

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ZAREPHATH WIDOW LESSON ONE

by Sandy Harber

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

I Kings 17:1

"A certain woman's" story begins with the death of her husband. The name of the widow is not given. She is simply a poor widow that God used to preserve the life of His prophet Elijah. This unnamed widow's story is recorded in I Kings 17. The story opens with the first appearance of Elijah in Scripture where he boldly stands before the King of Israel and proclaims that God will be withholding the rain indefinitely.

Elijah is somewhat of a mystery to us in that virtually no background information is given about him. The names of his parents are not known. The Bible doesn't tell us what tribe he hailed from. We do know that he came from Tishbe in Gilead, which is on the east side of the Jordan River. The tribes of Reuben and Gad settled that area so, perhaps, he belonged to one of those tribes. The town of Tishbe is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture.

Elijah's call to be a prophet of Jehovah is not recorded in the Bible. He just suddenly appeared in Samaria, the capital city of Israel, to confront King Ahab and warn him that there would be no rain until he (Elijah) said so. This is probably not the first time that Elijah had confronted this wicked king. Most likely Elijah had previously admonished King Ahab for his sins and encouraged him to repent. Withholding rain was one of the ways that God punished His wayward people. Punishment never came out of the blue but was always preceded by warnings and chances to repent.

Somehow this rough-looking prophet had access to the king. Elijah wore an upper garment made of black camel's hair that was cinched at the waist with a leather belt (II Ki. 1:8). This mode of dress was copied by other prophets so that they were easily recognizable as prophets by their "rough garment" (Zech. 3:4). Elijah mentored many prophets-in-training in his schools located in Bethel, Gilgal, and Jericho. His students were known as the "sons of the prophets." It is understandable that his students would have chosen to dress like him. Apparently this practice lasted for many years since John the Baptist was so arrayed (Mt. 3:4). Or, perhaps, John revived the garb of the earlier prophet because he was the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy that Elijah would return to prepare the people to receive their Messiah (Lk. 7:27).

Elijah prophesied during a dark time in the history of Israel. King Ahab had taken for his wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, King of the Zidonians (I Ki. 16:31). Through her influence Baal worship became the state religion in Israel. Jezebel was determined to wipe out the worship of Jehovah. Under the rule of this evil couple the people embraced Baal worship with all its immorality. Thus God decreed that rain and dew would be withheld from the land as punishment for the nation's idolatry (I Ki. 18:18).

Elijah boldly confronted the wicked king and declared that he had a message from Jehovah, God of Israel. Elijah claimed to be a minister, or servant, of Jehovah. The phrase "before whom I stand" meant that he was God's representative. The image comes from the time when the tabernacle was erected as a dwelling place for God and the tribe of Levi was designated to minister (or "stand") before the Lord (Dt. 10:8). As God's servant, Elijah was declaring the beginning of an unspecified period of drought. The end would not come until Elijah declared (on behalf of Jehovah) that it was over.

Sometimes we face hardships of our own making. Wrong choices (sin) bring God's chastisement upon us. But that never happens without warning. God gives us time to repent and to change our ways. When you face tough times ask yourself whether this could be God's way of getting your attention.

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receives." Hebrews 12:6