

# *Free At Last*

*A Life-Changing Journey  
through the Gospel of Luke*

*Leesa K. Donner*



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Scripture taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

## Segment Two: Luke 2:36–40

**A**n older woman I have had the privilege of knowing for about twenty-five years was not only instrumental in stewarding my husband and me to Christ; she has done so for countless others as well. In many ways, her entire life has been like a drink offering poured out in service to others—her children, her husband, and her church.

Since 2010, this lovely gal has been fighting for her life from a rare and usually fatal disease. Having stared death in the eye, this woman has fundamentally changed. Her graciousness is more evident. It is a delight to be in her company and listen carefully to her words of wisdom. Those who know her seek her out regularly just to be in her precious presence.

According to the biblical text you will study today, the second person on earth to offer adoration to the Christ child was a woman—the prophetess Anna.<sup>34</sup> In the case of both my friend and this historic prophet, difficult circumstances in life did not stop them from praising their Savior. In fact, their earthly trials served only to *deepen* their faith.

7. Read today's primary text below. Underline everything you are told about Anna. Pay special attention to the verbs attached to her such as "worshipping God," "waiting expectantly," etc.

**Lk 2:36** *Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. 37 Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshipping God with fasting and prayer. 38 She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.*

*39 When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. 40 There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.*

8. According to *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, Anna's "name means Grace. She was a widow, a daughter of Phanuel. This is the Greek transliteration of the more familiar Hebrew name Penuel, also spelled Peniel."<sup>35</sup> Let's find out what that word means by looking up Genesis 32:30. Write what it means here.

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34 This is discussed more extensively in J. G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: Luke* (Clinton, IA: LBC, 2008), 50.

35 Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 347.

9. Review verse 38. What do you think she was telling people about the baby Jesus? In what way if any does this connect to Genesis 32:30?

10. What happened to Anna according to Luke 2:36?

In the fellowship hall of my church, a woman of great faith recently discussed the death of her firstborn, a beautiful baby boy only a few months old when he died. At the funeral, her aunt quietly walked up to the grieving young mother and whispered to her, “Beth, this will either make you bitter or it will make you sweet.”<sup>36</sup> This woman rested in God’s providence despite her circumstances and held fast to her faith. Without a doubt, Beth is one of the sweetest women I know.

11. According to verse 37, what was Anna doing in the temple?

12. What do you think that says about how she weathered the storms of her tragic youthful circumstances?

13. Verses 39–40 can be considered a postlude to the previous passage. Read them again. What are the four characteristics used to describe Jesus?

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<sup>36</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all names in this study have been changed to respect the privacy of the individuals.

14. Serious students of the Bible cannot ignore the dissimilarity in Luke and Matthew about the birth of Jesus. Take a quick look at Matthew 2:1–23 and compare it to today’s passage. What are the differences? The similarities?

Theories abound as to why the two accounts differ so much. It is vital to understand that the two are not mutually exclusive and that there is certainly no reason why all the events needed to be mentioned in both books. It is also crucial to understand that the gospels of Matthew and Luke were written to two entirely different audiences. Here’s one point of view.

*The question occurs, therefore, “How is it that Luke omits the material found in Matt. 2:1–21, particularly the visit of the wise men from the east and the temporary residence of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus in Egypt?”*

*Some are of the opinion that Luke omits it because he did not know about it...*

*One author may well be pointing in the right direction when he states that Luke omitted this material because the plan for his book did not require its inclusion.<sup>37</sup>*

Whether this small family went straight to Egypt or back to Nazareth for a short time, it seems that the “adoration in the Temple was followed by the animosity of the throne (Herod).”<sup>38</sup> And is it not also true that often in life, “persecution often follows praise; trials often follow triumph. This keeps us humble and focused on God and not on circumstances.”<sup>39</sup>

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37 Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary*, 177–78.

38 Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor*, 52.

39 Ibid.



## *Exploring the Heart of the Matter*

Reflect on how Anna responded to the adversity in her life and how that might correspond with the way you react to the difficulties in your own life. Do you recover from the pain and hurts in your own life with praise and worship, or do you throw yourself an everlasting pity party?

15. Following a spiritual mountaintop experience, do you find there are often times of testing and/or hardship? Have you ever considered that there might be a relationship between the two? Expound below for your own spiritual growth.