

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

TABITHA: LESSON SIX

by Sandy Harber

"Then Peter arose and went with them." Acts 9:39a

Two male disciples from Joppa traveled the ten miles from Joppa to Lydda in search of Peter (Acts 9:38). Their mission was urgent. A sister in Christ, Tabitha, had died earlier that very day and she would be placed in her tomb by evening. Peter's presence at her funeral was desired by the grieving believers. We don't know their motives for sure. Possibly, they just wanted to honor Tabitha for the godly legacy that she left behind. Maybe they were looking for comfort from one of their most notable leaders. It could be that some of them believed that the Apostle Peter had the power to revive Tabitha. If that was a possibility, it had to be done quickly. And the trip from Lydda to Joppa would take them three to four hours.

Meanwhile, what were the believers in Joppa doing for six to eight hours while they were waiting for Peter to arrive? While the Bible does not tell us, we can conjecture that they were gathered together in Tabitha's house mourning her loss. And, probably, praying. Perhaps they shared stories of Tabitha's kindness. No doubt some of her neighbors and friends were unbelievers. Here was an opportunity to spread the gospel, show Christianity in action by recalling Tabitha's good deeds. The church was probably anxious for Peter to arrive while they had the attention of unbelieving neighbors.

In the Book of Acts, Peter was last heard of in Samaria, where he and John had laid hands on Philip's converts and the Holy Spirit was given (Acts 8:18). This occurred about four years earlier, in 34 A.D. Apparently Peter had been traveling throughout all parts of Israel (Acts 9:32). In 38 A.D., he visited Lydda, which was about 25 miles from Jerusalem. The population of Lydda (today called "Lod") was made up of Jews and Gentiles. Here Peter healed Aeneas, who had suffered from palsy for eight years (Acts 9:33-34).

We don't know how long it took the two men to locate Peter once they had reached Lydda but it probably wasn't long. Peter was probably well known in the city. The miraculous healing of Aeneas was universally known and resulted in many conversions (Acts 9:35). Nor do we know how much information the men shared about Tabitha beyond the mere fact of her death. Likely their initial plea for him to accompany them back to Joppa was short and to the point. They had three to four hours to fill him in on all the good works that Tabitha had done as they walked. Whatever they said, Peter got up immediately and went with them to Tabitha's home. There was no hesitation. Certainly he was guided by the Holy Spirit. His work in Lydda was completed. As we shall see, Peter chose to remain in Joppa (Acts 8:43) rather than return to Lydda. The people of Joppa needed him more.

All of us who have accepted Jesus as our Savior have the same Holy Spirit that Peter had dwelling in us. He did not have more of the Spirit than I have. I do not have more of the Spirit than you have. The important thing is: how much of you (or me) does the Holy Spirit have? Peter was completely surrendered to the Holy Spirit. Are you? I can't honestly say that I always am. There are times when I want to be in charge of my life. It's not always easy to surrender control. Most of the time we don't think about it. "Today I'm going to run my own life and ignore the Holy Spirit," you say. No? Of course, not. But, conversely, how often do we consciously think about yielding to the Spirit?

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be a Comforter, Teacher, and Guide (John 14:26;16:13). Paul exhorts us to be continually filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). A person who is filled with wine is not in control of his speech or actions but is under the influence of the alcohol he ingested. Likewise, the thoughts, words, and deeds of the Spirit-filled man reflect the influence of the Holy Spirit. Our part is to submit. Get out of the way and let Him be in charge. Then God can use us as He used Peter.

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." Ephesians 5:18