

Elijah — Serving God in Less Than Ideal Places

1 Kings 18:1-16 (KJV)

1 And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. **2** And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria. **3** And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly: **4** For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) **5** And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. **6** So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. **7** And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? **8** And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. **9** And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? **10** As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. **11** And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. **12** And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth. **13** Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? **14** And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. **15** And Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. **16** So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

Great Chapters in The Bible

There are chapters that are scattered all throughout the Bible that have need to have labels on them describing them as the some of the greatest in the Bible.

Genesis 1—The Creation of the World
Genesis 3—The Fall of Man
Genesis 37—Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors
Exodus 20—The Ten Commandments
Psalm 23—The Shepherd Psalm
Psalm 51—The Repentance Psalm
Psalm 119—The Word of God Psalm
Proverbs 31—The Virtuous Woman
Ecclesiastes 5—The Matter of Time
Ezekiel 33—The Watchman
Matthew 13—The Sower and the Seed
1 Corinthians 13—The Love Chapter
Galatians 5—The Fruit of the Spirit
Hebrews 11—The Heroes of Faith
James 3—The Tongue Chapter

There are many others that could be placed in this list as well, but certainly 1 Kings 18 needs to have some consideration here also. It is the confrontation between Elijah and Baal. This would include Jezebel, Ahab, the prophets of Baal, and Baal himself. Most importantly it includes Jehovah.

But before we get to the confrontation that Elijah has with the prophets of Baal there is a character that we run across that needs some of our attention.

Schofield's Error

As you study the Word of God, there are preconceived ideas that are put into your mind as you walk out the Christian life. Sometimes those ideas can be put in there and they live for years before they are confronted.

This passage is one of those situations. More than twenty years ago, I heard a message preached that caused me to cast this prophet Obadiah into a very bad light. He had been foisted as a weak, immature prophet who did not live for the Lord as he should have.

He had been afraid to stand up for God and had utterly failed in his responsibilities. He was painted up to be a backslidden or at best lukewarm soul

who had no real reason for existing. But as I have dug into the text surrounding the life of Elijah, I find that this idea is simply not the truth.

Further, I have a Schofield Study Bible and C. I. Schofield called Obadiah “a believer out of touch with God.” He claimed that Obadiah should have been right at the side of Elijah but was not. He wrote that Obadiah’s actions serve as a warning to those who would still adhere to the world and still seek to serve God.

As I looked at the text, I pondered that especially after reading the text:

v. 3—He feared the Lord greatly

v. 4—He preserved a group of prophets (100) by hiding them in a couple of caves and supplying them with food

v. 7—He also has great respect for Elijah

Here was a man who was just being faithful. His job may not have been very exciting, but it was ever so effective.

Obadiah’s work was accomplished in a place that was hidden away from the eyes of the world. If ever there was one who was living out the plan that John the Baptist had spoken, “He must increase, I must decrease!” it would have been Obadiah.

God’s Call Again to Elijah

God’s Time Factor

1 Kings 18:1-2 (KJV)

1 And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. **2** And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria.

Once again those two words “many days” forces us to push back into the time factor of Elijah’s life. God’s timing is always involved no matter whether we can see it or not. Three years pass and there is a relative silence of God on Elijah’s part and then... Go find Ahab... Now... When you find him, I will send rain to the earth.

Here is another thing that we must notice about the will of God in our lives, it may not always be the easiest thing to do but it is the right thing to do. It may have seemed like a death sentence to Elijah, but God had already mapped out the way.

He devised the plan at Cherith.
He worked the angles at Zarephath.
He would give direction at Carmel.

Here is where the danger lay:

1 Kings 18:10 (KJV) As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not.

Ahab had been hunting Elijah as if he were an outlaw fugitive from justice. He had scoured the country of Israel and then he had moved beyond the borders to look for him there.

Make no mistake about it, the Lord will always provide the exact amount of faith that we need wherever he may lead us to.

No man is ever led into the valley of the shadow without the support and comfort of the Shepherd's rod and staff.

Abraham—Marched three days toward Moriah... God was already there.

Job—Suffered through nine months of horrific pain and loss before it let up... God was already making arrangements to get him through it.

Jeremiah—A lifetime of weeping for a wayward nation... God gave him the exact amount of strength he needed to get through it.

But we also cannot forget that Elijah was always going to have to go back and face down Ahab. In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah had informed Ahab, "It is not going to rain again until I say it will." That statement necessitates a return to revisit Ahab.

Elijah is now about to start his public career of ministry knowing that all who are the true worshippers of Jehovah are were objects of public scorn.

Surrounded by difficult dangers.

Surrounded by the challenges and problems of a wayward nation.

He has been categorized as an outlaw.

He is the “troubler of Israel.”

Despite all of that, we see as we read the history of Elijah, that God’s timing was in the middle of all of it. We have to know with great confidence that God is still working in the same manner in our generation as he was those many centuries ago.

Serving God in Less Than Ideal Places

1 Kings 18:3-14 (KJV)

3 And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly: **4** For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) **5** And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. **6** So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. **7** And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? **8** And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. **9** And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? **10** As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. **11** And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. **12** And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth. **13** Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them

with bread and water? **14** And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me.

The famine has been working now for a little over three years and the land has literally been cooked because of the lack of rain. So, Ahab determines that he will look for some relief for his animals. He sends for Obadiah. "We have to find some water and fodder for our horses." Think about that for a moment:

Ahab is not the least little bit concerned about the problem of the people but the trouble of his horses.

Times don't change... only the names change. The outrageous political practices of our day come from the same evil spirit that existed back then.

What is said about Solomon sums up the foolish of our age...

2 Chronicles 9:19-21 (KJV)

19 And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps. There was not the like made in any kingdom. **20** And all the drinking vessels of king Solomon were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold: none were of silver; it was not any thing accounted of in the days of Solomon. **21** For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram: every three years once came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.

Solomon was expending his energy on making sure that his apes and peacocks were being brought to the Kingdom.

Ahab's mind is elsewhere! It is amazing how the carnal mind will move toward the same kind of cares that Ahab moved toward. Instead of holy matters, longing for eternal things, serious thoughts of spiritual things, or a decision for prayer, they only have a low desire for the cares of this life.

Proverbs 27:22 (KJV) Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.

Jezebel is a prophet killer and she had almost exhausted herself to eradicate Israel from God's prophets almost as if she were trying to remove a germ from the land. Persecution of this world will always make its attempts to create havoc among God's preachers. Spiritual wickedness is in a lot of high places, but it also lives in some low places too.

While Jezebel wants to kill the prophets, Obadiah has a commitment that he wants to preserve the voice of a prophet. The expense involved in it did not deter him. I am certain there was a financial expense, but there was a greater one and that had to do with him getting caught by Jezebel saving these men.

Elijah was not the only one who was a worshipper of Jehovah. Right in the king's court, in fact one of the governors of his court, was Obadiah.

He was surrounded by people who were bitterly prejudiced against real godliness. Living in a court where the god of this world had blinded their minds and was in seemingly absolute control.

Sustaining moral purity amidst the disgusting immorality of heathen worship
Resisting the vicious temptations of the day
Keeping himself unspotted from the world
Maintaining honor, integrity, and responsibility

I believe that Obadiah's presence ought to be adequate encouragement to all who are trying to live for the Lord in less than ideal conditions.

Be careful about saying that your circumstances and conditions keep you from serving the Lord. That excuse only comes from a deceitful heart that would give every excuse in the world as to why you cannot serve the Lord.

There are times that you may be able to bless others simply because you are living under the strain of that place. Obadiah was able to save 100 of God's prophets' right under the nose of the murderous Jezebel.

The Challenge That Comes with Being Faithful

A challenge in the Christian life is to remain faithful no matter what comes in your direction. But God has called us to faithfulness not success.

If your goal is to change society, you will miserably fail, but if we give ourselves to simple obedience to God, our efforts literally are energized by Him. The effects reach much further than we could even begin to hope for.

Washington Gladden wrote a hymn at one of the lowest points in his life when he thought that all his service to the Lord meant very little. In the fits and throws of great discouragement, he penned this song:

O Master, let me walk with Thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me Thy secret; help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.

The hymn writer, Frances Ridley Havergal, wrote a book entitled, *Kept for the Master's Use*. In that book she wrote:

"Of ourselves we may have but little weight, no particular talents or position or anything else to put into the scale, but let us remember that again and again God has shown that the influence of a very average life, when once really consecrated to Him, may outweigh that of almost any number of merely professing Christians. Such lives are like Gideon's three hundred, carrying not even the ordinary weapons of war, but only trumpets and lamps and empty pitchers, by whom the Lord wrought great deliverance, while He did not use the others at all. For He hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty."

Obadiah meets Elijah as he is moving along in his assignment. When we compare those two men to each other, it has to come home to us that God uses all kinds and types of people to move His kingdom forward.

Do your part and serve where God has called you to be! Find out what your gift is and then work on serving others with that gift!

Elijah is the bold prophet of fire... Obadiah is the steady prophet of relief. God needed both! One of them was needed to preach and the other one was needed to preserve.

Elijah's Mandate with Destiny

1 Kings 18:15-16 (KJV)

15 And Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. **16** So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

Once Elijah listened to what Obadiah had to say, he knew that he had to go on and find the courage to face Ahab for himself.

We all must learn that there are some things God has called us to do that no one else will be able to do. When it came down to the time for it to happen, Elijah had to step forward and walk out his path to destiny.

God had more than enough prepared him for it, although Elijah apparently did not feel like that... God was going to use him like no other prophet to that point in history...