

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

TABITHA: LESSON FOUR

by Sandy Harber

"And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick and died; whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber." Acts 9:37

In the midst of performing her good deeds Tabitha fell ill. The text doesn't give us any details about her illness other than that which is inherent in the word "sick," which means (in the Greek) "to be weak; feeble; lacking strength; infirmity." There are any number of conditions and diseases that rob the body of strength. We aren't told if the sickness came on gradually or attacked her suddenly. Did she linger awhile or succumb quickly? In view of the fact that the disciples in Joppa knew that Peter was close by and could be summoned to heal her, it seems likely that the sickness took her quickly.

The Bible doesn't give us details on Tabitha's living conditions. We can draw conclusions based on what information is given, but these are only guesses. Tabitha appeared to be well off financially since she was able to make garments and give them away freely. Someone had to pay for the materials needed to create the garments and the poor widows that she helped were just that: poor. Presumably, Tabitha used her own resources to acquire the supplies she needed. She probably owned her home, the one with the upper room where she was laid out. There is no mention of any family so she may have resided alone. On the other hand, if she was wealthy she may have had one or more servants in residence.

What we do know is that Tabitha died from her illness. "They" laid her body in the upper room and washed her. While "they" are not specifically identified it seems likely that it was the widows that she ministered to who cleaned her body. Probably several men from the local church carried her body up the outside staircase to the upper room located on the roof. Then the women took over and washed her, as was the custom. Normally, after a body was washed it was anointed for burial with spices and herbs. There is no mention that that was done in this case. It may be that Luke neglected to mention that detail, taking for granted everyone knew this anointing was customary. However, Luke was a precise and detail oriented writer so it seems more likely that the anointing did not take place. Could it be that the widows believed there would be no burial that day? They knew that two men were already on their way to Lydda to fetch Peter. Perhaps they had faith that Peter would be able to resurrect Tabitha. What was the state of expectation in Tabitha's house, where the believers were doubtless gathered together awaiting the arrival of the Apostle Peter? Were they expecting a miracle? Hoping for one? Or, were they just waiting for comfort and guidance from one of the Twelve?

Have you ever been part of a group of believers who gathered together for a specific purpose? Perhaps after 9/11 you joined with others to pray for the nation. The Joppa Christians were united in their love for Tabitha and devastated by her passing. Their collective faith was amazing. Jesus said the faith of just one believer could move mountains (Mt. 17:20). Imagine what an entire congregation could accomplish if they were united and focused on one goal. Are we using the power God has given us to the best advantage in our local churches? It's something to think about.

"And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Acts 2:46-47