

Text: Luke 2:36-38

Title: Anna the Prophetess on the Birth of Messiah

Truth: Christmas is a delight to those who are looking for redemption.

Date/Location: Sunday January 1, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

³⁶ Now 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; ³⁷ and this woman *was* a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸ And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

I. Who is Anna? v. 36-37

- A. Anna is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Hannah, like Hannah in 1 Samuel 1–2. The name derives from the Hebrew word for *grace* or *favor*.
- B. She is designated by Luke as a prophetess. This did not bother our human author at all—nor the Holy Spirit—because in that era, there *were* prophets. She need not be a predictor of the future to be a prophetess. She could simply be a woman who was diligent in her study of the Law and active in proclaiming it to others. She may have had insight that others did not have, insight given her by God. It was clear to all those around her that she was a woman who was very close to God.

Was she a prophetess in the “miraculous” sense or only the “normal” sense? We do not know for sure. We avoid the terminology altogether in our circles today because of the excesses of the charismatic movement in how it portrays prophets as direct channels of divine revelation. It is true that Bible preachers could be called prophets in without claiming direct new revelation from God. She could have been a prophet in the sense that she applied the Old Testament prophecies—those declared in the past—to the present-day situation. In other words, she was a prophet focused

on looking *back* and awaiting the promises of God instead of predicting *ahead*.

Other women who held this title *prophetess* are Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Isaiah's wife, and Philip's four daughters (Exodus 15:20, Judges 4:4, 2 Kings 22:14, Isaiah 8:3, Acts 21:9). There are two false prophetesses mentioned as well—Noadiah and Jezebel. Just because they are women does not mean they get a pass—they are just as dangerous as male false prophets (Neh. 6:14, Rev. 2:20).

- C. Her lineage traces back through father Phauliel who was of the tribe of Asher. This was not the priestly tribe. Asher settled to the far north of the promised land, along the Mediterranean Sea coast, west of Naphtali, just north of Mt. Carmel, which was near the seacoast as well, and west and north of the Sea of Galilee.
- D. She was very old. The text describes her as a woman who had been married for 7 years. Imagine marrying at a young age, say 17, being married until age 24, when your husband dies. What a terrible grief for a young woman that her lover, provider, protector, and closest friend is taken away at such a young age. Then she lives 60 more years until she is 84 years old.¹ This means she was born around 84 B.C., and her father perhaps 104 B.C. if he were 20 years old when she was born. In their lifetimes, 2nd Maccabees may have been written, Julius Caesar rose to power, Rome gains ascendancy throughout the Mediterranean world and begins to collect tribute from Palestine.
- E. Imagine this, ladies: you are a young woman, your husband dies, and you dedicate yourself to serving the Lord for the rest of your life. That is indeed *dedication*. The usual advice for such a young widow is to marry, have children, and manage her household (1 Timothy 5:14) and that would be totally righteous and good for a young widow to do. It does not say anything about your dedication to your previous spouse who died. It simply means that you were the “marrying type” before, and so you likely still are, and there are possibly other men out there who would meet the criteria of a godly and loving husband and companion. Remarriage after

¹ There is a minor debate about whether she lived 84 years *after* her husband's death, making her total age more than 100 years old. That is possible, but not necessary.

widowhood reduces the chances the young widow will become tempted outside of marriage, having known already the joy of marriage and missing it so, and reduces the possibility that she will make a short-sighted vow to serve the Lord, and then go back on it into the married state (1 Tim. 5:11).

- F. Anna is presented to us as a very godly woman, one who was faithful to her husband, and faithful to her God. She was so close to the Lord that she gave herself to His service for all those years. Who knows how she supported herself. Perhaps her husband and her family were wealthy, and she could live from that the remainder of her days. Or perhaps people supported her to minister to others. We simply do not know, but that she was a very righteous person.
- G. Anna's service was centered on the temple. That is where all "Old Testament" worship was centered.² The location *and* the heart of the worshipper were critical. Certain things could only be done there—sacrifices and offerings to the Lord, etc. That is now opened in the church era so that proper worship can happen anywhere at any time. It is *still* a matter of the heart, but not of location. Nevertheless, we do well to set aside special places and times in our lives, our homes, and our communities (like our church building) where we focus on worship. It helps us to set aside a multitude of distractions and to focus on our God. Do you have those places and times in your life? If you do not, I guarantee you this: you are spiritually malnourished and impoverished. Anna practically *lived* at the temple, and in fact may have lived in quarters inside the temple because she was a prophetess, or so close next door to it that she was practically there all the time—night and day.

Her service would have been considered strange, weird, or even mentally unhinged by some people. John the Baptist probably

² This was true after the temple was completed (1 Kings 8). It was similar during the "reign" of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and in Israel from Exodus through Numbers, Deuteronomy, and the time through David and early in Solomon's reign. The Jewish faith was expressed most visibly at the place where God set His special presence. Before the Tabernacle, the people of God built altars to the Lord in various locations.

seemed strange a few decades later in his own day. It was similar with all the prophets because they had such a focus on the “other world” that they did not fit well into this one. They were not mentally deficient in any measure. It is those who do not understand the things of God who are missing some things.

H. Anna’s service focused on constant fasting and prayer. These expressions of devotion to God are well understood, if not consistently practiced by God’s people. Those who fast from food have time and mental acuity to focus on the things of God. They can pray more and demonstrate that they do not live by bread alone, but by close fellowship with God. She was another of the Old Testament prophets who did the same (Nehemiah 1:4, Daniel 9:3, David in Psalm 35:13).

II. Anna’s Message, v. 38

A. Anna happened to come into the temple at the very moment that the baby Lord Jesus was presented in the temple to the Lord. Mary was completing her 40 days of purification (Lev. 12:6-8), and the parents were presenting Jesus to the Lord as their firstborn “holy to the LORD” in accordance with Exodus 13:12, 22:29 and the renewed practice of the same in Neh. 10:36. (The parents had baby Jesus circumcised on the eighth day, Luke 2:21, so this is several weeks *after* that.) First Simeon got to hold the Baby and gave a prophecy concerning the Child, Mary, and the people of Israel. Right then Anna enters the scene.

B. God gave Anna a blessed reward for her constant service—that she got to see the Messiah with her own eyes before dying. Simeon too! They longed for the Messiah and told others of Him. It is no small thing that they understood the Old Testament so well that they could “see” what He would be like and what needed to happen for Him to come to Israel. Undoubtedly, they longed for the people of God to repent of their sin and make straight the way of the Lord.

C. I hope you too are so dedicated to God and that He will reward you, as I hope for myself, to see the Rapture with my earthly eyes

in this body. He may not do that, and that is completely fine. But it would be a nice reward, would it not?

- D. Her first words were to give thanks to God for the Child. She somehow knew, like Simeon, that this one was the “consolation of Israel,” the redeemer, the savior, the king, the Messiah.
- E. Such insight should have been well understood throughout the nation of Israel, but alas it was rare. Simeon and Anna were two. I suspect that those two knew each other from their frequent presence at the temple. But there were others: “those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” Some translations have, “those who looked for the redemption of Jerusalem.” The difference is not that great, but the focus is on the people looking for redemption, whether in Jerusalem or for Jerusalem.

That phrase marks off a certain kind of person who is different than other people. There are people looking for money and those looking for entertainment and peace and man-made solutions to the world’s problems. There are those who are looking out for themselves, or to redeem themselves. But there is a certain kind of individual who is looking for redemption from God for humanity. Christians are that kind of person.

- F. Anna spoke about this baby Messiah to all those people, many of whom she probably knew quite well also. *They* would be interested to hear what her insight was on this issue. She knew the Old Testament prophets had spoken of this one, and she was awaiting His arrival. She now spoke about Him to all those who she could. *They* would be keen to find out about Joseph, and Mary, and the baby, and the shepherds who came shortly after the baby was born. *They* would be fascinated to hear about the angelic announcements, and what Zacharias prophesied in his message after the birth of John the Baptist.

Conclusion

When reading this short account about Anna, we would have to work hard to avoid some serious questions for ourselves.

- Do we care about what Christmas really means?

- Are we like “those who looked for redemption”?
- Are we as keen as they were to hear from Anna her aged wisdom, or do we throw all that to the side of the road and barrel down the highway of life oblivious to what our elders have learned and what God has promised to do in the world?
- Are we like Anna, who served God diligently for decades of her life even after her dear spouse passed away?
- Do we give thanks to God—for anything?
- Do we have good insight into God’s word?
- Are we going to be faithful all the way into our old age?
- Will our faith be expressed in the manner *God* ordains in this era—in connection with our church family?

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