

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Our Responsibility Toward Widows

(Jerry Fite)

In ancient times, the plight of the widow was foreboding. The Greek word, translated “widow”, literally means “left empty” or “forsaken” due to losing a husband. A widow often desired to die when losing her husband because in staying with her deceased husband’s family, she took on “an even more subordinate, and often humiliating position.” Only if “the purchase price was paid back to the husband’s heirs, or the dowry to the wife’s family” could she return to her own family. (*Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament, Kittel, Vol. IX, pages 441-442*).

The Bible reveals the need of the widow in two distinct, but related areas: legal justice, and physical sustenance. Job and Isaiah comment on their times “when a widow’s ox is taken for a pledge” (*Job 24:3*), and “the cause of the widow” is not considered (*Isaiah 10:2*). Jesus condemns certain leaders among the Jews who “devour widow’s houses” (*Mark 12:40*), and points to a common scene of a widow shamelessly persisting to receive justice at the hands of an unrighteous judge to illustrate the principle of continually beseeching God in prayer (*Luke 18:1-8*). The

widow, in ancient times, had her borders taken away (*Proverbs 15:25*), and found herself without one to take up her “cause” (*Isaiah 1:23*).

The loss of a husband often led to a widow’s need for physical sustenance. Among Christians in Jerusalem, the widows in the church were receiving sustenance through a “daily ministration” (*Acts 6:1*). When some Grecian widows in the church murmured about not receiving this service, the apostles met the need by choosing seven godly men among the brethren who would be over the work of “serving tables” on behalf of these neglected widows (*Acts 6:2-3*). Desolate widows, at least 60 years of age, who were serving the Lord faithfully as Christians, were sustained by the New Testament church.

Jehovah, “the judge of the widows” (*Psalms 68:5*), who upholdeth the fatherless and the widow” (*Psalms 146:9*), instructs us as individuals as to how we should treat the widows among us.

In our physical families, children and grandchildren are commanded to take care of the

needs of their needed mother or grandmother. After all, did not your mother and father take care of your needs when you were helpless? Then, you should lovingly “requite” – pay back - by helping them in their time of need (*I Timothy 5:4*). Each of us must “relieve” the widows of our own family. The church must not be burdened by our responsibility (*I Timothy 5:16*).

We, as individuals, are to “visit the fatherless and widows” (*James 1:27*). The word “visit” involves “seeking out” one because we are concerned about their welfare (*cf. Acts 15:36, 7:23*). Tabitha practiced “pure religion” when she made garments for the widows to wear (*Acts 9: 36, 39*).

Have any of the widows among you been deprived of justice in the courts, lacked daily food and sustenance and need help? Then, we must “visit” them. While widows among us live in a country of plenty with justice for all, and may not suffer the same plight as widows of ancient times, they still have been left empty by the death of a husband. Let us lift their spirits by checking on them, and never allow them to be neglected.