

**AMAZING ACTS—
act two**

Acts 9:32 to 18:23

Follow the battles and blessings of the early church

by Gerard Chrispin



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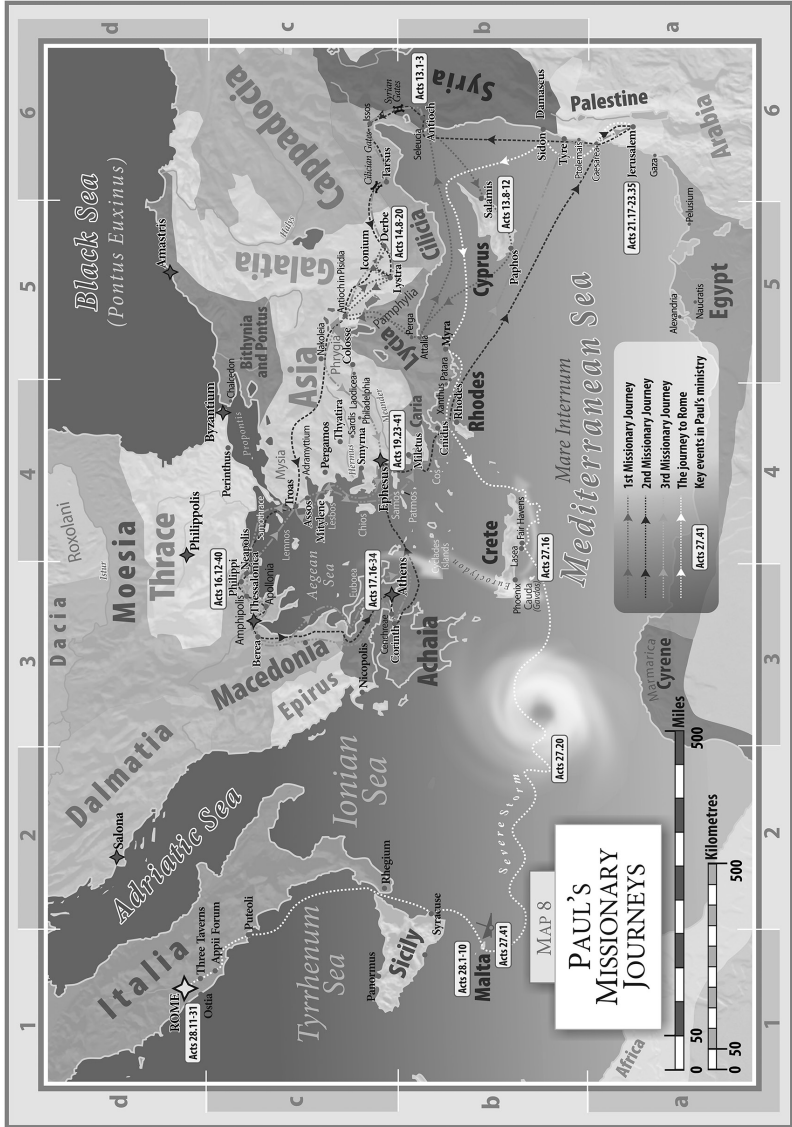
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This book is dedicated to my team of helpers who are such an encouragement to me in producing the *Amazing Acts* trilogy.



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Foreword by Stephen Wright, Barrister at Law

‘If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?’
Acts is an Amazing book because literally the early Christians were on trial for their faith and they were literally tried and convicted for their faith!

Gerard Chrispin is no stranger to trials. As a Lawyer he has borne witness to the criminal justice system both inside the court room and in his Christian work in prisons. With great lucidity he masterfully clarifies the teaching of the Acts of the Apostles. He traces the trials of Stephen; the conversion of one the greatest opponents of Christianity, Saul of Tarsus, and his subsequent trials. This book makes these amazing stories of suffering, inspiration and faith walk straight off the pages of the early church and he shows their applicability to the reader’s life today.

Next to the Gospel of Mark, I would recommend a young Christian to read the Acts of the Apostles. Never has a more gripping record been penned. If the amazing events in Acts fail to electrify the imagination and stir the emotions of any serious

reader, nothing ever could. Acts is the sequel to the mighty events of the gospels and the gateway to the great teachings of the Epistles. It marks in fact, one of the greatest turning points in history.

Christianity today is under attack by secularism and in some cases suffers hostility just like the early church. How did Christianity thrive? This book will unlock some of the amazing secrets. My father, Professor Verna Wright (who was a spiritual mentor to the author) said ‘our greatest need as Christians is not opportunity but power. Power with God and power with men’. The book of Acts exemplifies this. As a teenager in Young Life and the United Beach Missions such relevant and practical teaching given by Gerard Chrispin, encouraged and enabled me to grow and stand for Christ when I was in a college of 1000 students with only a handful of Christians.

Time and again in the Acts of the Apostles, we read of someone being converted. The key word of Acts is ‘witness’ and it appears in various forms at least 20 times. The key verse in Acts 1:8 is ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.’

The growth in the Church was explosive, quite apart from the Day of Pentecost. Acts 6:7 ‘the Word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly’.

Acts 9:3 ‘The Church ... walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied.’

Acts 12:24 ‘word of God grew and multiplied.’

Acts 16:5 ‘churches established in the faith and increased in number daily.’

Acts 19:20 ‘so mighty grew the Word of God and prevailed.’

Acts 28:30, 31 Even when Paul was in prison he still preached on as visitors flocked to see this unusual prisoner. ‘He received all that came in ... Preaching the Kingdom of God today, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence.’

Amazing Acts outlines how the Gospel, in adverse circumstances won acceptance throughout the world. The author explains how the Gospel triumphed and was accepted amongst the religious, the pagans and in communities that were commercially successful yet morally corrupt. As Christians living in the 21st century AD we need to rediscover some of the principles that the church in the 1st century AD operated on. *Amazing Acts* is a must read!

Stephen Wright LL.B Barrister-at-Law
Honorary Director of Young Life

A word from the author

There is not much more to say now regarding *Amazing Acts—act two* than I said in ‘A word from the author’ in *Amazing Acts—act one*. I hope that many now reading this second book in the *Amazing Acts* trilogy do so because they read the first book. If not, I hope that they will want to read it and get a copy and be back soon for *Amazing Acts—act three*!

My team of helpers for the *Amazing Acts* trilogy, happily for me, remains the same. A big ‘thank you’ again to David Harding, Derek French, David Fortune, and my Phillippa for their invaluable help, expertise, advice, and hard work. Thank you too to Graham Hind and the Evangelical Press team for managing the complicated task of publishing a co-ordinated trilogy along with an optional integrated correspondence course available for each book in the trilogy. Thank you especially to Trudy Kinloch, the ever helpful and skilful editor.

Anyone acquiring *Amazing Acts* is invited through amazingacts.net/downloads to download a free audio copy of each book, or to apply to receive a set of three CDs. The amazingacts.net site

also enables the book to be read and listened to at the same time (but not downloaded), on a chapter by chapter basis.

For details of the correspondence course, and advice about how to run a discussion course, please turn to the two appendices in this book.

I am as grateful to Stephen Wright, an accomplished Barrister, leader in United Beach Missions, Honorary Director of Young Life and dedicated servant of Jesus Christ, for his kind Foreword to this book as I was to my brother in Christ, ‘Chris’, who provided the Foreword to *Amazing Acts—act one*. Chris was converted in prison and is still witnessing for Christ in custody, by God’s grace, as he proceeds through the system to get nearer to his release date.

My prayer is that through following the truly amazing acts recorded carefully and factually in the Acts of the Apostles, God will inform minds, change hearts, and motivate changes in behaviour and priorities. If that results in a generous mix of helping people to understand the truth of God’s word, encouraging many of them to come to trust in Jesus personally, and motivating both established and new Christians to live and speak for Christ and seek the utmost good of others, I will rejoice greatly!

Gerard Chrispin

Amazing Acts—Overview

The 28 chapters of the Acts of the Apostles are covered in three books, *Amazing Acts—act one*, *Amazing Acts—act two*, and *Amazing Acts—act three*.

This Overview shows how the three parts relate to each other in dividing up the Acts of the Apostles.

Amazing Acts—act one (Acts 1:1–9:31) covers the birth, growth, witness and cruel persecution of the church up to the conversion and early evangelistic ministry of Saul, later to be known as Paul.

- Jesus' commission to the church to witness to Him 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8).
- The birth, growth, witness, and persecution of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:1 to 8:3).
- The spread of the gospel into Judea and Samaria by Christians fleeing persecution (Acts 8:4).
- Concentration of gospel preaching in Samaria by Philip, Peter and John (Acts 8:4–25).
- Concentration of gospel preaching in Judea by Philip (Acts 8:26–40).

- Moving on from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria: the conversion and nurturing of Saul, the arch-persecutor of the church, near Damascus in Syria (Acts 9:1–19); Saul immediately preaches the gospel in Damascus with the believers there (Acts 9:20–22); After a Jewish death-threat Saul flees to Jerusalem via Caesarea (Judea), from where he escapes another death-threat by going north to his home town of Tarsus in Cilicia. (Acts 9:23–30).
- A period of freedom from persecution and further growth for the church, after Saul’s departure (Acts 9:31).

Amazing Acts—act two (Acts 9:32–18:23) covers Peter’s gospel preaching in Judea, the wider spread of the gospel, persecution through Herod, Paul’s first two missionary trips which take the gospel wider still toward ‘the end of the earth’; between those missionary trips Saul attends the meeting of the apostles’ Council:

- Peter’s evangelistic ministry in Judea at Lydda, in the plain of Sharon, and at Joppa (Acts 9:32–43).
- Peter’s witness in Caesarea (Judea) to the Gentile, Cornelius; the falling of the Holy Spirit on the believing Gentiles; after Peter’s debriefing is discussed, the rejoicing of the apostles and believers that Gentiles are converted (Acts 10:1–11:18).
- The spread of the gospel further to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch; Barnabas brings Saul from Tarsus to Antioch; famine relief arranged for Judean Christians through Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:19–30).
- Herod Agrippa’s persecution of the church and martyrdom of some leaders; Peter in and out of prison; Growth of God’s word; return of Barnabas and Saul from Jerusalem (Acts 12:1–25).
- Paul’s first missionary trip (Acts 13:1–14:28).

- The Council of apostles and elders at Jerusalem about salvation by faith alone (Acts 15:1–35).
- Paul’s second missionary trip (Acts 15:36–18:23).

Amazing Acts—act three (Acts 18:24–28:31) covers the last of Paul’s three missionary ventures, Paul in Jerusalem again, his hearings before various authorities leading to his going to Rome to appeal his case to Caesar, his arrival there and freedom to share God’s word for two years:

- Paul’s third missionary trip (Acts 18:24–21:16).
- Paul in Jerusalem with the apostles and elders; his arrest in the temple; facing, speaking and testifying to a mob from which he is rescued by the soldiers (Acts 21:17–22:29);
- Paul’s appearances before the Council (Sanhedrin) in Jerusalem and Felix in Caesarea, and Festus through whom he appeals to Caesar; further appearance before King Agrippa and his testimony to the king (Acts 22:30–26:32);
- Paul’s very eventful journey to Rome via a shipwreck on Malta; his ministry there to Jewish leaders, and his relative freedom to preach about Jesus Christ for two years ‘no-one forbidding him’ (Acts 27:1–28:31).

INTRODUCTION

Follow the battles and blessings of the early church

Welcome to *Amazing Acts—act two*, or welcome back if you have just read *Amazing Acts—act one*!

What could be more exciting, challenging or relevant today than to see how a small, dejected and defeated body of believers became the first members of the early church which, though sorely persecuted, were empowered by the Holy Spirit to turn the world upside down with the gospel and establish local churches of new believers?

Each chapter of *Amazing Acts—act two* whether in writing or by audio, contains the passage of the book of Acts covered in that chapter. *Amazing Acts—act two* covers the middle nine chapters of Acts, except for a few verses which stray over into *Amazing Acts—act one* and *Amazing Acts—act three*.

How can you best use this book for your own and for others' blessing? (Appendix One and Appendix Two to this book explain how best to use this book to run a Discussion Group and how best to complete and return the Correspondence Courses).

1. Pray that God will help you understand and trust His word, and put it into practice in your life.

2. Listen to the relevant audio track while you read the same passage and its explanation in the book.

3. Read more than once through the verses of Acts printed in each chapter of *Amazing Acts—act two*.

4. Ask 'What is the main point of the passage?' How do the noted Bible references relate to that?

5. Consider the three questions in each chapter, using the Bible verses noted there to help you.

6. Pray over what you have learned. Ask God to help you to apply it faithfully to your own life.

7. Read and listen through the chapter again to see if you have missed anything important.

You may adapt these points to use *Amazing Acts—act two* for Bible studies, study groups, or one-on-one teaching.

Amazing Acts—act two may be used with any Bible translation of the book of Acts, although the New King James Version ('NKJV') is the one generally quoted. The Bible references function as follows: Acts 18:1–18 means Acts chapter 18, verses 1 to 18.

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