

Who was Dorcas / Tabitha in the Bible?

Dorcas, or Tabitha, in the Bible lived in the town of Joppa, a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Dorcas was also called Tabitha—Dorcas is a Greek name meaning “gazelle,” and Tabitha is the Aramaic rendering of the same name. Dorcas, or Tabitha, was a charitable person who made things, especially clothing, for the needy in Joppa. The story of Dorcas in Acts 9 is notable because Peter raised her back to life after she had died.

Dorcas was known for her good works and acts of love for the poor (Acts 9:36); she was much loved in the community of Joppa. When she became ill and died, the believers who knew Dorcas heard that Peter was in the nearby town of Lydda, and they sent for him. The Bible does not specifically say that the disciples at Joppa were hoping for Peter to resurrect Dorcas, but they did call urgently for him (Acts 9:38). When Peter arrived at the home where Dorcas’ body had been laid out, he went up to see the body. There were many widows there, weeping. They all showed Peter “the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them”—tangible evidence of Dorcas’ loving service (Acts 9:39).

What happened next is proof that our God is full of glorious, unrestrained power: “Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, ‘Tabitha, get 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 for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:40–42).

Bringing Dorcas back from the dead was not done for Dorcas’ sake—Peter knew she was in

paradise, with Jesus, and that her life after death was preferable to her life on earth (see Luke 23:43). Peter's motive, at least in part, for raising Dorcas to life may have been for the sake of the widows and others in Joppa who needed the help Dorcas could provide. The resurrection of Dorcas was also a major reason so many people in Joppa believed. This miracle performed in the name of the Lord led many to faith in Christ.

Dorcas is a fine example of how we are to meet the needs of those around us. Christians are to "continue to remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10). Part of "religion that God our Father accepts" is "to look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27). This was the type of religion Dorcas practiced.

We also see in the story of Dorcas how the Body of Christ functions as a whole. We are united in Christ, and the believers in Joppa mourned the loss of Dorcas as a close family member. "There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Corinthians 12:25-26). Dorcas was one of their own, and her absence left a huge void in their lives.