

ANNA – THE EXPECTANT WIDOW

Lk. 2:36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; 37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

When we think about the first outsiders to meet Jesus, we automatically think of the shepherds and the ‘wise men’. However, there was someone else who actually met Him *before* the ‘wise men’. She was the first woman the Bible records to meet Him ... when Jesus was only forty days old! Her name was Anna.

Anna was a widow, but she was a special type of widow, - she was *an expectant widow* ... she was expecting a child ... and *she was eighty-four years of age!!* ... Let’s look at her background ...

‘Anna’ is a Hebrew name which means ‘grace’. Luke tells us she was the daughter of a man called Phanuel (Greek spelling; as in ‘Elijah’ and ‘Elias’), - or ‘Penuel’ in the Hebrew, the name is sometimes also spelt Peniel ... Where do we find Peniel in the Bible? ... When Jacob was returning to his homeland he was left alone at the river Jabbok. Jabbok is an interesting word, it means ‘emptying’. It was a little stream that ebbed its way through the mountain range of Gilead and ‘emptied itself’ into the River Jordan. ... It was where the little stream *ended* and flowed into the river. ... It was also where Jacob ‘the supplanter’ (i.e. someone who ‘tricks’ his way into getting what he wants), - also, ‘the heel-holder’ (cf. **Gen. 32:24** And when her [*Rebekah’s*] days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, *there were* twins in her womb. **25** And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. **26** And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob, - became ‘Israel’, **Gen. 32:28** And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. ... It was also where he wrestled with the Angel, **Gen. 32:30** And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. ... Peniel/Phanuel means ‘the face of God’ ... The name of Anna’s father ... who was also about to come face to face with God.

We are also told she belonged to the tribe of Aser/Asher (which was in the region of Galilee). Aser was the second son of Leah’s handmaid Zilpah, and Jacob’s eighth son. His name means ‘blessed’, and at his birth Leah confirmed her as ‘blessed’. ... Now, you have heard of people referring to the so-called ‘ten lost tribes of Israel’. They were the tribes who supposedly became so assimilated with the foreign nations after the Assyrian King Sennacherib had conquered the region in 721 BC that they lost their Jewish identity ...

Well, ... Anna's record shows us the so-called 'Lost Tribes' are not lost at all ... for God knows exactly where they are ... and Anna was one of them. And in fact, this also shows us the Jews of the ten tribes were keeping their family registers and genealogies up-to-date! ... They are well-known for keeping such records.

Another incident which the Holy Spirit found worthy to record relating to Christ's family records is in Jn. 7. The Pharisees were facing tough times because of Jesus; the people were trying to come to work out Who He claimed to be, **Jn. 7:40** *Of a truth this is the Prophet.* **41** *Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee?* **42** *Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?* **43** *So there was a division among the people because of him. They then brought the matter to the Pharisees, who were infamous for 'looking-down-their-noses' at everyone,* **47** *Are ye also deceived?* **48** *Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? [i.e. has any of us been 'hoodwinked' by this impostor? Of course, we haven't!]* **49** *But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed ...* In other words, when you can't find any honest evidence against your opponent, resort to insult!

However, Nicodemus stood up for Jesus, **51** *Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? ...* It was like 'a red rag to a bull', **52** *They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet. ...* More insults! ... And, yet, what is God's Word saying about Anna, whose people came from western Galilee?! ... **36** *there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser ...* note, **I Cor. 1:27** *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28* *And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen. Upon what factors is God's choice based? His choice is established on His free and undeserved grace *alone*.*

So ... Anna's name means 'grace', her father's name meant (... because I presume he had died by this time) 'face of God' ... and she herself was a prophetess, - just like Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Huldah (II Kgs. 22:14), - and she originally came from up north in Galilee.

For many years the voice of prophecy had been silent ... and now here suddenly there is this prophetess! (... You will also know that the evangelist Philip's four unmarried daughters also prophesied, Acts 21:9). ... Women prophets? Yes! She served the needs of other women in the temple, - she instructed them concerning God. *That* was her remit. Her whole life was the temple; she attended the temple every day and went to all the meetings, - the public and the more private services, - she basically 'lived there'!

It was her supreme interest and purpose in life ... to serve God in His holy temple ... and the fact she was **about fourscore and four years** did not hinder her from coming out to all the meetings, - she lived for God, it was her life's ambition to serve Him ... and she also longed to see His Son.

Even when her husband died, - and she was only married to him for seven years ... and if she was married at the usual age of 14, he died when she was 21, she could have married again, but she didn't ... and for the sixty-three years or so she spent her life in the service of God. Here was a woman who was absolutely devoted to the work of God. ... She was more faithful than many of the Jewish men ... and she [*continuously*] **served God with fastings and prayers night and day**. What an epitaph God has recorded in His Word regarding this faithful servant!

In Jesus' parable the Pharisee boasted, **Lk. 18:12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess**. But this woman gave more than what was expected of her, - *she gave her all!* ... Such people are the backbone of any fellowship. You can rely on them and you can trust them. ... They are not out for self-glory... they just simply 'keep their hand to the plough' and *God keeps the records of their faithfulness*.

... And here was a good old-fashioned type of woman! ... Who says women don't have a ministry, *of course they do!* ... What an **example** Anna is to us all! ... And here is something else about her ... Who says elderly people can't get excited?! *Anna* was excited! ... For many, many years she had watched men and women coming in and going out of the temple. She wouldn't have known Mary and Joseph, - it's not very likely their paths would have crossed previously. On this particular day, though, this new family ... they came into the temple with their little Baby Jesus on the fortieth day after He was born (2:21, cf. Lev. 9:3).

In one of the courts of the temple Anna was moving about as usual, - eighty-four years old *expectant widow*. I'm sure every baby was beautiful to her, - I'm sure she was a typical woman when it came to matters like this ... and, of course, she herself had forfeited the privilege of having her own child as she chose service in the temple instead of remarrying and having a family (*λατρεύω*, she performed sacred services in an official capacity ... and she even *fasted* ... *this eighty-four year old woman!*). ... She is watching Simeon as he takes the Baby in his arms. ... She listens to the words of his '*Nunc Dimittis*', **Lk. 2:29 Lord, now lettest [*nunc dimittis*] thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel**. ... She hears every word, she

comes and joins this new family, - she would have been standing close to Mary, - ... and the Lord shows her this little Baby is the promised Messiah.

She is one of the remnant God has kept from out of the people of Jerusalem. While multitudes of Jews were following their own ideas and Jewish philosophies, Anna was one of a small number the Lord had keep faithful. ... It doesn't matter how spiritually dark the times, God always, - without fail, - keeps a number who are faithful unto His ways. We mentioned before how some people would tell you about the 'lost tribes' ... but none of God's people are lost to Him! He knows them all, He knows where they are ... and here in the temple, on this particular day Simeon whom God had promised ²⁶ [he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ](#). was holding the Messiah in His arms! ... And Anna was standing there too (v.38). ... Such resilience in the face of adversity for throughout all her years she had never given up hope of seeing the Messiah. Surely that is what keeps God's people going, - their trust in His promises! Anna is teaching us today ... Never give up ... never stop believing. Yes, what an **example** Anna is to us all ... and what **excitement** God privileged her to enjoy!

And then we see her **expectation** for when her eyes were fixed upon Baby Jesus she [gave thanks likewise unto the Lord](#). Of course, she was filled with emotion ... it was a wee baby after all ... Yes, but this Child was more than any ordinary baby because this Baby was *her* Redeemer, and the Redeemer of Jerusalem and all Israel ... the one of Whom the prophets had prophesied throughout the centuries. It shows us, once again, how important and how good for us it is to study prophecy, and to trust in God's promises! ... And here she was, her heart would have been skipping as she ... [gave thanks ... unto the Lord](#). ... This old woman being graciously spared to meet Jesus! ...

The commentators can't make up their minds about her age. Some of them reckoned she had been a widow for eighty-four years, ... and she had been married for seven years ... and the youngest age she could have been married was 14 ... so that means she was at least (by their calculations) 105 years of age! ... Other commentators simply read it she was [about fourscore and four years](#). It doesn't matter one iota whether she was 84 or at least 105 ... For many, many years she was faithful in the work of the Lord and that was what mattered!

What praise came from this old woman! You could not have kept her down, - she had seen Jesus! ... I can't help but wonder how she felt when she died and went to Heaven and saw Jesus again, - the risen, glorified, sin-conquering Jesus. ... In His

mother's arms Anna saw Jesus in the temple ... but in Heaven's beauty she saw Him on the throne!

She *expected* to see the Redeemer, - that is the hope of the Redeemed. She didn't know how, or where, or when ... but God led her to be there that day when Jesus came. She would have known all the portions in the Old Testament Scriptures that spoke of His coming ... and she was ready, she was prepared. ... She was actively looking for Him! ... Can you identify with Anna who, - everyday she opened her eyes, - longed to see the Messiah? ... Maybe today?! ... She *expected* to see her Lord. And when she *did* see Him she immediately gave thanks to God. When she finished her prayer she went out and found her friends with whom she *looked for redemption in Jerusalem* and she told them of Jesus. ... She just didn't tell one or two, - she made it the rest of her life's business (... this old woman of eighty-four years of age) to tell her people their Messiah had come.

She shows us how good it is to keep company with those who share the same expectation of His coming, as she went through the streets of Jerusalem and through the various hallways and courts of the temple telling about her meeting with Jesus. ... She was a changed woman! She had a new life, and her face would have been 'beaming' as she spoke to others about Jesus. ... She is one of those straightforward, ordinary, lovely ladies it would have been a delight to meet. ... Who says older people do not have a ministry! ... Yes, they most definitely do! ... When God saves you He never expects you to stop serving Him, - it does not matter what age you are. And even when your time on this earth runs out God will take you up to Heaven and you will keep on serving Him in Glory.

In about twelve hours, we shall be entering a new year ... we will be into another year of service for Him, and what better example is there to follow than Anna's? ... She was regularly in the Lord's house, among the Lord's people, and doing the Lord's work ... That is what she lived for. While many others had set such things aside, she was faithful, and the Lord blessed her faithfulness when she met the Saviour.

There were others in the temple that day who did not notice Baby Jesus. ... They went out of that temple the same way as they came in ... *Christless*. ... Their religion was dead and lifeless. There was no expectation of a living relationship with God through His Son. ... How different this woman was though ... She lived *every* day in the hope of seeing Him ... just a simple ordinary woman, - no 'airs and graces'. May she be a lesson to us in the new year ahead ... **Anna – the expectant widow** ... her **example**, her **excitement** and her **expectation**!