

Anna's daily life – Part 1



I have had such joy living here in the Temple. When my husband died only seven years after we had been married, I was devastated. We had not had any children, and I was left completely on my own. I came to the Temple to pray to Yahweh to release me from life, but instead I found peace and I so have remained here ever since.

I live here in the Court of the Women. I sleep there in that corner under the portico near to the Chamber of the Nazarites. I love the pillared walkway that goes right around the edges of this court. Each day I wonder how the masons managed to carve each stone of each pillar just so, so that they fit together so perfectly and that each pillar is exactly the same size. Stone seems such a hard material to work in, yet the finished pillars, like the rest of the court, in the beautiful creamy white stone of the quarry just up the hill, takes up the colours of the sky, changing

with the hours of the day and the seasons of the year sharing the reds of dawn and the pinks of sunset and even making grey cloudy days somehow more special. Bright days of sun are just dazzling, especially when you move from dark corners out into the light. The light, the dark, the changing colours help me to understand the presence of Yahweh in this place.

Over there in that corner of the court is a room for keeping the wood which is used to keep the sacred fires going. In that corner the room where the sacred oils are kept and in the last corner is the room where the lepers live. During the day many thousands of people come to the Temple. On feast days the Temple Priests tell me we can have 400,000 or more people around the Temple complex. This court is the biggest of the courts of course, as can be used by all the people of Israel. It is the gateway to the holiest parts of the Temple. Most people will enter over there, through the Beautiful Gate in the western wall. In my lifetime here, the Temple has grown enormously. King Herod has put a lot of time and money into this place. The Temple just used to sit on the flat platform at the top of Mount Moriah, but King Herod has brought in Roman, Greek and Egyptian engineers to make the platform bigger by building a huge stone wall on the slope below the mount, so that the platform was doubled in size. Some of the stones are eight or nine times as tall as a man. I do not know how they got them from the quarry and in to place.

I spend my days sitting or standing over there on the Beautiful Steps leading up to the Nicanor Gate, which leads into the Court of the Israelites, which is where the men can go to watch the rituals of the Temple. As a woman I can go no further, but from my watch place I can see the altar on which the animals are ritually slaughtered, slightly to my left and I can watch across the Court of the Priests to the doors of Sanctuary, the holiest part of the Temple. In the morning its doors are opened; such tall doors that it takes two men to move each of them. Herod had them beautifully carved in a dark brown wood, which contrasts with the colour of the stone and somehow complements it. Through the open

door, if I am standing in the right place I can see down the Sanctuary to the curtain that shades the Holy of Holies. Once a day one of the priests comes and goes through into the Holy of Holies to tend the eternal flame and wait on the presence of Yahweh. The rest of the day I watch and wait to see if a movement of the curtain signals that Yahweh has come into his Temple.

For all that King Herod has put his money into this place and to beautify the Temple of Yahweh, he does not trust us. You can see, just about, built into the corner of the Temple mount at its highest point, beyond the Holy of Holies is the Antonia Fortress. From its towers soldiers watch constantly, and patrol the nearby streets, just to make sure we do not do anything that would threaten Herod or his Roman allies.

But enough of that. Most of the time we all forget they are there and get on with the life of the Temple and the worship of Yahweh. The routines of the Temple were set by our great prophet King David. In the writings of Ben Sira, which one of the Priests has read to me it says;

"[David] established harp-singers before the altar, also to make sweet melodies with their ringing sounds. He gave dignity at the feasts, and he arranged seasons until completion. When they were praising his holy name, and from early morning the holy precinct was resounding" (Sirach 47.9-10).

We have not always managed to keep to the worship patterns established by King David. Just 170 years ago that dreadful man Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid Emperor decided that Israel was part of his Empire and when Jason, brother of the High Priest Onias, bribed him to pronounce him High Priest instead, the whole of Jerusalem made outcry, for our High Priests are appointed only by Yahweh and not by human hands. Jason tried to turn us away from the proper worship of Yahweh in the Temple and in our daily lives, but he did not succeed. When the people rioted against him Antiochus came and overthrew Jerusalem and led away women and children as captives. It was not a glorious time in our history, for many Jews remaining in Jerusalem turned away from our traditions and slaughtered pigs on the altar of Yahweh and ate their meat. They left their sons uncircumcised and began to behave more like Greeks than Jews. Judas Maccabeus and his brothers led a revolt and returned the Kingdom of Israel to the right and proper worship of Yahweh. When they had finished their task of returning Israel to the people, so it is written;

"At the very season and on the very day that the gentiles had profaned the temple, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals" (1 Macc. 4.54)

"They offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year" (2 Macc. 10.7-8)

In the Mishnah, which is a collection of our oral traditions the Tamid (7.5) which tells us how Temple worship should be carried out, tells us that we should use the following Psalms. On Sunday we use Psalm 24, on Monday it is Psalm 48, on Tuesday we sing Psalm 82, on Wednesday it is Psalm 94. Thursday sees us singing Psalm 81, Friday Psalm 93 and the Sabbath Psalm 92.

Of all the Psalms these are the ones which every Jew should have carved into their hearts. Psalm 24 says:

"Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? And Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart ..."

Psalm 48 reminds us:

"The LORD is great and greatly to be praised. In the city of our God, his holy mountain ... We envision, O God, your kindness, In the midst of your temple, As is your name, O God, so is your praise, Unto the ends of the earth ..."

Psalm 93 reads:

"Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, for evermore."

Psalm 92 says:

"The righteous flourish like the palm tree, Like a cedar in Lebanon he shall grow strong. They are planted in the house of the LORD; and they flourish in the courts of our God."

These tell us how we should approach our lives, so that when we come to the Temple to worship Yahweh, we will be ready to face him.