

## Lydia-Anna

### The Woman Who Became the First Christian Missionary

#### *Scripture Reference - Luke 2:36-38*

***Name Meaning - Favor, or Grace.*** Anna is the same with Hannah of the Old Testament, and was the Phoenician name used by Virgil for the sister of Dido, queen of Carthage.

***Family Connection - Anna was the daughter of Phanuel, a name identical with Penuel, and meaning, "The face, or appearance of God."*** The name of her husband who died young is not given. Like Anna, he, too, doubtlessly waited for the salvation of God. Her father was of the tribe of Asher - one of the so-called "lost tribes." This is all we know of the ancestry of Anna, who, although her biography is one of the briefest in Bible history, lived a life that is still fragrant. Her name is a popular one for girls. Elsdon C. Smith in *The Story of Our Names* says that there are over half-a-million girls and women in America alone who have the name of Anna. In our exposition of this most renowned of Bible widows we deem it best to take her record as given by the beloved physician, Luke, who says of her that –

#### **She Was a Prophetess**

Jezebel, the self-styled and false prophetess is the only other one in the New Testament (Revelation 2:20) to bear this designation. Philip's four daughters also prophesied (Acts 21:9). The narrative does not tell us why she was known as a prophetess. It may be that her long departed husband had been a prophet, or because under divine inspiration she herself told future events, or spent her time celebrating the praises of God (1 Samuel 10:5; 1 Chronicles 25:1-3). To prophesy simply means to proclaim a divine message, and Anna was one to whom it was given to know events before and after, and one through whom God spoke to others. Anna must be included in that continuous line of prophets and prophetesses who had heralded the coming of the Messiah through succeeding generations. As she gazed upon the face of the Babe of Bethlehem Anna knew that the past predictions of Him were fulfilled. Through her long, godly life her mind had become saturated with Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head. Waiting unceasingly for Christ she believed, along with Simeon, that Mary's first-born Son was indeed the rod out of the stem of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1; Micah 5:2).

### She Was of a Great Age

Anna was married for only seven years, and remained a widow for eighty-four years. All of this means that she must have been over one hundred years old when her failing eyes beheld the Saviour she had longingly expected. She had grown old in the service of the sanctuary, and having seen, with Simeon, God's Salvation, was ready to depart in peace. How encouraging it is to meet those who through a long life have remained true to the Lord and whose gray hairs are honorable because of a life lived in the divine will, and who, when they pass away, are ready for glory.

### She Was a Widow

Paul exhorted young Timothy to "honour widows who are widows indeed," and Anna, a worthy widow, all should certainly honor. In fact, we wonder if the Apostle had the aged Anna before his mind's eye when he gave Timothy this thought - She that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplication and prayers night and day (1 Timothy 5:3, 5). Anna was desolate, that is, alone, or solitary. A widow can know what it is to face a long, lonely and cheerless life, and a solitude made more acute because of the remembrance of happier days. But it was not so with Anna. When as a young, motherless wife, God withdrew from her the earthly love she rejoiced in, she did not bury her hope in a grave. In the place of what God took, He gave her more of Himself, and she became devoted to Him who had promised to be as a Husband to the widow, and through her long widowhood was unwearying in devotion to Him. She "trusted in God," and her hoary head was a crown of glory ( Proverbs 16:31). Repose of soul was hers for eighty-five years because the one thing she desired was to have God's house as her dwelling place all the days of her life.

### She Departed Not From the Temple

When death ravaged her own home, Anna turned from all legitimate concerns to join the band of holy women who devoted themselves to continual attendance at the "night and day services of the Temple." She was no occasional attender or dead member, but a constant, devout worshiper. Her seat in the Temple was always occupied. What an inspiration worshipers of this sort are to a faithful pastor who feels he can minister more freely when they are present because of their prayer support! When their seat is empty in the church, he knows there must be something unusual accounting for their absence.

### **She Served God With Fastings and Prayers**

Without doubt, Anna was one of God's own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, and who was heard in that she feared. It was not in some retired nook of the Temple she prayed, or in a corner where females only supplicated God. She would join with others openly in the presence of the congregation and pour out her soul audibly in the Temple. The One to whose birth she witnessed was to say that praying and fasting are necessary requisites in a God-used life, and Anna not only prayed but also fasted. She was willing to miss a meal in order to spend more time before God. Hers was a life of godly self-control. She had learned how to crucify the flesh in order to serve God more acceptably.

### **She Gave Thanks Likewise Unto the Lord**

Anna's prayers were paired with praises. How arrestive is the phrase, "she coming in that instant." This was no mere coincidence. Through her long pilgrimage, day after day, she went to the Temple to pray for the coming of the Messiah, and although He seemed to tarry she waited for Him, believing that He would come. Then one day the miracle happened, for as she entered the Temple she heard sounds of exultation and joy proceeding from the inner court, and then from the lips of the venerable Simeon she heard the words, "Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." Gazing upon the Holy Child who was none other than her long-looked-for Messiah, Anna, too, was ready to depart in peace and be joined with her husband above.

### She Spoke of Him to All

Anna not only prayed and praised, but went out to proclaim the glad tidings to those who had shared her hope and faith. Note, again, the glimpse we have of Anna in her brief record. We see her, first of all, as - *A Daughter of Phaul of the tribe of Asher - a somewhat interesting fact seeing that she is the only one of note mentioned in the Bible of the tribe of Asher, even though the name means blessedness.*

### A Widow of a great age.

*A Devout Worshiper of the living God. A Prophetess proclaiming the prophetic word. Now she assumes another role. Old though she is, she goes forth to become - A Missionary . Anna was one of the godly remnant in Israel who, through centuries, even in the darkest days before Christ came, looked for the Dayspring from on high. Thus, as she heard Simeon's praise for prophecy fulfilled, she went out to her godly intimates to declare the glad tidings. Faith, through her long years of waiting, was rewarded and she became the first female herald of the Incarnation to all who looked for the Redeemer in Jerusalem. In Anna we have "a sample of an aged female's waiting faith, as Simeon is of an aged man's." Blessed are all those who patiently and prayerfully await Christ's second appearance ( Hebrews 9:28).*