

PROPHET OF COURAGE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 19:28-39

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 18–19; Matthew 17:1-13

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 18:5-18

I. Ahab and Obadiah

1 Kings 18:5-6

5 And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts.

6 So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

5. *Obadiah* is used of 12 different men in the Old Testament. This particular man is first mentioned in the biblical record in 1 Kings 18:3. He is described as the “governor of [King Ahab’s] house.” This likely means that Obadiah was in charge of Ahab’s palace in Samaria.

Obadiah was a man of remarkable courage, given the position he held and the faith he embraced. He is described as someone who “feared the Lord greatly” (1 Kings 18:3). His faith was not a private matter. But he must have been careful in how he exercised it, given the devotion of Ahab and Jezebel to Baal.

Ahab did not express concern for people who were suffering or dying during the famine. Perhaps he was preoccupied with keeping his army supplied with animals necessary for military preparedness. The situation in the kingdom had become so

desperate that the king and one of his chief officials, not the usual workers, were tasked with finding sustenance for the animals.

6. *Ahab* realized how difficult it would be for one man to cover that extent of territory. He proceeded to divide the northern kingdom between the two of them. The hope was that they would find enough grazing area to keep their livestock alive.

II. Elijah and Obadiah

1 Kings 18:7-15

7 And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah?

8 And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.

9 And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?

10 As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not.

11 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.

12 And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he

cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth.

13 Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?

14 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me.

15 And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day.

7. *Elijah* probably would have been traveling south from Sidon, where the prophet had been helping the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-24). It is likely that *Obadiah* was traveling through the northern part of Israel when the two men met.

Obadiah's question reflects some measure of doubt that this was *really* Elijah. Addressing Elijah as *my lord* reflected the reverence with which Obadiah held the prophet as God's messenger.

8. *Elijah* confirmed that he himself was speaking to Obadiah as part of a command to return to Ahab. Although Obadiah had called Elijah *lord*, Elijah implied that Obadiah had actually been honoring and serving Ahab. This may have been a subtle dig or an outright test of Obadiah.

9. Obadiah assumed that if Elijah were asking him to put his life in such jeopardy, it must be to punish him for a particular sin he had committed. Obadiah's thinking was similar to that of the widow in Zarephath, who accused Elijah of punishing her sin by taking her son from her. Calling himself Elijah's *servant* rejects the idea that *Ahab* had Obadiah's true allegiance. Thus Obadiah distanced himself from any implied sin, especially of idolatry, that could result from serving Ahab in any capacity.

Obadiah anticipated Ahab's reaction to Elijah's message. For Obadiah to leave Eli-

jah alone in order to travel to Ahab would anger the king, who had already stood by as his wife killed God's prophets. Would Ahab suspect that Obadiah was a supporter of Elijah and a worshipper of Elijah's God?

10. In contrast to the prophet who feared this task would leave him dead, *the Lord . . . liveth* (1 Kings 18:15). The promises of Obadiah and Elijah were made before God. This marks both men as true prophets. They served the living God, not idols or fictitious, powerless gods.

Obadiah described how intensely Ahab had been searching for Elijah. The rulers in Sidon had not realized that Elijah had been among them. Had they been, they would have risked Ahab's wrath by lying under *oath* that they had not seen the prophet.

11-12a. If Ahab heard from Obadiah that he had met *Elijah* without arresting him, the king would be infuriated. The implication of not immediately bringing Elijah to Ahab would be that Obadiah was lying to the king—something that one just did not do!

The phrase *and it shall come to pass* indicates that Obadiah considered what he had to say next to have been a foregone conclusion. In his own estimation, Obadiah would pay with his life when *the Spirit* whisked Elijah away. We often think of the Spirit's work in the prophets' lives in terms of their speech and writing. However, Obadiah was more concerned with the Spirit's ability to move or hide a person supernaturally, as he had done with Enoch (Genesis 5:24).

Obadiah knew something of how prophets *of the Lord* operated in obedience to Him. Though Elijah intended to appear before Ahab, it would only happen if God allowed it. In fact, God had commanded it (1 Kings 18:1-2).

12b-13. Obadiah began a defense of his personal character and devotion to *the Lord* as a reason why his life should not be put in danger. He had lived up to the meaning of

his name, “*servant of the Lord.*” In fact, he’d grown up from his *youth* fearing God, a sign of wisdom (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7).

Obadiah’s actions on behalf of *the Lord’s prophets* were evidence that he feared the Lord. Obadiah’s hiding *an hundred* in two caves and smuggling in supplies for them was indeed a dangerous task. Not only did he have to be very sneaky with large amounts of *bread and water*, but chances of discovery were heightened during that time of drought and the famine it produced.

14. Obadiah repeated 1 Kings 18:12a to emphasize the danger that *Elijah* was putting him in.

15. Elijah’s first recorded prophecy that neither dew nor rain would fall on Israel opened with a similar oath (1 Kings 17:1). The oath at hand was as trustworthy as any promise could ever be. In it, Elijah expanded on Obadiah’s oath (18:10): not only does God live, but he is *the Lord of hosts*. This is a warrior image of God, leading the heavenly angels in battle against evil. The title called Obadiah’s attention to God’s power, not just His presence.

The words *before whom I stand* indicated the close relationship between the Lord and Elijah. Elijah stood ready to go, speak, and do whatever his commander desired.

III. Elijah and Ahab

1 Kings 18:16-18

16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

17 And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?

18 And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.

16. Elijah’s word and oath satisfied *Obadiah* and settled any doubts he may have

had about returning without the prophet *Elijah*. This was the first time King *Ahab* and Elijah meet face-to-face following the three-and-a-half-year famine that had devastated the entire northern kingdom of Israel.

17. Ahab’s greeting on seeing *Elijah* was the very opposite of Obadiah’s. Ahab’s words reflect the utter contempt in which he held prophets like Elijah. This disdain was based on the bad reports prophets frequently brought him.

In a sense, Ahab was right. Any true prophet of the Lord will trouble people when he or she confronts them with the truth about their sinfulness and their need to repent. Ahab was justified in accusing Elijah of being the cause of the famine. However, his larger point is way off the mark. God’s judgment would not have occurred had *Israel* remained faithful to the Lord alone.

18. Elijah did not back down in the face of the king’s anger. He threw Ahab’s accusation back at him, letting him know that the king and the idolatry of his *father’s house* were the real troublemakers in Israel.

The famine had come upon the land because of the idolatrous practices that had first been encouraged by Ahab’s father, Omri. These practices were furthered through Ahab’s efforts in promoting the worship of Baal.

Baalim is the plural form of *Baal*. The word means “lord” or “possessor,” and the plural may refer to different manifestations of this so-called god.

Not long after this meeting, the king and the people saw a clear demonstration of the impotence of idolatry and the power of Elijah’s God at the contest on Mount Carmel. Even that did not convince Ahab to change his practices and renounce his idolatry. He repented late in life (1 Kings 21:27). Ahab is still remembered primarily for all the trouble he caused Israel.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

PROPHET OF COURAGE

Into the Lesson

Today's lesson will be about two examples of courage from the Old Testament.

Create an acrostic with the word *courage*.

C
O
U
R
A
G
E

Into the Word

Read today's text and then complete the following prompts about Obadiah and Elijah.

Obadiah

1. What God called him to do

2. How he responded to God's call

3. Why God's call required courage

4. I personally identify with him because . . .

Elijah

1. What God called him to do

2. How he responded to God's call

3. Why God's call required courage

4. I personally identify with him because . . .

Into Life

Research and report on the following topics. One option might be to discuss the topics with a member of your church staff or missions committee.

- Stories of persecuted Christians
- Examples from the work of a missionary supported by your congregation

Consider taking time this week to write notes of encouragement to persecuted Christians to gain courage from the Lord.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Be a courageous, Spirit-led troublemaker!