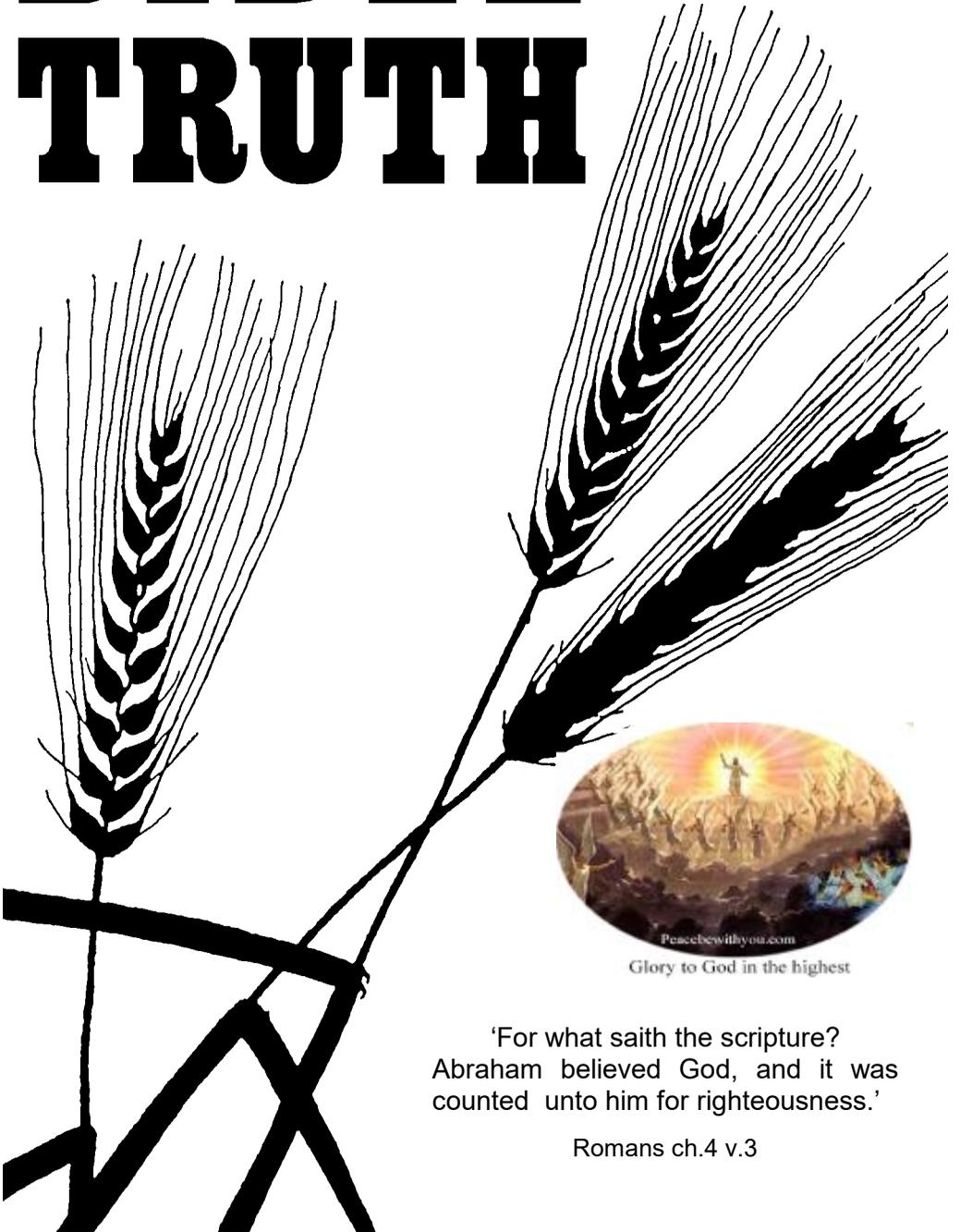


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'For what saith the scripture?
Abraham believed God, and it was
counted unto him for righteousness.'

Romans ch.4 v.3

Memorable Women - **Anna**

by Lynne Gray

There were many women of faith that are mentioned in the New Testament who fulfilled particular purposes for God in God's plan for their lives. It is as a direct result of the actions and witnessing of these women that we have recorded in the New Testament their testimonies about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

'... at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.'

Deuteronomy ch.19 v.15

This verse is one aspect of the law given to Moses for the people of Israel. But in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' birth, tradition and culture declared that witnesses must always be male. Women were held in such low esteem that they were not allowed to testify in any court of law or be acknowledged as capable of giving witness in any judicial or financial matter.

According to the historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37-100), whose writings are contemporaneous with the New Testament, the practice of the exclusion of women as witnesses was a common practice. Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, records,

'But let not a single witness be credited, but three, or two at the least, and those such whose testimony is confirmed by their good lives. But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of the sex'.

Book IV, Chapter VIII, 15

God, however, as an equal opportunity employer, has given no such command and the testimonies in the New Testament are in social opposition to the accepted prejudices and restrictions placed upon women in 1st Century Israel and the Middle East generally.

One of the greatest witnesses to the authority and office (who He actually was) of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Messiah was Anna.

Who was Anna? Well, we don't really know a lot about her but what we do know is recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

'And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed

not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.'

Luke ch.2 vv 36-37

Why was Anna so special? Anna was the first person to recognise and witness about salvation through Jesus Christ. Her name means 'favour' or 'grace' and is the same as the name Hannah used in the Old Testament. She was the daughter of Phenuel and from the tribe of Asher, a widow, but the name of her husband is not mentioned. She had been married for seven years and either widowed for 84 years thus making her over a hundred years old, or she was 84 years old - the text is slightly ambiguous.

Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist and cousin to Mary the mother of Jesus, recognised the spiritual potential and greatness of Jesus while he was still in His mother's womb,

'And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord'.

Luke ch.1 vv 39-45

But it was Anna who was the first witness to actually speak publicly about redemption through Jesus Christ and we could even say that Anna was the first person to fulfil the great commission: to preach the message of salvation to all people in all nations.

Let's examine the events that occurred at the Temple in Jerusalem with Anna. As Joseph and Mary presented their forty day old infant Son, Jesus, at the Temple according to the law, two witnesses appeared on the scene - they were Simeon and Anna. Simeon, first took the child up into his arms and prophesied over Him but Simeon's understanding was a personal revelation and he was now prepared to die in peace as he had achieved his life's goal of seeing the promised Messiah for Israel.

Simeon took the child in his arms and, praising God, said,

‘Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel’.

Luke ch.2 vv 29-32

Anna then approaches the Holy Family. She too recognises Jesus as the Messiah, but she has a very different reaction.

‘And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.’

Luke ch.2 v.38

Anna is over 80 years of age but she does not want to peacefully pass away as Simeon does. Anna is a woman of action as well as faith. She gets out among the people in the Temple and begins to proselytise. Anna bears witness to her understanding of the redemption through Jesus Christ!

Culture and tradition within Middle Eastern society held that no woman could be a witness, but God Himself showed that He will use whom He will to spread the message of salvation. It was He who chose and called His servant Anna to be His witness to Jesus. The honour and privilege of being one of two chosen witnesses to the dedication of the infant Jesus was given not to a high priest, nor to a Levite, not even to a person of social or political power, but rather this privilege was given to an aged and faithful servant who just happened to also be a woman.

Anna was the first Christian missionary and after living a life of service in the Temple she could die peacefully knowing that the Messiah had come.

What we can learn from the life of Anna is that women are to take the time out of their increasingly busy lives to study the Word of God. This is vitally important for our growth in faith but we are also to realise that there is a time for action. We are all to witness to the world, as Anna did, about salvation and redemption through Jesus Christ.

‘Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.’

Matthew ch.10 vv 32-33
