

Elijah: Prophet of Courage

Bible Background • 1 KINGS 18-19; MATTHEW 17:1-3

Printed Text • 1 KINGS 18:5-18 | Devotional Reading • LUKE 19:28-39

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will COMPARE Elijah's response to speak to Ahab to that of Obadiah's response to report back to Ahab, GAIN a sense of Obadiah's concerns when reporting Elijah's message to Ahab, and ACT in boldness when speaking the Word of God.

In Focus

When Cris fled her abusive husband, she vowed never to depend on another human. She packed her bags and drove across the country to a new job in a strange new town. She worked hard and at the end of the day she would sit down with a cup of tea and a book. She went to church, but the closest she ever got to anyone was to Mandy, a single mother living in the same apartment complex. She would nod at Mandy as they passed each other in the halls and quickly turn away with a polite little cough. As the weeks went by, the polite cough became serious and a throbbing pain settled in her chest. The violence she suffered had taken a toll. A series of contradictory doctors discouraged her and slowly her apartment and solitary life started falling into disarray. Mandy met her one day as she was catching her breath on the stairs. "Hey Cris! Want a hand with those groceries?"

"No, thanks. Actually... yes. That would be great." She accepted Mandy's help but hesitated a bit to let her into the chaos her apartment had become. Cris rested on the couch and Mandy cooked dinner for them. "I see where you're coming from," said Mandy, after hearing Cris' story, "but shutting yourself off from other people isn't the best way to go. God made us be part of a community, and that means sharing your struggles with other people and listening to their advice." Cris nodded. "I can see that now. I thought I'd be safer by myself, but it looks like that wasn't meant to be."

Whom could you reach out to for advice and help?

Keep in Mind

"I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead" (1 Kings 18:18, NLT)

Words You Should Know

- A. **Troubleth** (1 Kings 18:17) akar (Heb.)— To stir up, disturb
- B. **Forsaken** (v. 18) 'azab (Heb.)—To leave, abandon, fall away

Say It Correctly

- Jezebel.** JEH-zuh-bell
- Obadiah.** oh-buh-DIE-uh
- Asheroth.** AH-sure-oth

KJV

1 Kings 18:5 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.

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.

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.

NLT

1 Kings 18:5 Ahab said to Obadiah, "We must check every spring and valley in the land to see if we can find enough grass to save at least some of my horses and mules."

6 So they divided the land between them. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

7 As Obadiah was walking along, he suddenly saw Elijah coming toward him. Obadiah recognized him at once and bowed low to the ground before him. "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?" he asked.

8 "Yes, it is," Elijah replied. "Now go and tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'"

9 "Oh, sir," Obadiah protested, "what harm have I done to you that you are sending me to my death at the hands of Ahab?"

10 For I swear by the LORD your God that the king has searched every nation and kingdom on earth from end to end to find you. And each time he was told, 'Elijah isn't here,' King Ahab forced the king of that nation to swear to the truth of his claim.

11 And now you say, 'Go and tell your master, "Elijah is here.'"

12 But as soon as I leave you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you away to who knows where. When Ahab comes and cannot find you, he will kill me. Yet I have been a true servant of the LORD all my life.

13 Has no one told you, my lord, about the time when Jezebel was trying to kill the LORD's prophets? I hid 100 of them in two caves and supplied them with food and water.

14 And now you say, 'Go and tell your master, "Elijah is here.'" Sir, if I do that, Ahab will certainly kill me."

15 But Elijah said, "I swear by the Lord Almighty, in whose presence I stand, that I will present myself to Ahab this very day."

16 So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah.

17 When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, "So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?"

18 "I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead.

The People, Places, and Times

Obadiah. The Obadiah found in 1 Kings 18 is not the prophet and author of the book of Obadiah. This Obadiah worked in King Ahab's administration as a governor, mayor, and one of the top officials. Obadiah held this high position assisting one of Israel's most disobedient kings. However, Obadiah maintained his belief in Jehovah, the true and living God. The Scriptures identify him as a worshiper, one who feared God greatly (1 Kings 18:3). Scholars disagree concerning Obadiah's character. Some call him a hero, while others criticize his timidity, saying he compromised and was afraid to speak out on God's behalf.

Elijah. Little is known about Elijah's birth or family, other than that he came from Tishbe in Gilead. God called Elijah to prophesy, speaking out against Baal worship in Israel and to actively take part in ending this abomination among God's people. Initially, God kept him secluded near the brook of Cherith where he is fed by ravens for six months. As the drought progressed, God connected Him with a widow and her son. God miraculously provided food for them for the next three years (1 Kings 17:8–16). Just before the end of the drought, Elijah called out the prophets of Baal for a showdown on Mt. Carmel. He challenged the people of Israel to serve the winner of the contest. God victoriously proved his superiority over Baal and the prophets of the false gods were destroyed (1 Kings 18:17-40).

Ahab. One of the most rebellious kings in Israel's history (1 Kings 16:30). He married Jezebel, a Baal worshiper who hated God's people (1 Kings 18:4). She encouraged his worship of the false gods Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 16:31–33). God sent the prophets Elijah and Elisha to warn him, but he refused to listen. His ultimate downfall came when he made an agreement with a foreign king he was supposed to kill and did nothing when his wife had an innocent Israelite murdered (1 Kings 20-21). Both Ahab and Jezebel died gruesome, tragic deaths.

How does God protect His followers when leaders are unjust?

Background

God's Law clearly commanded never to worship false gods (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7), not to invoke their names (Exodus 23:13), not to marry their adherents or practice any of their customs (Leviticus 20:23; 2 Kings 17:15). King Ahab violated each one of these laws during his 22-year reign in Israel. He married Jezebel, a Phoenician Baal worshiper who had altars and a temple built for Baal. This false god of rain and dew was the supreme male deity of the ancient Phoenicians and Canaanites. Their rituals included illicit sex, ritual prostitution, and child sacrifice. God's prophet Elijah confronted King Ahab. The first time Scripture mentions him, he appears before King Ahab announcing a drought to come upon the whole land because of the nation's sin (1 Kings 17:1–7). This one verbal threat by a lone prophet of God challenged the worship of Baal, who was supposed to control the rain. Instead of Ahab and Jezebel acknowledging God and repenting, they were furious. They desperately sent out soldiers to hunt for Elijah to force him to reverse this curse.

How have you pushed back against God instead of acknowledging Him and repenting?

At-A-Glance

1. God's Providence (1 Kings 18:5-8)
2. God's Servant, Obadiah (vv. 9-16)
3. God's Prophet, Elijah (vv. 17-18)

In Depth

1. God's Providence (1 Kings 18:5-8) Feeling the effects of the drought, King Ahab and his chief servant Obadiah discuss trying to find grass for the royal horses. The king fears for his safety if his horses died—no army to protect him. Ahab and Obadiah agree to search the area in different directions. As Obadiah combs the area, Elijah, the missing prophet, walks toward him. King Ahab had looked diligently for Elijah for three and a half years, determined to force him to reverse the drought. The leaders in the surrounding countries joined in the massive hunt for the prophet. No one located him. They swore to the king that no individual had laid eyes on Elijah. However, by the providence of God, Obadiah and Elijah travel down the same path. Obadiah recognizes him, then bows with his face to the ground, in fear, reverence, and respect for God's messenger.

When has God caused you to have an unexpected encounter?

2. God's Servant, Obadiah (vv. 9-16) Elijah asks Obadiah to deliver a message. He wants a face to face meeting with King Ahab. Obadiah responds with excuses. He thinks his master might be suspicious, assuming he knew the prophet's hiding place all this time. Obadiah images an upset king, angry enough to kill. He also raises another reason for his reluctance. Elijah had a reputation of being in one place, and then the Holy Spirit whisking him away to another. Obadiah lacks confidence in Elijah being in this location for a meeting with the king. Obadiah continues giving reasons for refusing Elijah's request. He calls himself one who truly worships Yahweh, since his youth. When Jezebel tried to kill all of God's prophets, Obadiah hid one hundred of them in caves, supplying them with food and water. The king's servant urges Elijah to realize how much he'd done already and withdraw his demand.

When one's leader is a tyrant, is it better to covertly honor God as Obadiah did or overtly as Elijah did?

3. God's Prophet, Elijah (vv. 17-18) Elijah refrains from addressing Obadiah's fears and hesitations. Instead, he speaks about the Mighty God they serve. Elijah walks in the assurance of God's presence, his shield of protection. He boldly intends to challenge King Ahab, resting in the sovereignty of God. He promises Obadiah that when King Ahab arrives, he will be in that very spot. Obadiah never says another word to Elijah but proceeds to go and arrange the meeting. Finally, Ahab and Elijah face each other. The King accuses Elijah of being the one that disturbed and destroyed his kingdom with the drought. He speaks correctly. Elijah had made the "no rain" declaration. However, Elijah places the responsibility right back on Ahab's shoulders. He tells the king about his willfully ignoring and violating God's Law. Elijah calls for a showdown on Mt. Carmel that will prove the superiority of Jehovah over Baal.

When have you spoken boldly in the presence of fear?

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Elijah requesting of Obadiah and what was his response? (1 Kings 18:9-16)
2. What did Ahab accuse Elijah of doing? How did Elijah respond? (vv. 17-18)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Use the Focus Scriptures to point out words that describe Obadiah and Elijah. Contrast the two men.
2. In what ways were both men instruments in the hand of God?

Liberating Lesson

Speaking the truth today, especially to those who disagree with Christian beliefs is not always easy. Elijah walked in such confidence. He struggled at times with negative thinking and depression, but he also listened to God and followed His instructions. Think of Christians that you know that are bold like Elijah. If possible, have a conversation with them about their journey and glean from their experience.

Application for Activation

Take some time this week to examine your circles of influence, in your family, church, job, or community. Have you spoken up about Christ or have you kept your faith private? Pray about how God may want you to change. Ask the Holy Spirit to point out Scriptures this week to give you more wisdom and understanding. Surrender to the Lord and allow Him to do the transforming.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 Kings 18:5-18 King Ahab was the epitome of evil. He is often referred to as the king that made Israel sin; he led Israel to worship Baal. The Bible describes him as the king that “did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (from 1 Kings 16:33). Whereas good kings of Judah were portrayed as following the example of King David, evil kings of Israel and Judah were described as following the example of Ahab (1 Kings 22:51-52; 2 Kings 8:18, 25-27; 21:1-3). As a consequence for their rebellion against the Lord, Israel was punished with a severe drought. After three years, the Lord sends Elijah back to announce to Ahab that there would be rain again in the land. Here we encounter God’s nature of love, mercy, and grace at work. He does not wait for Israel to repent before changing their circumstances. Meanwhile, the effect of the drought has become so severe that Ahab summons the governor in charge of his house, Obadiah to his palace. Obadiah is known as one that fears God and is credited with saving the lives of a hundred prophets from extermination at the hand of Ahab’s wicked wife, Jezebel (1 Kings 18:1-4).

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.

Unlike King David, who repented and sought the Lord during the famine (2 Samuel 21:1), the famine never stirred Ahab to repentance. Rather, Ahab plans to scout the land for food and water. Ahab asks Obadiah to help him go to all “the land, to all fountains and brooks” to see if there is any grass to feed his horses and mules. Ahab is not as concerned about the lives of his people as he is about the lives of his livestock. His concern that “not all the beasts” would die gives a hint at the severity of the famine. Animals were probably dying in great numbers. His concern for the animals is probably motivated by his desire to preserve a strong army. When his military strength appears to be depleted because of the drought, Ahab himself joins in the search for grass to

feed the animals used by the army. So the king and Obadiah divide the land between the two; one goes to one side of the land and the other goes to another in search of grass.

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.

Elijah is on his way to deliver a challenge from God to King Ahab. Obadiah is on his way to scout for grazing land for the animals. Through divine providence, they meet each other on the road. On seeing Elijah, Obadiah recognizes him and falls on his face in reverence to him. The phrase “he knew him” is translated from the Hebrew root word *nakar* (naw-KAR), which means to “acknowledge, recognize, or to take knowledge of.” Recognizing it was Elijah, Obadiah asks him, “Art thou that my lord Elijah?” It is not that Obadiah was in doubt of the person he has just met. Rather the question indicates a state of surprise and apprehension, as he will explain later (vv. 9–10). Elijah affirms his identity and instructs Obadiah to tell his master, “Behold, Elijah is here.” There is a ring of confidence and boldness in Elijah’s instruction in contrast to Obadiah’s sense of anxiety and apprehension. Elijah has been sent by God to confront the wicked King Ahab directly; therefore he commissions Obadiah to go and notify Ahab of his presence. Obadiah’s anxiety is apparent from his answer to Elijah’s order.

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.

Moved by fear, Obadiah asks Elijah what crime he has committed that would warrant his death. Asking him to go and declare that he has seen Elijah, Obadiah believes, is tantamount to sending him to death at the hand of his master, Ahab. Then Obadiah states the reasons it is so dangerous to go to Ahab and inform him that Elijah is around. In case Elijah is inclined to doubt the seriousness of the situation, Obadiah swears, “As the LORD thy God liveth.” This is a way of stating an absolute truth: The person’s statement is just as true as the statement that the Lord lives. In case Elijah has missed the news, Obadiah tells him, Ahab has sent people to search for Elijah and often encountered many false leads. Since Elijah prophesied about the drought in the land, Ahab declared him a wanted man all over the region. He deployed people everywhere to search for Elijah—“there is no nation or kingdom” where Ahab has not searched Elijah but all had met with failure. If any nation or kingdom reported that Elijah had not been found there, Ahab would force them to swear an oath that they were telling the truth.

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.

Obadiah knows if he tells Ahab that “Elijah is here,” and the king comes and fails to find him because the Spirit of the Lord had taken him to an unknown place, the king would suspect Obadiah of conspiracy or lying. That would mean his death. Elijah’s disappearance earlier and his sudden reappearance now suggested to Obadiah that God’s Spirit was miraculously transporting the prophet about. It should be noted that after Elijah’s prophecy of the drought, the Lord ordered him to go hide at the brook Cherith. There was no evidence that the Spirit of the Lord carried him away, although that is something the Spirit does at other times (Acts 8:39).

Obadiah questions his presumed punishment. Elijah’s command seems like a death sentence, so Obadiah gives a testimony of his faith: “but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth.” The name “Obadiah” means “servant of God.” It is essential to note the role a name can play in a person’s life. As it is with most African traditions, so it is with the Jewish culture where names given often reflect a person’s character. Such given names may tell a story about a person, his or her family history, an event, a person’s mission in life, or an event that took place. Names in the Igbo culture of Nigeria often reflect who God is and what He has done or express gratitude or praise to God. There are several examples in the Bible too. Moses is named because he was “drawn

out of water” (Exodus 2:10). The angel of the Lord told Joseph “name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21, NLT). Obadiah likely had godly parents who gave him this name and practiced the true faith from birth in their household. Indeed, he had feared the Lord from his youth. He also lived out the meaning of his name throughout his life.

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.

Continuing the argument of why he should not go to face Ahab, Obadiah refers to the good work he did. He proved his ultimate loyalty to God during Jezebel’s purge by risking his life to rescue and support one hundred prophets of the Lord. Obadiah states his case by rhetorically asking, “Didn’t you hear about that time when Jezebel killed God’s prophet? I saved one hundred of them, hid them in two caves, I also fed them with bread and water.” Obadiah’s tone and line of question seem to imply that Elijah had heard the rumor. Obadiah has already risked his life for God and asks not to have to do it again by going to Ahab.

15 And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. 16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

After Obadiah’s excuses, Elijah assures him with an oath that he will certainly show himself to Ahab that very day. Elijah’s statement “As the LORD of host liveth, before whom I stand,” is seen in the Jewish culture as more than a promise of assurance; it is a binding pledge, a word of honor that cannot be broken. Armed with this vow and trusting Elijah as a man of integrity, Obadiah goes off and meets the king. He gives him the message from Elijah, and the king goes to the prophet.

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.

When Ahab saw Elijah, probably in an attempt to intimidate him, he said to him “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” The question here might suggest that Ahab was in doubt it was Elijah. That wasn’t the case. There is no doubt Ahab recognized Elijah the moment he saw him. However, he must have been stunned to see him after years of searching without success. Therefore the translation that tends to accurately portray the essence of the moment is “So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?” (NLT). Ahab blames Elijah for how he “troubleth” (Heb. ‘akar, aw-KAR) Israel. The word refers to the turmoil caused by great worry, in this case, worry about famine and death caused by the drought that has been ravaging the whole land of Israel. Ahab tried to hold Elijah responsible for the drought and to charge him of a crime against the state worthy of death. Of course, Elijah was in a good company because Paul and Jesus would be labeled “trouble makers” (Luke 23:5; Acts 16:20; 17:6). But Elijah is not intimidated or afraid of the king. Instead of apologies or pleas for pardon, the prophet boldly throws back the charge to Ahab. He tells him that the national calamity is traceable to him and his family because they do not obey God’s laws and worship other gods. Therefore the source of Israel’s problem was not Elijah or the drought, but Ahab’s breaking of the covenant. Definitely, Ahab knew the terms of the covenant and understood that the blessings of the Lord depended on the king and his people’s obedience. Instead, following the example of Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel, Israel abandoned the worship of the true God. The sin that always gets Israel into trouble is apostasy. During Ahab’s reign as king, his wife Jezebel established Baal and Asheroth as the official gods in Israel. Baal images were often in the shape of a bull, representing strength and fertility. Worship of these gods included ritualistic prostitution and meeting near phallus-like (male organ) pillars; it often included child sacrifice. This confrontation between Ahab and Elijah is the prelude of the famous confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Elijah with Moses and Jesus
(Mark 9:2-8)

TUESDAY

John the Baptist, the New Elijah
(Mark 9:9-13)

WEDNESDAY

Elijah Sent to King Ahab
(1 Kings 18:1-4)

THURSDAY

Elijah Challenges Baal Prophets
(1 Kings 18:20-26, 30-33, 36-39)

FRIDAY

Elijah in the Wilderness with God
(1 Kings 19:1-8)

SATURDAY

God Commissions Elijah for New Work
(1 Kings 19:9-15)

SUNDAY

King Ahab Meets Prophet Elijah
(1 Kings 18:5-18)