

File No. 73

## I KINGS 18:1–46

### OBEDIAH / ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

(SBS Bk 3 Story Nos. 9 & 10)

*Story Notes*

#### Background Information

*God had been caring for Elijah, during the time of no rain, in Zarephath (Phoneciah).*

#### Main Lesson

Back in Israel, Obadiah's service to God in caring for 100 prophets and his concern at getting caught between Elijah and Ahab are in marked contrast to the bombast of Ahab and his feeding of 950 false prophets. Years of drought had not made him doubt his wicked policies. He thought Elijah was the problem and set out to eliminate him. He had not reckoned on the God who lives and before whom Elijah stood. Obadiah was wonderfully sensitive to God and his servants.

But not even Ahab could argue with the man who had stopped it raining for 3 years. Only by Elijah could the rain be restored. So Israel and their false religious leaders were summoned. The nation was not yet totally apostate but, as Elijah said, had been limping between two opinions. Even now, with Ahab watching, the people would not choose between the Lord and Baal, but preferred to let the Lord prove himself.

Baal's prophets could draw blood but light no fires. Their antics, scorned by Elijah, emphasise the futility of religion that does not arise from the word of the living God of grace. Elijah repaired an ancient altar to the Lord and made it for all Israel. Then he drenched the offering with water to demonstrate that no human intervention was necessary in what was about to happen. Elijah waited until the evening sacrifice was being offered (as ordained by God, in Jerusalem), and prayed that the Lord would show himself to be Israel's God.

Elijah wanted Israel to know that he was acting for the Lord and that the Lord had turned their hearts back to himself. It is one thing to challenge false powers, but it is another to turn the hearts of the children to the godliness of their forefathers (cf. Mal. 4:6; Luke 1:17). This was the spirit and power of Elijah, and of his successor, John the Baptist: to bear witness that it is the Lord who can turn our hearts back to himself, and so, to assure the continuity of a true worship.

Fire fell, Israel worshipped the Lord and the prophets of Baal were bundled to the base of the mountain and slaughtered. Ahab was sent off to celebrate the coming rain, but Elijah climbed the mountain again to pray. He waited long enough to see one tiny cloud, then warned the waiting Ahab to get out before he got bogged. We are not told why the Lord helped Elijah outrun Ahab's chariot back to the latter's summer palace (or to the turn off to the same). Perhaps he wished to be first to tell the story so no false account could blur its impact.

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