

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

TABITHA: LESSON TWO

by Sandy Harber

"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." Acts 9:36

Aramaic "Tabitha," a Syriac name, was the equivalent of the Hebrew "Zibiah" (or "Tsibiah"). In the Old Testament, Zibiah was a princess of Judah who married King Ahaziah and became the mother of King Joash (Jehoash), a godly king who reigned 40 years in Judah (II Kings 12:1). "Dorcas" is the Greek equivalent of "Tabitha," which means "a gazelle." The name carries with it the idea of grace, agility, and beauty. It was customary at that time for individuals to have both a Jewish and Gentile name, especially in a city like Joppa, which was located in Israel but received a lot of Gentile travelers and commerce. It's likely that Tabitha was known by both names.

Luke identified Tabitha as a disciple who was "full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." "Disciple" here is the Greek "mathetria," which means "a female pupil." It comes from the root "math," which indicates "thought accompanied by endeavor." A disciple does not just acquire knowledge (thought) from the teacher but puts that learning into action (endeavor). Tabitha was a follower of Jesus' teaching who proved her faith by her charitable deeds. She used her skill with the sewing needle for the benefit of others. "Almsdeeds" indicates "compassion; beneficence; tender mercy." As we shall see, Tabitha had compassion on the poor widows of her city. She worked tirelessly creating garments for the widows and their children and they loved her for it (v. 39).

Jesus told those who believed on Him that they must continue in His Word to be His disciples (John 8:31). To "continue" means "to abide; to stay; to tarry." Once we become believers and begin to follow His Word, Jesus expects us to stay in the Word, to abide there. In other words, to live there. Take up residence in God's Word and stay there, never straying from it. Tabitha was identified as a disciple because she walked daily in His ways. She was a doer of the Word and not a hearer only (James 1:22). She had the mind of Christ, which is the Word of God, within her (Phil. 2:5). And she had the Comforter, the indwelling Holy Spirit, to instruct her and remind her of the words of Christ (John 14:26).

We have everything available to us that Tabitha had. And more. We have the complete written Word of God at our fingertips. And, like Tabitha, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit (assuming you have accepted Jesus as your Savior) to teach us and guide us in the way we should go. We just need to yield to His leading (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:25). We have the example of Christ to follow, as well as the examples of the apostles and early disciples like Tabitha herself (Heb. 12:1-2). We have all the equipment we need to be successful disciples. Do we also have the compassion and tender mercy that characterized Tabitha?

Tabitha chose to minister to the poor widows in Joppa. It may be that she was a widow herself and could relate to their suffering. Or, perhaps, the Holy Spirit brought to her notice the plight of these ladies without the means to earn money and care for themselves and their children. However it came about, this was Tabitha's calling. God is calling you, too. You are surrounded by opportunities to serve others. So many people are suffering or lost. And, God has given you skills and talents that He wants you to use to benefit others. Perhaps you want to serve but you aren't sure where God wants you to go or what He wants you to do. How can you know His will for your life? Abide in His Word. God speaks through His Word and His Spirit. Listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. He is your guide. Luke penned the perfect eulogy for Tabitha of Joppa. She was a disciple of Jesus. Her life was filled with good works and charitable acts. What legacy will you leave?

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:15-16