



Lessons from Elijah's Life

Obadiah the Secret Believer

Date: 12 February 2020

Text: 1 Kings 18:1-16

Key Lesson: Secret believers are usually compromisers.

A New Word from the LORD

Many days passed after God used Elijah to raise to life the widow's son. James tells us that the total duration of the drought was 3 ½ years. (James 5:17) "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." Every day that Elijah lived in the loft at the widow's house, God faithfully provided their meals from the handful of meal and the little oil. They never went hungry. Now after 3 ½ years, the word of the LORD came to Elijah with new instructions.

God's instructions were to "Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." He was to go straight to the king who sought his life and stand before him. That was a dangerous mission. How would Ahab respond?

Elijah's Response

The rough and ready prophet, whose faith strengthened during the years of God's miraculous provisions, immediately obeyed the Lord's command. God was truly his Commander and he obeyed God's commands. He went to show himself unto Ahab (v.2). God's message also included a promise to send rain upon the earth again. We must not forget that God controls the elements of nature.

How quick are you to obey God? Who is in command of your life? Who makes the decisions in your life? Have you learned to trust God in every situation? Do you seek God's will in every decision you make? Can you truly say that God's Word, the Bible, is your absolute authority? If you make choices without consulting God and the Bible or choices that are contrary to the Bible, is God truly in command of your life. Who truly IS your commander?

Pastor Alan Carr makes this observation. "Did you know that nothing reveals the truth of our love for God any more clearly than our obedience to Him? We can say anything we wish to say, but we prove we love the Lord when we cheerfully obey the commands He has given us, John 14:15."¹

Ahab is Desperate

The famine had destroyed the nation. Many, likely hundreds, perhaps thousands had died during the drought. God was getting the attention of His people who had forsaken him for the world. The lack of rain had caused "a sore famine in Samaria" (v.2). Even in the royal city of Samaria, the famine was so severe that King Ahab himself was now feeling the blunt of it.

Ahab called Obadiah, the governor of his house (v.3). As governor of his house, he was over the house. He was in charge of the care of the palace, the food for the royal family, as well as other stewardship duties. Some even suspect that he was Ahab's highest officer. To serve in this trusted position in the royal palace, Obadiah must have been a very trustworthy man.

Though Obadiah was faithful to King Ahab, he was only partly faithful to the LORD. He was a compromiser and a secret believer. God tells us, "Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly" (v.3). If God had not told us, we would never have known that he had great respectful fear for the LORD. To persuade Elijah that he truly did greatly fear the LORD, Obadiah related one of his daring deeds. Jezebel was the wicked aggressor against the LORD and his faithful people. She wanted to stamp out the worship of the LORD totally and replace it with Baal worship. She sought to cut off or destroy all the prophets of the LORD. In daring compassion, Obadiah arranged to hide two groups of fifty prophets in a cave and smuggled bread and water to them to keep the alive (v.4). Did Ahab know that Obadiah was loyal to Jehovah? Perhaps! Did Ahab know that he was smuggling food to God's prophets? It is very unlikely. Certainly, Jezebel did not know about it or even this trusted stewardship would have lost his head.

The Secret Believer

Is it wrong to be a secret believer? (Mark 8:38) "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Christians are to let their light shine before men (Matthew 5:16) "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." If one has to lie or deny the LORD to keep this a secret, then being a secret believer would be wrong. Whether Obadiah lied to remain a secret believer or not,

¹ Pastor Alan Carr, https://sermonnotebook.org/elijah/1%20Kings%2018_1-16.htm

we do not know. However, he certainly had to compromise to maintain his position in the king's court. He could not take a clear stand against Baal worship. He could not openly worship the LORD.

Many Christians today are compromising secret believers as well. They listen to the foul talk of co-workers without turning away. They tell no one that they are a Christian. They talk like the world, dress like the world, act like the world, and participate in ungodly activities. They watch filth on TV and the Internet. Yet, on Sunday at church, they put on that they "fear the LORD". It is wrong to be a compromising, secret believer. (2 Timothy 3:12) "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Having called Obadiah, Ahab sent him into all the land in search of water (v.5). They must find grass in order to save some of the horses and mules from starvation. They divided the land between them (v.6). Ahab went one direction and Obadiah went the other direction. Since Elijah had been living north of Israel, perhaps Obadiah's assignment was north of Samaria.

Ahab was not concerned about the thousands of people under his rule who were starving. He was only worried about his own horses and mules. Ahab was a heartless, self-centred king. He did not care about others. He only cared about himself. Times of trial reveal a person's true character. Many husbands get more upset about the dent in their new car than they do about the safety and emotions of their wife who was in the car accident. The Lord said that we are to set our affections on things above not on things of this earth.

Elijah and Obadiah Meet

While Obadiah was walking down the road, Elijah met him (v.7). Obadiah knew him when they met. Perhaps Obadiah was present the day Elijah announced the drought to Ahab or maybe God just revealed to him who he was. It is possible that Elijah's appearance had so often been described as a rough, hairy, country man that this alone made him believe it was the prophet. Whatever the case, he recognised Elijah. In respect or maybe fear for the powerful prophet, he fell on his face and asked if he was truly his lord Elijah. Elijah affirmed saying, "I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here" (v.8). Obadiah had just called Elijah his "lord". Now Elijah called Ahab Obadiah's "lord". Elijah knew that Obadiah had mixed loyalties. When with God's man, he wanted to appear to be loyal to Elijah and to the LORD. However, Elijah knew that his true compromising loyalty was to the king.

Many professing Christians do the same thing. When with unbelievers, they act like one of them. However, when with Christians, they act pious. Jesus identified that kind of action as hypocrisy. Don't be ashamed of Christ. Don't be a hypocrite. Stand up for Jesus. (Proverbs 29:25) "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe."

Obadiah's Lack of Faith

Obadiah did not trust Elijah nor Jehovah. He saw this as a plot against his own life (v.9-14). He assumed that because Elijah had disappeared from the presence of the king on the day he predicted the drought and had remained hidden for the past 3 ½ years that as soon as he turned to go get Ahab, Elijah would disappear again. This would anger the king and he would kill Obadiah.

Once again, Obadiah tried to convince Elijah that he was a spiritual man by claiming that he was his servant and that he had feared the LORD from his youth (v.12). He then told him again of his care for the prophets in a cave. If we have to tell others of the spiritual things we have done to convince them that we fear the LORD, something is wrong with our testimony. Addressing the religious hypocrites of His day, Jesus said, (Luke 16:15) "... Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." He said a similar thing about the Pharisee who prayed in the temple near the publican. (Luke 18:10-14) "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Elijah's Promise

Notice how Elijah affirmed that he would that day see Ahab (v.15). He said "The LORD of hosts liveth". The word "host" refers to a huge army or a vast multitude of angels. Jehovah, the Commander of the armies of heaven, is alive. This was another jab at the dead god, Baal. It was before that living LORD that Elijah stood. He received his orders from the Commander-in-chief, Jehovah Himself. Turn back to 1Kings 17:1 and see the similarity. Elijah promised that based on the LORD's orders, he would show himself to King Ahab that very day. Elijah was confident because he was obeying God's commands.

Obadiah then went to find Ahab, told him the news, and Ahab went to meet Elijah (v.16).

We too may have confidence in our walk with the LORD if we will faithfully obey the Bible. The Bible is God's mind concerning everything that we need to know to live for His glory. We dare not obey the Bible verses we like and ignore the ones we dislike. Instead, we must pray as the Psalmist, (Psalms 119:133) "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." (Psalms 86:11) "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name."