



DORCAS, LYDIA, AND PRISCILLA: WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

In the history of Christianity, the truly great characters have always been simple, humble men and women. They were disciples who gave of themselves as an expression of their love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each of the women in this study demonstrated her love and thanks to Jesus through her service to Him and to others. As we become a part of the Body of Christ¹ and choose to follow Jesus, we grow in appreciation of who He is and what He has done for us; as a result, we want to please Him and serve Him.

As you do this study, allow the Lord to speak to your heart and show you ways of serving and giving of yourself to Him. It has been said, *We only have one life to live and soon it will be past, but only that which is done for Christ will last.*

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him (Colossians 3:17).

¹ Body of Christ: refers to all believers in Christ who work together in unity for the Gospel of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-27).

Names Given to the Women in this Story

Tabitha Dorcas	<i>Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas . . . (Acts 9:36).</i> Dorcas in Greek means gazelle; the female of a roebuck: a term of endearment. In Hebrew Dorcas means – Tabitha.
Lydia Seller of purple	<i>And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us . . . (Acts 16:14).</i> Thought to have been a Phoenician name which means – bending.
Priscilla	Paul <i>found a certain Jew named Aquila . . . with his wife Priscilla . . . (Acts 18:2).</i> Feminine form of <i>Priscus</i> which means – primitive, worthy or venerable ² , ancient, old-fashioned simplicity.

SECTION I – Dorcas, the Generous Disciple

READ Acts 9:32-43.

1. Who was Dorcas (v. 36)? _____ 3

_____ 4

Where is she from? _____

Joppa, now called Jaffa, was a busy seaport town on the Mediterranean coast. It was about thirty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem. Being the only harbor in Israel at the time, it became a town that housed the widows and orphans of many seamen.

PERSONAL

As a disciple, Dorcas' life reflected Christ in her actions; and in turn, touched the lives of many others. As a disciple of Christ, how is your life reflecting Him to others in what you do?

How does Matthew 5:14-16 instruct you as a follower of Christ? _____

² venerable: commanding respect because of great age or associated dignity.

³ disciple: learner, pupil, a follower of Christ.

⁴ almsdeeds: charitable gifts for the poor and needy.

2. As time went by, what happened to Dorcas (Acts 9:37)? _____

DESCRIBE the care given to her body. _____

3 Who was in the nearby town of Lydda and what was requested of him (v. 38)? _____

4. What may have prompted the people to summon Peter (Acts 9:32-35)? _____

5. When Peter arrived in Joppa, where Dorcas lie dead, what did he find (v. 39)? _____

PERSONAL

Dorcas' good works consisted of sewing clothes for the poor and widowed. She could have just given the needy her money. Why did these gifts demonstrate an even greater gift?

In what ways can you influence unbelievers for God around you? _____

LOOK DEEPER

Proverbs 31 describes a virtuous⁵ woman. Which characteristics might describe Dorcas? _____

6. As a follower of Christ, what did Peter do (Act 9:40)? _____

What miracle took place? _____

⁵ virtuous – Hebrew *chayil* an army: wealth, valor, strength, valiant.

7. What did Peter do next (v. 41)? _____

8. As news spread of Dorcas' resurrection, what happened (v. 42)? _____

Our ultimate goal in ministering to others is to point them to Jesus Christ and give all the glory to Him. We are never to draw people to ourselves.

LOOK DEEPER

NOTICE that neither Dorcas nor Peter received praise for the results. When a great act of God is done, why and how should the glory be given to Him?

I Corinthians 1:27-31 _____

I Peter 4:10, 11 _____

PERSONAL

How are you allowing God to freely work through your circumstances so those who hear will believe in the Lord? How are you giving glory and praise to God when He uses you?

9. As the people of Joppa believed on the Lord, what did Peter decide to do (Acts 9:43)? _____

6

⁶ Simon the tanner: a Christian convert with whom Peter lodged while in Joppa. The trade of a tanner was considered unclean by the Jews and not allowed to be carried on inside their towns.

LOOK DEEPER

Dorcas was an example of a woman who was a true believer. She obeyed the Word of God and served Him. According to the Word of God, what is pure and undefiled religion?

Deuteronomy 10:12 _____

Ecclesiastes 12:13 _____

Micah 6:8 _____

Matthew 25:31-40 _____

Mark 12:33 _____

James 1:27 _____

Dorcas' influence on those around her spread beyond the borders of her city. She became a great evangelist. Today there are Dorcas ministries all over the world that feed and clothe the needy. Because of her gratitude to her Savior, Dorcas dedicated her time and talents to her Lord.

PERSONAL

EXAMINE your activities and actions, how can you give more to the Lord Jesus Christ?

SECTION 2 – Lydia, a Worshipper of God

Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles⁷, traveled on his second missionary journey to Europe. It is here in the city of Philippi in Macedonia, that he preached the Gospel⁸, and the first European was converted.

READ Acts 16:6-40.

1. Why did Paul travel to Macedonia (vv. 9-12)? _____

⁷ Gentiles - Hebrew *goyim* surrounding nations; foreigners as opposed to Israel (Nehemiah 5:8). Greek *ethnos* a people or nation; in the plural it is used for the heathen.

⁸ Gospel: the good news of Jesus Christ.

What was Philippi? _____

2. On the Sabbath, where did Paul and his group go (v. 13)? _____

What was the usual activity that occurred here? _____

What did Paul's group do? _____

3. LIST the details given to us about the *certain woman* they met (v. 14)? _____

Lydia sold purple, a very costly cloth which was worn only by the rich and kings. There were no colors as gorgeous as the crimsons and purples of Thyatira. No doubt, she had a thriving successful business.

4. As Lydia accepted the Gospel through Paul's sharing, what did she do (Acts 16:15a)? _____

9

Who else, besides Lydia was baptized? _____

LOOK DEEPER

What does Jesus teach about baptism (Matthew 28:18-20)? _____

New believers in the newly forming church obeyed the Lord's command and were baptized. Who were they? What happened?

Acts 2:37-41 _____

Acts 8:5-13 _____

Act 8:26-40 _____

⁹ baptized - Greek *baptymos* to dip or immerse: immersion of a believer in water as a sign of his identifying with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Acts 9:1-20 _____

Acts 18:1-8 _____

Acts 19:1-8 _____

What is the significance of baptism?

Romans 6:3, 4 _____

I Corinthians 12:13 _____

Galatians 3:27 _____

Colossians 2:12 _____

I Peter 3:21 _____

5. In what way did Lydia show her thankfulness to the Lord (Acts 16:15b)? _____
- _____
- _____

We show our gratitude and love to the Lord by loving and serving those He loves (John 13:34, 35).

6. Paul and his group were persuaded to visit with Lydia and her household. What happened as they went to prayer (Acts 16:16-24)?

10

7. As Paul and Silas began to pray and sing in prison, what did the Lord do? How did He use them (vv. 25-39)?

¹⁰ spirit of divination: the practice of obtaining secret knowledge especially of the future; inspirational divination by demonic power whereas genuine prophecy is by the Spirit of God.

8. What did Paul and Silas do when they returned to Lydia's house (v. 40)? _____

Lydia and her family became the nucleus of the European church. The church of Philippi began in her home. Her home was a blessing to all who visited. She served the Lord with gladness.

I [Jesus] AM among you as He that serveth (Luke 22:27).

SECTION 3 – Priscilla, a Fellow Servant

Paul continued on his second missionary journey in Europe and went to various cities preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. After Philippi, he went to Thessalonica, where there was a great multitude of converts. Paul and his group continued on to Berea, where again, many came to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The next city, Athens, brought a poor reception due to the fact that it was home to some of the world's greatest philosophers of the time.

READ Acts 18:1-28.

1. After Paul left Athens, where did he go (v. 1)? _____¹¹

2. Who did Paul find in Corinth (v. 2)? _____

Where was this couple coming from? _____

Why did Priscilla and her husband have to leave Rome? _____

3. Where did Paul stay while in Corinth (v. 3)? _____

What did Paul have in common with Priscilla and her husband? _____

4. SUMMARIZE Paul's ministry in Corinth (vv. 4-17). _____

5. Where did Paul travel next (v. 18)? _____

Who went with him? _____

¹¹ Corinth: Greece's most splendid commercial city located just south of the narrow isthmus connecting central Greece with Peloponnesus.

Paul and this couple had a common bond, it was stronger than just having the same occupation. As they worked together at tentmaking and in evangelistic outreaches, Priscilla and Aquila had the opportunity to be taught and trained by the Apostle Paul, the early church's greatest Bible teacher.

6. Paul reasoned with the Jews at Ephesus, and then continued his missionary journey. Where did Paul leave Priscilla and her husband (vv. 19-23)?

7. After Paul left who arrived in Ephesus (vv. 24-26a)? _____

DESCRIBE Apollos. _____

8. In what way did Priscilla and her husband minister to Apollos (vv. 26b-28)? _____

How did it make Apollos more effective? _____

Although Priscilla had a household to manage, she still found time to be a thorough student of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

9. For several years, Priscilla and Aquila were leaders in the Ephesian church. What did Paul affectionately and gratefully write about them in his letters to the churches?

Romans 16:3-5 _____

I Corinthians 16:19, 20 _____

2 Timothy 4:19 _____

PERSONAL

Priscilla and her husband showed their love for God by loving and honoring Paul. How do you honor the servants of the Lord that God has placed in your life?

LOOK DEEPER

How do the following Scriptures admonish you to honor the servants of the Lord?

I Thessalonians 5:12, 13 _____

I Timothy 5:17 _____

Hebrews 13:17, 18 _____

PERSONAL

Jesus said in Mark 10:45 *For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.* Jesus expressed His love for us by giving His life for us. God has created you for an eternal purpose, how are you serving the Lord in communion with Him? With your talents and service?

MEMORY VERSE

_____ (Colossians 3:17).

Through Dorcas, Lydia, Priscilla, and disciples of the Lord, we learn the heart of ministry. Christ was the great example of true servanthood. As these women surrendered their lives fully to Jesus, they took on His character, the one of a servant. Through their devoted lives and many others like them, the Gospel has been spread throughout the world.

NOTES: _____

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