

Acts 9:37

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

Analysis

And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. Tabitha's death despite her godliness reminds that earthly life's uncertainty affects believers and unbelievers alike; divine favor doesn't guarantee physical immunity.

She was sick, and died states facts simply without explanation. Good works didn't prevent death; godliness doesn't promise physical immortality. Reformed theology emphasizes common grace (sun rises on righteous and unrighteous) and special grace (spiritual salvation). Believers experience mortality's same realities while possessing resurrection hope.

When they had washed describes Jewish burial custom—ritual washing preparing body. Laying her in upper chamber rather than immediate burial suggests expectation or hope—possibly anticipating Peter's arrival from nearby Lydda. Faith doesn't presume on God but holds hope in His power and will.

The account's details (washing, upper chamber placement) indicate historical reliability. Early Christian narratives include mundane details distinguishing them from legendary accretions in later apocryphal literature. Luke's medical background possibly accounts for clinical description of death and preparation.

Historical Context

Jewish burial customs required prompt interment (typically within 24 hours) due to climate and ritual purity laws. The delay in Tabitha's case suggests extraordinary circumstances—faith that Peter might restore her. Lydda's proximity (10-12 miles) made urgent summons feasible.

Upper chamber provided private, elevated space—perhaps belonging to wealthy Christian hosting community. The location parallels Jesus raising Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:35-43) and widow's son (Luke 7:11-17), and foreshadows Eutychus's restoration (Acts 20:9-12). These parallels show apostles continuing Christ's resurrection ministry. Tabitha's death occurred around 38-39 CE, shortly before Peter's world-changing Cornelius encounter.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How should believers understand death and suffering affecting godly Christians?
2. What distinguishes hoping in God's power from presuming on His will?
3. In what ways does preparing for burial while hoping for restoration demonstrate realistic faith?
4. How do mundane details in biblical narratives support historical reliability?
5. What role should resurrection hope play in believers' approach to death?

Interlinear Text

ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἀσθενήσασαν
it came to pass **And** **her in** ^{G3588} **days** **those** **that she was sick**
G1096 G1161 G1722 G2250 G1565 G770

αὐτὴν ἀποθανεῖν· λούσαντες δὲ αὐτὴν ἔθηκαν ἐν
they **and died** **had washed** **And** **they** **they laid** **her in**
G846 G599 G3068 G1161 G846 G5087 G1722

ὑπερώω
an upper chamber
G5253

Additional Cross-References

Acts 1:13 (Parallel theme): And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

Acts 20:8 (Parallel theme): And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.