

Elijah Confronts King Ahab; Obadiah the Secret Believer

1 Kings 18:1-6

1 Kings 18:1-6 – *“And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, “Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.” So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria. And Ahab had called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly. For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water.)*

And Ahab had said to Obadiah, “Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so that we will not have to kill any livestock.” So they divided the land between them to explore it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.”

Background Notes

At the beginning of 1 Kings 17, Elijah the prophet confronted wicked King Ahab and pronounced this message from God: *“As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”* And then Elijah disappeared!

God kept Elijah far away from the capital city of Samaria, where King Ahab and Queen Jezebel lived. He spent some time by the Brook Cherith, where God miraculously sent ravens to bring food for him. Then the Lord had Elijah move to the town of Zarephath in Phoenicia, where he lived with a poor widow and her son.

But now it was time to return to Samaria, to confront King Ahab once again. Over three years had gone by without rain, and the drought had caused a severe famine in the northern kingdom. God had withheld the rains from Israel because of their sin. In the His Law, God said drought would be one of the penalties for disobedience, and failing to follow Him. God would withhold rain from the land (Deuteronomy 28:23-24).

God was planning to send the rains once again - but not because Ahab and the northern kingdom of Israel had repented. *It was strictly because of **God's grace**.* King Ahab certainly showed no sign of repentance. In fact, he was more concerned about the welfare of his horses and mules than the plight of the starving people of his kingdom. By the way, archaeology confirms that Ahab had many military horses. Large stables that have been excavated at Megiddo were thought to be Solomon's stables, but new dating has dated them closer to Ahab's time.

Ahab's chief servant, Obadiah, was helping Ahab look for grass for the horses. This Obadiah was not the minor prophet Obadiah, but this Obadiah was a true believer. Verse 3 says that he feared the Lord greatly. He was a secret believer in wicked Ahab's employ.

The fact that Obadiah was a believer raises a question. Why was Obadiah, a devout believer in the Lord, working for Ahab, the wicked king?

Doctrinal Point

God is looking for fully committed believers.

Three characters emerge from these verses: Ahab, Elijah, and Obadiah. From these three characters, the Holy Spirit has given us of three levels of commitment. In Ahab we see no commitment. In Elijah we see full commitment. In Obadiah we see partial commitment. God is looking for fully committed believers.

- *Ahab was a nominal believer.*

Ahab knew the name of the Lord and could even mouth the name of the Lord when it suited him. But Ahab was like a nominal Christian today – he had absolutely no real commitment to the Lord. Ahab was weak-willed, self-centered, and self-indulgent. He permitted, and even promoted, idolatry in the land. He allowed Jezebel to massacre a number of prophets of the Lord (v4). He cared more for his animals than for his own subjects who were suffering during the drought (v5). “Grass before God” was Ahab's standard operating procedure. And Ahab showed no repentance during this whole ordeal.

In Ahab we see no commitment. We trust no one listening to this Talk is like Ahab, unwilling to repent of your sin, no commitment to the Lord Jesus as Savior.

- *Elijah was a fully committed believer.*

At this point of his life, Elijah demonstrated full commitment. He obeyed the Lord completely (v1-2). “*The word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, ‘Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.’ So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.*”

In Elijah we see full commitment. Elijah obeyed the Lord completely. He courageously obeyed the Lord even when his commitment could have cost him his life. He was willing to boldly confront Ahab about his sin. Elijah was fully committed. What about us? Are we fully committed? Do we obey the word of the Lord completely? Do we boldly speak up for the Lord - or are we like Obadiah?

- *Obadiah was a partially committed believer.*

How could a godly man like Obadiah stay involved in Ahab's service? Why didn't Obadiah confront Ahab? Ahab had no respect for God. Ahab was allowing idolatry to increase in the land, and this idolatry included pagan fertility practices, ritual prostitution and ritual homosexuality. How could Obadiah, a man who feared the Lord, stay in the employment of wicked King Ahab?

If you read about Obadiah in various commentaries, you'll get mixed reviews. Some see him as a believer who was doing the best he could in the situation. After all, when Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took 100 prophets, hid them in a cave and fed them bread and water. So some see Obadiah as a man whose hands were tied. He was doing the best he could in the situation. Others, however, see him as a believer who should have done more.

In Obadiah we see partial commitment. Yes, he "feared the Lord greatly." He was a devout believer. He hid 100 prophets at some risk to his own life. And he was one of the 7000 people who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19).

But he was not like a Moses. Look at Hebrews 11, that great chapter of faith. Verse 24 says: "*By faith Moses when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasure of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.*"

Moses could have stayed in Pharaoh's court, reasoning like this: "I can do more for the people of Israel if I stay in the court of Egypt. If I continue to relate well with Pharaoh, I can do much more for them!" But no – Moses forsook Egypt. Obadiah isn't listed in Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11 does not say, "by faith Obadiah worked for wicked King Ahab as a secret believer."

But, you may say – what about Joseph and Daniel? They served wicked kings, and they are praised as faithful believers. Well, Obadiah served an evil king, but he was **not** like Joseph or Daniel. Yes, Joseph served Pharaoh, and Daniel served Nebuchadnezzar - but they had no choice. They were captives! Obadiah was not a captive. He could have left wicked King Ahab's employment. And another point - Joseph and Daniel were not *secret* believers. They let their faith in the God of Israel be known!

Obadiah was more like David's friend Jonathan. Jonathan is commended for siding with David against the evil schemes of King Saul. He did what he could for David. But Jonathan stayed in the palace of King Saul. He never joined David in David's time of rejection, "outside the camp."

Obadiah was partially committed. What about us? Are we only partially committed believers?

Practical Application

Are you a partially committed believer like Obadiah?

Are we secret believers? Or are we willing to let it be known that we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior? Are we willing to confess that “Jesus is Lord” where we work or where we live? Are we willing to separate ourselves from the entanglements of this world that are not honoring to Christ?

Full commitment doesn't mean you have to leave your secular job - but full commitment definitely means letting it be known that you're a Christian on your job and in your career. Full commitment may involve leaving a particular secular job - for example, if you're an executive in a company that begins to produce pornographic art, or literature that denies God, or music that teaches pagan values. In that situation, you should leave that job -even if it's high paying, and even though you don't have another job. You have to trust the Lord. So full commitment may involve leaving a secular job at times.

We need to ask ourselves: Am I a partially committed believer, like Obadiah? Am I willing to speak out against the sin in our society? Am I willing to confront leaders who are taking the nation away from God?

A few months ago I wrote to Time Magazine about their feature article on the origin of the universe. God was not even mentioned as an *option* in the article! Well, Time Magazine didn't publish my letter - but that's all right. They were confronted. That's what we need to do. At the time I remember thinking about Elijah. I realized that he would probably have done more than just write a letter. Elijah would have burst into the New York office of the editor, and confronted him with the Word of God!

James 5:17 says that Elijah was “a man with a nature like ours.” He was just like us - but he was fully committed! Am I a fully committed believer, like Elijah? Or am I only partially committed, like Obadiah?