Acts Chapter 9: Conversion of Saul

Not one hair of your head can fall to the ground without God knowing,(Matt 10:30), nothing is hid from God's sight. The story of Saul of Tarsus should be an inspiration to us all of God's mercy and grace. Saul was an enemy of the Gospel and Jesus. First we see him watching the garments of those stoning Stephen (Acts 7:58), then we see him on heading up the hunting of Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-3), how many were executed and imprisoned we don't know. The High Priest was given Roman authority over religious matters, and the outbreak of "The Way" was seen as threat to their authority. The Sadducees were in control of the Priesthood and they were in alliance with the Rome and its puppet Herodian government.

This alliance with Rome goes back to the time of Pompey the Great in 63 BC, Who conquered Jerusalem for the Roman Republic, he was invited to solve a dispute for the Priesthood between two brothers, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. Rome sided with Hyrcanus II effectively taking control of Jerusalem, from that point forward. Later Herod the Great was installed as a puppet king of Rome. The priesthood maintained this authority with Roman permission

Acts mainly focuses on the ministries of Peter and Paul as they lead the Church out of Jerusalem to begin the mission to fulfill the "Great Commission" with the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. Except for this portion, Acts 9, chapters 1-12 focus on Peter and the early church, and Acts 13 to 28 focus on the ministry of Paul.

> Acts 1:8
> 8 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."

Here we are introduced to Saul's conversion and how Jesus introduced himself to the

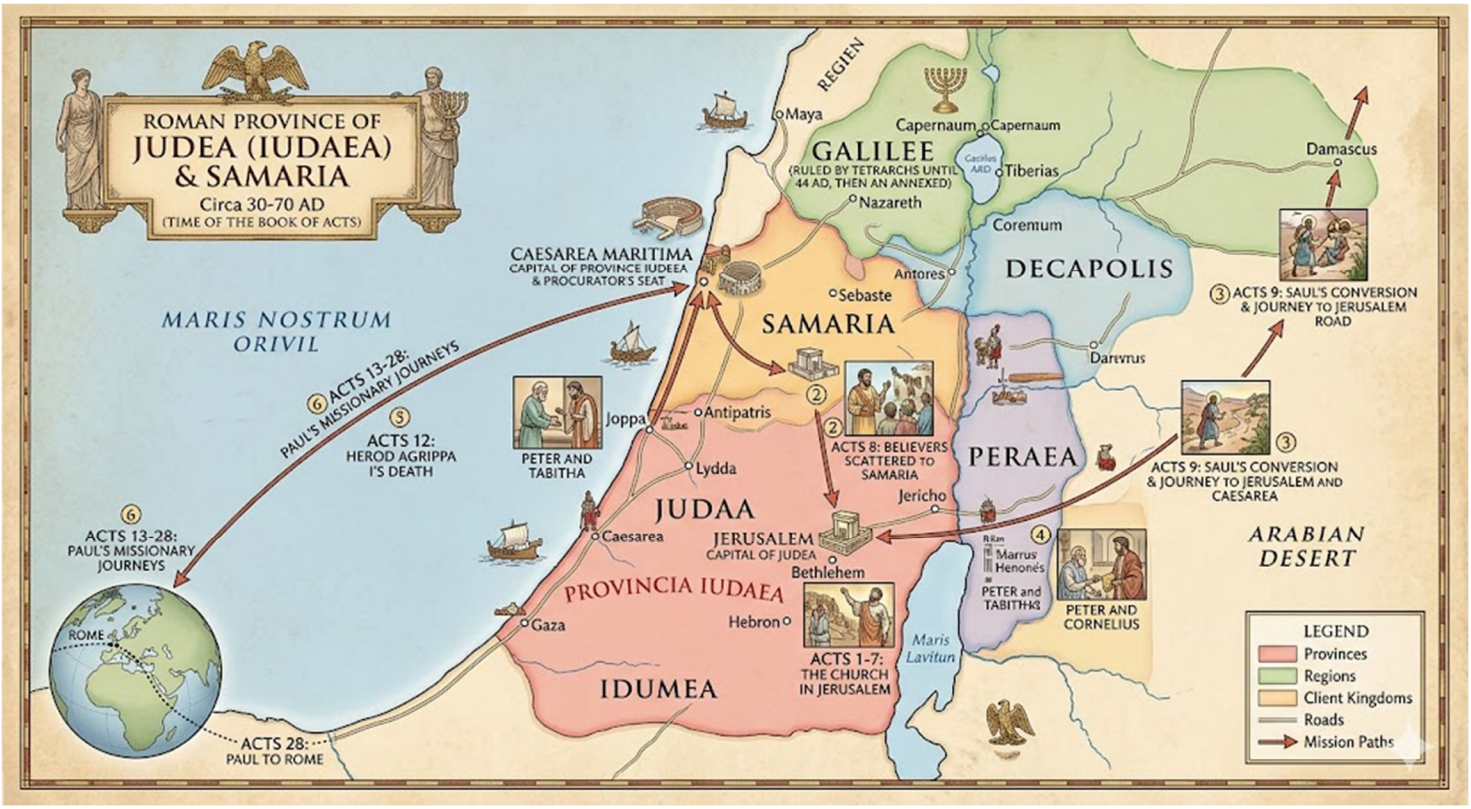
one hunting believers. Saul later admits his persecution was in ignorance; he did not really understand God's plan for the Messiah, so his actions not based on knowledge.

> 1 Timothy 1:13
> 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

Here we see the grace and mercy of God, of all people on the earth, why would God choose someone who was at war with Him? Saul was guilty of killing and imprisoning the followers of Jesus. Saul is an example for all of us, he is evidence of the mercy and grace of God, Saul literally writes almost 25 percent of the New Testament. When the question is asked, Can God use sinful people, God brings forward the evidence of Saul, yes absolutely! It's called Grace, it's the Free Gift of Salvation, that is what the Good News is all about.

> Ephesians 2:8-9
> 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Paul is a perfect example of the Free Gift of Salvation, he does not deserve it, that is why its called Grace, because there are no works you can boast about, you have to accept it to receive it, it is a gift from God.

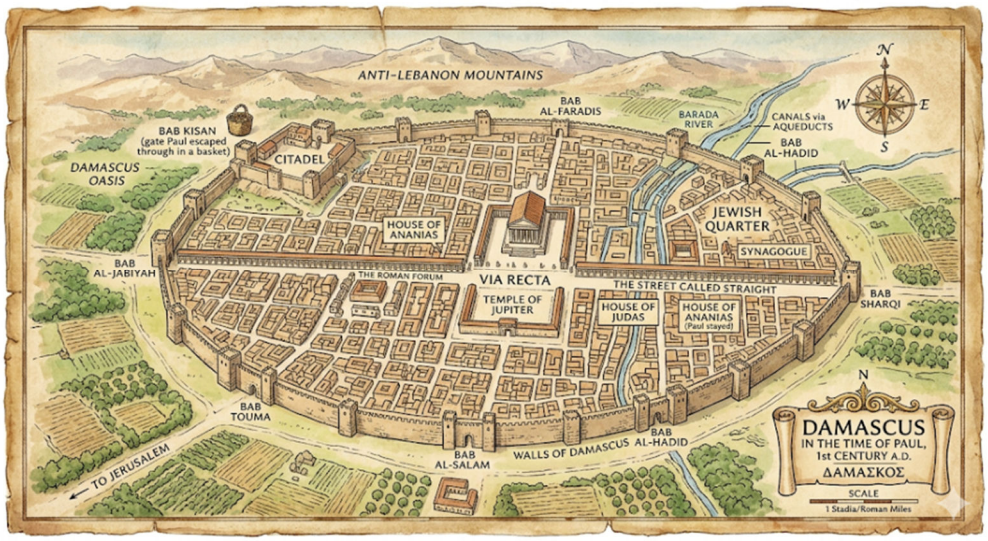


The Conversion of Saul

Saul has the church on the run, he is captain of the team opposed to the Gospel, working with the High Priest with a continuation of the alliance between Rome, Saul has authority to

retrieve fleeing Christian Jews who fled to Damascus.

Acts 9:1-2



1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest
2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Vs. 1-2

The High Priest: Saul's goal was to stop the spread of Christianity, Jewish believers took refuge in Damascus, which was under the authority of a different Roman governor and king. The appointed ruler is King Aretas[1], who was the father-in-law of Herod Antipas. Rome was collaborating with the High Priest to maintain order in Jerusalem. This involved the Christian Jews, who were challenging that order.

Synagogues at Damascus: Damascus was and is one of the oldest cities to have continual occupations. Abraham traveled to Damascus and his servant Eliezer also came from the city (Genesis 14:15), giving it an age of over 4000-years. The number of Jews in Damascus have been estimated to be between 10,000[2] to 40,000, so it would have been a place of refuge for Christan Jews to hide from persecution.

Damascus was a 5-day journey from Jerusalem, about 140-150 miles.

Vision of Jesus

Acts 9:3-7

3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.
4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"
5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.
6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."
7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

Vs. 3-7

Saul was closer to Damascus when he had this vision, he describes it a **light from heaven**, and Jesus spoke to him out of that light. This is not a dream but a vision. Saul was blinded by the light, but he saw Jesus. (I Cor 15:8, Gal 1:16, Acts 9:27)

1 Corinthians 9:1
1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?

Jesus is the one who has appeared to Saul and is going to commission him, this is why Saul is an Apostle, even though he did not know Jesus before the resurrection. Jesus

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[1] The successor of Obodas was apparently surnamed Aeneas and this is the Arabian king who figures in the New Testament (2Co_11:32; compare Act_9:24). The Aretas, here mentioned, is the father-in-law of Herod Antipas, who divorced his wife to marry Herodins, the wife of his brother Philip (Mat_14:3; Mar_6:17; Luk_3:19). Josephus (*Ant.*, XVIII, v, 1, 3) gives us a circumstantial narration of the events

[2] At this time about 10,000 Jews lived at Damascus, governed by an ethnarch (Acts ix. 2; II Cor. xi. 32). The attraction which Judaism exercised at that time over the pagans was so great that many men and women were converted to that religion. https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/

commissioned him as an Apostle to the Gentiles. Jesus tells him, "**I am Jesus**," Saul did not know Jesus, he through ignorance thought Jesus was a false prophet, like Jews do today.

At this point, Jesus is using people, the church, to explain the Gospel, Saul is told to go to Damascus, where he will be told what to do. Saul was traveling with the Temple Guard to exercise the authority of the High Priest over the Judeans believers. **The men**[3] were also those sent by the High Priest, they were witnesses to what happened to Saul.

Saul in Damascus

Acts 9:8-12
8 Saul rose from the ground, and although **his eyes** were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.
9 And for **three days** he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named **Ananias**. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."
11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to **the street called Straight**, and at the **house of Judas** look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,
12 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."

VS 8-19

His eyes : there was a covering on his eyes, described as scales (vs.18) which prevented him from seeing, so his eyes were open, but they could not see. He was in darkness, God was getting Saul's attention, he was letting him know that He Jesus was in charge.

Three days: Three days without food is hard enough, 3 days without drink is near death.

According to Church Tradition: Ananias was the bishop of Damascus, he was also martyred around AD 70

Ananias: He was a disciple and leader of the Damascus church. Ananias, informed about church persecution in Jerusalem shows he was a church leader. According to tradition, he was the first bishop of Damascus, and was martyred in AD 70 by the Roman governor Lucian for refusing to sacrifice to pagan gods. Jesus chose him to help Saul understand the Messianic hope.

The street called Straight: This street is still in existence in the current city of Damascus, it was designed by the Romans in 64 BC, Saul was staying at the house of Judas located on the street. Today a small mosque stands at the location of the **house of Judas**. And the house of Ananias is a chapel that can be visited in Damascus.

Saul was waiting for Ananias to deliver him the information he needed; God was preparing the heart of Saul to accept it. Notice, how God chooses to deliver the message of the Gospel to Saul. He still used an individual, to deliver the message at the right place and at the right time.

God is no different today, just like in the story a Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8) an angel directed Philip to go to Gaza and there meet the Ethiopian. Today God will put us in places to meet people, to share the good news of Jesus Christ, but we must be sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit, in our connection with others who are around us.

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[3] Later in Acts, he says the men saw the light and heard a sound but did not understand. The did not see anyone as Acts 9:7 affirms, hearing the voice, they did not understand. Acts 22:99 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

Even today, Muslims have seen **visions** of Jesus and have been directed to specific individuals who have the gospel in their country.

Saul a Chosen Instrument

Acts 9:13-19
13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much **evil** he has done to your **saints** at Jerusalem.
14 And here he has **authority from the chief priests** to bind all who call on your name."
15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is **a chosen instrument** of mine to carry my name before **the Gentiles** and kings and the children of Israel.
16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."
17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."
18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then **he rose and was baptized;**
19 and taking food, he was strengthened. **For some days** he was with the disciples at Damascus.

VS 13-19

Evil: Paul engaged in In the systematic persecution of the believers in Jerusalem and other cities, Stephen was just one example, Saul hunted the Christians by his own admission, in his personal testimony, Saul said he was murderer and a blasphemer.

Acts 26:10-11
10 And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.
11 And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

Saints: Who is a saint? Is it someone who needs to be voted for? When you accept Jesus as savior, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside you as God's "Guarantee" of the inheritance to come. Salvation means you are washed and cleaned by the blood of Jesus Christ, you are holy not because of your righteousness, but because of His Righteousness. You are "Sanctified", separated because of the Holy Spirit. You are a saint or *hagios*, in the Greek meaning pure, *morally blameless or ceremonially consecrated,* because the Holy Spirit is dwelling inside you.

Ephesians 1:13-14
13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,
14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

The believers in Jerusalem are called "saints", like every true believer. When the Holy Spirit is in you, you are sanctified, or a saint.

Chosen instrument: Saul was God's apostle to the Gentiles; Paul will end up writing almost 25% of the New Testament.
Some days: This covers a period of about 3-years, after Paul vision, restored, he spends time understanding who Jesus the Messiah is, and how the Messiah had to suffer, Saul is then **baptized** as a believer.
For some days: What is not mentioned here, referred to elsewhere, Paul then goes into Arabia, the Nabatean Kingdom, whose capital was Petra for a period. We do not know how long, but his time from his conversion to his return to Jerusalem is 3-years. After his conversion, Paul spend time with the disciples, then goes into Arabia, and returns to Damascus and then begins his ministry proclaiming Jesus Christ.

Paul in Galatians breaks down these events, about his time in Damascus, Arabia and then back to Jerusalem to meet with Peter for 15-days.

Galatians 1:11-18

ɔproximate Date	Event	Biblical Reference
34 AD	**Conversion on the Damascus Road**; is blinded and then healed.	Acts 9:1–19
34–37 AD	Preaches briefly in Damascus, spends time in **Arabia**, then returns to Damascus.	Gal 1:17; Acts 9:20–22
37 AD	Escapes Damascus; makes his **first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem** to meet Peter and James.	Acts 9:23–29; Gal 1:18–19
37–44 AD	Ministries in **Tarsus** and surrounding regions of Syria and Cilicia.	Acts 9:30; Gal 1:21

11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.
12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
13 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.
14 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.
15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,
16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;
17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.
18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

Saul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues

Acts 9:20-22
20 And **immediately** he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."
21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"
22 But Saul **increased** all the more in **strength**, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by **proving** that Jesus was the Christ.

Immediately: Once Paul understood the Gospel, what did he do? He proclaimed Jesus that He is the Son of God! There was a large Jewish population in Damascus, we know this because Josephus tells us between 10,000 and 18,000 were killed in AD 70 by the Romans. There was even a Jewish Quarter in Damascus, so there were a number of **synagogues**, some are still standing today.
Saul increased…strength: What did Saul do? He was proving **Jesus** was the Messiah of Israel. He did this by showing how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the "Suffering Messiah", Saul is amazed at the evidence, he wants to share it with his fellow Jews, people just like him, to see what he sees. Prophets in the Old Testament clearly wrote the Messiah was to suffer and die. This is what Paul proclaimed, we see this when Paul goes to the city of Thessalonica, he talks about his routine.

Acts 17:1-4
1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.
2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,
3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."
4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

Paul explained Jesus from the scriptures, for example the Isaiah wrote 700 years before Jesus that the Messiah, when he came would die for the sins of the world.

Isaiah 53:4-7
4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Saul Escapes from Damascus

Acts 9:23-25
23 When **many days** had passed, the **Jews plotted** to kill him,
24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him,
25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a **basket.**

Paul preached Jesus to the Jews of Damacus for a period, he calls it **many days**, but its within the 3-year window of his conversion, before he returns to Jerusalem. His preaching was so powerful, that they tried to kill him, so Paul was lowered from the walls of Damascus in a **basket** and escaped the assignation plot on his life. This is a physical event, but its really part of the spiritual war, Satan is trying to prevent the Good News of the Gospel, and he is now trying to murder the messenger of the Gospel. The same takes place today.

Saul in Jerusalem

Acts 9:26-31
26 And when he had come to **Jerusalem**, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.
27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.
28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.
29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.
30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.
31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Paul returned to **Jerusalem**, where he started 3-years earlier, he was such vicious enemy of Christ, the believers in Jerusalem had a tough time believing it was real. **Barnabas**, who first meet in Acts 4:36-37, a Levite from Cyprus, accepted him and interceded on his behalf with the disciples. Eventually Paul stays with Peter for 15-days (Gal 3:18).

Paul cannot help but proclaim what is so clear to him now about Jesus, he was well known by the Jews in Jerusalem, he was such a vocal enemy of the Christians, he was part of the Hellenized Jews, known as the Hellenists, so he tried to implore and prove that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. Again, his message of Jesus brought the threat of death, by those who were his friends and allies before. So, the church ushered him out of Jerusalem, and he returned to his home of **Tarsus**, and there he stayed for 8 to 10 years before being called by Barnabas to help in the teaching ministry in Antioch (Acts 11:25), the third largest city in the Roman Empire and intellectual center for philosophy and education. In Acts 13;9, Saul becomes known as Paul.

The Healing of Aeneas

Acts 9:32-35
32 Now as **Peter** went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.
33 There he found a man named **Aeneas**, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed.
34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose.
35 And all the residents of **Lydda** and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Peter: The Gospel continues to spread, God is using signs and wonders to give authority to the ministry of Peter, as recorded in Acts. Aeneas was paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. His healing caused many in the cities of **Lydda** and **Sharon** to turn to the Lord. God has different methods of evangelism, some are through words, sometimes God draws attention through miracles. The purpose of the miracle, is to establish the authority, and to get the attention of people to hear the Gospel.

Dorcas Restored to Life

Acts 9:36-43
36 Now there was in **Joppa** a disciple named **Tabitha**, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.
37 In those days she became ill and **died**, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.
38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay."
39 So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.
40 But Peter put them all outside, 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 And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.
42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.
43 And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one **Simon, a tanner**.

Peter continues to the coast to Joppa, modern day Jaffa, there he raises Tabitha, a good believer who was loved by the Believers. Peter then stays at Simon the tanners house.