

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

TABITHA: LESSON SEVEN

by Sandy Harber

"When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them." Acts 9:39b

At last Peter had arrived in Joppa. The mourners gathered in Tabitha's house had waited approximately eight hours for the disciples to return with Peter in tow. Presumably, the two men sent out from Joppa to fetch the Apostle had given him the facts concerning Tabitha's ministry to the widows, as well as her illness and death.

The mourners didn't waste any time once Peter had arrived. They immediately took the Apostle up to the upper room where Tabitha's body was laid out. The widows that she had ministered to surrounded Peter, weeping. They produced numerous garments for his inspection. Here was the evidence of the good works for which Tabitha was well known in the city. The widows were anxious for the Apostle Peter to understand the significance of her loss to the Church and the community.

Were the widows simply honoring the memory of their benefactress? Or, was it important to them that Peter understand the value of her service and the gravity of her loss? Were they, perhaps, trying to persuade him that the Church could not afford to lose this good saint? Were they making a case for Tabitha's worthiness to be raised? If, indeed, this was their purpose in sending for Peter (and we don't know that it was), then the widows did a good job pointing out how valuable Tabitha had been in caring for the poor and helpless.

Peter himself had some experience with the precarious position widows held in society and in the newly formed Church. In Jerusalem, individuals were added to the Church daily (Acts 2:47). This included Jewish widows. Those early believers determined to help one another by sharing whatever they owned (Acts 4:32). Widows, who were among the poorest and most helpless among them, were among the recipients of the bounty that was laid at the Apostles' feet for oversight and distribution (Acts 5:37). Unfortunately, friction arose among the Hellenistic believers because they felt that the Hebrew widows were receiving more benefits than the Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:1). Remember, salvation did not come to the Gentiles until Peter offered it to Cornelius in Acts 10. Hellenistic and Hebrew widows were all Jewish. The difference was that the Hellenistic widows had adopted Greek culture and language. Peter and the other Apostles resolved the issue by appointing seven men to take on the responsibility of caring for all the widows (Acts 6:2-6).

God has always been concerned with the plight of widows, women who were bereft of the protection and security provided by their husbands. He had Moses write into the Law provisions that allowed widows to glean grain in certain parts of a farmer's field and to gather olives and grapes, thus ensuring that they had access to food (Dt. 24:19-21).

The early Church recognized and accepted their responsibility to care for the widows among them. In Joppa, God had raised up a godly woman of means, who was perhaps a widow herself, to minister to these special ladies. Have you ministered to a widow yourself? Perhaps a family member or a neighbor comes to mind. What can you do to make her burden a little lighter?

"Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Isaiah 1:17