

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ZAREPHATH WIDOW LESSON TWO

by Sandy Harber

"And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan." I Kings 17:2-3

Israel has only two seasons: dry and wet. The dry season occurs in the summer, running from May-June through September. The wet season begins with the early, or autumn, rains in October-November and ends with the later, or spring, rains in March-April. Dew is a necessary supplement to rain, providing moisture in areas that have little or no rainfall.

Most likely Elijah appeared before King Ahab in October before the early rains would have begun. His announcement that there would be no rain occurred at a time when the land was supposed to be coming out of its dry season. There had been no rain for six months (since April) when Elijah proclaimed the bad news. The farmers counted on the early rainfall to soften the ground to prepare it for planting.

The Bible does not tell us how soon after Elijah warned King Ahab there would be no rain that God told him to go hide himself by the brook Cherith. It was probably immediately. Elijah's life was already in jeopardy from Jezebel's determination to destroy all of the prophets of Jehovah.

The brook Cherith flowed into the Jordan River from the east. It was located in the vicinity of Jericho and Gilgal, two towns where Elijah established his schools for the Sons of the Prophets. During his sojourn by the brook Cherith Elijah had to rough it. While he was in hiding there could be no trips to town for supplies. He could not take a chance of being seen and his whereabouts reported back to Queen Jezebel.

Why did God send Elijah into hiding for three years? Perhaps He used this time to prepare Elijah for his future confrontation with the 850 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (I Ki. 18:19-40). After his conversion, Paul spent three years in the Arabian desert being trained by God (Gal. 1:17-18). It was during this time that Paul was given special revelation so that he could say that he did not receive the gospel he preached from men, not even the apostles, but from God (Gal. 1:11-12, 16).

This was a dark time for Israel, a time of great idolatry. God responded by sending a great prophet to represent Him. Elijah was unfailing in his loyalty to Jehovah, the God of Israel. He was determined to turn the hearts of the people back to the true and living God. The three years he spent out of the public eye were years of private training where Elijah experienced first-hand the power of God.

He witnessed God's power over His creation through the conduct of the ravens who brought him food daily. He experienced the compassion of God Who sustained a poor widow and her son during the famine. He saw God's power over the elements as the oil and meal continued to flow daily. His faith was strengthened by God's daily provision and protection in his life. His trust that God would answer his prayers yielded the miraculous resurrection of the widow's son.

The years of Israel's famine were not easy years for the prophet. But he came through them a mighty servant of God. Sometimes God allows difficult times in our lives so that we can learn more about Him, or about ourselves, that will make us better servants of our Lord. He may even take us out of commission for a while, as He did Elijah (and Paul), until we have been prepared to handle whatever tasks and challenges He has planned for our lives. Our faith is built up one victory at a time.

*"Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."
Psalm 27:14*