

FPFWC Christian Development



Jesus and Calls in His Ministry

January 2021

Winter Quarter

January 30, 2020

Lesson #5 – Called to Prophecy

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:16-21; Acts 21:8-9

Key Verse - 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.—Acts 2:17

ICE BREAKERS –

1. *What role should fasting play in your own devotional life? Why?*
2. *How important is it to introduce our children to faith in God as early and consistently as possible?*

LESSON BACKGROUND

The five lessons of this quarter's final unit look at examples of faithful women in the first-century church. All three of today's lesson texts come from the author Luke. Analysis of his two books (Luke and Acts) shows that he had special regard for women (Luke 7:11–14; 10:38–42; 13:11–13; Acts 1:14; 16:13; etc.). These texts and others affords an opportunity to celebrate stories that are sometimes overlooked. These women, named or not, played important roles in the ministry of Jesus that continued in the church.

The Jews of Luke's day lived not only in Palestine but also in enclaves of Greek and Roman cities throughout the empire (examples: Acts 2:5; 6:9; 14:1). Jews maintained their own practices regarding women's roles, as directed by their understanding of Scripture and of family structure from ancient times. In general, a Jewish female was attached to a man who served as her provider, protector, and authority. Normally, a father held this role for a daughter and a husband for a wife.

Devout Jews honored God's concern for widows (see Deuteronomy 27:19). These often were older women who had no opportunities to remarry or be employed. For them, the likelihood of having a male provider was limited, necessitating help from the community (compare Acts 6:1–7; James 1:27).

Women were allowed to attend synagogue gatherings, but only as observers. They were usually seated in a balcony or in some other section apart from men. The temple in Jerusalem that was rebuilt after the exile had a courtyard for women, beyond which women were not allowed.

C. Lesson Context: Paganism

Jewish communities experienced varying degrees of influence from Greek and Roman cultures. As the Roman Empire expanded, Romans brought their traditions to their conquered peoples. Roman society was dominated by men at all levels:

business, politics, government, and military. But some women gained influence by their association with powerful men. In particular, some wives of the emperors achieved notoriety and celebrity. Sometimes mothers, wives, or sisters would even appear on the coinage of an emperor.

Women also played an important role in the civic religion of Rome, with the revered Vestal Virgins recognized as maintaining the ancient traditions of the city. However, the primary sphere of influence for Roman women was within the home, where they managed the household and saw to the proper raising of children. The Romans idealized the “matron,” the upper-class woman who managed her home well and remained chaste, modest, and loyal to her husband (in many cases, in spite of his own lack of sexual fidelity).

Although the Greeks had been conquered by the Romans, Greek culture survived and remained influential in reshaping Roman society. Greek culture, like that of the Romans, was male-dominated; the home was considered to be the proper realm of women. The Greeks, however, were not as uniformly tradition-bound as the Romans in this regard. Some Greek women were people of business, and their wealth gave them influence in their communities (compare Acts 17:12).

Even so, relationships within families varied in pagan cultures. Some husbands loved and respected their wives and saw them as equal partners in life. Other men had little affection for their wives and might abuse or ignore them, with few consequences from society outside the home. Wives often tolerated sexual infidelity by men, but women who were unfaithful were liable to divorce, disgrace, or even death. No one considered this to be a double standard, but simply the proper state of things in society. The prominence of even a few women in the New Testament accounts is therefore both surprising and instructive.

LESSON COMMENTARY –

The performance of these required rituals set up two encounters in the **temple**. The first encounter was with a man named **Simeon** (2:25–35). Simeon was described as **righteous and devout** (2:25) and one to whom the Spirit of God had given a promise that he would live to see **the Lord’s Christ** (2:26). Upon seeing the child he recognized the fulfillment of that promise (2:29) and of the Lord’s promise of salvation for **all peoples** (2:31)—both Gentiles and **Your people Israel** (2:32). Simeon had an ominous warning about this child as well—His life would be a challenge to the nation of Israel and would bring sorrow to Mary (2:34–35). The second encounter was with **a prophetess** named **Anna**. She was described as an elderly but devout worshipper. As with Simeon, when she saw the child she recognized that in Him was the fulfillment of the promise for **all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem** (2:38).

Starting in 2:14, Peter explained how the gift fulfilled prophecy, and then he gave evidence that Jesus is Lord and Christ.

Peter addressed his countrymen (Jews), and refuted the charge of drunkenness. The Jewish day began at 6 a.m.; the third hour was 9 a.m. Only a hard-core alcoholic could get drunk by 9 a.m.

From Peter's perspective, the gift of the Spirit fulfilled the promise of JI 2:28–32 (see the comments there). Though debatable, it seems best to interpret the day of Pentecost as only a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy—"an already, not yet" kind of fulfillment. The division between "the already" and "not yet" comes between vv. 18 and 19. The gift of the Spirit marked the beginning of the Holy Spirit's work, but not the complete fulfillment of the events at the day of the Lord. For an explanation of the phrase **BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD**, see the comments on JI 2:30–31. Peter anticipated the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Israel when Christ returns from heaven (cf. 3:20–21). Another possibility is to recognize that JI 2:28–32 predicts the Holy Spirit's work in the events of the future tribulation period, while Ac 2:14–21 merely applies them to the Spirit's work. The application would be that just as many unusual signs would follow the Holy Spirit's powerful work at the end of days, so here at the birth of the church, the unusual and demonstrative work of the Spirit was evident in the apostles' speaking in tongues.

On the trip to Caesarea, Paul stopped for a day at **Ptolemais** and greeted the believers (v. 7). Luke did not explain how the church was established, but it probably came about through the preaching of the gospel by those scattered during the persecution after the martyrdom of Stephen (cf. 11:19–20). Paul stayed with **Philip the evangelist** and one of the seven chosen to supervise the distribution of food to the Hellenistic widows (cf. 6:1–7). Luke mentioned without comment that Philip had **four virgin daughters** who prophesied. His intention was perhaps to confirm that the gift of the Spirit had been given to both Jews and Gentiles and to men and women. **Agabus**, however, was the one who symbolically prophesied that Paul would be arrested and handed over to Gentiles in Jerusalem (vv. 10–14).

LESSON NUGGET – Simeon and Anna were very old; however, they never lost their hope that they would see the Messiah. Many times we push seasoned saints to the background. As believers, we should encourage older people to share their wisdom and experience.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*