

Bible Workshop: Readers' comments

Regarding Brother Vincent's question on John 7:17 as to whether Jesus means "that you come to know the truth of something by experiencing and doing it" (Dec. 2004, p. 454), the RSV translates this verse rather more clearly than the AV as: "if any man's will is to do His will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority". A person who really wanted to do the will of God

would be able to judge whether Jesus's doctrine was in line with it because he or she would have made efforts to find out God's will by study of the Scriptures. Can we get to know that what people say is true just by "experiencing and doing" it? Surely, only by comparing people's teachings against what God has already revealed can we be certain that they speak the truth. As we know so well, the Bereans were commended in the Acts of the Apostles because they "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things [that Paul and his companions preached] were so" (17:11).

Mary Benson

Lessons from the life of Elijah

7. "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab" (1 Kgs. 18:1-4)

Stephen Whitehouse

In this series we now move to the next phase in Elijah's ministry, as he leaves Zarephath behind and goes to confront Ahab. In this article we meet Obadiah, Ahab's God-fearing steward, who cared for a hundred prophets of God, sheltering them from the wrath of the persecuting Queen Jezebel.

1 KINGS 17 is exclusively occupied with Elijah's enforced absence from the Land of Israel, during which the northern kingdom suffered from the most acute effects of the severe drought which God had brought upon the Land. The months and years passed by and neither dew nor rain fell; the heavens remained as brass and the earth iron. Yet amid such dire circumstances, though the land was barren and scorched, in the spiritual sense some seed "fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold" (Lk. 8:8).

Elijah's fruitful time with the widow and her household had now come to an end. She had become an adopted daughter of the God of Israel, and now the Almighty desired His faithful prophet to commence his next phase of spiritual development. The nation of Israel was now ripe for his return, and Elijah ready for his reappearance onto the stormy stage of public life.

In 1 Kings 18 we find one of the most dramatic episodes in the life of Elijah, indeed in the

whole of the Old Testament record, for the scene is now set for Elijah, before many witnesses, to confront King Ahab, behind whom stands Queen Jezebel, the wicked woman who "cut off the prophets of the LORD" (v. 4).

"After many days"

Chapter 18 commences with the modest, yet mightily profound, words: "And it came to pass after many days . . ." (1 Kgs. 18:1). Thus the predetermined timing of God had been fulfilled; His appointed hour had finally arrived.

Let us all learn an important lesson by attending closely to the expression of the Spirit. Elijah numbered his life by days and we should all do likewise, taking "therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself" (Mt. 6:34). Happy therefore are those whose constant prayer is, "teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).

The Spirit records: "the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year" (1 Kgs. 18:1). Since the period of drought was three-and-a-half years (Lk. 4:25; Jas. 5:17), it is highly probable that the prophet dwelt one year at Cherith and two years at Zarephath, and now, at the end of the third year, he returned back to Israel.

Have we ever pondered what this waiting must have been like for the prophet of Gilead? For a man brimming with fervour for his God

and compassion for his people, this prolonged inactivity, absent from the nation, must have proved a great and testing trial. Surely it would have been far more beneficial for him to continue to succour and support his fellow countrymen in their time of distress. But instead he was Divinely commanded to sojourn with a lowly widow, even a Gentile, to bring her into covenant relationship with God.

“Go, shew thyself unto Ahab”

The Word of God came to Elijah and commanded him, “Go, shew thyself unto Ahab” (1 Kgs. 18:1). To flesh and blood this command would have seemed most alien, to appear before a tyrant who was armed with dictatorial power and whose own personal enmity for him overflowed with anger and prejudice.

Contrast God’s command, “shew thyself” (v. 1), with His previous command, “hide thyself” (17:3). God wanted Elijah to reveal himself physically to Ahab in order for the monarch to inspect him and recognise that he surely came in the Name of the true God of Israel. By observing Elijah, the king would discern that he had not been ravaged by the drought, unlike all his courtiers and subjects, but rather had been well fed and watered during this severe period, nourished by the Divine hand.

So, as was the usual practice of the prophet, he faithfully responded and “went to shew himself unto Ahab” (v. 2). Commissioned by God to take an arduous path of faith, a route that would ultimately lead him to Ahab, he pressed forward, buoyed high by the Divine promise.

“A sore famine in Samaria”

Elijah had fared well these many days, but how were things faring with Ahab and his kingdom? All was not well, for they suffered terribly from the extreme effects of “a sore famine” (v. 2). Indeed, a mighty famine had taken hold of the land; the terrain had choked, then perished, under the constant and unrelenting strain of the Divine yoke.

Yet throughout this distressing episode, where was the focus of God’s wrath, the very kernel of His sore displeasure? It was in Samaria (v. 2), the territory of the wicked king, his murderous wife and their indoctrinated subjects. Significantly, Samaria means ‘watch-mountain’ or ‘watchtower’, and surely this name should have reminded the children of Israel of the need to watch and wait patiently in faith.

Thus the children of Israel should have acted as watchmen. They should have been thoroughly surveying all around them in order to “discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not” (Mal. 3:18). During this time of anxiety and distress the Father desired them to observe, figuratively, from the lofty towers of Samaria, to warn their fellow brethren of any impending natural or spiritual danger they surveyed (Hab. 2:1).

Yet instead “they all slumbered and slept” (Mt. 25:5) and failed to detect the rapidly approaching “sword” of drought, nor did they “blow . . . the trumpet” to warn of looming judgement (Ezek. 33:6). The Divine blade soon arrived and devoured the kingdom, leaving just waste in its wake. Therefore, applying these lessons to ourselves, let us not fail in our individual spiritual duties, for we have each been “set [as] a watchman unto the house of Israel” (v. 7). So let us then be occupied in the “patient waiting for Christ” (2 Thess. 3:5), “and so much the more, as [we] see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

Obadiah, the governor of the house

We are now introduced to the wretched sovereign ruler, King Ahab, and a God-fearing man, Obadiah, in order that the Spirit might develop a powerful contrast between these two disparate individuals. Obadiah’s name means ‘the servant of Yahweh’, yet he was also “the governor of [Ahab’s] house” (1 Kgs. 18:3). The margin further reinforces his royal responsibilities: “over his house”. This is a wonderful testimony to the integrity of this man Obadiah—governor over the entire household of Ahab, yet he still remained a true servant of God.

On numerous occasions, God’s servants have been well favoured by heathen masters. Was not this true of Joseph, David, Daniel, Esther, Mordecai and Nehemiah? All these enjoyed prominent positions in heathen courts, yet never compromised their faith, nor ever violated the principles they so dearly held. As the governor of Ahab’s household, Obadiah had been Divinely placed, appointed to provide a hand of influence in the affairs of the kingdom, but was undoubtedly in a most difficult and precarious situation.

As Obadiah is considered, let it be remembered that on occasions we can so easily assert that our own personal situation and individual circumstances prevent us from diligently serv-

ing our God. We can at times work hard in justifying our lack of commitment to His work, or our general apathy in supporting those “things which are . . . eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). But, in stark contrast to such an attitude and spirit, this man Obadiah never allowed his elevated position, or his individual circumstances, to stand in the way of serving his God.

“Obadiah feared the LORD greatly”

Quietly observe this man’s character: Obadiah “feared [yare’] the LORD” (1 Kgs. 18:3). The Hebrew verb *yare’* speaks of a reverent or godly fear. He was confident that the great Creator is “a consuming fire, even a jealous God” (Deut. 4:24; cf. 9:3; Heb. 12:29), but also appreciated that He had “set His love upon [him]” (Deut. 7:7), that indeed “love is of God” (1 Jno. 4:7), and He was his very sure refuge and fortress, the One Whom he could always trust (Ps. 91:2).

The fact that he “feared” his God is a hallmark of Obadiah’s spirituality, since this term is also used to describe other great men of faith, such as Abraham. When on Mount Moriah with Isaac, about to smite his son, Abraham was stayed by an angel of God: “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou *fearest* God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me” (Gen. 22:12). It was this godly reverential fear which both Job (Job 1:1,8) and Joseph (Gen. 42:18) also possessed, besides Hezekiah (Jer. 26:19) and Jonah (Jon. 1:9).

Note that Obadiah did not merely fear his God, but he did so “greatly” (1 Kgs. 18:3). He had a great love and godly fear for his Creator, and this feeling overflowed from his heart. This was a man who had God at the core of his being, who had feared the LORD from his youth (v. 12). His godly reverential fear is quantified, for it was ‘great’, it was also from his “youth”, borne over a significant period of time. How marvelous are the spiritual qualities of this man from Ahab’s court!

Surely we should all be developing a similar disposition within ourselves, for those who have “feared the LORD” will be acknowledged as His “in that day when [He] make[s] up [His] jewels” (Mal. 3:16,17), the innumerable saints in the Kingdom of God.

“Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD”

Though Ahab placed such a God-fearing man in his own court, the king’s heart still solely be-

longed to his wife, the treacherous woman Jezebel, the queen of Israel. Be assured that she had taken full reign of his heart and was the exclusive possessor of the workings of his mind and intellect. This woman was a spiritual scourge in the land, a cancer with no cure, and only the surgical hand of the Divine Judge could alleviate this alarming condition.

So evil was this woman that she “cut off the prophets of the LORD” (1 Kgs. 18:4). This is the first mention of God’s saints suffering from the persecuting hand of a civil authority. Jezebel became a type of the false spirit that took hold of the early ecclesial community many years later, as Christ himself testified regarding the ecclesia in Thyatira: “I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel” (Rev. 2:20). This whorish influence would later mature and become “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH”, a woman “drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (17:5,6; cf. 18:24).

Jezebel was thus a persecutor besides an idolater, and she influenced her husband in her wicked and deceitful ways. How apt it is, then, that the phrase “cut off” is also used of the ‘cutting of a covenant’! Jezebel, with her Phoenician religion, in an act of total dedication to Baal (1 Kgs. 18:18), vanquished these holy prophets of God, as it were, as sacrifices, dedicated to her false deity. But let us rest assured that vengeance is the Lord’s (Rom. 12:19); and so, though Jezebel had cut off God’s righteous prophets, it was God Who, in response, had cut off the rain from heaven, bringing sore and just judgement upon the Land.

A remnant still remained

Even during these spiritual dark times, when the two golden calves were worshipped at Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs. 12:28,29), and the Levites had emigrated to Judah (2 Chron. 11:13-16), there still remained a few faithful servants in the northern kingdom. It was these faithful few that Jezebel aimed to “cut off” (1 Kgs. 18:4).

The handful that escaped the sword were forced to live as fugitives, hiding themselves in caves where they were effectively “cut off” in another sense, not from life itself but from their spiritual calling and duty. Though they may well be numbered amongst the faithful who “wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” and “obtained a good

report though faith" (Heb. 11:38,39), nevertheless, figuratively, they had been slaughtered by the sword of doctrinal corruption, silenced from speaking God's Word in the Land, and entirely hidden from view, as if without trace.

Obadiah not only hid his fellow brethren, but also cared for them, tending to their natural and pressing needs, and placing them before himself (Phil. 2:3). Like Christ, he was totally responsive to the "feeling of [their] infirmities" (Heb. 4:15) and fed "his flock like a shepherd" (Isa. 40:11), for he "fed them with bread and water" (1 Kgs. 18:4).

These hundred prophets, though preserved by the special providence of God, were nonetheless maintained through much human intervention and effort. Such an undertaking would have required great resourcefulness, remarkable skill and ingenuity. Here we observe the practical teachings of Christ in the undertakings of this faithful servant: "be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Mt. 10:16).

Caring for the brethren

What a powerful illustration we have here of the spirit of Christ! For it was the Lord Jesus himself who said that the faithful, those who will receive

the joyous news at the judgement seat, will be those who have actually fed, watered, housed, clothed and visited his brethren down the ages (Mt. 25:34-40).

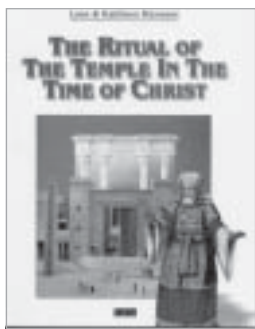
Obadiah had done just that; he had housed, fed and watered his brethren and had performed all this as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (Rom. 12:1). He had executed such a fearful task with "a willing heart" (Ex. 35:5), spontaneously, without any hesitation, knowing that he was not to use "liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

This is the spirit of Christ, that "by love [we] serve one another". What a sobering exhortation, particularly when we consider the level of hospitality we extend to our brethren and sisters compared with that which we have been called upon to provide. We are not only to be "given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2) but also to be "lover[s] of hospitality" (Tit. 1:8), and to perform such "without grudging" (1 Pet. 4:9). What kind of welcome, or level of generosity and kindness, do we ourselves shower upon our brethren? As so often is the case, are we merely left digesting yet another poignant lesson from the life of one of God's faithful servants?

[\(To be continued\)](#)

The temple worship in the time of Christ

John Nicholls



The Ritual of the Temple in the Time of Christ.

Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer, Carta, Jerusalem, 2002, 80 large pages.

Available from The Christadelphian.*

Price: £12.50 plus postage.

BROTHER LEEN and Sister Kathleen Ritmeyer have written a companion volume to the book about the journeys of the ark, reviewed last month.¹ This one, about the ritual of the temple in the time of Christ, centres around two models and a nineteenth-century book.

The first model is a scale model of the Temple Mount and all its buildings, and it was formerly located in a farmer's barn in East Anglia.² It has been painstakingly built by Mr Alec Garrard, and includes figures all made to scale and painted. The reviewer and his wife and two of their sons were privileged to be able to see it in 1996. The book is dominated by many colour photographs and close-ups of scenes from the model, taken by Brother Philip Evans. The second model is of the temple itself. (The authors were involved in the archaeological excavations

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1. "Following the travels of the ark", Dec. 2004, p. 467.
2. In recent years it has been relocated elsewhere in East Anglia, where I know not. If any reader knows the precise location I will publish the details.—T.B.