

# There Was An Old Woman Who Lived To Serve Jews

Luke 2:36-38

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## **They are called the 400 silent years.**

It is the time between the Old Testament and New Testament, during which no inspired Scripture was written.

It would be wrong, however, to say that God did not speak. He certainly spoke to Anna as a "prophetess." She may have been over 100yrs old. That cuts deep into the 400 so-called silent years.

God speaks. He's a talker, with lots to say. He reveals Himself to us so that we can know Him.

- He speaks to everyone through the wonders of the created universe. You could call it, "Creation Evangelism" or, "The First Testament." "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language *Where* their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:1-3). Design demands a designer; creation, a Creator. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth."
- God reveals Himself to each person through his or her conscience. Everyone has a conscience. Our conscience gives us an awareness of what is right and what and wrong. Don Stewart writes, "Humanity knows intuitively the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. Furthermore, they know from their conscience that they will ultimately be held responsible for their behavior." Another commentator said, "Conscience is the voice of God in the soul."
- God speaks to you from the Cross upon which Jesus was crucified. If you listen, you hear, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Most of you recall Verizon's "Can you hear me now?" ad campaign. No matter where the tech was, you could hear him on Verizon's superior network.

It's Christmas and God has brought you here so He can chat you up. If you are not a Christian, then His Creation... Your conscience... & The Cross where He took your place in death that you might live...

**They are the very voice of God drawing you to Himself.**

- Only a fool says "there is no God" as you experience and explore the wonderful world He has created.
- In your conscience, you know that you are a sinner.
- With your attention drawn to the Cross, God's Spirit provides the ability for you to repent and believe.

**Since you know He is speaking..."Can you hear Him now?"**

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We will spend the next few minutes with Anna. We'll see her living in the Temple, always ready to serve her fellow Jews. The title of the message:

***"There was an Old Woman Who Lived to Serve Jews"***

**"What do you want to be when you grow up?"**

We start asking kids this question when they're in elementary school.

A poll revealed that the #1 career among children is Professional Athlete. Rounding out the top ten: Doctor, Don't Know, Teacher, Veterinarian, Firefighter, Scientist, Astronaut, Engineer, and Law Enforcement.

I couldn't find, 'Widow who lives in the Temple serving God with fasting and prayers.' Most likely, Anna didn't aspire to the career that would occupy the majority of her very long life. Nevertheless, that was her calling and she went about it as a gift from the Lord.

Some of us are in our dream job. One or more of you might go as far as saying you hate your job. You might have upward mobility. Perhaps you are stuck, can't start over. The possibilities are many.

Anna didn't choose the course of her life, but no matter the twists and turns, she walked her course to please God.

Luk 2:36 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;

Asher was one of Jacob's sons. He was the progenitor of one of the tribes of Israel. When you search the Bible for him, you find his greatest achievements stated in the form of prophecies: "Bread from Asher *shall be* rich, And he shall yield royal dainties... Let him be favored by his brothers, And let him dip his foot in oil" (Genesis 49:20 & Deuteronomy 33:24).

It sounds like he owned a day spa.

When the tribes of Israel inherited their land, Joshua assigned to Asher western and coastal Galilee. It was a region with some of the most fertile land in Canaan, with rich pasture, wooded hills, and orchards. You could say of Asher that he was materially well-off.

He is remembered as a privileged, wealthy land owner, rancher, and farmer. God is not opposed to wealth, only its potential to trip you up in your walk with Him. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. The love of money is what motivates people to lie, steal, cheat, gamble, embezzle, and even murder. Jesus warned that "you cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24). By one estimate, stock market losses wiped out \$9 trillion American' wealth this year. Meanwhile, Heaven is cranking out the dividends to those who invest with God.

The Bible encourages us to counter the hold money may have on us by being thoughtful, generous, hilarious, regular givers to the work of God.

We can't know if Anna was once, or even then, materially well-off. We can say that she spent most of her life living meagerly. She's an example to us of being rich in faith.

Her dad, 'Phanuel,' is mentioned nowhere else. Nothing is known about her family, or her deceased husband's family. Whether or not any relatives were still involved with her, her daily contact was with the Temple servants. They would be like family to her.

Don't think of her as some crazy oracle, the kind highlighted in fantasy movies. Prophets didn't necessarily predict the future. Technically, we would list Anna with the godly Old Testament women called prophetesses: Miriam (Exodus 15:20); Deborah (Judges 4:4); Huldah (Second Kings 22:14; Second Chronicles 34:22); and the wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3). The scope of their speaking for God can be ascertained by reading

the relevant passages. What I get out of them is that they advised with wisdom derived from the written word, and they revealed the will of God. We could say that they functioned in the office of prophetess to advise about the will of God.

Anna's ministry, whatever its scope, assured the people God was not silent. He was behind the scenes, prepping for the fulfillment of His promises to them. If in your walk with the Lord He seems silent, know that He is behind the scenes, prepping for the fulfillment of His promises to you.

BTW: Sometimes silence can be effective, edifying communication.

Luk 2:37 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.

What happened to her husband? Did they have children during their seven years of marriage? If not, why not? Still a relatively young woman when her husband died, why did she not get remarried? Don't know. Don't know. Don't know. Don't know.

She may have been 84yrs old, or widowed for 84 years. If she married in her teens, she would be over 100.

At some point she "did not depart from the Temple." If someone spends a great deal of time somewhere other than home, we say they live there. *Anna really did live there.*

Another big part of her being a prophetess was to "[serve] *God* with fastings and prayers night and day."

Anna was on-call, day and night, to pray for you.

"Fastings" can be translated, "Going without eating." I buy Chaplain gear from a website called ColdDinnerClub. The name represents firefighters & police officers not being able to finish a hot meal on account of their commitment to serve. Anna was often not able to finish her meal, and, in addition, she practiced the discipline of fasting.

Jesus spoke of praying, giving, and fasting as spiritual disciplines. I doubt any of us would claim to be satisfied with our praying, giving, and fasting (Matthew 6). These disciplines, however, are not a one-size-fits-all program. Talk to God about **your** praying, giving, and fasting.

Are you thinking what I'm thinking? She was pretty spry for her age. Pilates?? No, God measured out her physical health.

If you have your health, do you have everything? Of course not. What is the condition of your soul? That's the essential thing. Charles Spurgeon writes, *"I venture to say that the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, with the exception of sickness. Sickness has frequently been of more use to the saints of God than health has."*

Luk 2:38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Anna came just when Simeon was holding baby Jesus and prophesying about the royal family.

The words, "that instant," are truly amazing. Simeon, Anna, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus converged in a fleeting moment of time. It was a case of right place, right time, in God's providence. He had foreseen the free actions of these people, and then He saw to it that their meeting came to pass for His glory.

If I asked you to name a spiritual "that instant" moment in your life, most of you could do so. If you were saved later in life, not from an early age, the moment you received the gift of salvation was a "that instant."

**As long as you are on Earth, you should expect "that instant" moments.**

We aren't told how Anna "gave thanks." It may have been silently, in her heart. Maybe it was out loud. It probably describes not just her immediate reaction, but an ongoing one. We can assume that she was thankful prior to this. Now she would take gratitude to an entirely new level.

I'm reminded of the apostle Paul and what he described as the thorn in his flesh. After praying about it, the Lord revealed to Paul that it would not be taken away. Paul reacted, saying, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (Second Corinthians 12:9-10).

God's answer wasn't "No," it was grace, sufficient grace. Paul was grateful. That is 'next level' gratitude.

Anna “spoke of Him to all...” As a prophetess, she already did this, but now there was a renewed excitement that expressed itself in her sharing.

“All those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” were godly Israelites who hoped for the arrival of their promised Messiah. Here that hope is called “redemption.” A redeemer was a certain person described in the Bible, who had a very important role in their tribal culture. The Jews connected the Messiah to the person in the Law of Moses known as the “kinsman-redeemer.” Our friends at [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org) put it like this:

*The kinsman-redeemer is a male relative who had the privilege and responsibility to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble, danger, or need. The Hebrew term (go el) for kinsman-redeemer designates one who delivers or rescues (Genesis 48:16; Exodus 6:6) or redeems property or person (Leviticus 27:9-25, 25:47-55).*

Another commentator said,

*“A kinsman-redeemer was someone who redeemed what was lost. This could be the other persons’ property, their freedom, or even their name. The kinsman might also be called upon to exact revenge on someone who may have killed their relative. In short, the kinsman was a rescuer and restorer.”*

Summarizing our redemption as Christians, one author said, “To be redeemed is to be forgiven, holy, justified, free, adopted, and reconciled.”

Commenting on our need to be redeemed, Dave Hunt said, “The more clearly we see the infinite chasm between God’s glory and our sinful falling short thereof, the greater will be our appreciation of His grace and love in bridging that gulf to redeem us.”

There were four requirements you had to meet to be *go el*:

1. You had to be kin.
2. You had to be willing.
3. You had to be able to redeem.
4. You had to pay the price in full.

### **Jesus was Israel’s *go el*.**

1. Jesus was God in human flesh. He became just like you and me, our kin, which put him in position so that He could redeem us.

2. Jesus gave up His life for us as a sacrifice of His own free will.
3. Because Jesus was God, He has the ability to redeem us.
4. Jesus paid the redemption price. We are told, "He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us His very own people..." (Titus 2:14).

If you want to understand redemption, read the short Book of Ruth in your Bible. It tells the story of a *go el* rescuing and restoring his kin. It tells it as a love story.

**God redeeming you by sending Jesus as your *go el* is a love story; it is THE love story.**

The holiday season is for most people a fun time of the year, filled with parties, celebrations, and social gatherings with family and friends. For many people, it can be a time filled with sadness, self-reflection, loneliness, and anxiety. You either know someone who has suffered loss for whom the holidays hit hard; or you are that someone.

Anna was that someone. We need to be careful to not suggest a backstory for Anna that is purely speculative. One thing for sure is that she had suffered the loss of her husband. She remained widowed all her very long life.

No one chooses that path to walk on. Little girls don't aspire to widowhood.

**Some little girls will get a bride Barbie doll this year, but not widowed Barbie, with coffin Ken.**

We might immediately admire Anna's life devoted to God, living in a makeshift room in the Temple, praying and fasting night and day, blessed with getting to see Jesus, the Redeemer. At the same time, I think the majority of us look at Anna and say, "See you; wouldn't want to be you."

You have, or you will, suffer loss on your way to Heaven. It might be great loss, by our reckoning. Anna can minister to you in your loss.

It isn't a matter of trying to be like Anna. You are an Anna already. In fact, *you're better off than Anna, spiritually, because you have God's Spirit in you.*

Anna didn't overcome loss by praying and fasting and living at church. She didn't discipline herself out of depression. She was on a walk with God, and she accepted

that her path went through the loss of her spouse, and all these other things that followed.

You don't know where your path will lead me, let alone you. On Earth, it will involve greater or lesser loss, on account of the problem of sin.

The psalmist wrote, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 76:3). It would have been a good life-verse for Anna. Let it be yours while waiting for your own; or, if you have been given a life-verse, let it fill your heart.