

The Book Of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

Study Notes: Acts 9:36-43

- **“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha”:** v. 36

Joppa is on the Mediterranean coast, some ten miles northwest of Lydda, and about 30 miles south of Caesarea Maritima.

The name Joppa appears for the first time in the list of cities that Egypt's Thutmose III captured during the 15th century BC. Some Jewish sources claim that Joppa was named after Japheth, one of Noah's three sons. In Greek history, the city is linked to the names Cassiopeia and Andromeda.

Ancient Joppa/Jaffa was built on a 130-foot-high ridge overlooking the Mediterranean coastline. This gave the city strategic importance in military history.

Joppa/Jaffa is mentioned four times in the Old Testament:

- Joshua 19:46: Its location is noted as the northernmost Philistine city bordering Dan's tribal territory.
- 2 Chronicles 2:16/Ezra 3:7: It is referenced as a port-of-entry for the cedars of Lebanon used in Solomon's Temple.
- Jonah 1:3: Joppa is cited as the port that Jonah went to when he was fleeing to Tarshish.

- **Tabitha/Dorcas:**

“Tabitha” – Aramaic name means “gazelle”. The Greek equivalent is “Dorcas”. The Hebrew equivalent is “Zibiah” (see: 2 Kings 12:1).

Luke emphasizes that Tabitha was a “disciple”. At this point in Church history, there was already a sizeable pocket of Christians in Joppa. Tabitha, then, is part of a Messianic group in a Gentile city.

Luke says that Tabitha/Dorcas, “was always doing good and helping the poor”. These charitable works most likely involved sewing undergarments and outer clothing for the poor – perhaps, especially for poorer widows.

The overall point is that she was well known in the larger Christian community. Her generosity had made her well-loved by her friends and neighbors.

- **Seeing The Connections: vv. 37-38**

“About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”

John Stott: “It seems that, by the way in which Luke recorded the miracles ... [he] deliberately portrayed Peter as an authentic apostle of Jesus Christ, who performed ‘the signs of a true apostle’. Similar miracles had endorsed the prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha” – John Stott

While Peter was in Lydda, Tabitha had fallen sick and died. Her family(?) and friends washed her body and placed it in an upstairs room.

Considering the Jewish tradition of immediate burial, one would expect Luke to say her body was washed, wrapped, and either placed in a family tomb (if the family owned one) or taken to the cemetery and interred. (See: Acts 5 - Ananias and Saphira’s burial)

Luke says that Tabitha’s body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Her family and friends had not taken her death as final!

- **Sending For Peter: v. 38**

“Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in

Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

Several times in the Acts narrative we read of two men being sent by believers (example: Peter and John sent to Samaria). It's possible this is a veiled reference to the Deuteronic requirement for two or three witnesses to establish the facts of a case.

Did the disciples at Joppa know about Aeneas' healing? Luke says the news had spread throughout the Sharon Plain region, so we can assume the healing had been reported in Joppa.

When the messengers arrived, they "urged Peter", 'Please come at once!'" Why?

The decomposition of Tabitha's body was going to be an issue. So there is an element of urgency. If there was no expectation of a resurrection, why urge Peter to go with them to Joppa right away?

Joppa was about 10 miles from Lydda. The trip could be comfortably accomplished on foot in five to eight hours (even faster by horse or donkey).

- **The Dead Woman In The Upstairs Room: vv. 39-40:**

"Peter went with them, and when he arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them."

- **Linked Stories: Tabitha and Jairus' Daughter - Luke 8:51-56.**

"When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. 56 Her parents

were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.” – Luke 8:51-53

1. The Mourners:

- Luke 8:52: “Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. “Stop wailing,” Jesus said. “She is not dead but asleep.”
- Acts 9:40: “All the widows stood around ... crying and showing Peter the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.”

Luke 8: Moirologism: In Jewish antiquity (and in many ancient cultures), paid mourners were common. Today, they are called, “moirologists” – from the two words, “fate” and “speech”.

The occupation of “wailing women” goes all the way back to the Old Testament. (See: Jeremiah 9:17). The Mishnah: “Even a poor man shall bring no fewer than two flutes and one wailing woman.”

British/English culture: Stoic silence is the proper expression of mourning. Ancient easter societies: Vocal expressions of grief were signs of respectful for the dead, and psychologically healthy for the survivors.

2. Putting Everyone Out Of The Room:

- Luke 8: “When Jesus entered the house, He did not allow anyone to go in with Him except Peter, John, James, and the child’s father and mother.”
- Acts 9: “Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed.”

Luke doesn’t explain why Peter put everyone else out of the room. Alfred Barnes: “Perhaps it was because he did not wish to appear as if seeking publicity. If done in the presence of many persons, it might seem like ostentation.” -Alfred Barnes

An Old Testament corollary: "Elisha went in alone and shut the door behind him and prayed to the LORD. - 2 Kings 4:33

3. "Talitha Cumi":

- Mark 5: "Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Tal'itha cu'mi" ("Talitha Koum"); which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."
- Acts 9: "Turning toward the dead woman, Peter said, Tabitha, get up" (Tabitha Koum")

- **"She Opened Her Eyes and Sat Up"**

"She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive."

The Greek verb for "get up" used both in Aeneas' and Tabitha's miracle is the same one used to describe God raising Jesus from the dead. As John Stott points out, "[This can hardly have been an accident.]"

The Fundamental difference between Tabitha's raising and that of Jesus: Tabitha was 'resuscitated' only to die again. Jesus was resurrected to a new life - never to die again.

After her resurrection, Peter helped Tabitha to her feet and presented her to her widow friends alive. Again, what joy and wonder must have filled that room. Peter was intentionally presenting her to the very people who had been genuinely mourning her death.

A Peek Ahead: I Thessalonians 4:16-18 – "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words."

- **Miracles, Signs, Wonders, And Conversions: v. 42-43**

"This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon."

Acts 9:35: "All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord."

Once again in the Acts narrative, we have a miracle followed by people believing on Christ. That is precisely what one purpose of miracles, signs, and wonders was meant to accomplish.

While the individual recipients of these miracles were personally greatly impacted, the larger sphere of impact was registered in the number of lives who came to Christ.

Jesus' words in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." – Acts 1:8

Are those days over? John Piper:

"If we could collect all the authentic stories all over the world — from all the missionaries and all the saints in the all the countries of the world, all the cultures of the world — if we could collect all the millions of encounters between Christians and demons and Christians and sickness and all the so-called coincidences of the world, we would be stunned. We would think we were living in a world of miracles, which we are."