

Anna's Story





Anna – To Natasha, my first born. You inspired this story. My fearless worshipper. Naturally generous and forgiving spirit. Inspire others as you have inspire me.

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I have always lived in Jerusalem, which I am really thankful for. I know that, for people from my tribe, homes were not always that stable. Since the first temple was destroyed over 800 years ago by King Nebuchadnezzar, and my tribe Asher was sent into exile, my people have struggled to settle in a land of their own. Abba told me that our land was rich with olive groves and our tribe was envied for its fortune and prosperity. Well, it was in the stories He told, and He got it from my Saba, but they never saw it either. Memories of old men passed down through the centuries, memories of better times for my people. I suppose home is where the heart is, but I am grateful that I didn't have to move from place to place like my ancestors.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Anna of the tribe of Asher as I have said, and daughter of Phanuel. I am the ripe old age of 106. I know it is hard to believe, but I have an amazing story to tell you about what happened last week in the temple.

It began as any other day. I remember I woke up slowly that morning; my eyes opening and adjusting to the bright sun streaming in through the crack in the shutters. I could hear the hustle and the bustle of the neighbours as I lay there. These old bones are not what they used to be, so it takes me a minute or two to sit up.

For almost 20 years now, the Cohans have lived next door wonderful people. Sarah and Jacob moved in as newlyweds when they were both just 16. To an old woman like me that seemed so young, but I suppose I was married at 16, so I can't talk. Of course, I have been in this neighbourhood a long time. I knew their parents and their grandparents too; they are a good family and have always been good to me in turn.

I could hear Sarah telling her girls to use a little more oil with the flour to make the bread, and instructing her boys to gather the vessels for

the daily trip to the well. Jacob would be busying himself with the fire that Sarah would cook the bread on. It was probably well lit by now. I remember thinking that I could just lie in bed all day, these bones are weary, but they would think I was ill, and I don't want them to fuss. So, it's time to get up and get started. I sat up on the edge of my bed and prayed.

I never let my feet touch the floor to start the day without a conversation with my creator. I prayed what I pray every morning, 'I give thanks unto You, Adonai, that, in mercy, you have restored my soul within me. Endless is Your compassion; great is Your faithfulness. I thank You, Adonai, for the rest You have given me through the night and for the breath that renews my body and spirit. May I renew my soul with faith in You, Source of all Healing. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who renews daily the work of creation. Amen'

I remember thinking, 'Come on Anna, get a move on. The boys will be back with the water soon, and Jacob will be in with hot embers on his shovel to get my fire started.' It's the quickest way to light a fire you know, from one that is already burning well. Like I said, they are so good to me- they look after this old widow well. They are great neighbours. I don't mind them getting my day started. I know my limits now, but this mind is sharp, and I won't take advantage when I can still do most things myself. Washed and dressed, I had started preparing breakfast when the boys came knocking. 'Savta-Anna', they called- a little pet name. All of the children call me this. It's more about my age than my relation to them. I didn't have children of my own- I was widowed after just 7 years of marriage so never became an 'imma', never mind a 'Savta'. (That's mother and grandmother.)

Beriah and I were not blessed with children, and we only had seven years of marriage before he became very ill and died. I was sad for so long, but when I hear the boys shouting, 'Savta-Anna are you awake?' it makes me smile.

Do I regret not having children? It was not a choice. We were just not blessed as a couple, but I have been surrounded by children both here, where I live, and in the temple. You know the benefit of being everyone's Savta is that you can send them home with their parents, and an hour at a time is enough- well at my age anyway. Many people tried to convince me to marry again but Beriah and I, we are soul mates. There was no one who could fill his sandals.

With the fire now lit and the bread baking, I busied myself with the usual sweeping, cleaning and tidying up. When I finally sat down to breakfast, normally I feel a nap coming on, but strangely not that day. That day I was feeling refreshed, I remember thinking that must have been a good night's sleep.

So, to prayer- 'blessed are you Lord our God, ruler of the universe who brings forth bread from the earth. Amen.' I ate in silence thinking of all the times I would tell Beriah my plans for the day. I miss that, although it used to drive him crazy. Not a morning person, if you know what I mean. I would be all talk, what happened yesterday, what I was going to do today, the little jobs around the house I needed him to do, and he would smile and say, 'Anna slow down, my eyes aren't open two minutes, and I haven't had breakfast yet.' I was always looking ahead trying to organise my day and his come to think of it. 'Days should not be wasted,' I would say. Not much has changed. I miss him sorely.

What was left over from breakfast, I packed into a lunch. I was going to the temple which, by the way was not unusual, but I normally spent all day there so a lunch was needed. Time to go or I would be late for morning worship. Locking up I shouted to Sarah that I would see her later and headed toward the temple. Today was different- but I couldn't really tell you why. I had a little spring in my step.

Well, maybe the spring was on the inside and less visible to anyone else, given my age. I love to sing, so the spring in my step is probably more visible because of the singing and less of the bouncing. When

you serve an almighty God, I find it is hard to contain the joy within, in my case, it comes out in song. And I am not quiet about it. Instead of humming to myself, I was singing quite loudly as I went along my way, I do remember the odd head turning because they heard me, but I don't care. In ten years, people will have forgotten about the crazy old woman who sang in the street.

The day in the temple started like any other. The usual morning greetings from the other ladies. I checked in on the Rabbis to see if there was anything I could do for them, then headed to the women's court for worship.

I was passing through the Gentiles court, and I remember thinking how busy it was today. Many people coming and going, and I spoke pleasantries and greetings to all that I saw. I have found that a smile and a friendly greeting can infect the stranger. A little smile usually gets a smile in return. I believe that so many need that basic kindness in their day. Common courtesy and good manners, my Abba taught me, should be the basis for every encounter. Gentile or not, male or female, young or old; kindness and respect for all is what he taught me, and I have lived by that.

My Abba was a good man. When my grandparents named him, they wanted to give him a good solid Jewish name. One that was unique but would be remembered. He was Savta's favourite, he could do no wrong. He was her first born and she would say that when she held him for the first time as a baby, and looked at his tiny, chubby cheeks she saw the face of God. So that's what they called him 'Phanuel' meaning 'Face of God'. Names are very important in our culture. To a Jewish Imma, a good strong name is needed to give the firstborn son a respectable start in life. Jewish Immas are very proud and hard to please. Beriah was the same- a good strong name. It means 'in envy' and I was the envy of all the other girls when he turned his attention to me. A good-looking man, although I did turn a few heads, even if I do say so myself.

Anyway, I was just passing through the Shushan gate into the women's temple. It's the eastern gate. The beautiful gate we fondly called it, because of the sculpture of the palace at Suza, it is stunning. As I hurried past it, keen to enter morning worship, I could see Simeon just ahead of me. Simeon means 'to hear', and he did hear the voice of God. He was a devout man; a righteous, godly man, I would have been surprised if I hadn't seen him this morning. There was a long list of rituals and sacrifices that were made every day here, and it looked like it was going to be a busy one. The women's court was hectic. So many men, women, and children. I know I am in the women's court, but that just means that the women can't go any further into the temple, not that it is women only. When I think about it, that day was all about God's timing. If I had turned to the left or to the right or spent even a little longer talking to the Cohan children, I would have missed it.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw them. There stood two young teenagers, here to present their first-born son. There were plenty of these ceremonies this morning, but these two caught my eye. She was sixteen, maybe seventeen at the most, and he was slightly older, but not by much. It wasn't their age that had caught my attention though, it was their countenance. Such love in their eyes for this little boy, and I knew that they had real purpose in what they were doing this morning. Lots of couples come and take part in this ceremony, but they are doing it out of duty or tradition. Not these two. They hadn't much money, they were offering pigeons instead of doves. Like myself, they would have been classed as part of the 'Anawim'. We are the faithful remnant, the poor ones who remain faithful in times of difficulty. We are kindred spirits- maybe that's what drew my attention to them.

Then I felt it. The overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit. My faith is strong, as a prophetess it needs to be. I had known this feeling many times as God had been good and had given me this gift. What happened next can be difficult to describe as it was supernatural.

As a prophetess I know that the supernatural is not to be understated, but God's presence is closer than normal at times like these. What I

have realised over the years is that God is ever present- we as people just don't pay attention. I have known God's presence as a constant in my life and I knew that He was speaking to me about this couple and about their baby.

I am warning you now, what I am about to tell you will blow your mind. Please stay with me and remember this isn't a fairy tale an old Savta is telling you. This really happened and it changed my life completely, as it will change yours, you'll see.

Simeon stirred up and, anointed by the Holy Spirit, takes this little boy in his arms and begins to pray. This was not part of the ceremony. "Lord," he said, and everything stopped. The whole room went quiet in anticipation of what would come next. Simeon had tears in his eyes and was emotional and passionate about what he said next. I must be honest; I knew what was coming, I just didn't dare to believe it. So, I held my breath for what seemed like an eternity.

Please remember this all happened in minutes, but it will forever be imprinted on my mind and written on my heart. Every second captured, every breath slow and steady I had to control the excitement stirring in my spirit. Simeon prayed so personally and with great authority. "Now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

My heart missed a beat, I think. I just remember the sound of the temple singers and the instruments ringing out in celebration, like the angels themselves had joined us. Simeon continued speaking directly to the young mother. Who, by the way, was completely awestruck, her and her husband both, at what was unfolding. What he said next sent a chill down my spine. A warning for this poor woman. It was, indeed, a prophetic warning to all who heard.

This little boy was going to be the salvation of all of Israel. He would be the 'rise and fall' of Israel, he said. A heart-breaking moment and hard for any mother to hear. He said that 'A sword would pierce her own soul for the hearts of many to be revealed'. I had no way of knowing what this could mean, but she knew or seemed to know. It was only a split second, a fleeting glance but I felt that this young mother knew exactly the importance of her firstborn.

Snapping back into the natural I began to rejoice. Giving thanks and praising God. My grateful spirit overflowed as I approached the baby. I had to see for myself. The face of God manifested in flesh. Our Saviour was in the arms of Simeon and the people around were not falling to their knees in worship.

In awe I praised and prayed and worshipped that day. They thought I was a crazy old woman humming and singing in the street. That day I burst forth in prophetic worship, with thanksgiving and praise that the Lord had come. I looked and sounded crazy, so did Simeon, but we knew. It was a risk abandoning all tradition and religious decency, but if King David could surrender and be more undignified to worship and honour God then so could we.

He was right there, in the temple. A baby, yes, but the Messiah that we had been promised, the Saviour who we longed for was right there and so many did not see. The people around us were unaware of the significance of this moment. It was just another day. The couple returned home, and Simeon finished up his work.

When we finally got the chance to speak, we had time to process what had just happened. I was captivated by the beauty of the encounter, Simeon gripped by the fulfilment of prophesy. You see, a long time ago, and I had heard this story often over lunch or times of fellowship, God had spoken clearly to Simeon. Now, I don't want to spoil it for you- if you get the chance ask him. But God told him that he would not die before he saw the promised Messiah in person.

I used to hear him tell that story, hoping and praying that I would see him too. We had waited so long, and I had seen so many years go by that I could only dream of this day. If I was truthful, I didn't think He would come in my lifetime. What I saw today was the faithfulness of God to His servant Simeon, and His mercy and grace poured out on an old widow like me. I thank God that my mother called me Anna. It means 'merciful and gracious', would you believe. To look into the face of God and know that mercy and grace, well... you will only understand if you believe and trust.

I have no words to describe the refreshing in my spirit that day. I have no words to express the completeness of the restoration of my soul. I don't even have words to help you understand the anointing of God that came with that encounter. But I am changed. I am irreversibly changed, body, mind, and soul. These old bones feel like life has been breathed into them again and here I am, 106, about to begin a new chapter of my life. That day was the last day that I spoke pleasantries and greetings to all that I met. Oh, I don't mean that I stopped doing that or became rude in any way. No- what I mean is I said more. So much more. Let me explain.

That afternoon, after lunch with Simeon and some of the others, I headed home as I always did. I can tell you right now that it was the longest walk home that I ever experienced, but I didn't even notice. I came into contact that day with so many friends and acquaintances that I knew, because they had told me, were waiting for the Messiah. I had great news for them that He was here, and I didn't want one person to wait any longer. What was extraordinary about this was that not everyone who I spoke to believed me. Many people who knew me and trusted me. My friends who knew my prayer life and service in the temple thought I had lost my mind. This did not dishearten me, nor did I stop telling the story, I couldn't. The world had been waiting for a Saviour and they needed to know that He had come.

When I finally arrived home, I heard Jacob shout for Sarah, Savta-Anna is here. Sarah came rushing out fusing about how late I was, and they had been so worried, and they thought that something had happened to me. Rebekkah, another neighbour had called in to see Sarah a few hours ago, concerned about the ramblings of this old woman. She had heard some of the ladies who had been in the women's court gossiping about my behaviour this morning. 'Out of character,' one said. 'Rushed toward the couple and their baby to burst into song,' said another.

Sarah was concerned that I had taken a funny turn, or maybe she thought I was having a stroke- I laughed and asked her to gather the children and Jacob and I would tell them what happened. I knew she thought that it was getting late and that it should wait until the morning, but out of respect she did as I asked and invited me in for supper. As we ate around the table that night I told the story, pretty much as I am telling you now. They saw that what I was saying was true, and they believed, as I did, that the Saviour had come. This was better news for them than the others that had told. My Jewish friends expected a saviour, and belief and unbelief in their hearts was revealed.

You see, Sarah and Jacob were Gentiles. They believed that the Saviour would come, and He would unite our people- we had spoken of this often. Now I was telling them that I had seen Him. Their children listened intently that day- my hope and prayer is that one of them, if not all, will proclaim the good news that the Messiah has come. The hope that this message will bring to their people I expect will unite all people under heaven to worship the one true God, the creator of the universe.

It was the perfect end to an unforgettable day, and they believed. Jacob sent one of his sons to walk me home. As we walked Luke asked, 'Savta-Anna, do you think I will know Him when I see him? He is only a baby; will I recognise Him when I grow up and He grows up?' 'There will be no mistaking Him. As the prophet Isaiah has told us in times gone by, He is Emmanuel God with us.' As a child he believed.

As I lay my head to sleep, my prayer is as always was ‘Adonai, may it be Your will that I lie down in peace and rise up in peace. Let not my thoughts, my dreams, or my daydreams disturb me. Watch over my family and those I love. O Guardian of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, I entrust my spirit to You.’ The day was over but the mission to tell everyone has begun.

My prayer for all of you who have heard my story is that you too will encounter God in a miraculous way. May you believe and receive His goodness as He has provided the Saviour Jesus, the Messiah. That day, when I saw Him, my life was changed. I became an evangelist, telling all who I met of what I saw. There are no exceptions, Jesus came for us all. It doesn’t matter who you are, your background, your gender and especially not your age, God can use us all and it’s never too late. I have served in the temple, and I will serve for the rest of my days by telling the good news. Imagine being called to a new vocation at 106. Anyway, before I carry on with that and since I am known for my continual worship and prayer, let me pray for you now.

Father God, ‘Let your Spirit speak to our minds and hearts while we are asleep tonight, so that, when we wake up in the morning, we may find that we have received in the night-time, light for our way; strength for our tasks; peace for our worries; forgiveness for our sins. Grant us sleep tonight and ignite the fire inside of us, and tomorrow give us power to live, and burn brightly for your honour and glory.

Amen.



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