

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 12

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

CHAPTER 18

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, Elijah delivered the warning that there would be a severe drought in the land of Israel to King Ahab. After that, God sent him to the brook Cherith (Kerith) and from there to Zarephath where he helped a widow and her only son. It was three years later that Elijah returned to meet with Ahab again. Chapter 18 records an important event in the history of Israel. The issue was: Who is the true and living God – Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or the Baalim in the land? The sin of the hyphenation of Baal and Yahweh worship is clearly taught here. The stake was very high because it concerned not only man's life on earth but also his eternal destiny. Since the dawn of time, the world had rarely enjoyed long periods of peace because man had continually rejected his Creator God and turned to idols.

God used many great prophets at crucial periods in the history of the Jews. He used Moses to confront the Pharaoh of Egypt and deliver His people out of oppression; David to

defeat Goliath and to free the Israelites from the tyranny of the Philistines; and here He used Elijah to warn the apostate King Ahab to lead Israel back to worship Him.

OUTLINE

1. The effects of the drought in Israel (vv.1-6); 2),
2. The encounter between Obadiah and Elijah (vv. 7-16);
3. The spiritual battle on Mount Carmel (vv.17-40);
- 4) Elijah's prayer for rain (vv.41-46).

COMMENTARY

Israel in Bad Shape – 18:1-6

The severe drought in Israel had its toll on the land and its people. It was "sore in Samaria". For more than three years, there was no rain. King Ahab got his chief servant Obadiah to search the land for grass to save his horses and mules. In those days, it was not beneath the king or any leader to go on such an expedition to look for fodder. Ahab seemed more concerned for his animals than his people. In the meantime, Jezebel was on a campaign to cut off the prophets of the LORD (YAHWEH) and to eliminate the worship of the God of Israel. The economic, agricultural and religious situation in Israel was not good.

In the midst of Jezebel's persecution of the prophets, we are introduced to Obadiah whose name

means “servant of the LORD”.¹ He should not be confused with the minor prophet of the same name. Obadiah, was a God-fearing man who faithfully served the LORD. He did not worship Baal but kept himself pure and separated from any idolatrous practice. The fact that he lived in Ahab’s house under the nose of Jezebel and still managed to maintain his religious conviction to the true faith attested to his integrity and courage. He hid 100 prophets and provided them with food and drink from his master’s kitchen. He protected them from Jezebel who sought to slay and eradicate the worship of the LORD. These hideouts were likely in the region of Mount Carmel where there were no less than 2000 caves. Bible scholars described Obadiah as “a good man in a bad place”.

Obadiah Met Elijah – 18:7-16

In his search for fodder for Ahab’s animals; Obadiah met Elijah. He recognised the great prophet immediately and unhesitatingly paid the customary obeisance to him. Elijah told Obadiah to inform Ahab of his presence. Obadiah openly admitted that he feared that it might endanger his own life. He explained that Ahab had been searching everywhere for Elijah. All nations that reported that Elijah was not in their midst, were required to take an oath. Obadiah said that if he were to lead Ahab to the meeting and Elijah should disappear, Ahab would surely slay him. That would leave the young

prophets under his care in jeopardy because they depended on him for sustenance (18:13, 14). This was the import of Obadiah’s argument.

On hearing this, Elijah swore in the name of the LORD – “As the LORD of hosts liveth before whom I stand” – that he would surely show up at the meeting with Ahab. Obadiah then did as requested by Elijah.

Obadiah was a courageous and obedient prophet but not a foolish one. He was right to express his concerns to Elijah. If Elijah had “played” him out, he would surely be killed. He had protected 100 of God’s prophets from wicked Jezebel. This confirmed his faithfulness to the LORD whom both of them obviously served. Elijah promised him that he will meet up with Ahab and not run away to hide. Ahab came and Elijah met him. This act of Obadiah by “finding” Elijah for Ahab would go down well in securing Obadiah’s hidden identity from being found out by Ahab.

The Spiritual Warfare on Mount Carmel – 18:17- 40

Ahab met Elijah. They started hurling accusations at one another. Ahab charged Elijah for bringing the trouble into Israel. Obviously he was referring to the drought and famine in the land. Ahab failed to see that the suffering was the LORD’S rod of chastisement – a warning that they should go back to God. In those days, the people believed that soothsayers and prophets possessed supernatural powers to create such calamities. Elijah pointed out that the real cause of the trouble was Ahab and his father

¹ The Arabic equivalent is “Abdullah.”

who had forsaken the LORD and had turned to Baalim.

Elijah proposed a plan that would once and for all settle the question of whether the LORD (YAHWEH) or Baal was the true God. The plan was to assemble all the 450 prophets of Baal and an additional 400 prophets of Asherah, who were supported by Jezebel on Mount Carmel. The name "Carmel" means "the garden land". It consisted of a long range of mountains which ran northwest to southeast from the Mediterranean Sea to the inland plains of Esdraelon (the Greek form of the Hebrew "Jezreel"). The top was almost a plateau and its highest point was about 1,730 feet above sea level. This was a suitable place for the contest. Each party would offer a bullock, which would be cut into pieces and placed on an altar. The outcome would be decided by fire -- the parties would call on their god/God to consume the sacrifices and the God that answered by fire would be the true God. All the people who heard of the plan approved of it. Elijah made sure that the prophets of Baal were given every chance to do what they wished, so that there would not be a shadow of doubt as to the revelation of the identity of the true God. He allowed them to choose their own bullock and to dress it in whatever way they desired except putting fire under it.

Elijah was very confident that the plan would reveal the true God. The prophets of Baal called on their gods from morning till midday. There was no voice, no answer and no fire.

They then jumped and danced. Elijah taunted them mockingly: "Cry out louder, he is a god after all, maybe he is talking or busy or travelling, or asleep and must be awakened". The prophets cried out louder. They even lacerated themselves till they bled but it was of no use. There was still no voice, no answer and no fire. It was almost evening when Elijah called the people to draw near to him. There was a broken altar. Elijah took 12 stones to repair it. The number 12 was full of significance. They projected thoughts of the: 1) giving of the Law by Moses (Exodus 24:4); 2) entrance of their forefathers into the Promised Land which they were standing on [Joshua 4:3]; and 3) number of tribes of Jacob.² Elijah placed the wood on the altar and the pieces of bullock on the wood. Then he had the altar, wood and the meat soaked with water not just once but three times. The intention was to make it more difficult for the altar to catch fire. He also had a trench dug around the altar into which the water from the altar could flow.

² Exodus 24:4 And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joshua 4:3 And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night.

Genesis 32:28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

Elijah prayed and asked “the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel” to exalt Himself as the God of Israel and to vindicate him as His servant. He called on the LORD (YAHWEH) to hear so that the people might know that He was the LORD God, and “hast turned their heart back again” (19:36, 37). Elijah prayed as if the miracle had already been done and the people had already repented! It tells us that Elijah prayed believing. The moment he stopped praying, “the fire of the LORD” shone like a laser-beam and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust and the water in the trench! Everything was completely burnt! When the people saw it, they fell prostrate on their faces and cried out: “The LORD, he *is* the God; the LORD, he *is* the God” (18:39b). At that moment, Elijah called on the people to seize the prophets of Baal and let none escape. He then led them down to the brook Kishon where he slew the false prophets. The Kishon flowed into the land of the Phoenicians, Jezebel’s own homeland, where Baal was extensively worshipped.

The Effectual Prayer of a Righteous Man – 18:41-46

Elijah then instructed Ahab to get up, and to eat and drink. Ahab too must have prostrated himself on the ground. Elijah intimated that the rain would come soon. Ahab got up, ate and drank to the good news. Water that would irrigate the land and bring forth bread from the land was a matter of life and death. Elijah climbed back up to the top of the mountain. He knelt

down on the ground and bent himself, cupping his face between his knees. This posture suggested that he prayed earnestly and fervently for the drought to end and the rain to come as God had promised. The rain did not come at once. On seven occasions, he asked his servant to climb to the highest point of the mountain and looked towards the sea for any sign of rain. Finally, the servant reported that there was some sign of the coming rain.

Elijah instructed Ahab to ride his chariot back to Jezreel to escape the rain. Then we see the hand of the LORD on Elijah as he girded his loins and ran, overtaking Ahab’s chariot to Jezreel. The LORD gave Elijah renewed strength to outrun Ahab’s chariot.

PRACTICAL VALUE

This chapter is rich with many precious spiritual lessons. Elijah did not leave Zarephath until the LORD directed him to return to Israel and present himself to King Ahab. The LORD promised to end the drought and to send rain. As children of God, we should always wait upon the LORD in making choices in life – for example, moving house, migrating to another country, changing jobs and choosing life-partners. We should walk close to the LORD so that we can discern His prompting. Nothing can be more assuring than to know that one’s life is in the will of the LORD.

OBADIAH is an example of how a God-fearing person should live in the

midst of a rotten society. He was firm and his religious zeal did not prevent him from retaining his position of honour and dignity in the royal court. Some might argue that he should resign from his job as a form of protest. That is an alternative but it is also acceptable to stay on and be like Obadiah in bearing a good witness without compromise. Christ sends us into an imperfect world to be the salt and the light of the world. And our Christ-like courage can send a soothing balm to a sour situation. We are reminded of the words of Proverbs 16:7 *When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*

When bad things happen, it is important that we first examine ourselves to see whether we brought the trouble upon ourselves. We should search the Scriptures and prayerfully ask God for His guidance. The less we accuse and blame others, the faster differences can be amicably resolved. Ahab was quick to blame Elijah for delivering the message of the drought. Despite Elijah's explanation, he did not admit that he himself had been the cause of the drought – the fact that he had forsaken the LORD and had led the people to worship Baal.

The main thrust of the chapter was the battle between Elijah and the prophets of Baal and Asheroth. The point of the battle was not about the power of God versus those of Baal and Asheroth. After all, Baalim and Asheroth were mere idols. The Psalmist aptly described such idols (115:4-8): *Their idols are silver and*

gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

The false prophets called upon their gods but there was no voice, no answer, and no response. Our LORD (YAHWEH) is the ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD! When the Thessalonians heard Paul preaching the gospel of Christ, they believed and turned away from worshipping idols to the living and true God! The Scripture tells us that God is concerned over the affairs of men and is committed to keeping His covenants. Thus we should be strong and confident in doing His will.

Should Elijah slay all the false prophets of Baal? Some might quote Scriptures that clearly demand the death penalty for those who worship and serve gods other than the LORD God (Exodus 22:20; Deuteronomy 17:2-7). Elijah did it because he was consumed with the zeal for God. On the other hand, some might argue that these judgements should only apply to the Israelites who had the Law. The penalty of death would therefore be appropriately applied. The heathens however did not have the Law -- though this did not excuse them from their sin. They would be judged by God in His time. Along this same argument, they should be won over to the Lord Jesus Christ, instead of being

slain. Nevertheless, Elijah was not chided for killing all the false prophets who led the people to sin and to a lost eternity in Hell. They were not heathens worshipping in a heathen land but heathens worshipping in the Land of Promise. They had the Word of God as their guide but had rejected it. God sent Elijah to rebuke them but they also ignored him. They were killed according to God's righteous judgement for the great sin that they had brought to Israel.

We can learn some basic principles of effectual prayer from Elijah. First of all, prayer should be earnest and fervent. Elijah's posture exemplified these qualities. Very often, our prayers are perfunctory, lacking in passion and faith.

The second principle we can draw is that Elijah prayed with all his heart and mind although God promised that he would send the rain (18:1). God requires that we pray for the very promises that He has made. In other words, if we do not pray for His promises, we will not get them. And we can know what His promises are by reading and digesting His Word! Many times, our prayers are not answered because we pray amiss. In short, we pray and do not get because we do not ask, and when we ask, we do not get because we ask amiss.

The third principle is that Elijah prayed for rain in accordance with God's will. Do not pray for our own will but the Father's will to be accomplished in our lives and the lives of our loved ones.

Finally, we cannot worship the LORD our God and at the same time worship other "gods". These idols can be anything or any person whom we fear or whom we are beholden to. We have to take a stand. There should be no neutrality. The word neutrality comes from two root words, "ne" and "uter", meaning "not either". In many spheres, neutrality has been exalted as a virtue. Open-mindedness, suspended judgements, and "I-am-not-sure" attitude (agnosticism) are often honoured as sophisticated or laudable. But in matters of faith, neutrality is a sin. Jesus says it very plainly (Matthew 6:24) *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 1 Kings 18:1-6; Proverbs 16:7; John 17:14-18.

TUESDAY: 1 Kings 18:7-16; 1 Corinthians 4:1-7; Romans 12:3.

WEDNESDAY: 1 Kings 18:17-29; Psalm 115:4-14.

THURSDAY: 1 Kings 18:30-40; Matthew 6:24; John 4:48-53.

FRIDAY: 1 Kings 18:41-46; James 5:15-18; Mark 11:22-24.

Discussion Questions

1. How should believers today respond to calamities such as the drought? Can we say for certain that they are sent by God to punish?

2. What adjective best describes Obadiah? Do we need Obadiahs in our church today? Why?

3. Both Elijah and Obadiah faithfully served God. Contrast the way in which they served the LORD.

4. What can we learn from Elijah's response to Ahab's accusation that he was a trouble-maker (18:17)?

5. At Mount Carmel, what did Elijah do to prove without a shadow of doubt that the LORD (YAHWEH) is God?

6. What was the point of the contest on Mount Carmel? Was it about power, logic or doctrine?

7. Was Elijah over-reacting when he killed all the prophets of Baal? Why or why not?

8. What can we learn from the fact that Elijah prayed to God for rain?

9. In your opinion, what is the most effective way of convincing people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ – logical arguments, emotional appeals or miraculous power?
