

A Moment Worth Waiting For

Luke 2:36-38

Pierre Cannings

I. A Woman Waiting v. 36

- a. Jesus Brought to the Temple
- b. Prophetess
 - i. **προφῆτις** She was known as such before this occasion. Like Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and the daughters of Philip, Anna was a woman divinely inspired to make known God's will to others
 - ii. As a **προφῆτις** (Rev. 2:20) Anna possessed divine insight into things normally hidden from ordinary people, and hence was able to recognise who the child in the temple was and then to proclaim his significance to those who were interested
- c. Daughter of Phanuel
- d. Tribe of Asher
 - i. Why Luke made mention of her coming from the tribe of Asher is unclear, but it does lend credence to the story
 - ii. Although the ten tribes were lost, some families possessed private genealogies. For the word **προφῆτις** comp. Rev. 2:20; Exod. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; 2 Chron. 34:22; Is. 8:3.
 - iii. The second witness is introduced with a surprising amount of detail. Ἄννα is the feminine form of Ἄννας and equivalent to Hebrew *ḥannāh* (1 Sa. 1:2). Φανουήλ is equivalent to *p^enû 'ēl*, 'face of God' (1 Ch. 4:4; 8:25) and Ἀσήρ (Hebrew *'āšēr*, 'good fortune') was one of the ten northern tribes (Rev. 7:6).
- e. Advanced in Years
 - i. Seven years after marriage
 - ii. 84 years a widow
 1. Jewish and Greco-Roman culture often viewed widows who never remarried as pious and faithful. Judith, a famous widow in Jewish tradition, was said to have lived as a widow till her death at 105. If one adds the two numbers given in the text here, seven and eighty-four (taking eighty-four as the length of Anna's widowhood rather than her age), and she was married at the common age of fourteen, one could see her as 105
 2. The reference to Anna's age indicates her long and single-minded devotion to God. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth (1:6) and Simeon

(2:25), Anna was devout and righteous and a model for the believer.

3. She was of great age, *because* she had lived seven years as a wife and eighty-four years *by herself* (Rom. 7:25) as a widow. The ἕως draws attention to the great length of her widowhood; “up to as much as” (Mt. 18:21, 22). That she should be considerably over a hundred years old is not incredible.
4. That she had never, in spite of her early widowhood, married again, was held to be very honourable to her: comp. 1 Tim. 5:3, 5.
5. **Stress is laid on her great age and on her single-minded devotion to God.** πολλαῖς is redundant, perhaps to give a contrast with 1:7, 18

II. A Woman Serving v. 37

- a. Never Left the Temple
 - i. Simeon comes to the temple under the influence of the Spirit; Anna (Hannah) dwells there continually. The sight of the Messiah makes him at once long for death; it seems to give her renewed vigor of life.
 - ii. but spent her time there in religious devotions. ἀφίσταμαι is frequent in Lk. with the intransitive sense ‘to go away’ (4:13; 8:13; 13:27; Acts, 5x; rest of NT, 4x; transitive, Acts 5:37)
- b. Serving Night and Day
 - i. Fasting and Prayers
 - ii. Night and day” corresponds well to the Jewish reckoning of time since a day began at sunset (cf. Acts 20:31; 26:7). This expression should probably not be pressed to mean twenty-four hours a day, i.e., she lived in the temple, because women were not normally allowed to stay in the temple during the night. It is best therefore to interpret it in the popular sense of *all the time*, i.e., she was “in church” all day long (cf. 24:53).

III. The Moment She Waited For v. 38

- a. Gave Thanks
 - i. **She gave thanks to God.** This serves as an example of model Christian behavior.
- b. Speak of Him to all Looking
 - i. Like the shepherds, Anna includes in her praise proclamation about him (sc. Jesus) to those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (cf. 1:68; 2:25). The phraseology is based on Is. 52:9
- c. Redemption of Israel
 - i. **Looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.** The “redemption of Jerusalem” (cf. 1:68, “redeemed his people”) serves as a synonym for the “consolation of Israel” in 2:25

- ii. Being a prophetess, Anna recognized the child and Jesus' salvific role. Just as Simeon's righteous and devout character qualified him to give reliable information concerning Jesus, so Anna's prophetic role and piety (2:37) qualified her in a similar way. She clearly was a reliable spokesperson for the reader
- iii. the Pharisees, who expected a political deliverer; the Sadducees, who expected nothing; and the blessed few, who expected the spiritual deliverance or consolation (ver. 25) of Jerusalem.

Commentary Notes

(36) The second witness is introduced with a surprising amount of detail. Ἄννα is the feminine form of Ἄννας and equivalent to Hebrew *hannāh* (1 Sa. 1:2). Φανουήλ is equivalent to *p^enū'ēl*, 'face of God' (1 Ch. 4:4; 8:25) and Ἀσήρ (Hebrew *'āšēr*, 'good fortune') was one of the ten northern tribes (Rev. 7:6). As a προφήτις (Rev. 2:20^{*1*}) Anna possessed divine insight into things normally hidden from ordinary people, and hence was able to recognise who the child in the temple was and then to proclaim his significance to those who were interested (G. Friedrich, TDN²T VI, 836). Stress is laid on her great age and on her single-minded devotion to God. πολλαῖς is redundant, perhaps to give a contrast with 1:7, 18. ἔτος, 'year' is frequent in Lk. (15x; Acts, 11x; Mt., 1x; Mk., 2x). παρθενία^{*3*} is 'virginity'.

(37) After seven years of marriage she had become a widow (χήρα, 4:25f.; 7:12; 18:3, 5; 20:47; 21:2f.^{4*}; G. Stählin, TDN⁵T IX, 440–465), and remained so for 84 years. It is less probable grammatically that the phrase means that she lived for a total of 84 years, *pace* Lagrange, 91; RS⁶V; NE⁷B t; J⁸B; TN⁹T t; NI¹⁰V; Barcla¹¹γ. If the former view is accepted, and it is assumed that she was married at about 14 years, she would have been about as old as Judith (105 years, Jdt. 16:23) who likewise did not remarry after her husband's death and is presented as a figure of honour for this reason (Jdt. 8:4–8; 16:22f.; cf. 1 Cor. 7:7f.; 1 Tim. 5:5, 19). In view of the case of Judith, there is nothing impossible about Anna's great age (see other examples in Zahn, 160 n. 91), but the way in which it is mentioned does not suggest that it has been consciously modelled on that of Judith.

Anna did not depart from the temple, but spent her time there in religious devotions. ἀφίσταμαι is frequent in Lk. with the intransitive sense 'to go away' (4:13; 8:13; 13:27; Acts, 5x; rest of NT, 4x; transitive, Acts 5:37^{*12*}). It may be used with the genitive (1 Tim. 4:1), but is

^{1**} All the occurrences of the word in the NT are cited.

²TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (translated by G. W. Bromiley), Grand Rapids, 1964–76

^{3**} All the occurrences of the word in the NT are cited.

^{4*} All the occurrences of the word in Lk. are listed (in some cases, all the occurrences in Acts are similarly noted).

⁵TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (translated by G. W. Bromiley), Grand Rapids, 1964–76

⁶RSV Revised Standard Version

⁷NEB *New English Bible*

⁸JB *Jerusalem Bible*

⁹TNT *Translator's New Testament*

¹⁰NIV New International Version

¹¹Barclay W. Barclay, *The New Testament: A New Translation*, London, I, 1968

^{12**} All the occurrences of the word in the NT are cited.

more commonly used with ἀπό (so here T¹³R; *Diglo*^{14t}). Fasting (νηστεία, Acts 14:23; 27:9; 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27*^{15*}; cf. νηστεύω, Jdt. 8:6; J. Behm, TDN¹⁶T IV, 924–935) is often linked with prayer (cf. 5:33). For λατρεύω see 1:74 and especially Acts 26:7. The order ‘night and day’ corresponds to the Jewish time-reckoning which began the new day at sunset (18:7; Acts 9:24; 20:31; 26:7; *et al.*). Anna’s way of life was thus similar to that of Judith (Jdt. 11:17; 2 Esd. 9:44) and was also found in the early church (1 Tim. 5:5). But the account of her staying in the temple should not be taken with prosaic literalness (cf. 24:53; *pace* Lagrange, 91), nor are we justified in thinking that she belonged to a special order of widows with religious duties at the temple (*pace* Hauck, 44; Ellis, 83; the material in S¹⁷B II, 141, does not justify this supposition).

(38) The subject αὕτη is inserted after καί by T¹⁸R (αὕτή, *Diglo*^{19t}) probably through confusion with the following αὕτῃ (especially if this was originally written without accents; Alford, I, 460). αὕτῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ must mean ‘at the same hour’, αὐτός being used in a demonstrative sense (examples in A²⁰G s.v. αὐτός, 1h). Black, 108–112, however, argues that the phrase is an Aramaism with the sense ‘in it, (namely) the moment’, i.e. ‘immediately, then’. The usage is frequent in Lk. (10:21; 12:12; 13:31; 20:19; 24:33; Acts 16:18; 22:13*^{21*}; cf. Lk. 7:21; 13:1; 23:12; 24:13; Acts 16:33). ἀνθομολογέομαι*^{22*} suggests the ideas of recognition, obedience and proclamation which occur in praise rendered publicly to God in return for his grace (O. Michel, TDN²³T V, 213; see, however, Sahlin, 285). Like the shepherds, Anna includes in her praise proclamation about him (sc. Jesus) to those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (cf. 1:68; 2:25). The phraseology is based on Is. 52:9, and Jerusalem is used by synecdoche for Israel (on the text see Metzger, 135). λύτρωσις conveys the idea of divine deliverance which is to be brought about by Jesus, and is thus a messianic concept like ‘comfort’ in 2:25; cf. 24:21.

¹³TR *Theologische Rundschau*

¹⁴*Diglot* Luke: A Greek-English Diglot for the Use of Translators (British and Foreign Bible Society, London, 1962; this work incorporates the projected 3rd edition of the BFBS text of the Greek New Testament prepared by G. D. Kilpatrick)

^{15**} All the occurrences of the word in the NT are cited.

¹⁶TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (translated by G. W. Bromiley), Grand Rapids, 1964–76

¹⁷SB H. L. Strack und P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, München, 1956³

¹⁸TR *Theologische Rundschau*

¹⁹*Diglot* Luke: A Greek-English Diglot for the Use of Translators (British and Foreign Bible Society, London, 1962; this work incorporates the projected 3rd edition of the BFBS text of the Greek New Testament prepared by G. D. Kilpatrick)

²⁰AG W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Cambridge, 1957

^{21**} All the occurrences of the word in the NT are cited.

^{22**} All the occurrences of the word in the NT are cited.

²³TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (translated by G. W. Bromiley), Grand Rapids, 1964–76

It has been suggested that the original source contained the words of Anna's prophecy. Sahlin, 286–288, 300–306, credits her with the Benedictus. This is unnecessary and conjectural.²⁴

36–38. Anna the Prophetess. That the Evangelist obtained this narrative “directly or indirectly from the lips of this Anna who is so accurately described,” is less probable than that the source for all this chapter is one and the same, viz. some member of the Holy Family, and probably Mary herself.

36. ἦν. Either “was present,” as in Mk. 15:40, in which case ἦν in the sense of “was” has to be understood with what follows; or simply “there was,” which is better. Thus all runs in logical order. First the existence of Anna is stated, then her life and character, and finally her presence on this occasion. Symeon comes to the temple under the influence of the Spirit; Anna (Hannah) dwells there continually. The sight of the Messiah makes him at once long for death; it seems to give her renewed vigour of life. Is this subtle distinction of character the creation of a writer of fiction? We find fiction at work in the tradition that Mary had been brought up in the temple under the tutelage of Anna. There is nothing here to indicate that Anna had ever seen Mary previously. *D.C.G.* i. p. 70.

Neither in ver. 36 (καὶ ἦν) nor in ver. 37 (καὶ αὐτή) does καί = “also” in ref. to ver. 25. The meaning is not “There was Symeon, the holy and aged man; *also* Anna, the holy and aged woman.” Throughout the section καί = “and.”

προφήτις She was known as such before this occasion. Like Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and the daughters of Philip, Anna was a woman divinely inspired to make known God's will to others. That her genealogy is given because prophetesses are rare, is doubtful. But Lk.'s accuracy appears in such details, which a forger would have avoided for fear of mistakes. Although the ten tribes were lost, some families possessed private genealogies. For the word προφήτις comp. Rev. 2:20; Exod. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; 2 Chron. 34:22; Is. 8:3.

For the omission of the art. after θυγάτηρ see on 1:5.—φανουήλ = “Face of God,” Peniel or Penuel (Gen. 32:31, 32); in LXX εἶδος Θεοῦ.—Ἀσήρ, 2 Chron. 30:11.

αὕτη προβεβηκυῖα, κ.τ.λ. “She was advanced in many days, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and herself a widow even for eighty-four years.” From αὕτη

²⁴ I. Howard Marshall, [*The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 123–125.

προβεβ. to τεσσάρων is a parenthesis in which ἦν is to be understood: ζήσασα explains προβεβηκυῖα, and αὐτή balances μετὰ ἀνδρός. She was of great age, *because* she had lived²⁵¹ seven years as a wife and eighty-four years *by herself* (Rom. 7:25) as a widow. The ἕως draws attention to the great length of her widowhood; “up to as much as” (Mt. 18:21, 22). That she should be considerably over a hundred years old is not incredible. But the eighty-four may be intended to include the seven years and the time before her marriage. In any case the clumsy arrangement of taking all three verses (36–38) as one sentence, and making αὕτη the nom. to ἀνθρωμολογεῖτο, should be avoided. That she had never, in spite of her early widowhood, married again, was held to be very honourable to her: comp. 1 Tim. 5:3, 5. *Monogamia apud ethnicos in summo honore est* (Tertul. *de. Exh. Cast.* xiii.: comp. *de Monog.* 16.; *ad Uxor.* 1.7). See quotations in Wetst²⁶. on 1 Tim. 3:2, and Whiston’s note on Jos²⁷. *Ant.* xvii. 6, 6. Sy²⁸r-Sin²⁹. has “seven days.”

37. οὐκ ἀφίστατο τοῦ ἱεροῦ. See on 8:13. This is to be understood, like 24:53, of constant attendance, rather than of actual residence within the temple precincts, although the latter may have been possible. She never missed a service, and between the services she spent most of her time in the temple. In spite of her age she kept more than the customary fasts (comp. 5:33), perhaps more than the Mondays and Thursdays (see on 18:12), and spent an unusual amount of time in prayer.

λατρεύουσα. Freq. in Lk., Paul, and Heb. See on 4:8. Not in Mk. or In. Mt. 4:10 from Deut. 6:13.—νύκτα κ. ἡμέραν. Comp. Acts 26:7. This is the usual order: Mk. 4:27, 5:5; Acts 20:31; 1 Thes. 2:9, 3:10; 2 Thes. 3:8; 1 Tim. 5:5; 2 Tim. 1:3. But the other is also common: 18:7; Acts 9:24; Rev. 4:8, etc.; and in O.T. is more common. It may be doubted whether the order makes any difference of meaning: see Ellicott on 1 Tim. 5:5, and comp. Hom. *Od.* ii.345; *Il* xxiv. 73, v. 490; Plat. *Theaet.* 151 A.

38. αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ. “That very hour” (RV³⁰): see on 10:7, 21. AV³¹. exaggerates with “that instant,” as does Beza with *eo ipso momento*, and also Gen³². with “at the same instant.”—ἐπιστᾶσα. “Coming up” and “standing by,” rather than “coming suddenly” (Gen³³. and Rhem³⁴.), although the word often has this meaning from the context. Comp. 21:34, 10:40, 20:1; Acts 4:1, 6:12, 22:13, 23:27; and see on ver. 9.—ἀνθρωμολογεῖτο The ἀντί does not refer to Symeon, meaning that “she *in turn* gave thanks”; but to the making *a return*, which is involved in all thanksgiving: Ps. 78:13; Ezra 3:11; 3 Mac. 6:33; *Test. XII. Patr.* Judah i.

²⁵¹ The first aorist of ζῆν is late Greek. It occurs Acts 26:5; Rom. 14:9, Rev. 2:8, 20:4. Attic writers use ἐβίωv, which is not found in N.T.

²⁶Wetst. Wetstein.

²⁷Jos. Josephus.

²⁸Syr Syriac.

²⁹Sin. Sinaitic.

³⁰RV. Revised Version.

³¹AV. Authorized Version.

³²Gen. Geneva.

³³Gen. Geneva.

³⁴Rhem. Rheims (or Douay).

ἐλάλει Not on that occasion, but afterwards, “she was habitually speaking.” When she met Mary and Joseph she could not speak πᾶσιν τοῖς προσδεχομένοις, for they were not present. Grammatically **περὶ αὐτοῦ** may refer to τῷ Θεῷ, but it evidently refers to the Child. Godet divides the people into three sections: the Pharisees, who expected a political deliverer; the Sadducees, who expected nothing; and the blessed few, who expected the spiritual deliverance or consolation (ver. 25) of Jerusalem. Bengel argues from πᾶσιν *erant igitur non pauci*, which does not follow, especially when we consider Lk.’s fondness for the word.

λύτρωσιν Ἱερουσαλήμ. This, without ἐν, is certainly the true reading (³⁵κ ³⁶B, many Versions and Fathers), “redemption of Jerusalem.” Comp. Is. 40:2. Fiction would probably have given Anna also a hymn. Against the hypothesis that this narrative is “a poetical and symbolical representation,” Schleiermacher asks, “Why should the author, along with Symeon, have introduced Anna, who is not made even to answer any poetical purpose?”³⁷

2:36 There was also a prophetess. Being a prophetess,¹¹³⁸² Anna recognized the child and Jesus’ salvific role. Just as Simeon’s righteous and devout character qualified him to give reliable information concerning Jesus, so Anna’s prophetic role and piety (2:37) qualified her in a similar way. She clearly was a reliable spokesperson for the reader. Why Luke made mention of her coming from the tribe of Asher is unclear, but it does lend credence to the story. See comments on 13:19.

She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. Whether “eighty-four” is meant to signify Anna’s age or the years of her widowhood is uncertain. Judith was devout (Jdt 8:4–8) and lived to be 105 years old (Jdt 16:23). While of historical interest, this question is of no exegetical importance. Whether Luke sought to portray Anna here as a prototype of the Christian widow is also uncertain.¹¹³⁹³

³⁵κ κ Cod. Sinaiticus, sæc. iv. Brought by Tischendorf from the Convent of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai; now at St. Petersburg. Contains the whole Gospel complete.

³⁶B B. Cod. Vaticanus, sæc. 4. In the Vatican Library certainly since 1533¹ (Batiffol, *La Vaticane de Paul 3, etc.*, p. 86).

³⁷ Alfred Plummer, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*](#), International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 71–73.

³⁸112 We read of prophetesses also in Acts 21:9 (cf. 1 Cor 11:5; Exod 15:20; Judg 4:4; 2 Kgs 22:14).

³⁹113 Luke’s concern for widows is evident from 4:25–26; 7:11–17; 18:2–5; 20:47; 21:1–4; Acts 6:1; 9:39–43.

2:37 She had never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. The reference to Anna's age indicates her long and single-minded devotion to God. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth (1:6) and Simeon (2:25), Anna was devout and righteous and a model for the believer. "Night and day" corresponds well to the Jewish reckoning of time since a day began at sunset (cf. Acts 20:31; 26:7). This expression should probably not be pressed to mean twenty-four hours a day, i.e., she lived in the temple, because women were not normally allowed to stay in the temple during the night. It is best therefore to interpret it in the popular sense of *all the time*, i.e., she was "in church" all day long (cf. 24:53).

2:38 She gave thanks to God. This serves as an example of model Christian behavior.

Looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. The "redemption of Jerusalem" (cf. 1:68, "redeemed his people") serves as a synonym for the "consolation of Israel" in 2:25 (see discussion there) and "salvation" in 2:30. The references in 2:25 and here serve as an inclusio and bracket the Simeon and Anna accounts.⁴⁰

2:37–38. Jewish and Greco-Roman culture often viewed widows who never remarried as pious and faithful. Judith, a famous widow in Jewish tradition, was said to have lived as a widow till her death at 105. If one adds the two numbers given in the text here, seven and eighty-four (taking eighty-four as the length of Anna's widowhood rather than her age), and she was married at the common age of fourteen, one could see her as 105 also.⁴¹

Anna's thanks to God. 2:36–38. This godly woman from the prophetic tradition continued the work Simeon had started. Anna **was 84** years old and had devoted herself completely to the Lord's service in **the temple** since her husband had died years before. She announced **to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem** (cf. v. 25) that the Messiah had come. The word about Jesus was likely known throughout the entire city as people either believed or disbelieved the words of the old prophet and the widowed prophetess.⁴²

⁴⁰ Robert H. Stein, [Luke](#), vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 117–118.

⁴¹ Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Lk 2:37–38.

⁴² John A. Martin, "[Luke.](#)" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 209.