

18. May 2025

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### “Paul's second escape and Peter's apostolic journey”

Acts 9:26–35

*When he [Paul] 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. 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. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus.*

*So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied. Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints that lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*

The news of Saul's conversion from persecutor to messenger of the Lord had not yet reached Jerusalem. Therefore, fear of him still prevailed among the disciples, who could not initially believe that he was now one of them. This was only overcome through the mediation of Barnabas, who testified to the apostles about Saul's conversion and the fervour with which he had preached the Gospel in Damascus. After this, Paul was accepted into the Christian community in Jerusalem. There, too, in the City of the Lord, he was able to proclaim the Gospel with great authority.

However, we then read in the Acts of the Apostles that the Hellenists, with whom Paul had been arguing, began to harbour hostility towards him, even wanting to kill him. He therefore had to flee again. What was it about Paul that aroused such hostility, despite him having joined the Church of God so recently?

Reading his letters in the Bible, which feed us spiritually to this day, and learning about his later apostolic life reveals that he truly was a 'chosen instrument' of the Lord, just as He had told Ananias (Acts 9:15). Paul combined scholarship with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. The zeal that had previously led him to fanatically persecute Christians now became an impulse to tirelessly proclaim the Gospel. This gave rise to a great strength of conviction. Thus, Paul became invaluable to those who listened to him and opened themselves to the truth, as we do when we read his writings to this day. However, for those closed to the truth, he became a source of scandal. As we can see, his opponents could not simply turn away from him indifferently, but were confronted with a situation that required a decision.

Added to this is Paul's astuteness in evangelising those who were still trapped in the worship of various divinities and ignorant of the true God, as we shall see in his later speech in Athens. Clearly, the Lord had bestowed a special grace upon Paul, destined to become the great Apostle to the Gentiles. He posed a threat to the powers of darkness. In any case, he could not remain in Jerusalem. Therefore, the brethren took him to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus.

Meanwhile, the young church was enjoying a period of peace. She continued to grow, and the number of believers increased. Signs and wonders continued to accompany the apostles. While visiting the new communities, Peter came to Lydda, where he healed a paralytic. This miracle caused many people from Lydda and Sharon to convert to the Lord. The church grew steadily.

Peter's journey then took him to Joppa. A disciple named Tabitha had died, and the community begged Peter to come and help them. Tabitha was very dear to the community, and many mourned her death. The Acts of the Apostles goes on to describe the miracle that took place through Peter:

*“When he had come, they took him to the upper room (...) Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed; then turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, rise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive” (Acts 9:39-41).*

The miracle of Tabitha's resurrection *"became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord"* (v. 42).

The catch of fish that the Lord had initiated through His apostles was unstoppable. The Holy Spirit was doing His work, and He found willing co-workers in the apostles, resulting in more and more souls being caught in the net of divine love. We will soon see how the Gospel will spread beyond the borders of Israel, offering salvation in Christ to all peoples, fulfilling the Lord's words: *"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"* (Lk 11:28).

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**Meditation on the day's reading:** <https://en.elijamission.net/comforting-and-encouraging-the-faithful/>