"They Laid Her in an Upper Room": A Lexical-Theological Reflection on Acts 9:37d and Its Implications for Funeral Practices Among Ghanaian Seventh-Day Adventists

Ebenezer Quaye (PhD) iD
Valley View University, Ghana
&
Kenneth Oppong (MPhil) iD
Valley View University, Ghana
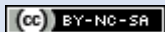
ABSTRACT

A growing controversy among Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Ghana surrounds the appropriate location for laying a deceased believer before burial. The absence of clear theological or historical guidance has led to tension, disunity, and, in some cases, division within local churches. This calls for a critical examination of biblical and historical perspectives to provide clarity and foster unity. In response, this paper offers a lexical and theological examination of Acts 9:37d –"they laid her in an upper room"– to explore its implications for contemporary funeral practices within Seventh-day Adventist communities. By conducting a detailed analysis of the Greek terms ἔθηκαν ("they laid") and ὑπερῴῳ ("upper room"), the paper highlights how early Christian traditions understood sacred space and the respectful treatment of the deceased. The research contrasts these biblical insights with prevailing Ghanaian Adventist views that regard the presence of a corpse in the church auditorium as a desecration. Through contextual and comparative analysis of relevant New Testament passages and historical-cultural sources, the study argues that the upper room served as a sacred place of prayer, worship and fellowship, thereby legitimizing the act of laying Tabitha's body there. Consequently, the paper contends that funeral services held within church auditoriums need not to be viewed as defiling. Instead, such practices can reflect theological dignity and communal honor toward the deceased. The finding seeks to inform and reshape Adventist burial customs in Ghana by offering a biblically grounded perspective on sacred space and death.

Keywords: *Acts 9:37d, Upper Room, Ghanaian Adventists, Early Christian Practices, Burial Customs*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The question of where to lay a deceased believer for funeral services has become a significant point of contention among Seventh-day Adventists in Ghana. While some members advocate for the use of the church auditorium as a suitable place to lay the dead, others vehemently oppose the practice, arguing that it desecrates the sanctity of the worship space.[1] In some cases, the divergent views on this issue have led to serious consequences. A notable instance involved a local congregation splitting into factions after a deceased member was laid out in the church auditorium, with some members subsequently refusing to worship or fellowship in that space.

Generally, the accepted practice among many Adventist churches in Ghana has been to avoid laying the dead within the church or chapel. Instead, funerals are often conducted in open public spaces such as town squares, private residences, family houses, or within the church compound, but outside the actual auditorium.[2] While a few exceptions exist where deceased members are laid inside the church, these instances frequently spark tension and disagreement. Some members consider the practice permissible and appropriate, while others consider it sacrilegious.[3] For the latter, the presence of a corpse within the sanctuary defiles the holiness of the space, prompting some to abstain from future worship services held in that location. A third group, however, remains indifferent, asserting that the location—whether inside or outside the church—is inconsequential.

Although the Bible contains considerable information about death, the dead, and the treatment of the deceased, it does not offer a clear, prescriptive command regarding where the dead should be laid, whether within or outside the worship space.[4] The Scriptures neither mandate nor explicitly forbid the laying of the dead in a place of worship. One descriptive passage that invites reflection is Acts 9:37, which notes, "they laid her in an upper room"—a reference to the believer Tabitha (also known as Dorcas). This text provides a basis for exploring early Christian burial practices and the possibility of laying a deceased believer in a space associated with Christian worship.

There exists a growing controversy within Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Ghana regarding the appropriate location for laying a deceased believer prior to burial. The lack of consensus has led to strained relationships, disunity, and, in some cases, schism within local churches. This situation raises the critical need to examine whether biblical and historical practices can offer guidance on the matter.

This study seeks to examine the phrase "they laid her in an upper room" (Acts 9:37d) within its immediate literary context and the broader framework of the Book of Acts. The objective is to determine whether such a description can inform present-day funeral customs within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana. The study hopes to offer insights that emphasize the honor, reverence, and eschatological hope attached to the treatment of the dead.[5] This understanding may provide theological and cultural grounding that enables churches to engage constructively with the ongoing controversy and offer a well-informed position on whether or not it is appropriate to lay a deceased believer within the church.

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[1] Milton Pardosi, "Theological View of Bringing Corpses of Members of Seventh-day Adventist Church into Church," *Journal of International Scholars Conference - Philosophy/ Theology*, 1(1) (2026): 42. Retrieved from https://jurnal.unai.edu/index.php/jischphil/article/view/251.

[2] Kenneth Oppong and Robert Osei-Bonsu, "Funeral Rites among the Akans of Ghana: A Biblical Response," *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* 17 (Feb. 2018): 3–89, 80.

[3] Pardosi, "Theological View of Bringing Corpses of Members of Seventh-day Adventist Church into Church," 42.

[4] Yoram H. A Tuan and Aprianus L. Moimau, "The Concept of Physical Death from a Christian Perspective: Belief, Hope, and Meaning," *Theological Journal Kerugma* 7(2) (2024): 130.

[5] George A. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 142.

2. METHDODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, exegetical approach to examine Acts 9:37d, focusing on the phrase "they laid her in an upper room." A lexical-theological analysis of the Greek terms ἔθηκαν ("they laid") and ὑπερῴῳ ("upper room") was conducted. The theological implications were explored within the broader context of early Christian practices and the book of Acts. Comparative analysis was also used to juxtapose biblical funeral practices with contemporary Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventist customs. The methodology aimed to establish a biblically informed position on the appropriateness of laying the dead within worship spaces.

3. BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

The book, Acts of the Apostles, as it is designated today, was part of the Gospel of Luke. It appeared as the second volume of the Gospel of Luke at the nascent of Christianity. It is observed that Luke probably did not give this second book a separate designation. Probably, it was when Luke's gospel was separated from its adjoining volume and forming part of the other gospels came a need to give the second part of his story a title.[6] Some authors made various suggestions, such as "The Memorandum of Luke" by Tertullian and "The Acts of All the Apostles" found in the Muratorian Canon in the second and third centuries AD. The title as it appears today, "The Acts of the Apostles," is first used in the anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke, probably in the late second century.

The word, Πρξεις (Praxeis), meaning "Acts" as used in the title of the book, denotes a known genre or subgenre of writings in the ancient world which characterize books that portray the great works of people and cities. The title is not unfitting since Acts narrates the early and founding events of the church at its beginnings, and most of them are attributed to apostles.[7] As much as this title, Acts of the Apostles is vastly used as it appears in the New Testament, some scholars hold exceptions to this generality and would prefer other titles. For instance, Wallace observed that "Suffice it to say, the title is only partially accurate, for only Peter and Paul figure predominantly in this book for reasons which should become clear when we consider the purpose/occasion of writing."[8] Carson and Moo also argued that "judging from Luke's own emphases, he may have preferred a title such as "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" or "What Jesus Continued to Do and to Teach"[9] as illustrated in 1:1 of the book. Without any equivocation, several arguments have been made for and against Lukan authorship of the book. However, it is generally accepted that Luke authored the book bearing the title, Acts of the Apostles.

4. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF ACTS AND THE CONTEXT OF ACTS 9:37

In terms of structure and content of the book, several views have been presented over the years. The book is generally a historical narrative "but not in the sense of a dry chronicle of events."[10] The author's narrative shows a fluid sweep (possibly not all the events though) of the deeds of the Church at its beginnings through mainly two apostles, Peter and then, Paul. Possibly in line with these two significant actors, Wallace argued that the thematic focus of the book is "The Beginnings of the Church and the Expansion of the Gentile Mission."[11] In this wise, whatever event is recorded in the book either occurred among the Jews in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then, to the end of the earth by way of expansion to the Gentile world as stated in Acts 1:8. The book, therefore, spans of about three decades

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[6] D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan n Publishing House, 2005), 285.

[7] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX, AB 28* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 39.

[8] Daniel B. Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 45.

[9] Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 285.

[10] Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*. (Illinois: Inter-varsity Press, 1965), 349.

[11] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 136.

of church history from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Syria, Cyprus, many cities in Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, and, finally, Rome.[12]

By way of content, the book is variously structured. It is opined that the book is mainly structured in two sections, being chapters 1-12 showing events from Jerusalem to Antioch, which can be referred to as Peter's section. The second part, covering chapters 13-28, also portrays events from Antioch to Jerusalem, which can also be referred to as Paul's section. This been the case as it appears, the author's aim was not a biographical sketch. Rather it is quite obvious to divide the book at 15:35/36 whereby the first part 1:15-15:35 shows expansion of the Church from Jerusalem to the assurance of the Gentile mission. The second starts from 15:36-28:31 showing expansion to Rome.[13] Wallace also saw the book as opening with a prologue (1:1 – 2) but showed that the author actually picked up his second volume with the ascension of Christ (1:9 – 11). According to him, it is after this establishment of continuity form where the first volume elapsed that the actual work begun.[14] Carson and Moo also saw a longer Prologue stating the foundations for the church and its mission as in 1:1–2:41 to show the church and its mission was rooted in Jesus' acts and words.[15]

Howbeit, Kummel showed that the entire work of Acts can be divided into five main sections which can be determined geographically in live with the missionary command the Lord recorded in Acts 1:8. He demonstrated this showing 1:15 – 8:3 as events in Jerusalem; events in Samaria and Coastal is recorded in 8:4 – 11:18; Antioch and the Antiochene mission is found in 11:19 – 15:35; lands of the Aegean Sea starts from 15:26 – 19:20; event from Jerusalem to Rome is recorded in 19:21 – 28:31.[16]

From this perspective, Acts 9:36 (the text of consideration in this work) being part of the pericope of 9:35 – 43, is found in the second main section of the book of Acts. This section (8:4 – 11:18) describes the spread of the gospel in Samaria and through the coastal regions. Which can be given details as 8:4 – 25, preaching of the gospel in Samaria; 8:26 – 40, the episode of Philip and the Ethiopian official's encounter; 9:1 – 9, conversion of Paul; 9:10 – 30, Paul in Damascus and Jerusalem; 9:31 – 43; 10:1 – 11:18, Peter in Caesarea and conversion of Cornelius.[17] The pericope having the story of Tabitha by translation, Dorcas, a believer who was described as "full of good works and charitable deeds which she did" fell sick and died. According to the narrative, "When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room." She was in Lydda and since Joppa was close by where Peter was, he was invited by possibly the believers who came and a miracle happened as he prayed for Tabitha in that she resurrected.

This work attempts a Lexical Analysis of the phrase, "they laid her in an upper room" which appeared in the above mentioned pericope. Although the entire pericope is not much highlighted in various structural analyses of the book, and often the focus is on Peter, this study rather focuses on the deeds of the believers in Lydda on how they prepared the dead for burial as found in 9:37. This is relevant in addressing, from a biblical perspective, whether it is appropriate to lay the dead in the church. Some claim impropriety and a desecration of the church the act of laying the dead in the church.

5.0 LEXICAL-THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF "THEY LAID HER IN AN UPPER ROOM"

The Lexical Analysis of a text offers the opportunity or privilege to critically look individual dictions or phrases that make up the chosen text. In this work, the expression, "they laid her in an upper room" as found in Acts 9:37d is in focus for consideration. The Greek, *αὐτὴν ἔθηκαν ἐν ὑπερῴῳ* is the

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[12] Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 285.

[13] Werner Georg Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 154.

[14] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 136.

[15] Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 286.

[16] Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 154, 155.

[17] Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 155.

expression translated as "they laid her in an upper room. This work, therefore, considers this expression as mentioned above under three subheadings, i) αὐτὴν, ii) ἔθηκαν, iii) ἐν and iv) ὑπερῴῳ.

αὐτὴν

The Greek word, αὐτὴν, is the third person singular of the third person personal pronoun, αὐτη (the feminine of αὐτος), although sometimes it does duty for the first and/or second person pronouns.[18] The third person personal pronoun is made up of a derivation from the particle αὖ and the added force of a demonstrative pronoun. It signifies and it is applied to what has already been previously mentioned. Again, when the whole discourse is looked at as a whole, sometimes, it must necessarily be supplied.[19] The personal pronoun, αὐτη, is in the feminine gender; hence, its translation is 'her'. This pronoun, αὐτὴν from αὐτη, just like other personal pronouns, pertains to that which is identical to something having the idea of being the same.[20] In this particular instance as a pronoun, it replaces its subject, Ταβηθά, ἣ διερμηνευομένη λέγεται Δορκάς of mentioned in verse 36. Generally, a pronoun is "a word used in place of a noun."[21]

Therefore, αὐτὴν applies to Tabitha whose name is translated, Dorcas being the subject mentioned in verse 36. By implication, "Since pronouns are grammatical proxies, they must indicate in some manner that to which they are referring."[22] In agreement with this general behavior of pronouns, Tabitha, although an indeclinable name, by its function in verse 36 can be said to be in the nominative being subject, αὐτὴν in the accusative case is referring to it as its antecedent. This is explained that the fundamental rule for the Greek pronoun, here, the personal pronoun αὐτὴν is that it is congruent with its antecedent Tabitha, in gender and number, but not necessarily in case. The case of the pronoun, αὐτὴν to its antecedent, Tabitha is determined by its function in its own clause, hence, accusative being the object in its clause.[23] The personal pronoun, αὐτὴν is therefore, translated, 'her' since it is in the feminine being applied to the name, Tabitha which is feminine. The accusative being part of the so-called oblique cases (others, genitive and dative) of personal pronouns, simply stand in the place of a noun or other nominal. This is referred to as anaphoric in that it refers back to its antecedent.[24]

ἔθηκαν

The word, ἔθηκαν here used, is the third person aorist of the verb, τιθημι. It is a bland verb with basic meanings such as put, place, lay. The sense of meaning is often derived from its object and the context as it is used[25] Being described as bland,[26] in the active and passive voices, i) generally it means in a local sense, 'lay' as in laying of a foundation as used in Luke 14:29; lay out to be seen by someone passing by (Mark 6:56); lay away or bury (Mark 6:29); lay on, especially, on the hands (Mark 8:25); put or place a light (Mark 4:21); ii) figuratively, it means endowment with the Spirit (Matt. 12:18); put down enemies (Matt. 22:44); economically invest and/or deposit money (Luke 19:21); set aside or

[18] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 142.

[19] Joseph H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1889), 268.

[20] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 111.

21 Imikan Nkopuruk and Kehinde Saheed Odusina, "The English Pronouns and their usage," accessed February 2, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/

[22] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 140-141.

[23] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 141.

[24] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 141.

[25] Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 145.

[26] It is quite a weak verb with several nuances when used. Its meaning is more contextual is would be observed. This means its dictionary definition would not make much sense until it is used.

store up money (1 Cor. 16:2); iii) idiomatically, it means literally to place the knees, i.e. bend the knees, kneel down (Mark 15:19); place in the heart or mind, i.e. make up one's mind, decide, purpose (Luke 21:14); literally place in the spirit, i.e. make up one's mind, resolve (Acts 19:21); literally lay down one's life, i.e. die voluntarily (John 10:11); etc.; iv) with a double accusative means to establish, appoint, make someone something, destine someone to or for something (Acts 13:47; Rom. 4:17). In the middle voice, it has the same meanings as above. However, as the middle voice generally implies, the meaning comes with more self-involvement. In this case, especially of God's designed self-activity to mean arrange, establish, fix, entrust (Acts 1:7; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1Tim. 1:12); again, it means to keep in mind, think of, or resolve (Luke 1:66; Acts 5:4).[27]

In Acts 9:37, it appears to have the same meaning as found in Mark 6:56. This is so since Tabitha who died was laid out to be seen by those who passed by her. Louw-Nida emphasized this meaning of the word as "to put or place in a particular location."[28] This demonstrates that Tabitha who died was actually laid out in a location public in nature to be seen by those who passed by her as would be referred by a modern understanding as filing past the body of the dead. As the word further implies, she was laid passive and in horizontal posture, and thus, it is different from $i\varsigma\tau\eta\mu\iota$ which actually signifies an upright and active position. $\tau\iota\theta\eta\mu\iota$ is also set apart from $\kappa\epsilon\iota\mu\alpha\iota$ which is properly reflexive and implies to utterly prostrate.[29]

The verb, $\check{\epsilon}\theta\eta\kappa\alpha\nu$ is in the aorist. To appreciate the work in context, it is appropriate to represent the action of the aorist in comparison with other main tenses in New Testament Greek studies. There are mainly three essential kinds of actions being: i) momentary or punctiliar action and this is when the action is considered as a whole and may be represented by a dot (.); ii) linear or durative action in which it may be represented by a continuous line (_____) or several dots (……….); and iii) the continuation of perfected or completed action which may be represented as (.____ .).[30] The aorist tense is essentially the kind of action described as the momentary or punctiliar and represented by a dot (.). Its forms, for instance, in the indicative, subjunctive, or imperative mood show or depict punctiliar action, that is, an action to be done once without reference to continuance or frequency.[31] A very essential distinction to this is not to suggest a temporal quality of singleness. The reason is that time is not of the essence to the aorist tense.[32] This, therefore, implies that the aorist is not necessarily a time tense. The action of the aorist is timeless, and it is best defined as action in "its simplest form."[33] This view is further affirmed by "the fact that the inherent meaning of the Greek tenses is defined as showing aspect rather than time."[34]

From the above, with $\check{\epsilon}\theta\eta\kappa\alpha\nu$ in the indicative, Tabitha dead body was simply laid without any reference to continuance. It implies she was laid there momentarily once as the aorist suggests.

$\dot{\epsilon}\nu$

The preposition, $\dot{\epsilon}\nu$ is severally used in the New Testament. It is used "more frequently and in more varied situations than any other. It overlaps with the simple dative uses to a great extent, but not entirely."[35] With its varied uses and meanings, it is observed that "It is impossible in our limits to deal

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[27] Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 145.

28 Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 111.

[29] James Strong, *Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (Albany: The Ages Digital Library Version 1.0, 1997), 481

[30] A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 823

[31] John Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 96; C. R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspects in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 86.

[32] R. L. Maddox, "The Use of the Aorist Tense in Holiness Exegesis," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 16(2) (1981): 106–118, 111.

[33] Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research,* 824.

[34] R. E. Picirilli. "The Meaning of the Tenses in New Testament Greek: Where Are We?" *JETS* 48(3) (2005): 533-555, 545.

[35] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 167.

exhaustively with the extended uses in late Greek of this "maid-of-all-work" among the prepositions."[36] It is here used in the structure, *ἐν ὑπερῴῳ* showing a spatial function. As preposition with the dative, the fundamental idea of *ἐν* is within, in, withinness, signifying static position or time. Nonetheless, its several and varied uses can be determined only by the context.

The main categories of its usage are: i) of place, it denotes a position within boundaries which can be translated in or within; it means on when it is about specific location; it is at or near when is expresses nearness; expressing an occasion or sphere of activity at, in, on the grounds of. The other two usages are of ii) time and iii) cause denoting instrument by or with which something is done.[37]

Its use, here showing place and/or sphere indicates a position of the body of Tabitha laid within a defined space "as being within certain limits - inside, within, in."[38] Therefore, the body was in the interior of the whole of the upper room or within the limits of the space of the upper room.[39] Form the discussion so far, the body of Tabitha was laid within the upper room as stated in the text.

ὑπερῴῳ

This word of consideration, *ὑπερῴῳ* is part of the rooms or chambers of houses in the ancient world. Houses in the Ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world had characteristic features, functions, and significances in their time. Humans began to create houses from cave dwellings, stone-built, tents, and mud or brick-built buildings. There were several features of a house, including cornerstones, floor, gutter, door, hinge, lock and key, threshold, hearth, window, roof, chambers or rooms - guest chamber, inner chamber, upper chamber, etc. Each of these chambers has its own functions and significance. In the ISBE Bible Encyclopedia, it demonstrated details of the plan and construction of a house as

> One should observe an isometric sketch and plan showing construction of a typical small house from Gezer. The house is protected and approached from the street by an open court, on one side of which is a covered way. The doors enter into a living-room from which the two very small inner private rooms, bedchambers, are reached. Builders varied the plan to suit requirements, but in the main, this plan may be taken as typical. When members of a family married, extra accommodation was required. Additions were made as well as could be arranged on the cramped site, and in consequence, plans often became such a meaningless jumble that it is impossible to identify the respective limits of adjoining houses. The forecourt was absorbed and crushed out of existence, so that in many of the plans recovered the arrangement is lost.[40]

It is then obvious that there were specific plans and designs for houses in the oriental and Greco-Roman world which became useful to the Early Christian Church. The significances, especially, of various chambers or rooms of a household are of high significance.

In this Lexical Analysis, *ὑπερῴῳ* is of high significance since it is the word that highlights the place where the body of Tabitha who was dead was laid. The word, *ὑπερῴῳ* is neuter noun in the dative case from *ὑπερῷον*. It is basically a room on the level above the ground floor which in today's architectural terminologies appears to be second story or floor in American usage and first story in most other languages. It can be said to be an upstairs room or upper chamber. The term *ὑπερῷον* then refers to the kind of rooms or chambers often built on the flat-roofed Middle East housetops.[41] This appears a normal room but it has various uses and significances in the Ancient Near East and Oriental world.

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[36] James H. Moulton and George Milligan, eds., *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930), 234.

[37] Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 145.

[38] Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 111.

[39] Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 268.

[40] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 631.

[41] Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 111.

A better way of describing ὑπερῷον is to see it as "roof-chamber"[42] since this makes it the topmost or uppermost room in a building, the one very near or next to the roof. It is not clear whether in Ancient Near East, they had more upper floors or chambers. However, Strong defined ὑπερῷον as a higher part of the house which is the apartment in the third story. He referred to is as upper chamber or room.[43] Whichever way the word is viewed, it is still the upper room.

From Greek writings, especially in Homer, ὑπερῷον was the highest part of the house, the upper room or story where women resided. Apart from this usage, in Biblical Greek, it is described as a room in the upper part of a house, sometimes built upon the flat roof of the house, where Orientals were accustomed to retire in order to sup, meditate, pray, etc.[44] The guest chamber was also often the uppermost room as demonstrated here that,

> The "guest chamber" was often the uppermost room (Greek *huperoon*, Hebrew `aliyeh), a loft upon the roof (Acts 1:13; 9:37; 20:8, 9), the pleasantest room in the house. Eutychus from "the third loft" fell down into the court. Little chambers surround the courtyard, piled upon one another, the half-roof of the lower forming a walking terrace of the higher, to which the ascent is by a ladder or flight of steps. Such "a little chamber" the Shunammite woman made (built) "on the wall" of the house for Elisha (2 Kings 4:10, compare 1 Kings 17:19). Ahaziah fell down from such an "upper chamber" with a projecting latticed window (2 Kings 1:2). The "summer house" was generally the upper room, the "winter house" was the lower room of the same house (Jer. 36:22; Amos 3:15); or if both were on the same floor the "summer house" was the outer, the "winter house" the inner apartment. An upper room was generally over gateways (2 Sam. 18:33). Poetically, "God layeth the beams of His upper chambers (Hebrew) in the waters, whence "He watereth the hills" (Ps. 104:3, 13)."

With the various functions of the upper chamber or room as mentioned above, it is clear that it was of significant benefit and an important part of both the oriental and Greco-Roman world in which the Early Church developed and functioned. From the text under consideration, it was in the upper room that Tabitha who was dead was laid.

The word ὑπερῴῳ, as stated earlier, is in the dative singular. It, preceded by the preposition ἐν, has a spatial function as dative of sphere, demonstrating a locative use. This means that Tabitha was actually laid within the sphere or space of the upper room. As dative of sphere, the dative substantive, ὑπερῴῳ indicates the sphere or realm within which the word to which it is related αὐτὴν ἔθηκαν takes place or exists. Although some may want to decipher between the dative use for sphere and space, Wallace argued that "Some people talk about the dative of place as a separate category, distinct from sphere. I disagree with this view. My sense is that sphere and place are simply different applications of the same category — one figurative, the other literal. The only difference is lexical, not semantic. Exegesis is not materially affected by such a distinction."[45]

With this usage, it is an undeniable fact that the corpse of Tabitha was laid in an upper room, which by usage, was a place of prayer and meditation, to state the least. Here again, it would be observed that ὑπερῴῳ is anarthrous, that is, appearing in the phrase without the article which would give it the sense of basic identity. Nonetheless, it should be noted that it is not always necessary for a noun or substantive to have the article in order for it to be definite. Thus, the substantive may be definite without the article, however, must be definite with the article. To it, when a noun is anarthrous, it may be definite or indefinite depending on the context, knowing that a substantive without the article, being anarthrous, may have one of these functions forces as indefinite, qualitative, or definite.[46]

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[42] Moulton and Milligan, eds., *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, 234.

[43] Strong, *Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*, 481.

[44] Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 268.

[45] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 72.

[46] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 108.

Another way of looking at this situation is to say that, since this was the first mention of the substantive, ὑπερῴῳ, it would usually stand anarthrous because it is merely being introduced without any basic identity.[47] This notwithstanding however, it appears that this particular upper room was a public place and not necessarily for a household. Even if it was for a particular household, as it is common knowledge that some homes of some believers of the Early Church were made available for congregating and worship, this particular upper room may have been made open to all manner of people, here, the believers of the Early Church in Lydda where Tabitha lived and died. This laying of the dead in an upper room was not a usual practice among both the people of Ancient Near East and Greco-Roman world, since no mention of such function is adduced. It becomes necessary to say that this appears to be a practice among believers of Christ since Tabitha was a known disciple (*See* Acts 9:36ff).

6.0 THE UPPER ROOM AS A SACRED SPACE IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

The upper room, in the Greek, ὑπερῷον, where Tabitha was laid when she fell ill and died, as found in Acts 9:37d, is a primary subject in the biblical text. It appears to be a significant room in both the Ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world. Of special consideration to its importance is the 1st century AD when the Early Church found its beginnings. From the reading, the key usages of the upper room are: i) as a guest chamber or room; ii) a place to sup; iii) importantly, as a room for meditation and prayer; iv) a place of worship where the Early Church evidently congregated severally. These functionalities of the upper room are variously attested to in the biblical text, for instance, as a lodging place and guest room (1Kings 17:17-24; 2Kings 4:10, 11; Mark 14:14, 15; Luke 22:11, 12; Acts 1:13); place of prayer and meditation (Daniel 6:10); a dining place (Mark 14:12-31; Luke 22:7-20); the place where the dead, in the example of Tabitha, was laid (Acts 9:36-43).

The essentiality of the upper room to the Early Christian Church is undeniable. As stated above, it was the place where Jesus and the twelve apostles had His final meal, the Passover with them (Mark 14:12-31; Luke 22:7-20; John 13:1ff). This has become an example, and it became instituted as one of the major 'rites' of the Christian Church, being the Lord's Communion. It was here that the Lord washed the disciples' feet. This gives a model for Christian humble service, which would prove to be a defining characteristic of the Early church and is especially practiced today among Seventh-day Adventists. It was in the same upper room that lots were cast to select Matthias to join the remaining eleven apostles. Although the text in Acts 2:2c stated that the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost filled the whole house where they were sitting, the apostles were actually in the upper room. They were praying, confessing their sins, making up with one another, studying, etc., before the Holy Spirit came upon them. This was actually a major worship session where all the apostles and known disciples congregated after Jesus ascended to heaven. In Acts 20:7-12, it is recorded that Paul was with the disciples in an upper room where he spoke and preached to them until midnight. From the window of an upper room, Eutychus fell to the ground dead but came back to life. These examples provide sceneries and series of how important the upper room was to the early believers in the setting of worship. This implies that they were using the upper room as a place for congregating and worship.

From the pericope of Acts 9:36ff, when Tabitha died and was laid in an upper room, they sent for Peter who at the time was at Lydda. The text did not state why they sent for Peter. Nonetheless, clearly from the narrative, with the presence of the widows that Tabitha helped whilst she was alive weeping, it should be observed that this was a funeral service setting. Peter was only invited to be part of the funeral and possibly the burial service of Tabitha. He was not necessarily called in to pray for Tabitha to come back to life. To this end, one can say that Tabitha was laid in a place of worship since the discussion so far adduces and attests to that fact. It should be observed also that Peter was not invited at the instance of the family of Tabitha but rather, by the Church or the brethren in Joppa.

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[47] Wallace, *New Testament: Introductions, Arguments, and Outlines*, 98.

Although the Bible does not explicitly specify in either the Old or New Testament where the dead should be laid, the example of Tabitha, a believer from Lydda, provides a descriptive reference. In Acts 9:36-41, it is noted that after Tabitha passed away, her body was laid in an upper room, a place traditionally associated with worship and community gathering. While this action is not a direct commandment, it subtly reflects the early Christian practice of honoring the deceased within sacred spaces. The upper room, often seen as a place of prayer and fellowship, thus carries symbolic significance, suggesting that even in death, believers were respected in places dedicated to worship. This, being descriptive rather than prescriptive, becomes an example of practice rather than an injunction. The church today, may decide to lay a dead believer in the church. This does not in any way defile nor desecrate the place of worship following the example in Acts 9:36ff. If this practice was indeed offensive, it stands to reason that Peter, given his prominent role among the apostles, would have addressed it or at least made a comment about it. This expectation holds true especially considering his tendency to speak out on significant issues in the Early church. However, it's important to note that not everything the apostles did or said was recorded in the Book of Acts, so we cannot draw definitive conclusions based on silence alone. Regardless, this specific pericope, particularly Acts 9:37d, offers a valuable example that contributes to the ongoing discussions among Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventists about whether the dead should be laid in the church or not. The passage can provide some clarity or insight into this debate, offering a potentially provable solution based on biblical practice.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNERAL PRACTICES AMONG GHANAIAN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

The phrase "They laid her in an upper room" from Acts 9:37 has important implications for funeral practices among Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventists. This passage, which describes the post-mortem care of Tabitha (Dorcas), a well-known believer, challenges the prevailing belief in many Ghanaian Adventist congregations that placing a corpse in a church building constitutes defilement.

Traditionally, Adventist funerals in Ghana are held outside the church auditorium—in courtyards, open spaces, or residences—because many congregants regard the sanctuary as a sacred space that must not be profaned by the presence of a dead body. However, the example from Acts 9:37 suggests that early Christians had a more nuanced understanding of sacred space. The upper room where Tabitha was laid was commonly used for worship, prayer, and fellowship. It was the same kind of room where Jesus held the Last Supper, where the apostles gathered for prayer and the descent of the Holy Spirit, and where Paul preached until midnight. Laying Tabitha in such a space implies that early believers saw no contradiction between honoring the dead and preserving the sanctity of a worship space. Rather than being an act of desecration, it was a gesture of reverence and hope.

This biblical precedent invites Ghanaian Adventists to reconsider their stance on where the deceased may be laid during funeral services. If the Early church used the upper room—a space for worship—as a place to honor a deceased believer, then modern churches might do likewise without compromising theological or spiritual integrity. The idea that the physical presence of a corpse defiles a place of worship may be more culturally driven than biblically grounded. In fact, the absence of any rebuke or correction from Peter in this narrative strengthens the argument that the practice is not inherently unbiblical.

The implications are both practical and theological. Practically, churches should consider equipping their auditoriums for dignified funeral services, ensuring that the environment is respectful and appropriate. Theologically, this shift would reinforce the idea that death is a temporary sleep in Adventist eschatology, and that the sanctuary remains a place of hope—even in the face of death. Such a change would also promote unity among congregants, reducing the tensions and divisions that currently arise over funeral arrangements.

Ultimately, Acts 9:37 provides a compelling narrative example for Adventist communities wrestling with the cultural and doctrinal aspects of funeral rites. Embracing this model may help bridge

the gap between scriptural precedent and contemporary practice, fostering a more biblically informed approach to honoring the dead within the church.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to inform and guide the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana regarding the laying of the dead in places of worship: First, church leaders and theologians should acknowledge Acts 9:37d as a valid biblical precedent that demonstrates the laying of a deceased believer in a sacred space—namely, the upper room—without defiling it. This understanding can guide present-day decisions regarding funeral locations within church facilities.

Secondly, local congregations should be intentionally educated about the theological and historical meanings associated with the upper room, particularly its function as a place of worship, prayer, and community gathering. Understanding this context can help dispel misconceptions about defilement and promote unity in funeral practices.

Additionally, churches should encourage members to consider using the church auditorium or chapel for funeral services, provided that the space is appropriately prepared and respected. This aligns with biblical examples and promotes a sacred and communal atmosphere during the final rites.

Furthermore, church administrative units (local conferences and unions) should develop clear, culturally sensitive policies and guidelines on the use of church buildings for funerals. These policies should take into account theological insights, cultural realities, and pastoral concerns, ensuring that such events are conducted in an orderly and reverent manner.

More essentially, to support church-based funerals, congregations should invest in improving infrastructure—such as ventilation, seating, and audio-visual systems—to handle the logistical demands of such events. This helps create a hospitable and dignified setting for honoring the deceased.

Also, given the existing divisions on this issue within some congregations, church leaders should facilitate open forums and discussions where differing views can be expressed respectfully. These dialogues should aim to build understanding, reduce tension, and promote reconciliation grounded in shared faith and scriptural reasoning. While promoting biblical principles, the church must also be mindful of local cultural beliefs and traditions around death and sacred spaces. A balanced approach that integrates scriptural truth with cultural understanding will foster acceptance and gradual change.

Lastly, pastors should play a key role in teaching, counseling, and mediating among members on this issue. Their leadership can help prevent division and promote a Christ-centered approach to funerals that reflects hope, dignity, and respect for both the dead and the living.

9.0 CONCLUSION

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a Bible-based Church, by thought and practice looks to the Bible in defining its ways of operation. This paper explored the phrase "They laid her in an upper room" found in Acts 9:37d, focusing on a lexical analysis to understand its significance within the narrative context and early Christian practices. The study examined the Greek terminology used, particularly the terms "ἀνώγεον" (upper room) and "ἔθηκαν" (they laid), delving into their etymology, usage in other scriptural and historical texts, and their cultural connotations during the period. By comparing these terms with other New Testament and contemporary Jewish and Greco-Roman literature, the research aims to shed light on the implications of placing Tabitha (Dorcas) in an upper room after her death. This analysis reveals the theological and communal aspects of early Christian burial customs, highlighting the role of the upper room as a significant space for prayer, gathering, and worship. The paper concludes that the Church today, may decide to lay a dead believer in the church auditorium or chapel. This does not in any way defile nor desecrate the place of worship following the example in Acts 9:36ff. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the socio-religious dynamics of the early Christian community and their practices surrounding death and burial narratives.

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About the Author

Ebenezer Quaye (PhD) holds a doctoral degree in Theology and serves a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Theological Studies, Valley View University. He is a known transformational author, speaker and influencer through his seminar, workshop, conference and other personal engagements as well as a discussant of diverse issues of global significance. He combines both academic and public speaking in a seamless manner to reach thousands across the world. As a Biblicist, he researches in pistology, mother-tongue and translation issues, lexicography, leadership and other areas of global

scope that transform societies. Quaye has authored and published numerous peer-reviewed articles in both local and international journals.

Kenneth Oppong (MPhil) is a Lecturer at Valley View University, Ghana, where he also holds the role of the Associate Dean of Spiritual Life and Development at the Techiman Campus. He has a Master of Philosophy in Religious Studies and Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies. Kenneth has authored a number of peer-reviewed articles in local and international journals. His research interests focus on Biblical studies, systematic theology, practical theology, and religion and society. As a seasoned seminar speaker, Kenneth focuses on youth empowerment advocacy.