

**BIBLE WOMEN – NEW TESTAMEN**  
**Lesson 20 – Sapphira – Dorcas (Tabitha)**  
**By Beverly McKey**

**I. SAPPHIRA – Acts 5:1-11**

A. In Acts chapter two, Peter and the other Apostles preached the first gospel sermon to the multitude in Jerusalem.

1. The audience was Jewish and included Jews from many foreign lands who had traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate The Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost. It is estimated that approximately two million people were in the city of Jerusalem.
2. It is no coincidence that the church (the kingdom) was established that day when so many could hear that first sermon.
3. There was so much to teach these first new Christians.
  - a. They had to learn a new way to worship God – no longer as they worshipped under the Law of Moses, as they had for two thousand years.
    - 1) No more animal sacrificing
    - 2) No more tithing
    - 3) No longer would the Levitical priesthood be needed.
    - 4) No longer would they have to go to Jerusalem for the four annual feast days.
    - 5) Christianity was now open to all nations, unlike the Law of Moses.
    - 6) No longer would they keep the Sabbath day holy; instead they would worship on the first day of the week to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus.
    - 7) No longer would anyone be physically born into the family of God as the Israelites were.
      - a) Now anyone could choose to be a child of God. However, there were conditions one had to meet to being accepted as a child of God.
      - b) One would first hear the gospel message preached to him. **Romans 10:17, I Timothy 2:3-4, John 8:32**
      - c) One would have to decide if he believed the gospel message and believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. **Hebrews 11:6, John 20:31**
      - d) One would have to publicly confess that belief. **Rom. 10:10, Matthew 10:32**
      - e) One would have to realize that he has committed sins and repent of those sins, with a firm commitment to avoid those sins in the future. **Romans 3:23, Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30**
      - f) One would agree that baptism, by immersion in water, is necessary in order to receive forgiveness for those sins and

upon being baptized, he is added to the church and becomes a child of God. **Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3-4**

g) One must understand that he has made a lifetime commitment and that he is required to live faithfully as a child of God in obedience to God's commandments in order to reach the goal of eternal life. **I Corinthians 4:1-2, , Hebrews 10:24-26, Revelation 2:10**

b. These new Christians were so eager to learn and they were meeting every day so their knowledge increased very quickly.

**Acts 2:46-47** – “<sup>46</sup> So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

B. Jerusalem was very crowded with the multitude of visitors who had come to celebrate The Feast of Weeks.

1. The new Christians who came from distant places did not go home after the celebration, as they usually would have done.
  - a. These families only intended to stay one week and go home after the Feast of Weeks.
  - b. They only brought enough supplies to last them through the week and their trip home, so when they decided to stay, many ran out of food and other necessities.
2. The multitude of believers were united in heart and soul. **Acts 4:32**
  - a. Those who lived in Jerusalem shared what they had with the visitors.
  - b. Those who were wealthy or owned land they could sell brought funds to the Apostles to help feed those who were in need.
  - c. One of those who sold land was Barnabas who later became a partner with Paul as they taught the gospel to the Gentiles.

C. Sapphira and her husband, Ananias, also sold property and brought money to the apostles. **Acts 5:1-11**

1. Sapphira and her husband agreed when they sold the land to donate “part of the proceeds” and to keep part of the money for themselves. **Vs. 2**
  - a. There was nothing wrong with keeping as much of the money as they wanted to – it was their property.
  - b. Ananias took the money to the Apostles.
  - c. Peter, through the power of the Holy Spirit, knew the deceit in the heart of Ananias and he said: **Vs. 3**

*"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?<sup>4</sup> While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*

- 1) Peter went straight to the source of the problem – Satan. Ananias and Sapphira gave in to the temptation of Satan.
 

**John 8:44** – *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks his native tongue, for he is a liar and the father of it."*
- 2) Selling the property was not the problem.
- 3) Keeping a portion of the funds was not the problem.
- 4) Motive was the problem – Ananias and Sapphira wanted the praise of the Apostles and their fellow Christians which they thought would come by saying that they "gave it all".
- d. Remember, Ananias and Sapphira had lived their whole lives under the Law of Moses and it required paying tithes.
  - 1) The word tithe means "tenth". For example, one of every ten animals born to any Israelite in a year was to be given to the Lord. Tithing applied to every type of prosperity. **Leviticus 27:32**
  - 2) These tithes were not given out of generosity or concern for the needs of other, it was simply "commanded by the Law of Moses".
- e. This teaching is not carried over to the Law of Christ:
 

**2 Corinthians 9:7** – *"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."*

  - 1) In the Law of Christ, generosity is encouraged but not mandated.
  - 2) Free-will offerings must not be given under compulsion or grudgingly.
  - 3) Motives or attitudes really do matter in the Law of Christ . Not only must the giver be generous, but also cheerful in his giving.
2. Since Sapphira and Ananias planned the deception together, their free-will offering was in vain since they seemed to give it "grudgingly" and only to gain the praise of other Christians.
  - a. While their gift was generous, their sin was the lie they told in order to appear much more generous than they were.
  - b. Ananias' punishment was swift and final – he was struck dead on the spot. No time for excuses, no time for apologies, no time to take it back or repent.
  - c. Great fear came upon all those who heard and saw what happened.

3. Three hours later, Sapphira came in, not knowing what had happened.
  - a. Peter wanted to know if she was aware of her husband's motives, so he asked: **Acts 5:8** – *"Tell me whether you sold the land for so much."*
  - b. Sapphira also said that they had sold their property for the amount of money her husband had given to the Apostles.
  - c. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter also knew that she had conspired with her husband to exaggerate the amount of their gift. *"How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."* **Vs. 9**
  - d. Immediately Sapphira also fell down and breathed her last.
  - e. Again, the scripture is repeated, *"So great fear came upon all the church ad upon all who heard these things."* **Vs. 11**
  - f. That was the intent – to instill the importance of obedience to the entire church.
  
- D. While it is true that their punishment was very harsh, they were not the first to ever be struck dead for disobedience to God.
  1. We learned from the Old Testament that failure to carry out the exact demands of the Law of Moses brought about swift judgment from God on several occasions.
  2. When the Law of Moses was first instituted while Israel was in the wilderness, God often executed punishment immediately to reinforce the fact that obedience to God is not only expected but required.
    - a. Nadab and Abihu were two of Aaron's sons, who served as priests in the Tabernacle in the wilderness.
    - b. They were struck dead because they used "profane fire" in their censers in their duty to burn incense before the Lord.
    - c. The only fire that was acceptable was that which was taken from the alter of burnt offerings – however, Nadab and Abihu used fire from some other source, which God called profane. **Leviticus 16:12**
    - d. "Such a very small difference.", some might say. Why was it deserving of death?
      - 1) At the death of Nadab and Abihu, Moses gave Aaron a message from God saying, *"By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified."*
      - 2) God considered that they did not "regard Him as holy" since they did not obey His specific instructions. Their disobedience got in the way of glorifying God before all of the people of Israel. **Vs. 3**
      - 3) God is regarded as holy when His commandments are obeyed precisely and His authority is respected.

- 4) Altering commandments to suit our convenience shows disrespect for God and places our opinions above God's authority.
  - 5) Their disobedience was so serious that God forbid Aaron and his surviving three sons from mourning the loss of Nadab and Abihu because they did not keep the ritual exactly as God required. **Vs.6**
3. Again, when King David decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he did not follow the approved method of carrying the Ark.
- a. The Philistines captured the Ark many years before, but they suffered several curses while it was in their possession, so they took it to the border of Judah and left it at the house of a man named Abinadab.
  - b. David went with a group of men to bring the Ark back to the Tabernacle.
  - c. He allowed them to place the Ark on a cart drawn by oxen.
  - d. When the oxen stumbled, Uzzah put out his hand and touched the Ark, to help keep it stable.
  - e. Uzzah was immediately struck dead for touching the Ark.
  - f. The Levites were given the responsibility for transporting the Tabernacle and all of its furnishings.
    - 1) They were to use two poles (one on each side) that went through gold rings on each corner of the Ark.
    - 2) Then four Levites would lift the Ark by the poles and carry it when the Israelites were moving from place to place.
    - 3) No one was ever to touch the Ark in any way, no exceptions.
  - g. The use of the cart was not the approved method of transport.
  - h. Even though Uzzah meant well, what he did was forbidden.
- E. Sapphira passed up an opportunity to be a real helper and partner to her husband.
1. She could have and should have counseled her husband to make a better decision.
  2. Either they could have given all of the money to the Apostles, or they could have given a portion and simply told the truth about it.
  3. Sapphira left no doubt that the deception was done with her cooperation when she told Peter that they had only received the amount of money Ananias had given the Apostles.
  4. Women are usually nurturing and watchful for the welfare of their families.
  5. Sapphira was certainly not watchful for the spiritual welfare of her husband when she agreed to the deceitful plan.
  6. Solomon was certainly right when he said: **Proverbs 16:18** – *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."*

7. Sapphira and Ananias were guilty of four of the seven things that are “an abomination” to God: **Proverbs 6:16-19** – “*These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: <sup>17</sup> a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup> a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, <sup>19</sup> a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.*”
8. We can take this lesson from Ananias and Sapphira to heart even today.
  - a. Disobedience, whether done in ignorance or defiance, is still the same, and it is sin.
  - b. The account of Ananias and Sapphira was given to us to confirm that God still requires strict obedience today.
  - c. While we do not see people immediately struck dead today for disobedience, we can be certain that God does not tolerate disobedience. **Romans 11:22** – “*Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: but toward you, goodness, **IF** you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.*”
    - 1) We can be certain that continued disobedience results in eternal punishment.
    - 2) We can also be certain that faith coupled with obedience will result in eternal life.
  - d. Those today who have twisted the gospel to fit their personal preferences in worship and in morality do not have the fear of God, unfortunately.

## II. DORCAS (also known as Tabitha) – Acts 9

- A. Dorcas is a Greek name and Tabitha is a Jewish name
  1. Many Jews living in the first century were called by a Greek name and a Jewish name, such as Paul (Greek), Saul (Jewish).
  2. This practice began when the church was forced to disperse from Jerusalem because of persecution and spread to many areas of the world.
- B. The story of Dorcas reminds us of God’s great love for all of His people.
  1. She was not a great evangelist, nor a prophet. She was just a plain Christian woman like us.
  2. Yet she was important enough to have her good works and charitable deeds recorded in God’s word for every generation for two thousand years.
  3. The first thing mentioned about Dorcas was that she was a disciple of Jesus.
  4. She was not a Christian because she did charitable deeds – she did charitable deeds because she was a Christian.

- a. This is a very important distinction since some mistakenly believe that anyone who does good deeds will be acceptable to God.
  - b. While doing good deeds cannot earn salvation for anyone, it is also impossible to have faith without doing good deeds.
    - 1) **James 2:26** – *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."*
    - 2) In reality, our good deeds must be the "evidence" of our faith.
    - 3) Faith must also be a growing thing – ever increasing as we grow in the knowledge of God's word.
  5. Dorcas was well known in her community because she used her ability to sew garments for the glory of God by providing clothing for poor widows.
  6. Dorcas was an humble woman whose faith in Jesus as the Son of God compelled her to loved others enough to help them however she could.
- C. Dorcas lived in the city of Joppa (now called Jaffa). **See map attached**
1. It was located on the Mediterranean Coast, thirty miles northwest of Jerusalem and is one of the oldest port cities in the world.
  2. It was in Joppa where Jonah took a ship to escape going to Nineveh as God had told him.
  3. Joppa's seaport was used by King David to receive the logs that floated down from Lebanon which were used in the building of the Temple in Jerusalem.
  4. Because of its value as a seaport, Joppa has been very often overthrown, sacked, pillaged, burned and rebuilt.
  5. Archaeological evidence shows that Joppa (Jaffa) was inhabited 7,500 BC and its natural harbor has been in use since the Bronze Age.
- D. Dorcas became sick and died and her friends prepared her body for burial and laid her in an upper room.
1. The friends of Dorcas heard that Peter was in the town of Lydda, about ten miles east of Joppa, so they sent for him, asking that he come quickly. **Vs. 38**
  2. When Peter arrived they took him to the upper room where widows stood by him weeping and they showed Peter the garments that Dorcas had made for them.
  3. Peter sent them all out of the room and knelt down and prayed.
    - a. He turned to the body and said, *"Tabitha, arise."* and immediately she opened her eyes.
    - b. When she saw Peter she sat up. Peter took her hand and lifted her up.
  4. Peter called for her Christian friends and the widows and presented her to them alive.

- E. What a celebration must have taken place in the home of Dorcas.
1. Surely she never expected that her name would be spoken two thousand years later.
  2. Having faced life threatening health issues myself, it is almost certain that Dorcas was so grateful for her miracle that she looked for even more ways to serve the Lord.
  3. Surviving serious illness or catastrophic accidents should cause us to appreciate the opportunities we have for serving the Lord more than ever.
    - a. Things that once seemed important become less of a priority.
    - b. We face our own mortality and realize that we have such a short time to accomplish the work that God has entrusted to us.
    - c. How can we ever take our salvation for granted again.
    - d. How can we ever forget to take time for prayer again.
    - e. How can we not beg God to send us opportunities to serve and to open our eyes so we will recognize those opportunities.
    - f. How can we fail to increase our knowledge of God's word so we will be prepared to teach it to others.
    - g. How can we continue to postpone getting involved in spreading the gospel and other good works.
    - h. How can we ever forget how precious our family and friends are.
    - i. How can we ever go back to complaining about those little things that are mere inconveniences.
    - j. How can we fail to appreciate every day of life (whether sunny or rainy or freezing cold).
  4. I wouldn't be surprised if the later years of Dorcas' life were even more productive than before.
- F. We must not wait for a health crisis to adopt a more positive outlook on the opportunities we have to serve.
1. **Colossians 3:17** – *“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”*
  2. **Philippians 2:4-16** – *“<sup>v4</sup> Do all things without complaining and disputing, <sup>15</sup> that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, <sup>16</sup> holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”*
- G. When I read the story of Dorcas, I am reminded of the funerals I have attended of so many Christian brothers and sisters where they are

memorialized with such glowing comments about their faithfulness and good works.

1. While we experience sorrow for a time because we miss them, I have often thought how wonderful it must be to have lived the kind of life that could be described so beautifully.
2. When our life is over, the only parts that will be important are those we spent serving others to the glory of God.
3. We certainly want our family to have the comfort of knowing that we remained faithful and leave them with beautiful memories of our dedicated service in the kingdom of God.

## DORCAS LIVED IN JOPPA – ACTS 6

