

The RAVENS that fed Elijah

in 1 Kings 17:2-7 **were** / are ...

“Then the word of the LORD came to him [Elijah], saying, “Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded **the ravens** to feed you there.” So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. **The ravens** brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. (1 Kings 17:2-6)

accustomed to
being near humans
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

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both
normal and unusual
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

coming
even on the Sabbath
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

encouragement
for Elijah and us
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

evidence that
the LORD is the Creator
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

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far more
stealthy than most people
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

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helping
Elijah remain hidden
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Descriptive



Meditation

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in line with
praying for daily bread
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

intelligent
and highly teachable
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

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like and unlike
the raven in Genesis 8:7
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

small miracles twice a day

miraculously
willing to feed Elijah
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

miraculously able
to repeatedly find safe food
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

obviously not
bakers and cooks
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

overshadowed by
the widow in 1 Kgs. 17:8-16
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

**

probably
well fed themselves
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

promoting
daily trust in the Lord
(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Directions: after reading through **First Kings chapter 17**, consider and discuss how the ravens that fed Elijah are described above. While doing so, think about why God may have chosen to use ravens to feed his prophet and why a Gentile widow (who was similar to the ravens in some ways) was used as well. **Do you agree with the points made above, or would you change some of them? If so, how?** — **At the end, discuss the most important descriptive phrases and make personal applications.** Obviously, some of the applications should be about trusting the Lord for daily needs. — © 2022 by Jon F. Mahar, Hakusan City, Japan and Alexander, Maine, U.S.A.

What are ravens like?

Though not normally kept as pets, many ravens are used to being around people. They often obtain food from people which probably was the case to some extent with those that fed Elijah. (Obviously, the ravens were not able to bake bread!) Also as intelligent and teachable birds with ample physical strength, ravens could have been taught by the Lord to deliver food twice a day to Elijah. Sparrows would have been too small and weak, and eagles would not have been as accustomed to interacting with humans.

Another way the ravens well fit the task was due to how common they were. It was important for Elijah to remain hidden, and the ravens did not attract much attention. If human couriers had been used, Elijah's location would have soon been made known to Ahab.

What is miraculous in this story?

First, since ravens are normally scavengers, obtaining healthy food for Elijah twice a day for months was a series of many "small" miracles. Though people were undoubtedly involved somehow (baking bread, etc.), this is kept hidden in order to stress God's part. In addition, the ravens' willingness to feed Elijah instead of eating the food themselves does not seem natural. Yet, the ravens themselves were also probably well fed by the Lord, and this probably in part explains their willingness to share.

Did the ravens need to work on the Sabbath?

Apparently, food was brought to Elijah every day, though the verse (17:6) does not specifically mention the Sabbath. Like other wild animals, ravens gather food for their young every day of the week, and the only prohibition against animals working on the Sabbath has to do with oxen, donkeys, and cattle not working with people in the fields on the seventh day (Deut. 5:14). The ravens delivered food every day, and the idea that Elijah needing to fast on the Sabbath is obviously contrary to the emphasis in the chapter on the Lord meeting daily needs.

What about the ravens being unclean?

The raven is included in the long list of unclean birds in Leviticus 11:13-19. So how could God use unclean birds to feed Elijah? The answer is simple. Under the law, the Jewish prophet could eat what the ravens brought rather than the ravens themselves. This was much like the Lord using the Gentile widow of Sidon in the second half of the chapter. Notice what Jesus said about her in Luke 4:25-27.

Why is the ravens' part of the chapter relatively short?

The ravens in 17:2-7 are overshadowed by the widow of Sidon in 17:8-24. Both the ravens and the widow were miraculously enabled, but much more is written about the widow and her son. Obviously, people are more important than birds (Matthew 10:29-31), but there is more to it than that. The raising of the widow's son from the dead (17:17-24) was a more spectacular miracle than the ravens bringing food. Moreover, the woman spoke about her faith (17:24), while the ravens were silent witnesses to the Lord being the true God of creation rather than Baal.

What is the application?

Many small "miracles," day by day, is what the life of faith is all about. So the story of the ravens is in line with praying for daily bread (Mat. 6:11) and being thankful (1 Thes. 5:18). Each raven probably brought something small, but rather than this being a problem, Elijah would have been thankful repeatedly. So should we.