

Prophesying Daughters

Bible Background • Luke 2:36-38; Acts 1:12-14, 2:16-21, 21:8-9

Printed Text • Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:16-21, 21:8-9 | Devotional Reading • Joel 2:28-32

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXAMINE how God called and empowered women to proclaim His message, AFFIRM contributions of godly women to the church's mission, and ADVOCATE for greater recognition of God-called women in the church.

In Focus

Gina had enjoyed the company of elderly folks since she was a child. Now, as an adult, Gina worked taking care of them. She had seen so much heartache. The physical suffering was bad enough, but it was the emotional suffering like abandonment and loneliness that hurt them the most.

In the past year, there had been several elderly folks in Gina's church who had succumbed to poor health and were no longer able to attend services. Gina genuinely missed seeing their faces in church on Sunday morning. She began to pray for the folks she missed, and the more she prayed, the greater her burden became. Her burden began to expand beyond the boundaries of her church and extended to the elderly folks who needed to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit was at work in Gina's heart. Surely she wasn't the only one in her church who saw the need for outreach in this area. Gina spoke with her pastor, and with his prayer and support, she launched a visitation and outreach program for the elderly in her community. The outreach team found that some of the elderly folks wanted to hear nothing about a Savior or the gift of salvation. They began to pray that the Holy Spirit would soften those hardened hearts and that He would empower them in their ministry. One by one, lost souls were led to Christ—not only the elderly but their family members and caregivers as well.

Today's story illustrates how the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, at work in one faithful heart, can reach out to lost, hurting souls and unite a community.

Keep in Mind

“‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams’” (Acts 2:17, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Redemption (Luke 2:38) lutrosis (Gk.)— Ransoming, deliverance

B. Pour out (Acts 2:17) ekcheo (Gk.)—To pour forth, bestow, gush, run greedily out, shed abroad, spill

Say It Correctly

Phanuel. FAH-noo-ell.

Azotus. AH-zoe-tuss.

Caesarea. KYE-sare-EE-uh.

KJV

Luke 2:36 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;
37 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.
38 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.
Acts 2:16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;
17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:
18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:
19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:
20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:
21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.
Acts 21:8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.
9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

NLT

Luke 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, worshiping 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.
Acts 2:16 No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:
17 'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.
18 In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy.
19 And I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and clouds of smoke.
20 The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives.
21 But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.'
Acts 21:8 The next day we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food.
9 He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

The People, Places, and Times

Upper Room Women. Jesus instructed His followers to go to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They obeyed and 120 men and women assembled in the Upper Room. The Scripture clearly states that certain women were included in this number. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was mentioned by name (Acts 1:14) and the wives of the apostles (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:5). Also, in this assembly were the female followers of Jesus

devoted to Him throughout His ministry (Luke 8:2–3). So, when the Holy Spirit came, He fell on men and women, just as Joel prophesied.

Pentecost. Celebrated fifty days after Passover, Pentecost was also called the “Feast of Harvest” and the “Feast of First Fruits” (Leviticus 23:5–21). Pentecost is also celebrated as Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks, which celebrates Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Christians celebrate Pentecost as a commemoration of the outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit. While Shavuot also represents the Jews being freed from slavery to Egypt, Pentecost represents humankind being freed from slavery to sin.

What has God freed you from and how do you share that redemption with others?

Background

Joseph and Mary carried the baby Jesus into the Temple in Jerusalem to fulfill two Jewish ceremonial obligations: the redemption of the firstborn and the purification of the mother after childbirth (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 8:17; 18:14-16; Leviticus 12:1-8). There they met the prophets Simeon and Anna.

Thirty-three years after these prophets proclaimed their message about Christ, another prophet’s words were fulfilled when both men and women played a significant part in the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had been active since the beginning of time, throughout the Old Testament, and during Jesus’ ministry. However, after the Day of Pentecost, the role of the Holy Spirit expanded. The power of God’s Spirit equips the believer to live the Christian life and carry out Christ’s mission (Ephesians 1:13–14).

Acts 21 states that Paul and his company stayed with Philip the evangelist and his four daughters for some time. The daughters, each called prophetess, and their father may have given Luke (the author of Luke and Acts), information about their ministry and the spreading of the Good News in Caesarea and the surrounding areas.

While Anna and Philip’s daughters have only a small mention, we will always remember them because they are in Scripture. What act of Christlike goodness will you always remember?

At-A-Glance

1. A Woman Called to Declare the Messiah (Luke 2:36-38)
2. All Believers Called to be Filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-21)
3. Women called to Prophecy (Acts 21:8-9)

In Depth

1. A Woman Called to Declare the Messiah (Luke 2:36-38) The Gospel of Luke highlights a prophetess named Anna, from the Israelite tribe of Asher. Anna’s husband died after seven years of marriage. Afterward, she devoted the rest of her long life in absolute surrender to God. Faithfully, she prayed, fasted, and served in the Temple in Jerusalem. Anna was so devoted that she “departed not from the temple” (v. 37), where she was certain to gain great knowledge and experience in God’s ways.

Anna longed to see the Messiah’s face. God granted her heart’s desire when Mary and Joseph walked into the Temple with the baby Jesus. Anna immediately recognized the long-awaited Messiah. She praised and thanked God for allowing her to see Jesus and witness the unfolding of the messianic prophecies. Anna, inspired by the Holy Spirit, spoke boldly about the coming Messiah, declaring the baby Jesus is, in fact, the promised one bringing salvation and redemption.

2. All Believers Called to be Filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-21) On the Day of Pentecost, Peter addressed the crowd in Jerusalem. He clarified that it was the partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy as it pertained to the church (Joel 2:28-29). Christians are now God's temple, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). At one time the operation of the Spirit was most prominently recorded as the revelation to a few people and one particular nation—Israel. Today God connects and communicates His desires through people in every walk of life, not merely through the Jewish leadership. Following the Day of Pentecost, people from all nations, cultures, and people groups regardless of gender, race, and social status can be filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered to speak out God's words. Both young and old; men and women; those who might be considered as insignificant and those who are high ranking in society; the educated, the unlearned; the rich and the poor can be recipients of God's divine salvation and filled with His Spirit. While Joel also predicted changes in the physical atmosphere, those signs will be fulfilled in the end times (Revelation 6:12, 8:12).

In what way was Joel's prophecy seen on the day of Pentecost? What aspects of his prophecy will be deferred?

3. Women Called to Prophecy (Acts 21:8-9) Philip was one of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:1-6). He witnessed to an Ethiopian eunuch and then the Holy Spirit led him to Azotus where he preached in Caesarea and the surrounding area (Acts 8:26-40). Twenty years later, Philip continued to reside in Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9).

Paul, Luke, and eight others visited Philip whose four unmarried, virgin daughters lived with him. Some scholars believe their unmarried status was an indication of their solidarity and devotion to the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:34). The Scripture offers no extensive details about these four prophetesses. They are unnamed and nothing was recorded about their mother or specific involvement in ministry except that they prophesied. Philip committed himself to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, boldly talking about Christ. As is often seen even today, when parents are involved in ministry their children are likely to be involved as well.

Search the Scriptures

1. How does the mention of Anna, the women in Acts 2, and Philip's daughters contribute to Jesus' ministry? (Luke 2:38, Acts 1:14, Acts 21:8).
2. Who were the recipients of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-17)?
3. What was Anna's message and to whom did she prophesy (Luke 2:38)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How is Anna a role model for men and women?
2. How do you account for the unity of men and women in the Upper Room (Acts 1:14; 2:21)?
3. Why did Luke see the mention of Phillip's daughters as significant?

Liberating Lesson

Some churches and denominations debate women's roles in the furtherance of the Gospel. How do the passages in today's lesson address this issue?

Application for Activation

The statements regarding women in today's passages, declare the role of women in speaking out as the Spirit of the Lord divinely inspires. Have you ever felt the urgency of speaking in faith under God's Word? How did you respond? What was the result? Seek God for the boldness to speak in favor of the Gospel.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:16-21, 21:8-9 **36 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; 37 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. 38 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.**

Anna was a holy woman, whose name means grace or gracious. During this time, prophecy was silent. Some have stated it was 300 years and others say it was 400 years that true prophecy from God did not exist, but the prophecy was now happening again coinciding with the arrival of the Messiah. At the time of Christ's birth, we are introduced to Anna, a prophetess.

Anna was the daughter of Phanuel, from the tribe of Asher, which refers to those descended from Israel's tenth son (Genesis 30:13). She was married for seven years and then her husband died. She never remarried. It is not exactly clear how old Anna is, though it is obvious she is a seasoned saint. "Fourscore and four years" is eighty-four, but it is not clear if this is her age or how long she has been a widow. She devoted her life to serving the Lord. It is thought that she lived near the Temple. She spent a great deal of time there. She was committed to fasting, praying, and giving thanks unto the Lord.

She had devoted herself completely to the Lord's work in the Temple. She was available to work as much as she did because her husband was deceased and she no longer had the responsibilities of being a wife. She focuses her time and energy to be mindful of Godly things (cf 1 Corinthians 7:34).

Because of this devotion, Anna happens to be at the Temple "coming in that instant" (v. 38) when Simeon recognizes Baby Jesus as the Savior. Anna, in turn, announces to all who were looking forward to redemption in Jerusalem: the Messiah has come. She would not keep quiet—she was all about the work of the Lord. Her first work, therefore, is to thank the Lord. When praise and thanksgiving are our first responses to whatever God does, we are in a better mindset to continue serving Him. After thanking God, Anna shares the word that He will bring redemption (Gk. *lutrosis*, *LOOtroh-* sees). Interestingly, Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple that day to fulfill the law of redeeming the firstborn. The Greek translation of the Old Testament even uses this same root (*lutroo*) when giving the instructions for this rite (Exodus 13:13). This baby who is being redeemed from God with a sacrifice of two doves will be the one to redeem from sin all who are looking for Him.

Even though the greatness of this promise makes it sound far-fetched, Anna is unafraid to speak the prophecy God gave her. By devoting ourselves to God like Anna, we too can joyfully embrace the messages God asks us to share. How good it is to have someone speak a prophecy over you, filling you in on God's great plan for your life!

Acts 2:16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

“In the last days” is often used in the Old Testament to mean “in a future time.” It is used in several Scriptures (Genesis 49:1; Isaiah 2:2; Micah 3:1). The most important time for the Jews was the Messiah’s reign. This was not the end of the world by any means, but it was celebrated and anticipated as a long and glorious time under the dominion of the Messiah.

“To prophesy” (Gk. propheteuo, pro-feh- TEW-oh) has several different meanings. In Matthew, it means foretelling the future. Then in Luke, it is to celebrate the praises of God, being under divine influence. In any case, to prophesy is to be under divine influence, whether telling the future, celebrating the praises of God, giving instruction in the duties of religious purposes or even in speaking foreign languages.

One of the ways the will of God in former times was communicated to the prophets was by visions and dreams. One of the familiar names of the prophets was seers (1 Samuel 9:9). God informed Abimelech in a dream that Sarah was the wife of Abraham (Genesis 20:3). This is one of the ways God would make known His will.

God promises to pour out from the Holy Spirit, not sparingly but freely His influences to refresh or renew and purify or sanctify the soul. To “pour out of” means to be given out in very large amounts, as in pouring from a fountain that has no barriers, hindrances, or restrictions. So God chooses to give freely His influences to refresh and purify the soul. Here when speaking of the “Spirit,” in this passage, it is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. The gifts of the Spirit can be traced back to the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 4-10). He is the source of which the gifts will flow. Henceforth, the Holy Spirit will refresh, renew, purify, and sanctify the receiving soul.

The Holy Spirit was liberal in whom He would influence, all kinds of people, old men, young men, sons, and daughters. Whereas before this time, men were normally the only ones recognized to hold the title of prophet, in these days, He was making it clear that women may hold this role. Age will no longer have significance and neither will gender because all of God’s children are equally welcome and equally blessed (Galatians 3:28).

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

God is not a respecter of persons (Romans 2:11), meaning He does not show favoritism. As a matter of fact, God teaches against showing partiality (James 2:9). It does not matter if you have money or not. It does not matter where you live or grew up or who your parents are. It does not matter if you are old or young. This means people, male or female, of the lowest conditions, are excluded from being able to share in the gifts and graces of receiving the Divine Spirit. The key factor is that you have to be His. You must be a child of God.

The influences of God would not be confined to a particular class of people. In Scripture, the worshipers of God were often referred to as servants of God. Therefore, He is saying He chooses whom He shall pour His Spirit into. The people will not fit in a certain category based on looks or social-economic status. The people will not be ranked according to the standards of men. The standard is God and God alone. He is the one to say who is allowed to have what He gives. He is the Giver and we are the ones to receive according to what He decides. God is the One to offer gifts to His servants and handmaidens with the one special gift: prophecy. The gift of prophecy is often coveted for the wrong reasons (cf Acts 8:18–19). The most important aspect of receiving the gift of prophecy is proclaiming that God’s Son came into the world to save the lost and redeem creation.

19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

To do wrong against another person is one thing, but to do wrong against God is very different. The wrong-doer has to pay for what they did. We can choose to sin, but we cannot choose the consequences of our sin. All the prophets could be clear about one message: the prophecy of judgment was sure to come to pass. This is a very dangerous place to be (Joel 3:14–16).

Here, the “day of the Lord” represents any day God manifests Himself, but in particular when He will come to pass judgment or punish His people. God is good and just. For those who reject the Lord, judgment day is frightful. The fire and smoke also remind us of Sinai, when the presence of God was with the people. The “vapour of smoke” here means a column or shaft of smoke, that is here for a moment and then completely gone (cf James 4:14).

21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

There is only one way to avoid the prophesied judgment and that is to sincerely call on the name of the Lord. Wouldn't that be wonderful to escape the judgment all together? Who will be able to escape the judgment?

The last days include the days of great salvation. Throughout the last days, people can be saved by calling on the name of the Lord. Once anyone recognizes their need to be saved, they have to know and believe that Jesus is Lord, and be willing to receive Him as Lord and Savior. Those who seek God must admit to being a sinner in need of a Savior. Through God's grace, that person can call on the name of the Lord and be saved (cf Romans 10:9–10, 13).

21:8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. 9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

Philip was a believer chosen to be one of the very first deacons. The business of a deacon was to take care of the poor members of the church (Acts 6:1-6). He was a deacon who truly was on fire for the Lord. His passion for the Lord caused him to receive the title “evangelist.” He is the evangelist who had reached Samaria with the Gospel for about twenty years or so before. He matured, developed in the faith, and is now a family man. He now has four daughters. Some think the recognition of the daughters being “virgins” (Gk. parthenos, par-THEHnoce) alludes to their still being unmarried teens. There is no mention of the girls' names, only their gift. Philip was apparently raising his family in the fear of the Lord so that his children were serving and trusting God. His four unmarried daughters are specifically gifted by the Holy Spirit to prophesy.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jesus Supports Mary's Choice
(Luke 10:38–42)

TUESDAY

Jesus Responds to Sister's Call
(John 11:1–11)

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Raises Lazarus; Mary Believes
(John 11:38–45)

THURSDAY

Women Carry Resurrection Message to Apostles
(Luke 24:5–10)

FRIDAY

Jesus' Final Words and Ascension
(Luke 24:44–53)

SATURDAY

Simeon Sees Impact of Jesus' Ministry
(Luke 2:28–35)

SUNDAY

The Spirit Empowers Daughters to Prophecy
(Luke 2:36–38; Acts 2:16–21; 21:8–9)