

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ZAREPHATH WIDOW LESSON SIX

by Sandy Harber

"Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." I Kings 17:9b

God made provision for Elijah for the three and a half years of drought and famine. He used nature in the form of a brook filled with the very thing that was being withheld: water. He used the fowl of the air and endowed them with instincts and abilities that they did not normally possess. And, finally, He chose to use a human being, but not one that Elijah would likely have found refuge with.

First of all, she was not Hebrew. God had chosen a Gentile woman to sustain His prophet. Because they were God's chosen people, the Jews kept themselves separate from the non-Jews (Gentiles). The reason was simple: Gentiles were pagans who worshipped false gods. The temptation to adopt pagan religious practices would be too great for the Jews to resist if they co-mingled with the Gentiles.

In addition, the woman was a poor widow. God could have sent Elijah to the home of a rich woman who would have had the means to feed him for several years. The widow that God chose did not even have the means to feed herself and her son, much less care for a stranger.

Jesus pointed out that there were many widows in Israel at that time, but God did not choose any of them (Lk. 4:25-26). Why not? We can only speculate since the Bible does not answer this question. Perhaps it is because the worship of Baal was so pervasive in Israel that there weren't any widows who remained faithful to the God of Israel.

But why a widow at all? God could have sent Elijah to live with a married couple or another single male. Appearances would have been better. While Elijah and the widow were both innocent of any wrongdoing, an unmarried male dwelling in the home of a widow and her minor son could give rise to malicious gossip.

What was so special about this widow that God singled her out? Did she already believe in the God of Israel? Commentators are divided on this point. She recognized that Elijah was an Israelite and referred to God as "thy" (i.e., Elijah's) God. She did not claim Him as her God. However, she did obey His prophet (v. 15). Perhaps she just believed that Jehovah was "a god," that is, one among many gods. And she didn't want to offend Him.

God clearly told Elijah that He had "commanded" the widow to sustain him. The Hebrew word translated "commanded" means "to give a charge." It is the same word used in verse 4, where God "commanded" the ravens to feed Elijah. The widow did not necessarily have to be a believer to obey God's command. God often used unbelievers to accomplish His will. They just didn't know that what they were doing was part of God's plan.

God used this poor Gentile widow to accomplish His purposes. And, in so doing, He preserved her life and the life of her son. And, He memorialized her in His Word.

Losing a husband is a heart-wrenching event. Life will never be the same. We need to accept our new reality. God has left us here on earth because our job is not done. He still has commands for us to obey. He still has a plan for our lives. God can use us to help others, as the widow did Elijah. And, like the widow, we will be blessed when we follow His commands.

"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." I Samuel 15:22b