

March 28, 2021

“Prophet of Courage”
Lesson 4 of Unit

I Kings 18:5-18

Intro

For the last study about faithful prophets, we move back about 200 years from last week's lesson. Today focuses on Elijah, whose prophetic ministry ran from roughly 869-838 BC, with its start occurring about 70 years after Israel split into the Northern and Southern kingdoms. The Northern kingdom maintained the name Israel, while the Southern was called Judah.

Israel was already worshipping idols when Ahab became king in 874 BC. But idol worship grew when he married Jezebel, who was a devoted worshipper of the god Baal, who was a fertility god. It was believed that he controlled anything to do with giving life, including animals and plants, as well as people.

Ahab made an image of Baal to put up in the temple to Baal that he had built in Samaria! First Kings 16:34 says that “Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.”

Elijah first shows up in Chapter 17, declaring that there will be no rain for “the next few years” unless God tells him to do something different. Famine, which would result from no water for the plants, is one of the curses listed for disobeying God's law (Lev. 26:19-20). This is an insult and challenge directed at Baal. If he's all that powerful, Baal can make it rain, and make things grow.

Read I Kings 18:5-18

1. vs. 5: Trying to find water

Ahab and Obadiah

Obadiah is an official in Ahab's court; not the same person who wrote the OT book
18:3 says he “feared the Lord greatly”—he is faithful to God

The situation must be desperate

Ahab and Obadiah (king and king's official) are involved in looking for water

Seems like a task the king would assign to lower-level workers

Ahab wants water to feed the horses and the mules

Doesn't say anything about the people...

2. vs. 6: They go in opposite directions, indicating the likelihood that little water is around

3. vs. 7: Obadiah meets Elijah

He recognizes him; must have seen him before, but Scripture doesn't show where/when

He bows down and calls him “my lord”, both signs of respect

He seems to be in doubt about Elijah's reality. Vs. 10 will explain why he might think this

4. vs. 8: Elijah tells Obadiah to take a message to Ahab

“Go tell your master”

Three possibilities here

- 1) Elijah is mocking him for serving Ahab
- 2) Elijah is giving him a little test—who are you really loyal to?
- 3) Elijah is recognizing that he is a servant of the king

5. vs. 9: Obadiah’s response

“What have I done wrong?”

Suggests that the action Elijah asks for is a punishment

Obadiah feels he has honored God thru his actions (see vs. 12-13 later)

Obadiah feels he will be killed for giving his news to Ahab

Again, see vs. 10 for fuller explanation of why

Obadiah calls himself “your (Elijah’s) servant”

He puts himself on God’s side, not on Ahab’s

6. vs. 10: Obadiah’s reasons for fearing Ahab

Every nation/kingdom has been searched for Elijah!

Shows the importance Ahab places on finding Elijah

Every nation claimed Elijah wasn’t there; had to swear they didn’t know where he was

This shows Obadiah’s concern

“If I show up and say I just saw you (Elijah) after you have been looked for everywhere and couldn’t be found, I will look like I knew it all the time! The king will kill me!”

7. vs. 11-12a: Obadiah’s concern

Going to tell Ahab of Elijah’s location without having Elijah with him

Elijah may be carried off by the Spirit

“If I tell Ahab and he doesn’t find you, he will kill me.”

There is apparently much space between Ahab and Obadiah at this time

Lots of time for Elijah to disappear

8. vs. 12b-13: Obadiah’s self-defense

He calls himself a “servant”

He has worshipped God since he was a youth

He protected and fed 100 of God’s prophets from Jezebel

This alone would have been dangerous if Jezebel wanted them dead

Taking food and water anywhere during a famine would be suspicious

9. vs. 14: This is a repeat of vs. 11

Shows the certainty in Obadiah’s mind of what will happen to him

10. vs. 15: Elijah’s answer

The phrase he uses “As the Lord Almighty lives”—almost the same as I Kings 17:1

He prophesied then that it wouldn’t rain for years, until God said so

This is exactly what happened

He is not “prophesying” (guaranteeing) that He will go to Ahab
Both statements are guarantees of what God wants to happen

In 18:10, Obadiah says almost the same phrase
This is to show the truth that Elijah has been searched for “everywhere”
Elijah’s response uses the same phrasing, showing the same “truth”

Elijah also adds “whom I serve” after “As the Lord Almighty lives”
This shows Elijah’s connection to God
Shows he is doing what God wants him to do

11. vs. 16: Obadiah is satisfied with Elijah’s answers
He goes to Ahab and gives the king Elijah’s message (vs. 8)
Ahab also seems accepting of the message
He doesn’t kill Obadiah; he goes to meet Elijah

12. vs. 17: Ahab’s first words are “Is that you?”
He hasn’t seen Elijah in the 3 ½ years of no rain
It’s possible he hasn’t seen him ever before, just knows Elijah gave the prophecy

Ahab’s words and attitudes are the opposite of Obadiah’s (vs. 7)
The contempt and disdain for Elijah are evident (“You troubler of Israel”)
Obadiah said, “Is it really you, my lord Elijah?”
Note the respect given to Elijah and Obadiah

Ahab is right without realizing it in what he says about Elijah
True prophets do what God wants / say what God wants them to say
This causes “trouble” sometimes when they are confronted with tough truths
However, the famine/drought of the past 3 ½ years is because of not obeying God
It could have been avoided

13. vs. 18: Elijah’s answer to Ahab
Elijah turns the accusation back on Ahab
“you and your father’s family have (made trouble for Israel)”
He levels the charge that God holds them accountable for
1. You have abandoned the Lord’s command
2. (You have) followed the Baals

Application: A little later in chapter 18 is Elijah’s confrontation on Mount Carmel with the 400 prophets of Baal. He shows himself to be a “Prophet of Courage”, today’s lesson title, in confronting both the idolatrous King Ahab, and the 400 prophets of the false god Baal.

There are many places in our world where being a practicing Christian takes a great deal of courage. They are beaten or killed for their faith; they must meet for worship in secret; they defy the governments that have outlawed Christianity.

It wasn't too long after Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2 that Christians began to be persecuted. Needing courage to walk by faith in a world hostile to Christianity has characterized the Church's history. We have a very comfortable world for the most part in America. We can look at both the OT prophets like Elijah and fellow Christians in unfriendly countries around the world for examples of how to have courage in practicing our faith as Christians.

Prayer: Father God, we ask for courage to live our faith in our world. We ask you to give power and strength of our fellow believers in other countries who must use courage daily to live our their faith. And we ask for a greater, deeper relationship with You so that we may live for you, regardless of the conditions. In Jesus' name, Amen.