

# WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

## ANNA: LESSON TWO

by Sandy Harber

**"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher...." Luke 2:36ab**

The book of Luke tells us that the prophetess Anna was the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. "Phanuel" means "I saw God face to face." Nothing else is known of the man. Since names often reflected the character of the person in Old Testament times, we can speculate that Phanuel was a godly man and passed his faith down to his daughter. It's interesting that Anna herself did indeed see God face to face when she beheld the baby Jesus.

Phanuel and Anna were from the tribe of Asher, one of the ten "lost tribes." When Rehoboam assumed the throne of Israel at the death of his father, King Solomon, he made a grave error in alienating the people he was supposed to govern. Ignoring their complaint of the tax burden his father had placed on them, King Rehoboam threatened to increase taxes. In anger, the majority of the people rejected Rehoboam and chose Jeroboam to be their king (see I Kings 12). The twelve tribes split into two factions. The ten northern tribes formed their own kingdom and kept the name "Israel." The two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed their own kingdom and called it "Judah."

The newly selected King Jeroboam of the northern kingdom was afraid the people would eventually desert him because the Temple, the center of their religious life, was located in Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah. So King Jeroboam made two golden calf idols and placed them at the northern and southern ends of his kingdom. He led God's people into idolatry and began a downward slide which all succeeding kings of Israel followed. As punishment, God allowed Assyria to conquer Israel and remove the people from the land in 722 B.C. They were scattered among the nations with no record of where the people ended up. Thus, the ten northern tribes were "lost."

So how is it that Anna and her father Phanuel knew that they were descendants of the tribe of Asher? It is because none of the tribes of Israel were truly "lost." When Israel split into two kingdoms, members of the priestly tribe of Levi moved out of the northern kingdom and came to reside in Jerusalem and Judah (II Chron. 11:14). "And after them (i.e. Levi) out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers" (II Chron. 11:16). In other words, the people who were loyal to their God Jehovah moved from their homes in the northern kingdom of Israel to the southern kingdom of Judah. Thus, all twelve tribes of Israel were represented in the kingdom of Judah.

In God's sight none of us are truly "lost" (i.e. missing). God knows where we are at all times. Even when catastrophe strikes God is there. The people of Israel were conquered by the Assyrian army. They were marched out of their land and taken to foreign shores, never to return. But God never "lost" them. He was there with them in the strange countries to which they were sent. Just as He is with us when our personal catastrophes strike and we find ourselves in strange territory. We are never lost to God. He's there with us providing for our needs and giving comfort. And He will continue to do so until we meet Him face to face.

*"... and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Matthew 28:20b*