

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ANNA: LESSON FIVE

by Sandy Harber

"And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord...." Luke 2:38a

Anna had come into the Court of Women at precisely "that instant" when Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms and began to praise God (Lk. 2:25, 27-33). She instantly recognized Who this baby was and joined Simeon in thanksgiving to God.

Lets back up a little and follow the action from the moment the holy family arrived at the Temple. Jesus was forty-one days old. As prescribed by the Law of Moses, it was time for Jesus to be presented and redeemed as a first-born son. Although Jesus could have been presented 10 days earlier, at the age of 31 days, His parents chose to combine this ceremony with that of Mary's purification.

The presentation of a first-born son had its roots in the exodus, when God had brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt with signs and miracles. Through a series of 10 plagues, God effected the release of His people. In preparation for the tenth plague, God had commanded His people to kill a lamb and paint the upper door post and the side posts with its blood (Ex. 12:3-7). Then, at midnight, when He passed over the land, God would spare the first-born sons in the houses marked with blood (Ex. 12:12-13). But in the Egyptian households, where there was no blood covering, the first-born sons died (Ex. 12:29-30).

God declared, therefore, that the first-born sons of the Israelites belonged to Him because He had spared their lives that night. But, rather than take all the first-born sons from every tribe into His service, God substituted the entire tribe of Levi, which was dedicated to serving in the tabernacle in various capacities (Numb. 3:12-13). When the land was divided among the tribes of Israel the Levites were excluded. They were allotted 48 cities within the boundaries of the other tribes, but these were scattered throughout the land. The other tribes were required to give one-tenth of their living to the Levites as payment for their service in the tabernacle (Numb. 18:20-21).

The child to be presented and redeemed must be the first-born son of his mother. Some believe that he had to be the first-born son of the father, as well. Neither parent could be from the tribe of Levi. In addition, the child could not have any physical blemishes or defects. The ceremony itself consisted of the formal presentation of the first-born son to a priest accompanied by two short benedictions. One benediction was for the law of redemption and the other was for the gift of a first-born son. Finally, the redemption money of five shekels was paid into the Temple treasury (one of the 13 trumpet-shaped chests arranged around the walls of the Court of Women).

When Jesus was presented, the Holy Spirit led Simeon into the Temple complex to observe the ceremony (Lk. 2:25-27). Simeon recognized the Lord's Messiah when he saw Jesus. He took the holy child into his arms and blessed Him (Lk. 2:28-30). Then he gave thanks to God and prophesied that Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel (Lk. 2:30-35). It was at this point that Anna entered the court and joined Simeon in thanksgiving. Simeon and Anna knew of and believed in God's promise of a Savior. They had been watching for Him and praying for His advent, while they served in the Temple. God kept His promise and Jesus came to earth the first time.

Two thousand years later we are waiting for the rest of God's promises to be fulfilled. We're waiting for the second coming of that same Savior. Are you praying for His return? Are you faithfully serving the Lord while you wait on His promises? Jesus warns us to be ready all the time because we don't know when He will return (Mt. 24:44). Are you ready?

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." Matthew 24:42