

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

WIDOW'S MITE: LESSON THREE

by Sandy Harber

"And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make up a farthing." Mark 12:42

"And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites." Luke 21:2

Jesus continued to watch the worshippers as they came forward to cast their offerings into the trumpet-shaped chests. The rich, He noted, cast in "much." In contrast, Jesus observed a poor widow who contributed two mites.

A "mite" or "lepta" (Hebrew word) was the smallest Greek copper coin. It had the least value of all the coins in use at that time. As Mark explained, two mites were the equivalent of one farthing, or "kodrantes" or "quadrans" (Roman term). The farthing was a Roman coin worth one-sixty-fourth of a denarius. A denarius was a day's wage for a Roman soldier or a common laborer. It took 128 mites to equal one Roman denarius. Therefore, the woman would have needed 64 times as much money as she had to equal one day's wage.

The Roman denarius was the most common coin in usage in Jesus' time. "Denarius" is often translated "penny" in our English Bibles. This translation was based on the weight of the silver in the coin. It's deceptive because it does not indicate the purchasing power of the coin. In the Court of the Gentiles two sparrows were sold for a farthing, or two mites, (Mt. 10:29). The poor were permitted to sacrifice birds rather than animals such as sheep or goats, which they could not afford. Mary offered two turtledoves for her purification after Jesus was born (Lk. 2:22-24). Mary would have paid two mites for the birds. A denarius, a day's wage, would have paid for 128 sparrows or turtledoves.

The Bible doesn't give us much information about the woman who gave the two mites. We don't even know her name. Perhaps that makes it easier to identify with her. She's just one of us, a common, unremarkable believer in God. We know she had no husband to take care of her. We know she was poor. We know she was Jewish because she was in the Court of Women. A Gentile woman could not have passed beyond the Court of Gentiles. Was she a young widow or an old woman? If young, did she have children that she had to raise? If older, did she have grown children whose job it would have been to take her in and care for her? Was she completely alone in the world? We don't know. Probably because her circumstances had no bearing on the lesson God was teaching.

Our unknown, unnamed, poverty-stricken widow walked into the Temple complex apparently alone. People came and went intent on their own business. No one noticed her but Jesus. There were no trumpets announcing her giving. She left all the money she had - two mites - behind, and walked out of the Court of Women.

Jesus saw her. Jesus knew all about her. He understood her circumstances completely. He knew exactly how much money she had access to and how much of that she gave to her God. She gave it all (Mk. 12:44; Lk. 21:4). Jesus didn't talk to the widow. She went out of the Temple never knowing that her giving had been observed. She never knew that her sacrifice would be recorded in Scripture as an example to all believers.

None of us know the impact our actions may have on others. We don't know who may be watching. It has been said that you may be the only Bible someone ever reads. Your example may be the only sermon they hear. As representatives of our Lord, it is our job to demonstrate Christ in everything we do.

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." II Corinthians 5:21