

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ZAREPHATH WIDOW LESSON THREE

by Sandy Harer

"And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook." I Kings 17:4-6

God made known to Elijah His plan for providing for the prophet while he was in hiding by the brook Cherith. The brook itself would supply Elijah with life-saving water. He could partake of it whenever he chose. Food, on the other hand, was delivered twice a day by God's servants, the ravens.

God let the prophet know that He had issued a command to His creatures, the fowls of the air. Specifically, God had instructed certain ravens to take bread and meat twice a day to Elijah by the brook. Along with the command God gave the ravens the capability to understand His instructions, the skill to find bread and flesh fit for human consumption, the ability to find Elijah by the brook Cherith, and the instinct to perform this service in the morning and evening daily.

Why ravens? The Bible doesn't explain God's choice of delivery system. There is purpose to every action of God. It's likely that God's servant Elijah learned something about the power of God by observing the actions of these obedient winged messengers. God tailors His lessons to the pupil. We have no way of knowing how his interactions with the ravens affected Elijah. Was he encouraged, uplifted, amazed at God's care for him?

What do we know about ravens? They are birds of prey who will attack and peck out the eyes of their victims (Prov. 30:17). But God had tamed the vicious fowls. Ravens neglect their own young and do not feed them (Job 38:41; Ps. 147:9). Yet God put them to work feeding His prophet. Ravens eat insects and carrion. God reprogrammed them to hunt for bread and nourishing food. The Hebrew word "lehem," which is translated "bread" means food in general and includes items such as berries, eggs, fruits, nuts, etc. The birds were not collecting food to satisfy their own bellies but nourishment for the Man of God. These unclean birds (Lev. 11:15) had been conscripted into God's army and provided with detailed marching orders. Their assignment came with time constraints : bring the provisions every morning and evening. God equipped them with an internal clock.

Imagine Elijah standing beside the brook looking skyward, waiting for his meal to be flown in. One raven could not carry very much in its beak so multiple ravens delivered the prophet's breakfast and dinner. Was the meat they delivered raw? Several commentators have suggested that the ravens picked up cooked meat from somewhere. Scripture doesn't say one way or the other. Whatever state it was in Elijah received food to sustain him during the drought.

The famine affected God's servants just as it did the idolaters whose sin brought the punishment in the first place. Believers are as susceptible to life's trials and tribulations as unbelievers. The difference is the active protection, provision, and care that God gives His own. Elijah experienced the support of God in a most supernatural way. Usually God works within the parameters of the natural laws of nature that He set in motion at the time of creation. But occasionally He transgresses His Own laws with miraculous results.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Isaiah 43:2