



# Dorcas/Tabitha

Women's  
Theology  
Network

Dorcas (Tabitha) is the **only** woman in the bible referred to as a disciple. The way the first verse is written implies there may have been other female disciples in Joppa too, who are not mentioned by name.

Her name Tabitha means Gazelle – indicating perhaps that she is a woman of grace, energy, beauty, and quick movements. Like Paul, she has both Greek & Jewish names – Greek = Dorcas, Jewish = Tabitha.

The name Tabitha was also popular among slaves – like Lydia there is the possibility that she was a freewoman.

She is raised from the dead after Peter prays for her. There are some similarities with other stories where people are risen from the dead:

- Elijah raising Zarephath's son's widow (1 Kings 17:17-24)
- Elisha's raising of Shunammite woman's son (2 Kings 4:18-37)
- Jesus raising Nain's son (Luke 7:11-17)
- Jairus's daughter Talitha (Luke 8:41-42 & 49-56, Mark 5:35-43) – similar name! Coincidence?
- Lazarus (John 11:1-44, Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12).

Tabitha is much loved and respected. Uses her sewing skills and financial resources for good. She is clearly generous and kind, has made clothes for widows and they all mourn her when she dies. Her story converts many people into believing. Care of widows was a long-held way of demonstrating God's righteousness and justice. Tabitha's status may imply she was leading the church in Joppa.

The widows in the story are not passive but engaged. They are neither silent nor insignificant, but rather of key importance. Their collective mourning commands respect for Tabitha, giving both them and her clear and respected roles.

There are decolonial themes – she is both Jewish and Greek but she is called back to life using her Jewish name. This is at a time when the Jewish community is still under mostly Roman rule and is likely set between 30-40 CE, which may provide hints of reclaiming her Jewish heritage.

## Read Acts 9:36-42

Do you notice anything interesting about the way Tabitha is portrayed in the verses?

Why does she not speak? Do you think this is deliberate? Why?

Why do you think that Tabitha is the only woman named in the bible as a disciple? Do you think there were others that were just not included in the canon?

Why do you think Acts acknowledges women like Tabitha & Lydia at all?

Are there any similarities between them? If so, what are they?

There is no mention of Tabitha's family – a husband or children, why do you think she still has such a high status despite the absence of her family?

Can you think of any other stories in the Bible that are similar to this one?

Where are the men of Joppa in this story?

What do you think the significance of her having two names is? Like Paul? Preaching to both Jews & Gentiles – bridging the gap?

Possibility that Tabitha used to be a slave – why does God keep using people from difficult/non-traditional/disadvantaged backgrounds for his work?

Do you think there is anything else that this story is trying to tell us about how women and their gifts should be used in the church?

How do these two stories make you feel about your own role in the church and this women's theology group?