

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ANNA: LESSON FOUR

by Sandy Harber

"which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Luke 2:37b

Anna would have been about 20 years old when she was widowed. Since she was only married seven years, if she had had any children they would have been very young. With small children to care for Anna would have sought a second husband to care for her and her young family. Instead, we learn that she devoted herself to the Lord seemingly from the time she was widowed. It seems logical, therefore, to conclude that Anna had no children and was, therefore, free to devote herself to God.

Luke tells us that Anna departed not from the Temple but served night and day. Does that mean she actually slept somewhere within the Temple complex? Most Bible scholars vote "no." They interpret this to mean that Anna spent all her waking hours at the Temple praying and fasting. A few commentators ventured a guess that there may have been accommodations in some of the outbuildings so that she would be onsite in case her prophetic gift was needed. One theory is that there was an alms-house maintained by the Temple charities which was located in the Temple court. If so, it would have had to be the Court of Gentiles or, less likely, the Court of Women. A Jewish woman could not go beyond the Court of Women; a Gentile woman could not have gone beyond the Court of Gentiles, that is, the outermost court.

Whether she slept on Temple grounds or not, Anna was always at the Temple serving her Lord when she was awake. Her service consisted of prayer and fasting. While Anna had the gift of prophecy, according to Luke, she spent her time praying, not prophesying.

What did she pray about? She may have prayed for the people who came in and out of the Temple every day. She may have prayed for the priests whose job it was to serve in the Temple in various capacities. She might have prayed for the religious leaders, that is, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Perhaps she prayed for the poor or those with physical disabilities, such as deafness or blindness.

Like most Jews, Anna was no doubt looking for God's promised Messiah. He may very well have been the subject of some of her prayers. She may have entreated God to send His Anointed to the nation soon.

Anna's prayers may have centered on her nation. Israel was subject to a cruel master, the Roman Government. Roman soldiers were everywhere, ensuring the people of Israel were quiet and obedient. Rome collected taxes from the people and the people hated them for it. Surely Anna prayed for the state of her country and the oppression of her people.

Anna coupled her prayers with fasting. Denying oneself food was a way to demonstrate to God how serious the supplicant was about her prayer request. Pharisees fasted on Mondays and Thursdays but they made a big production of it so that people would see how religious they were. They were fasting to gain favor with the people.

We can all take a page from Anna's book. She dealt with her loss by devoting herself to the service of God and others. She served in God's House. And, she fasted and prayed for others, lifting them up before the throne, entreating God on their behalf. No matter how grievous your loss, no matter how devastating your personal calamity, there is always someone else whose circumstances are equally grievous and devastating. They need God's hand in their lives. They need someone to lift them up before His throne and intercede for them. Praying for others takes our focus off our own troubles and helps us to show God's love and compassion to someone else. There is no downside to following Anna's example.

*"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."
Luke 18:1*