

eDevotions for Growing Christians

www.growingchristians.org

XXXVII-3 2009/2010

1 Kings 18:1-15

"¹After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land."² So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria, ³ and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of his palace. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. ⁴ While Jezebel was killing off the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.) ⁵ Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals."⁶ So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another. ⁷As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?" ⁸ "Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'" ⁹ "What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?" ¹⁰ As surely as the LORD your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. ¹¹ But now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.'" ¹² I don't know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the LORD since my youth. ¹³ Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD? I hid a hundred of the LORD's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water. ¹⁴ And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!" ¹⁵ Elijah said, "As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today."

OPINIONS OF OBADIAH

Introduction:

As you can see from the Scripture above, the man we'll be studying is not Obadiah the prophet, but Obadiah, the chief steward for wicked King Ahab of Israel. Romans 15:4 states that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." So we know, on the authority of Scripture, that there are spiritual lessons to be learned from the inspired accounts in the Old Testament, including this account of Obadiah, King Ahab's steward. But what are the lessons? Was Obadiah a "good guy" or a "bad guy"? Not every believer is of the same opinion.

Background Notes:

In the first section of 1 Kings 18, the Lord told Elijah to return to Israel to face King Ahab after three years of severe drought in Israel. Elijah had confronted wicked King Ahab three years earlier. Because of Israel's sin and disobedience to God, Elijah had prophesied, "There will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years, except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1). In Deuteronomy 28:22-23, God had promised that one of the results of disobedience to Him and His Word would be severe drought in the land: "The Lord will strike you with...scorching heat and drought...The sky over your head will be bronze and the ground beneath you iron."

After giving Ahab this message of judgment from the Lord, Elijah left Samaria, King Ahab's capital city in the northern kingdom of Israel, and went east across the Jordan River to live by the brook Cherith. There the Lord cared for him each day by sending ravens to bring him food. Eventually the brook dried up because of the drought, and Elijah moved on to Zarephath, where he lived for some time with a poor widow and her son.

In His grace, God planned to send the rains once again upon the land. This was purely

the grace of God, because in these verses we see no sign of repentance on the part of wicked King Ahab. In fact, it's apparent that Ahab was more concerned about his horses and mules than his starving people! Archaeological excavations at Megiddo indicate that Ahab had large stables and many military horses.

Upon Elijah's return to Israel, the first person he met was Obadiah, King Ahab's chief steward. Obadiah was out searching for grass for the king's horses. At first glance it seems that Obadiah was a "good guy," because the Scripture plainly declares that Obadiah was "a devout believer in the Lord" (v3). In fact, when Queen Jezebel tried to purge the land of the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah hid one hundred prophets in caves and supplied them with food and water. But on the other hand, when Obadiah greeted Elijah with, "Is that you, Elijah my master?" (v7), Elijah responded, "Yes. Go and tell your master that Elijah is here" (v8). In essence Elijah was saying, "I'm not your master, Obadiah. Your master is wicked King Ahab!" It's hard to miss the stinging rebuke! So we can readily see why there are different opinions about Obadiah.

In the spiritual picture that the Holy Spirit has given us here, a good case can be made that Obadiah represents a "partially committed" believer. In fact, we have a threefold picture of commitment in the three main characters of 1 Kings 18: Elijah, Ahab, and Obadiah. In Ahab we see no commitment, in Elijah we see full commitment, and in Obadiah we see partial commitment.

Doctrinal Point #1: God is looking for fully committed believers.

Ahab was a "nominal believer"---that is, he was a believer in name only. Like a nominal Christian today, he had no real commitment to the Lord. His "belief" in the God of Israel didn't affect his heart or his lifestyle in any way. Ahab knew about the Lord and he could even mouth the name of the Lord when it suited his purposes. However, he permitted idolatry in his kingdom, he

worshiped Baal himself and he built shrines for idol worship (1 Kings 16:31-33)! The pagan rites included "shrine" prostitution and homosexuality. Ahab allowed his wife, Jezebel, to kill the prophets of the Lord (18:4). Ahab was a weak-willed, self-centered, self-indulgent man. He cared more for his animals than for his people who were suffering during the famine. Ahab showed no repentance throughout the ordeal of drought and famine. In Ahab we see no commitment.

In Elijah we see full commitment to the Lord. Elijah courageously obeyed when the Lord told him to return to King Ahab, even though it could have cost him his life. Elijah obeyed the Lord's command to live outdoors by a brook and receive his food from scavenger birds! Elijah obeyed when he had to live in poverty in Zarephath. Elijah was fully committed. Are we? Do we obey the Lord completely? Do we boldly speak up for the Lord?

In Obadiah we see partial commitment. Why didn't Obadiah confront Ahab? How could a man who truly "feared the Lord" remain in King Ahab's service, as the steward of the palace of the wicked king and queen? Ahab had no respect for God, and he allowed idolatry to increase in the land, but Obadiah continued to serve this man. Obadiah was not forced to work in the palace, but it appears that he thought it was "too good a deal" to give up that job!

From the commentaries on 1 Kings 18, we get mixed reviews on Obadiah. Some scholars see him as a believer who was "doing the best he could in a bad situation." After all, he did risk his life to save the prophets of the Lord from Queen Jezebel. In fact, a good case could be made that Obadiah purposely stayed on the job to do what he could as a secret believer.

Other Bible students see Obadiah as a believer who should have done more. He was a believer, but he was only partially committed to the Lord. Yes, he was a "devout" believer in the God of Israel, and he did hide the prophets at the risk of his own life, and

he was one of the 7000 people who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). But he was not a fully committed believer. Nowhere in Hebrews 11 do we read, "by faith Obadiah worked for wicked King Ahab as a secret believer"! Obadiah was not a Joseph or a Daniel. Joseph served the Pharaoh and Daniel served King Nebuchadnezzar, but they were captives. Obadiah was not a captive. And Joseph and Daniel did not hide their faith, even in the midst of pagan nations.

Obadiah was similar to Jonathan, the friend of David (1 Samuel 18-20). Jonathan is to be commended for siding with David when Jonathan's father, King Saul, was pursuing David and trying to kill him. Jonathan did what he could for David, but Jonathan never joined David in his time of rejection. When David was forced "outside the camp" and had to flee for his life, Jonathan remained in the palace with King Saul.

In Obadiah we see commitment to God, but it was partial commitment. What about us? Are we only partially committed as believers?

Doctrinal Point #2: Partial commitment has telltale symptoms.

Obadiah was a secret believer. While he devoutly believed in the Lord God of Israel and even successfully hid the prophets of the Lord, he was not fully committed to the Lord. Serving in the royal courts of an apostate like Ahab, who was promoting idolatry throughout the land of Israel, was certainly not a sign of full commitment. Obadiah was not a captive. He wasn't forced to work for the wicked king and queen. And the God of the universe didn't need a compromising believer to protect His prophets!

We see several signs of Obadiah's partial commitment in this chapter. Partial commitment has certain telltale symptoms.

1. First of all, we see that Obadiah had a guilty conscience. Notice that after Elijah's greeting, Obadiah began making excuses (v9-14). He did not have a clear conscience. A guilty conscience is a telltale sign of partial commitment.

2. A second telltale symptom of partial commitment is a lack of courage. In verses 9-14 Obadiah said, "Ahab will kill me!" Obadiah repeated this fear three times! (Notice, by the way, that he didn't seem to worry about the danger to Elijah's life!) The apostle Paul was fully committed. In Philippians 1:21 he said, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Obadiah's lack of courage indicates that he was partially committed.

3. A third symptom of partial commitment is a "rest on your laurels" mentality. Obadiah reminded Elijah that he had saved the prophets of the Lord (v12-13). He seemed to think that if he recounted his record of faithful service Elijah would say, "OK, you've done enough for the Lord, Obadiah. You're off the hook. You don't have to risk your life any further!"

4. A fourth telltale symptom of partial commitment is lack of trust. Obadiah didn't trust the word of Elijah, God's prophet! Elijah told Obadiah to announce his arrival to Ahab, but Obadiah essentially replied, "How do I know you won't disappear if I go to tell Ahab you're here?" (v12). Obadiah didn't

trust the word of God's chosen spokesman, the prophet Elijah! His lack of trust in the word of his spiritual leader indicates a lack of trust in God Himself.

So here we have four telltale symptoms of partial commitment. What about us? We should examine our lives to see if we are exhibiting any of these symptoms of partial commitment. Are we fully committed to the Lord, or do we fit into the partial commitment category?

Practical Application #1: Am I a partially committed believer like Obadiah?

I'm sure you've heard the question, "If you were arrested and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Are we secret, half-hearted believers, or are we willing to let our commitment be known? Are our lives separated from entanglements in a culture that does not honor our Lord Jesus Christ? Obadiah was unwilling to risk his prominent job in Ahab's court, and he was unwilling to risk his life by confronting Ahab about his sinful lifestyle and actions.

Full commitment doesn't mean that we must all leave our jobs and become itinerant preachers or foreign missionaries like Elijah or the apostle Paul! No! Joseph and Daniel remained in their jobs, but on the job and in the pagan cultures they remained fully committed to the God of the Bible. They never compromised in their commitment to Him.

Full commitment means letting it be known that we are Christians by our lifestyle, our actions and our speech---in our jobs or careers, whatever they may be, in our social circles and our neighborhoods, and in our extended families (one of the hardest areas in which to maintain a committed Christian testimony). Are we willing to speak out against sin in our work place, in our society or in our families? Are we willing to publicly confront people who are leading our communities and nation away from God? Will we do this even though we may experience the hatred of this world, as Jesus predicted in John 15:18? Or do we keep quiet, because speaking out for God's standards may jeopardize our livelihood, or make us unpopular, or harm us financially and socially?

Some time ago I wrote a letter to the editor of TIME magazine about an article they had published on the origins of the universe. God was not mentioned in the article, not even as an option. My letter wasn't published, but at least the editor was confronted. I recall thinking that if Elijah was living and had read that article, he probably would not only have written a letter, but he would have gone to New York and burst into the editor's office to confront him! "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours" (James 5:17), but he was a fully committed believer. Are we fully committed -- or are we only partially committed believers, like Obadiah?

Practical Application #2: God will allow our commitment to Jesus Christ to be tested.

Why did Elijah meet Obadiah and ask him to announce his arrival to Ahab? Was their

meeting just a coincidence? Certainly not! This was a test of Obadiah's commitment. Elijah could have gone directly to Ahab as he did the first time, but he asked Obadiah to announce his arrival. Would Obadiah be willing to risk his life by telling King Ahab that Elijah had returned?

God will allow our commitment to Christ to be tested. James 1:2-4 and 1 Peter 1:6-7 teach us that God allows our faith to be tested so that it will be purified and strengthened. However, we can be sure that God will not allow us to be tested beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). How thankful we can be for God's grace!

Obadiah's test of commitment was in a public setting, and we may be tested in the public arena as well. Our place of employment is an obvious example, but it may be in a military setting or the university classroom or campus.

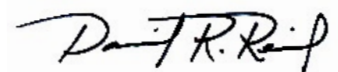
On the other hand, our commitment to the Lord may be tested in the hidden areas of our lives, such as with the literature we select at a book store or news stand, or with the websites that we choose to check out. Our commitment to the Lord will also be tested in the area of our love and faithfulness to our spouses and in our behavior with our families at home. We may be "devout" in our church attendance, our schedule of Bible study, and our outward testimony in public, and yet impatient, selfish, self-indulgent and sinful in our homes and in our private activities. Our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ will be tested, both in public and in private.

Sometimes we feel we have failed the tests of commitment that God allows to come our way. Our lifestyle does not live up to our profession. But God doesn't give up on us! He continues to help us grow in our commitment to Christ. He's the "God of the Second Chance"!

In spite of his initial lack of courage and lack of trust, Obadiah overcame the telltale signs of partial commitment and was moving in the right direction in his commitment to the Lord (v16). Obadiah reminds us of Nicodemus---a secret believer at first (John 3), but he became more open in his belief (John 7), and finally passed the test of commitment with flying colors at the time of the Lord's death and burial (John 19).

Recently I met a Christian student who is studying at a state university. Two years ago he took a course with an unbelieving professor. He wanted to share his faith, but he was intimidated by the professor and remained silent. He felt he had failed that test of commitment. But God didn't give up on him! He gained enough courage to share his faith later by giving the professor an appropriate Christian book.

Remember, for the purpose of helping us grow in our Christian faith, our commitment to Christ will be tested. May our "opinion of Obadiah" motivate us to be fully committed believers.



This essay may be forwarded or printed and freely distributed with acknowledgment.

Further Study:

If you would like information on how to purchase the set of CDs containing this teaching in audio or purchase other GCM material (books and talks on most books of the Bible), please go to our web store: www.growingchristians.org/store/talks.

This devotional essay may be forwarded or printed (without changes and with acknowledgement, please), and distributed without charge.

36 years of "Devotions for Growing Christians" (without the "News" section) have been indexed by Topic and Scripture, and are available on our website: www.growingchristians.org.

Bible Lands Study Tours:

Our March 2010 tours to Egypt / Jordan and Israel are completely booked, but we do have a waiting list in case of cancellations. Email us at gcm@growingchristians.org if you are interested. For prices and itineraries see the brochure posted on our website, www.growingchristians.org (on the main page under "Vacations for Growing Christians"). Much more than a vacation, but no tests or student papers required!

For your Information:

There is no subscription fee for "eDevotions for Growing Christians," but we greatly appreciate your financial partnership with us. Growing Christians Ministries, Inc. is a nonprofit ministry. Dave and Margie Reid do not take a salary, nor do they receive any remuneration from any area of the ministry. Contributions are fully tax deductible and are used entirely for the ministry. Receipts are mailed promptly. Contributions may be sent with your current mailing address to:

Growing Christian Ministries
PO Box 2268
Westerly, RI 02891

If you would like to make a contribution using PayPal, click on the PayPal button on the website: www.growingchristians.org. Include your mailing address to receive a receipt for IRS purposes.

New additions or requests for removal from our mailing list can be sent to the address above or to: gcm@growingchristians.org

If you're receiving this devotional letter though the mail, please help us save postage! Send your email address to us at gcm@growingchristians.org. We will not share or sell your address!

We are very thankful to the Lord for His provision, and we thank you for your gracious support of this ministry.

Feedback from the Ministry:

From Afghanistan:

"I am a US military member currently serving my fourth tour in Afghanistan. I have been in the service for 15+ years... I use your "Talks for Growing Christians" every day for my personal Bible study... Thank you!"

From Zimbabwe:

"Grace to you all. Thank you for your email...about my question on Ezekiel 37. I am an avid disciple of GCM and use it as my final authority, reference point and benchmark. You are always in my intercessory prayers. I want to introduce many people to your website..."

From Alabama:

"I am 56 years old and accepted Christ as my Savior in 2005. ...always looking for websites that can help me grow as a disciple of Christ. Struck gold when I found you. Of course, nothing happens by chance. All glory goes to God, who led me here."

From the Netherlands:

"Thank you for this site on the internet. It is a great help and encouragement for making Bible studies and sermons here in the Netherlands."

From Mayland:

"I love the site. Do you have a daily devotion page?"

From Sri Lanka:

"...as you might be aware, Sri Lanka is recovering from a civil war that has plagued our nation for over three decades. Now, God is doing a number of things to heal and rebuild this land- establishing righteousness, sufficiency, health and peaceful living... God is using your ministry to minister to many people and diverse communities..."

From the Middle East:

"I appreciate your ministry and pray that God will use your ministry for His people to mature."

Family and Ministry News:

Ministry News:

"Talks from Isaiah" and "Talks from Psalms" are now complete and will soon be online and available for ordering in their entirety. It took a long time to record and edit these Talks because of the size of the books!

Our Vacations for Growing Christians Bible Lands tours to Egypt, Jordan and Israel are approaching quickly. Lord willing, we will be departing on March 12 and returning on March 27. The tours are fully booked, and we are looking forward to a great time of learning and fellowship! We would appreciate your prayers that we would all learn and grow in the Word and in our experience with the Lord, and for good health and traveling safety.

Family News:

In December: Once again we enjoyed three great family Christmases. Our first celebration was in Rhode Island with Ron, Erica, Jon and David on the Sunday before Christmas. The boys received a Wii system, so there was a lot of Mario Kart racing excitement! We drove to New Jersey in time for the Christmas Eve service at their church with Catherine, Kirk, Callie and Connor. After a very festive, gift-filled Christmas in New Jersey we drove west for Christmas in Illinois with David, Kari, Ingrid and Kirsten. We encountered snow on the way there and snow on the way back, but we had a great time in between, including a concert in their home on New Year's Eve, with Ingrid and Kirsten playing their cellos and Kari playing violin and piano. Dave and David also got to try a new sport --land sailing. It's similar to a dune buggy (without a motor) that is propelled by a windsurfing sail. It's fast and exciting!

Thanks to all of you who sent us cards, letters and pictures at Christmas. We appreciate and enjoy keeping in touch with you, hearing the news of your busy lives, your growing families, and your various areas of service.

In January: Our grandson David celebrated his 7th birthday. He has two missing front teeth, with a third one ready to fall out any day (good thing it's not corn on the cob season!)

Also in January: we're thankful that a repeat endoscopy revealed that the ulcers in Margie's stomach (discovered last October) have healed well. Thank you for praying for her!

In February: Dave is looking forward to teaching for a week at Jackson Hole Bible College in Wyoming, a one year evangelical Bible school. He intends to bring his skis!

Also in February: Dave will be teaching from the book of Nehemiah at the "Golf and Grow II" retreat in South Carolina, hosted by his brother, Paul, and our son Ron. All the men are looking forward to another great time of golf and fellowship -- and hoping for good weather!

It's hard for us to believe that our granddaughter Callie will graduate from high school in June! She has been accepted at six universities, so she has a big decision to make in the next couple of months. She plans to study Interior Design.