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COURAGEOUS AND TIMID SERVANTS OF GOD.

– *I KINGS 18:1-16.* – *AUGUST 14.* –

"I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth."

IN the third year of Elijah's sojourn at Zarephath – the fourth year without rain – really three and a half years after Elijah's pronouncement to King Ahab (Luke 4:25; James 5:17) – the Lord sent his Prophet back into the land of Israel to Ahab. A less courageous man than Elijah might have hesitated, for he doubtless had knowledge of the fact that the king had instituted a search for him in every direction, probably with the intention of securing his revocation respecting the cessation of rain – of having him break the spell upon the weather and bringing rain – or to put him to death in the event he did not do so, or both. Elijah seems to have been a most courageous servant of the Lord in executing whatever commands he received from the great King, and in the present instance he would be encouraged with the thought that his mission to Ahab would be a most acceptable one, since the Lord had assured him that the due time had come for the sending of rain. Doubtless the Prophet, too, as a lover of humanity and particularly of his nation, would have both a humane and appropriate sentiment that he would be pleased to serve in such a manner.

The famine, which was over all the land of Israel, was [R3401 : page 221] keenly felt at the capital city, Samaria. The king was finally aroused to an appreciation of the fact that something must be done or soon all the cattle would die of thirst. Apparently he was more solicitous for his beasts than for the poor of the people. The dying of his herds and the dying of his horses and mules would impair his power and dignity as a king as well as his wealth. Hence the proposition to seek for springs or brooks not yet dried up, where water could be found for the king's beasts. He sent the chief servant of his palace, one in whom he had absolute confidence, in one direction,

while he himself, probably with a good retinue of servants, etc., went in another direction.

OBADIAH, THE TIMID SERVANT.

Obadiah, who was intrusted with this service, we are informed, was a true worshiper of the Lord – not only so, but one who at the risk of his own life had protected the lives of a hundred of the prophets of the Lord on an occasion when the Queen, Jezebel, had ordered the slaughter of all such. Obadiah, therefore, should be reckoned not only as a true and noble, but also as a courageous servant of God in some respects, and yet we note a wide difference between his disposition and courage and that of Elijah. That he maintained his position in the king's family not only implies that his loyalty to the Lord made him a trusted and useful man in the king's service, but it implies also that in a household so given up to idolatry, he must have in large measure put his light under a bushel and avoided the advocacy of the Truth, else he never would have been acceptable and retained his position. We may be sure that the king, and specially the queen, never knew that their chief servant had negated the commanded death of one hundred prophets.

Comparing the characters of these two servants of the Lord, Elijah and Obadiah, we can find items to commend in both, but especially in Elijah. It is not for us to condemn Obadiah, and, indeed, we have no doubt that the Lord gave him in his life-time a blessing or reward for his service to his cause, and that he will give him a still further blessing and reward in the future. But if we would have before our minds the proper example to be followed, the proper courage to be exercised, our pattern would be Elijah, whose loyalty to God was so thoroughly attested on every possible occasion. There are Christians of both of these types today, but Elijah stands for or represents the little flock with whom the Lord is specially pleased and who will with the Redeemer constitute the Kingdom class by and by. We rejoice also with the believers, the partially consecrated ones, represented by

Obadiah, yet we could sincerely wish for them the blessing of greater zeal in the Lord's service – less care for the friendship of those who are God's enemies and greater boldness in the advocacy of the Lord's cause and in proclaiming themselves in every proper manner his servants. We fear for such that being ashamed of the Lord to some extent, preferring advantages as respects the present life – to be in a prominent position, in good society, and surrounded by luxury maintained at the expense of a failure to properly confess the Lord – will mean to such eventually the loss of the great prize for which we are called to run in this present life. As already intimated, our expectation would be that such a class would eventually get a blessing from the Lord and a good position; but such a class surely, unless they turn about and become more courageous, will lose the great prize for which we have been called to run – joint-heirship with God's dear Son in the Kingdom.

ELIJAH, THE COURAGEOUS.

While en route in quest of the springs, etc., Obadiah met Elijah and at once recognized him as the special servant of the Lord and prostrated himself at his feet, saying, "Is it thou, my lord, Elijah?" and he answered, "It is I. Go tell thy lord Ahab that I am here." Immediately Obadiah's fear and caution came upon him as he thought of how Ahab would be anxious to find Elijah, and he surmised that Elijah would in some manner disappear during his absence and that in consequence the king's anger would be against his servant Obadiah, believing that he had deceived him in the matter or because he had not insisted on bringing Elijah as a captive to the king, knowing that he was searching for him. He feared that Elijah was thus inclined to do him injury, and related to the prophet that he was a servant of the true God and not an idolater, and that he had protected one hundred young men of the school of the prophets, delivering them from death because of reverence for the Lord. Elijah assured him that this was not his intention, and that he would without question meet Ahab. His word was believed and the meeting of the king and the Prophet resulted.

When the king arrived where Elijah was he saluted the latter in a bold manner, implying that all the trouble that had come upon the nation was properly chargeable to him, and that he should feel guilty of it. The king ignored the Lord's hand in the matter and ignored his own responsibility. He was a very different type of man from either of the others discussed in this lesson. Elijah was courageous for the Lord and for the Truth; Obadiah was less courageous and in some respects weak-kneed – lacking many of the qualities approved of the Lord; but Ahab was bold and defiant of the Lord and his Prophet, and after all the experiences through which himself and his nation had passed for three and a half years, his salutation to Elijah was, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Elijah met him on his own ground exactly and replied, No, it was the king who troubled Israel through the institution of idolatry. The king's boldness appears to have wilted in the presence of the Prophet's lance-like thrust of the Truth, and the latter, assuming the place of command as the Lord's representative, ordered the gathering of the chiefest of the people of Israel from every quarter and with them all of the prophets of Baal, to meet at Mount Carmel. This evidently was a challenge as between the forces of Baal, represented [R3402 : page 222] by the king and government and all the heads of the ten tribes and all the prophets of Baal, and the one Prophet representing Jehovah.

Evidently King Ahab was considerably humbled by the experiences through which he had passed, and was now hopeful that at last the difficulties were to reach a conclusion. Doubtless the Prophet had told him that this was his mission, to bring blessings and refreshment through rain. At all events, there seems to have been no parley on the king's part, but a prompt compliance with the Prophet's demands.

The principal lesson we see in this narrative is that of character and positiveness on the part of those who profess to be the Lord's people. It is not sufficient that we should not sympathize with Ahab's course of violence and opposition to the Lord and subserviency to his

wife Jezebel, the head and leader of the idolatrous worship. It is not sufficient for us, either, to copy after Obadiah's course and to serve and fear the Lord in secret, even though in secret also we strive to do good to some of the Lord's people. Obadiah's course is very much more honorable than that of Ahab, but still it is not sufficient. We all want to copy the general courage and loyalty of Elijah, and in a subsequent lesson we shall see that he is particularly a type of all the Lord's favored ones of this Gospel age.

