

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ANNA: LESSON THREE

by Sandy Harber

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher: she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years" Luke 2:36-37a

Anna was an old woman when she encountered the baby Jesus. Doctor Luke described her as a woman of "great age." Being a gentleman, he did not give away her exact age. But he provided some specifics by which we can make an educated guess.

Anna had been married for seven years before she was widowed. We don't know anything about her husband, not even his name. Some commentators have speculated that her husband may have been a prophet also. Perhaps. Scripture is silent on this subject.

At the time she met Jesus Anna had been widowed for 84 years. We are not told how old she was when she got married, but in her culture girls were usually married in their early teens. If, therefore, Anna was married at age 13 she would have been 20 years old when she was widowed. Add to that the 84 years of her widowhood and Anna was around 104 years old when she saw Jesus in the Temple that day. She was, indeed, of "great age." Note that some commentators interpreted the 84 years of verse 37 to be her chronological age, not the number of years that she was widowed. But, whether 84 or 104, Anna was an old lady when she saw the Redemption of Israel that day.

Anna proves that you are never too old to serve God. Moses was 80 years old when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt. And he served the Lord another 40 years after that. It comes down to willingness. Are you willing to serve the Lord regardless of your age? Or, are you using your age as an excuse why you "can't" do this or that?

Conversely, Jeremiah expressed his concern that he was too young when God called him to service (Jer. 1:6). While Jeremiah referred to himself as a "child," he was probably in his late teens or early twenties. He had a legitimate concern. Jeremiah belonged to a priestly family. He knew that priests had to be 30 years old before they could serve in the Temple. Jesus Himself did not begin His ministry until He was 30 years old. Jeremiah feared that the people would not listen to the messages he conveyed from God because they considered him too young to be taken seriously.

The Apostle Paul had counseled his apprentice Timothy to "Let no man despise thy youth" (I Tim. 4:12). Timothy's age is not given in Scripture. The Greek word translated "youth" was applied to men 40 years old and younger. I generally picture Timothy as a young man in his twenties. I have no Biblical basis for that. It just seems reasonable that most of Timothy's congregation was older than him so that there was a danger that they would discount what he had to say because of his age. The point is that we are never too young to serve God.

Age is not a factor in determining fitness for service. Anna was very old. Gender is not a deterrent to serving the Lord. Anna was a woman. Marital circumstances are not a barrier to godly service. Anna was a widow. God can use young and old, men and women, married and single individuals. The only requirement is a willingness to serve.

If you've been thinking that God can't use you because of your circumstances, think again. Whether you are facing physical challenges because of your health or emotional challenges because of some tragedy in your life, God can help you overcome your perceived limitations. And you will benefit because serving the Lord is therapeutic. Your mind will be focused on God and your work for Him, not on your own troubles, limitations, or loss. Give it a try. What do you have to lose?

"Serve the Lord with gladness...." Psalm 100:2a