

# WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

## ANNA: LESSON ONE

by Sandy Harber

### **"And there was one Anna, a prophetess ...." Luke 2:36a**

Everything we know about Anna is contained in three verses in the Gospel of Luke. But those verses paint a vivid picture of a godly woman who had devoted her life to serving the Lord God of Israel. Her reward was a personal encounter with the incarnate Son of God.

Luke tells us that Anna was a prophetess. Before the written Word of God was completed God conveyed His messages to mankind through the mouths of men and women called "prophets." which He had gifted with spiritual insight. The messages of God's prophets varied depending on the recipients of His messages and the times in which they lived. The message was often a warning to forsake sin and return to God. At times that message was ignored and, so, God sent a new message: "you have not forsaken your sin so this is your punishment." The prophet would then announce the form that the punishment would take, such as famine, plague, or war.

The message of the prophet might contain a prophecy of future events. These could have a near view or a far view, or both. That is, the fulfillment would occur immediately or in the near future, or the fulfillment would not come for many years, even centuries.

Many future prophecies centered around the Messiah. "Messiah" is the Hebrew word meaning "anointed." The Greek term for this word is "Christ." There were three offices in Israel where an individual was anointed with oil: prophet, priest, and king. The Messiah of the Old Testament prophecies was destined to be all three. Jesus, the Christ (the "anointed"), came to earth the first time to fulfill the office of prophet. He brought God's message to His people. He was the message! Today, Jesus sits in heaven as a High Priest, interceding for you and me. Some day He will return to earth a king and rule for 1,000 years.

With the closing of the Old Testament, about 400 years before Christ, the messages from heaven seemed to dry up. The prophet Malachi closed out the Old Testament with a prophecy that the coming of the Messiah would be preceded by a forerunner, a prophet like Elijah, who would turn the hearts of the people (Mal. 4:5-6). The New Testament opened with the angelic announcement of the birth of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:4-13). During the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments there were no prophets or angels sent by God with messages for His people. This period is known as "the 400 silent years."

But communications from heaven resumed with the angel Gabriel's announcement of the birth of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:4-13). Six months later, Gabriel appeared to Mary with news of another impending birth (Lk. 1:26-31). There was, in fact, quite a lot of angelic activity during this time. Apparently, God began speaking through His human messengers, known as prophets, during this time as well. John the Baptist was one. Anna was another.

We have no record of any of Anna's prophecies. Her messages may have contained warning against sin or encouragement to repent. Like John the Baptist, her messages may have been designed to prepare the people for the coming Messiah. That would certainly be in keeping with the time and place in which she lived. After her encounter with the baby Jesus Luke tells us that she "spoke of him (Jesus) to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (v. 38). It seems probable that she herself had been looking for the Messiah who would bring redemption to God's people and her prophecies may have conveyed that.

Anna used the gifts that God had given her to serve Him where she was. We shall see that she was widowed young and had no children. She could have felt sorry for herself. She could have pursued another marriage relationship. What she decided to do was devote herself to serving her Lord. She found a purpose for her life and filled her days with worthwhile activities, such as prayer and fasting (v. 37). We would do well to learn from her example.

*"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."  
Hebrews 12:2*