale, someone like that." But God meant you to be for Him just where He put you, if you do as unto Him and not unto men.

(from ["Glory in the Commonplace"](#) by Virginia Brandt Berg

[\(Continue to ACTS, chapter 10\)](#)