

# WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

## TABITHA: LESSON ONE

by Sandy Harber

**"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha." Acts 9:36a**

Tabitha was a resident of Joppa, one of the earliest cities to have a Christian congregation. Joppa, with its natural harbor, was located on the Mediterranean Seacoast, about 35 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Known as "Japho" (Yapo), Joppa was part of the land that was conquered by Joshua and the Hebrew people around 1400 B.C. Joppa (Japho) was part of the inheritance given to the tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:46). Solomon designated the Joppa seaport as the receiving center for the cedar trees transported from Lebanon around 1000 B.C. King Hiram of Tyre entered into an agreement with King Solomon of Israel to supply the lumber for building the Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 5:5-10; II Chronicles 2:16). The Temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar. But in 536 B.C. King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jewish people to leave captivity in Babylon and return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1-8). Once again the seaport of Joppa was used to receive the cedar lumber from Lebanon that they needed to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 3:7).

Joppa is probably best remembered from the story of the prophet Jonah. Commanded by God to warn the people of Nineveh of impending judgment, Jonah chose to run off in the opposite direction by boarding a ship at Joppa that was headed for Tarshish (Jonah 1:1-3). Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, located to the east of Israel on the Tigris River. Jonah did not want God to spare the Assyrians, who were the enemies of his people, so Jonah opted to go west to Tarshish on the Mediterranean Sea (believed to be located near Spain). Jonah never reached Tarshish. But the people of Nineveh heard God's warning and repented in sackcloth and ashes (Jonah 3:5-9).

While Jonah used Joppa as a means of avoiding taking God's message of salvation to the Gentiles, for Peter Joppa was the jumping off point for bringing the Gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles. Peter had received a vision while he was staying in Joppa that led him to the revelation that salvation was not only for the Jews (Acts 10:28-29). And he witnessed the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the first Gentile converts in the home of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48). Because he was willing to follow God's leading wherever it took him, it was Peter who opened the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles.

About ten years before the birth of Jesus, Herod built another seaport city on the Mediterranean Coast about 65 miles northwest of Jerusalem, called "Caesarea." Israel's commerce shifted from the Jewish city of Joppa to the Gentile city at Caesarea. In the same manner, the Christian faith began with the Jewish population but soon spread to the Gentiles, who came to believe in Jesus in ever increasing numbers. Today the city of Joppa is called "Jaffa." It is adjacent to Tel-Aviv, with which it was combined in 1949 into the Tel-Aviv-Jaffa (Yafo) municipality.

Tabitha was in the right place doing all of the right things to advance God's Plan of Salvation. Her charitable acts and godly life energized the early Christians into pleading for her restoration. Their faith brought Peter to Joppa to minister to Tabitha first and, then, to all those who became believers in light of her miraculous resurrection. Thus, Peter stayed in Joppa and was right where God could use him to extend the gospel to Cornelius and his friends and family. Tabitha could not have known the impact that her life and death would have on others. Neither do we, which is why we need to walk daily in His ways. You never know how God will use you to further His kingdom.

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Romans 12:1*