

Prophet of Courage

1 Kings 18:5-18

SS Lesson for 03/28/2021

Devotional Scripture: James 5:13-18

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: 1 Kings 18:18

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Salvation through the gospel (Eph 3:6)

Salvation promised through the Bible (2 Tim 3:15)

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A partnership where gifts are used to serve for the common good (1 Peter 4:10)

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Recognize that Jesus is about serving through the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17-19)

Recognize that through Jesus the veil over my face and mind is removed (2 Cor 3:17-18)

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Truth through the Gospel (Col 1:5-6)

Truth through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13)
Truth through correctly handling God's word (2 Tim 2:15)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

Obadiah: A Believer in Ahab's Court (1 Kings 18:1-15)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Today's Scripture covers the early portion of the ministry of the prophet Elijah (who prophesied about 869 to 838 BC). He proclaimed the word of the Lord during one of the most critical periods of Old Testament history. His ministry began after the split of the nation into two kingdoms (931 BC): Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom). The first king of the north, Jeroboam I (931-910 BC), began his reign by violating the first two of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-4). He set up two golden calves for the people to worship: one in the northern part of the northern kingdom, in Dan, and one in the southern part, in Bethel (1 Kings 12:28-29). This made it easier for those in the north to embrace pagan worship. The reign of King Ahab in northern Israel (874-853 BC) was characterized by economic prosperity, at least at the outset (1 Kings 22:39; compare 2 Chronicles 18:1). It was also a time of spiritual poverty (1 Kings 18:17-40). Idol worship became more prevalent when Ahab married Jezebel. She was the daughter of the king of Sidon and a devout worshipper of the god Baal (1 Kings 16:31; 18:3, 19). Baal was a fertility god, believed to be in control of anything to do with giving life, whether to animals, plants, or human beings. First Kings 17 begins with the sudden appearance of Elijah. He boldly proclaimed that "there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word" (17:1). Moses had warned God's people of the abomination that idolatry constituted in the sight of God (Deuteronomy 4:15-24). Famine was listed among the curses that would result from disobeying God's law (28:23-24; compare Leviticus 26:19-20). A declaration of famine amounted to a grave insult to Baal (and to Ahab and Jezebel) and constituted a direct challenge to the authority of that fictitious god. Following this announcement of a famine, Elijah went into hiding for a time. The prophet hid by the brook Kerith (until the brook dried up), then traveled northward to Zarephath of Sidon (Jezebel's homeland!). There he stayed with a widow, for whom he offered two unforgettable demonstrations of God's power. First, her supply of oil and flour to prepare bread for her household did not run out during the famine; and second, her son was raised from the dead (1 Kings 17:8-24). Both miracles revealed the Lord's authority in matters of fertility, where Baal was believed to be in control. Following this time away from the northern kingdom, Elijah was spiritually prepared to speak and demonstrate the Lord's authoritative word. He could return to Ahab's realm and confront the defiant, disobedient king.

Key Verse: 1 Kings 18:18

And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

18:1-6. In the third and last year of the famine God directed **Elijah** to **present himself to King Ahab**. Elijah had God's word that He would soon end the drought. **The famine** in the land was particularly **severe in the capital, Samaria**. (Cf. the famine[s] in Elisha's days, 2 Kings 4:38; 6:25; 7:4; 8:1.) God was directing this calamity especially at the guilty parties, Ahab and Jezebel. This situation prompted **Ahab** and his trusted servant, **Obadiah**, to go in different directions, looking for **some grass in the valleys** or near **the springs** where the most necessary **animals (horses and mules)** might graze. **Obadiah** had great responsibility in Ahab's court (**in charge of Ahab's palace**). **Obadiah was also a devout believer in the LORD** (but not the writer of the Bible book of that name). Whether **Jezebel** knew of Obadiah's commitment to the Lord is not clear, but undoubtedly he and the queen were not close friends. Jezebel's aim was to replace the worship of Yahweh with Baal-Melqart worship. Her plan included **killing off the LORD's prophets** (1 Kings 18:4). **Obadiah**, aware of her strategy, had hidden **100 prophets** of the Lord in **caves** and was supplying **them with food and water**—a difficult task in days of extreme famine and drought. Obviously there were many in Israel (cf. 19:18) and probably also in Judah at that time who believed in the Lord, though Israel as a whole had apostatized.

18:7-12a. Obadiah recognized Elijah when they met somewhere outside Samaria; **Elijah** was a “wanted” man in Israel. Out of respect for the prophet, Obadiah **bowed down to the ground**. He could hardly believe he had found **Elijah**. Elijah, wanting to talk with Ahab (vv. 1-2), asked Obadiah to announce him to his **master**. **Obadiah**, however, was afraid that **Elijah** would disappear again. **Obadiah** explained to the prophet how **Ahab** had searched for him at home and abroad (v. 10) to no avail. Obadiah affirmed that fact by the familiar words, **As surely as the LORD your God lives** (cf. 17:1, 12). If he reported to his king that **Elijah** had been found, and then could not produce him (**the Spirit of the LORD may carry you away**; cf. 2 Kings 2:16), **Ahab** would regard Obadiah’s words as a mocking trick and would probably execute him.

18:12b-15. To convince Elijah that his concern was sincere, Obadiah related proof that he was a devout believer in **the LORD** (cf. v. 3) **since his youth**. Obadiah seemed to think **Elijah** would have **heard** about his hiding and feeding **the prophets of the LORD**. Perhaps this was known among many of the faithful in Israel, especially the prophets, though of course not by **Jezebel** or her sympathizers. **Elijah** assured Obadiah that he would not disappear but would indeed stand before **Ahab** that same day. Elijah’s description of God as **the LORD** (Yahweh) **Almighty** who **lives** and whom Elijah served (cf. 17:1; 18:36) indicates that he was confident in God’s ability to handle the physical and spiritual situation in Israel, an assurance that had grown as a result of his experiences at Kerith and Zarephath. This popular story of Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal is both exciting and extremely significant in the history of Israel. The first part of this narrative (vv. 16-24) clarifies the reason for the dramatic encounter.

18:16-18. When **Ahab** heard Obadiah’s message the king **went to meet** the prophet; **Elijah** maintained the initiative as the spokesman of God to whom the king must submit. In Ahab’s eyes **Elijah** was the **troubler of Israel**. **Elijah** set the record straight and instructed the king who did not perceive or was not willing to admit that *he* and his **father’s** (Omri’s) **family** (cf. 16:25-26) were the real reason for Israel’s troubles. **Ahab** had **abandoned the LORD’s commands** in His Law **and** had instead **followed the Baals**. The plural “Baals” refers to local idols of Baal (cf. Judges 2:11) sometimes with differing names (e.g., Baal-Berith, Judges 8:33; Baal-Zebub, 2 Kings 1:2-3, 6, 16). This was the real issue and the root cause of all the trouble in Israel, spiritual as well as physical.

18:19. In view of Elijah’s directive that Ahab **summon the people from all over Israel**, it is likely that hundreds, if not thousands, congregated **on Mount Carmel**. The Carmel range of mountains, 1,742 feet in elevation at its highest point, extends about 30 miles to the southeast of modern-day Haifa from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It is a beautiful series of rounded peaks and valleys from which the sea can easily be seen. It is not known exactly where along this ridge Elijah staged this test; any of several sites is possible; *Muhraka* is suggested by many as one of the more probable sites. The extent of **Baal** worship in Israel can be estimated by the number of priests Jezebel regularly fed: **450 prophets** of the male god and **400... of** the female goddess **Asherah**, Baal’s consort.

18:20-21. **Mount Carmel** was agreed on by **Ahab**. It would be a fitting site since it lay between Israel and Phoenicia, the lands of the deities in question. Also Mount Carmel was regarded by the Phoenicians as the sacred dwelling place of Baal. No doubt Ahab was highly pleased with this suggested site for the contest because it would have given the Baal prophets a definite advantage; but this did not worry Elijah. It was also a geographically prominent location and thus a fit setting for Elijah’s contest. When **all the people had assembled....** **Elijah** stood before them and challenged them to end their doublemindedness, wavering **between two opinions**. It was not good to try to “walk the fence” worshiping two gods. Apparently the Israelites thought that if Yahweh let them down they could turn to Baal, and vice versa. Elijah was saying that if One is the true God and the other false they should follow the true One wholeheartedly and forget about the impotent impostor. **The people** could not argue with this statement, so they **said nothing**.

18:22-24. **Elijah** then pointed out that in this contest the odds would be **450 prophets** to 1—a humanly impossible situation in which to win! Elijah knew there were other prophets of Yahweh besides himself (cf. v. 13), but as far as this contest was concerned he was **the only one of the LORD’s prophets left**. Of the **two bulls** required, Elijah **let** his adversaries select their favorite. Each side would prepare to sacrifice its **bull** as a burnt offering to its god. **Then** they would each **call on their god** and **the god who answered by fire** would be shown to be the true **God**. Baal was supposedly a fertility god, the one who sent rain, caused the crops to grow, and provided food for his people. He was the one who supposedly sent fire (lightning) from heaven. The three-and-one-half-year drought and famine had been a great embarrassment to the worshipers of Baal. It seemed as if Elijah and his God rather than Baal were in control of the fertility of Israel. So Elijah’s test to Baal’s followers seemed like a good opportunity to vindicate their god and they readily agreed to it. When the preparations were completed, the test began.

18:25-29. All morning Baal's prophets... called on their god and danced around his altar to arouse him to action. At noon Elijah began to taunt them, mocking their ineffectiveness. Sarcastically he suggested that Baal was thinking about other things, or busy (lit., relieving himself), away on a trip (the Phoenician sailors believed Baal traveled with them on the Mediterranean Sea and elsewhere), or even sleeping! Surprisingly Baal's prophets responded by increasing the fervor of their appeals, working themselves into a frenzy. To propitiate their god they mutilated their own bodies as the custom of pagan worshipers has been for centuries. This continued for three hours (the time for the Israelites' evening sacrifice; cf. v. 36, was 3 P.M.), but still there was no response. No one answered or paid attention; that is, Baal did not respond to their six-hour chanting for lightning, though rain and lightning often come readily to the Carmel mountain range near the Mediterranean Sea.

18:30-32. When it was obvious to all that the prophets of Baal had failed, Elijah invited all the people to draw near and observe what he would do. An altar to the LORD had been built on the site long before but it was in disrepair. Elijah selected 12 stones, one for each of the tribes. Though the tribes had been divided into two nations they were still one people in God's purposes—with a single Lord, a single covenant, and a single destiny. With these stones he built an altar... and... dug a trench around it... to hold about one-third of a bushel of seed (two seahs equaled about 13 quarts; cf. NIV marg., and a bushel has 32 quarts). Perhaps the trench on each side of the altar could hold that much seed.

18:33-35. After the bull had been slain and laid... on the wood, Elijah gave another strange directive. He called for the whole sacrifice and its wood to be soaked with water three separate times. The excess water... even filled the trench. The water—four large jars filled three times each!—probably was collected from a spring on the mountain or in the Kishon Valley below (v. 40), or from the Mediterranean Sea. The purpose of this soaking, of course, was to show everyone present that the burning of the sacrifice that was to take place was not a natural phenomenon or a trick but was a miracle. Also the time involved in securing the water would have added to the tension of the hour.

18:36-39. At the time of the Israelites' evening sacrifice (3 P.M.; cf. v. 29), Elijah stepped forward and prayed. Without any of the theatrics of his adversaries Elijah simply addressed God as one addresses another living person. His words were designed to demonstrate to the onlookers that all he had done as God's servant (cf. 17:1; 18:15) had been in obedience to God's command and not on the prophet's own initiative. Elijah simply asked God to show the people that He is the true God and to turn the hearts of the people back to Himself. Instantly fire... fell from heaven (lightning), consuming the sacrifice... wood, altar, and even the surrounding soil and water. Spontaneously the crowd cried out in amazement. Since the LORD (Yahweh) had answered by fire (cf. v. 24); they acknowledged that He is the true God.

18:40-42. The Kishon Valley ran parallel to the Carmel range on its north side. There the people slaughtered the false prophets in obedience to the command of God through Moses (Deut. 13:12-15) and Elijah. Previously Elijah had predicted the drought to Ahab (1 Kings 17:1); now the prophet told the king there would be a heavy rain. Ahab rode off down the mountain to celebrate the end of the drought by eating and drinking, but Elijah walked back up the mountain to pray for rain. His posture as he prayed reflected the earnestness of his petition, again for the glory of the Lord.

18:43-46. Rains normally came from the west off the Mediterranean Sea, so Elijah instructed his servant to look in that direction. God answered Elijah's petition as he persevered in prayer. At first the rain cloud was small (like a man's hand), but soon the whole sky grew black and heavy rain descended. The torrent evidently overtook Ahab as he rode in his chariot... to Jezreel, his winter capital about midway between Mount Carmel and Samaria. Elijah overtook him, running the approximate 25 miles with divinely given energy. Tucking his cloak into his belt enabled him to run without tripping over the long garment. Because of Mount Carmel Elijah had discredited Baal and his worshipers, but he had also humiliated vindictive Queen Jezebel.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Courage through Obedience (1 Kings 18:5-8)

5 And Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so that we will not have to kill any livestock."

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

7 Now as Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him; and he recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, "Is that you, my lord Elijah?"

8 And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'"

Obedience through seeking salvation (5)

Salvation among all nations (Ps 67:2)

2 that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

Salvation that comes from the sanctification through faith (Acts 26:16-18)

16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. 17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Salvation for everyone who believes (Rom 1:16)

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Salvation through the gospel (Eph 3:6)

6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Salvation promised through the Bible (2 Tim 3:15)

15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Obedience through partnerships (6)

A partnership where everyone does their part (Eph 4:16)

16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

A partnership that depends on God making things happen (1 Cor 3:7-9)

7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

A partnership where God is working in all (1 Cor 12:6)

6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

A partnership where gifts are used to serve for the common good (1 Peter 4:10)

10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Obedience through recognizing Jesus (7-8)

Recognize that Jesus is the only way (John 14:6)

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Recognize that Jesus is about serving through the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17-19)

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Recognize that through Jesus the veil over my face and mind is removed (2 Cor 3:17-18)

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Recognize that through Jesus we are justified by faith (Gal 3:23-24)

23 Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Courage through Encouragement (1 Kings 18:9-15)

9 So he said, "How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me?"

10 As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, 'He is not here,' he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you.

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

12 And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth.

13 Was it not reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid one hundred men of the Lord's prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water?

14 And now you say, 'Go, tell your master, "Elijah is here." He will kill me!"

15 Then Elijah said, "As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today."

Encouragement when feeling mistreated (9-10)

Encourage because God works justice for the mistreated (Ps 103:6)

6 The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

Encourage because God arises to defend the mistreated (Ps 12:5)

5 "Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the Lord. "I will protect them from those who malign them."

Encourage because God is a refuge for the mistreated (Ps 9:9)

9 The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

Encourage because God sets the mistreated free (Ps 146:7)

7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free,

Encouragement when fearful (11-13)

Encourage because God wants us to not be afraid (John 14:1)

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

Encourage because God wants us to set Him apart as Lord (1 Peter 3:14-15)

14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." 15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Encourage because God's love drives out fear (1 John 4:18)

18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Encourage because God wants us to rely on the Spirit of power (2 Tim 1:7)

7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Encouragement through faith(14-15)

Through faith in the power of God (John 11:14-15)

14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Through faith in the word of God (John 20:30-31)

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Through faith in God's indwelling presence (Exod 4:4-5)

4 Then the Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. 5 "This," said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has appeared to you."

Through faith in Jesus as the Son of God (John 19:34-35)

34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

Courage through Honesty (1 Kings 18:16-18)

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

17 Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?"

18 And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals.

Honesty in participating in God's Will (16)

Participate by submitting to God's will (James 4:13-15)

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

Participate by becoming a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2)

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Participate by seeking the knowledge of God's Will (Col 1:9)

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Participate by living in the Will of God (1 Peter 4:2)

2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

Honesty in spite of opposition (17)

Opposition through persecution (2 Tim 3:12)

12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Opposition from those who are like wolves (Luke 10:3)

3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

Opposition from those who live in darkness (John 3:19-21)

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Opposition from false prophets (1 John 4:1)

1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Honesty in truth (18)

Truth through the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:9)

9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

Truth through the Gospel (Col 1:5-6)

5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

Truth through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13)

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

Truth through correctly handling God's word (2 Tim 2:15)

15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Obadiah: A Believer in Ahab's Court (1 Kings 18:1-15)

1 Some time later, in the third year of the famine, the LORD told Elijah, "Go, make an appearance before Ahab, so I might send rain on the surface of the ground." 2 So Elijah went to make an appearance before Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria. 3 So Ahab summoned Obadiah, who supervised the palace. (Now Obadiah was a very loyal follower of the LORD. 4 When Jezebel was killing the LORD's prophets, Obadiah took 100 prophets and hid them in two caves in two groups of 50. He also brought them food and water.) 5 Ahab told Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe you can find some grazing areas so we can keep the horses and mules alive and not have to kill some of the animals." 6 They divided up the land between them; Ahab went one way and Obadiah went the other. 7 As Obadiah was traveling along, Elijah met him. When he recognized him, he fell facedown to the ground and said, "Is it really you, my master, Elijah?" 8 He replied, "Yes, go and say to your master, 'Elijah is back.'" 9 Obadiah said, "What sin have I committed that you are ready to hand your servant over to Ahab for execution? 10 As certainly as the LORD your God lives, my master has sent to every nation and kingdom in an effort to find you. When they say, 'He's not here,' he makes them swear an oath that they could not find you. 11 Now you say, 'Go and say to your master, 'Elijah is back.'" 12 But when I leave you, the LORD's spirit will carry you away so I can't find you. If I go tell Ahab I've seen you, he won't be able to find you and he will kill me. That would not be fair, because your servant has been a loyal follower of the LORD from my youth. 13 Certainly my master is aware of what I did when Jezebel was killing the LORD's prophets. I hid 100 of the LORD's prophets in two caves in two groups of 50 and I brought them food and water. 14 Now you say, 'Go and say to your master, 'Elijah is back,'" but he will kill me." 15 But Elijah said, "As certainly as the sovereign LORD lives (whom I serve), I will make an appearance before him today."

From 1 Kings 17, we were informed that the drought Elijah prophesied came to pass, and we know that it created difficulties for Elijah, and for the widow of Zarephath and her son. We know that the brook Cherith dried up, and that it was necessary for Elijah to go to the land of Sidon to live. From these beginning verses in chapter 18, we learn more about the impact of the drought on Israel. We know that there was such a serious shortage of feed for the livestock that the king himself had to search for any pasture land, in the hope that they would not need to kill some of the horses and mules for lack of feed (18:5-6). We also learn how intent Ahab was on capturing Elijah. Obadiah informed Elijah that Ahab had an "all points bulletin" out for him. Without a doubt, Elijah was Israel's most wanted fugitive. Ahab not only searched throughout the land of Israel, he pressed the neighboring kingdoms to turn Elijah over to him if he was hiding out within their borders. Even when a neighboring country assured Ahab that Elijah was not living there, Ahab was not satisfied. He insisted that they provide him with the equivalent of a sworn affidavit, stating in writing that they did not know where Elijah could be found (18:10). Ahab was serious about capturing and killing Elijah.

And we know that it was not just Elijah whose life was in danger. In verse 4, we are informed that Jezebel was hunting down every true prophet of the God of Israel and slaughtering them. We are not told how many prophets died at the hand of Jezebel, but one must conclude that it was more than a few. I don't know exactly what time period the writer to the Hebrews is referring, but these words now take on new meaning:

32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets. 33 Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, gained what was promised, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, put foreign armies to flight, 35 and women received back their dead raised to life. But others were tortured, not accepting release, to obtain resurrection to a better life. 36 And others experienced mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, sawed apart, murdered with the sword; they went about in sheepskins and goatskins; **they were destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (the world was not worthy of them); they wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and openings in the earth.** 39 And these all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised. 40 For God had provided something better for us, so that they would be made perfect together with us (Hebrews 11:32-40, emphasis mine).

It was while this intensive manhunt was underway that God instructed Elijah to present himself to Ahab, and to inform the king that God was going to bring rain to the parched land of Israel (18:1-2). Elijah was on his way when he encountered Obadiah. Obadiah is a most interesting and perplexing fellow. He is the servant of King

Ahab and appears to be one of his most trusted men. It is Obadiah, along with Ahab, who searches the land for any remaining pasture or feed for the king's livestock.⁵⁹

What is most puzzling is that Obadiah is so closely associated with Ahab, and yet we are told that he **“was a very loyal follower of the LORD”** (18:3). The writer gives us some very compelling evidence to validate this assessment of Obadiah's relationship with God. He tells us that when Jezebel began killing the prophets, Obadiah hid 100 of the prophets away in two caves, in groups of 50, providing them with shelter and food (18:4). And yet one has to wonder how such a man could be a part of Ahab's administration. It would appear that neither Ahab nor Jezebel was aware of his faith in the God of Israel. Obadiah appears to be a kind of “closet Christian,” not unlike Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus in the New Testament (John 19:38-39). He does not seem to have come out into the open concerning his faith.

Obadiah seems to have recognized Elijah immediately (18:7). His response to Elijah's appearance inclines me to think that he was not really that happy to see Elijah. Obadiah apparently was able to keep his sparing of the 100 prophets secret. It was not that he was opposed to Elijah, but it hardly seems that he wants to be publicly associated with him either. Most of all, he does not want to tell Ahab that he knows where to find Elijah, only to have him disappear. Obadiah knows better than nearly anyone else how much Ahab wants to capture Elijah, and he also knows how angry he can get when Elijah makes him look bad by eluding him.

It is somewhat interesting to me that Obadiah can speak of Elijah miraculously disappearing by means of the Holy Spirit. Here is a man who saved 100 prophets by hiding them away, and yet he assumes that the prophet Elijah has been spared in some miraculous way—every time the enemy draws near, he is whisked away by the Spirit (18:12). If Obadiah informs Ahab of Elijah's whereabouts, he fears that the prophet will simply vanish into thin air, and then he (Obadiah) will be left to face the king's wrath. Elijah's instructions sounded like a suicide mission to Obadiah.

I am fascinated and somewhat troubled by the fact that Obadiah brings up the matter of the 100 prophets whose lives he saved. We have already been told this in verses 3 and 4, when we were first introduced to Obadiah and told of his character. Now, Obadiah feels obliged to tell Elijah about it, or at least to remind him of it in verses 12 and 13. Why does he feel he must do so? It sounds as though Obadiah wants to convince Elijah of his piety. And if he can do this, Obadiah seems to hope that this will change Elijah's mind about sending him to Ahab. Does Obadiah think that being pious is a guarantee that one will not suffer for his faith? I hope not, but the description of this man does leave some serious questions.⁶⁰ Of course we would like Obadiah to be flawless in his faith, but when we look in the Bible we see that even the greatest saints had their flaws. And so why should we expect perfection of this man?⁶¹ Elijah does not promise Obadiah that he will be safe, but he does assure him that he will be there when Ahab returns (18:15). And so Obadiah makes his way to Ahab, to tell him this amazing news.

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Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Courage has always been the trademark of God's spokespeople (examples: Joshua 1:6-7, 9, 18; Amos 7:10-17). Like Elijah, these prophets continued to proclaim courageously and lead faithfully according to the Lord's words. And like Elijah, these prophets were considered troublemakers. In many parts of the world today, an increased measure of courage is required to preach and teach the gospel. Defiant authorities in countries like China or Sudan consider followers of Jesus to be modern troublemakers. Such leaders work hard to silence missionary voices. In India, Christian ministers have been beaten by Hindu radicals. The country of Turkey has displaced Christians searching for a place of worship. And all over the world, Christian refugees seek new homes in nations that will welcome them in peace. Let us pray for these faithful servants of the Lord, that they may be restored, strengthened, settled (1 Peter 5:10), and empowered with the courage that has always characterized God's people in an often hostile world. May we learn from the examples of courage of our ancient prophets and our fellow Christians in the world today.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Fear - Obadiah, one of God's servants, worked in King Ahab's administration. The king and his wife Jezebel promoted idol worship and wickedness throughout the kingdom of Israel during his reign. In spite of the corruption, Obadiah stood firm on behalf of the true and living God. He struggled with fear but eventually fulfilled several tasks God required of him. The Lord caused a famine in Israel because of the king's disobedience. He shut up the heavens, and King Ahab blamed Elijah, not himself, for the drought. Ahab sent Obadiah to find grass for pasture, and Obadiah unexpectedly met Elijah, who asked Obadiah to speak to Ahab and bring the king back to talk with him. Initially, Obadiah refused Elijah's request. He had already risked his life to hide several of God's prophets in a cave. Obadiah felt as if he'd done enough. Obadiah also knew Elijah was sometimes in one place and then just disappeared. If that happened, the king might hold Obadiah responsible for the prophet getting away. But Elijah confidently told Obadiah he would be there to speak with Ahab.

Courage - Overcoming one's fears is not always an easy task, even when God is making the request. The Bible repeatedly says, "Fear not." This is because God knows our natural tendency is to live in anxiety, especially when faced with challenging situations. It's okay to be afraid and express anxious thoughts. However, God is with us, and when He calls us to be bold we can depend on the invisible heavenly host, and move forward. It's always important and essential to carry out what God is calling us to do.