

## LESSON 4

March 28, 2021

Unit I: Faithful Prophets

The Bearer of Bad News

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Luke 19:28-39

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

**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Kings 18:5-18

**Key Verse**— 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. (1 Kings 18:18, KJV)

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“I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the Lord’s commands and have followed the Baals.” (1 Kings 18:18, NIV)

### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- 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.
- Act in boldness when speaking the Word of God.

### KEY TERMS

**Ahab (verse 5)**—**Hebrew:** *Achab* (akh-awb’): the seventh king of Israel who reigned from the capital of Samaria. During his marriage to Jezebel, Ahab backslid from the worship of God and began worshipping Baal. (See 1 Kings 18:16-18.) Ahab’s wickedness is his royal legacy (see 1 Kings 16:30).

**Baals (verse 18)**—**Hebrew:** *Ba’al* (bah’-al): heathen gods; false gods (plural) whom ancient pagans and backslidden Israelites falsely credited with rain, storms, fertility, and fruitfulness; “Baalim” (KJV).

### INTRODUCTION

Can you remember hearing someone criticize the mailman for delivering a bill to his/her address? In one sense, the mailman is seen as the bearer of bad news, especially if the debtor does not have the funds to pay what is owed. How often do we vent our frustrations with the messenger when the blame lies elsewhere—often with us? Many people lack the courage and the character to confront their own shortcomings and admit when they have done wrong. Recall that Adam and Eve, when confronted by God for their sin, tried to save face or placate a guilty conscience before God by casually blaming someone else for their own actions. This was the kind of attitude Ahab

had when he met Elijah and declared him to be nothing more than the bearer of bad news. Ahab refused to acknowledge his own guilt of apostasy as the cause of the drought and famine in Israel. God created people with the capacity to make choices of their own volition. We each are responsible for the choices we make and need to be reminded that we are accountable to God for our actions. Ahab learned this important truth from the prophet Elijah.

## THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The first and second books of the Kings accurately report the sad histories of Israel after the death of King Solomon. King Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor to the throne of Israel, failed to seek the Lord. As a result, the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms— Israel and Judah. Sadly, the majority of Judah's kings and every subsequent king of Israel followed a path of apostasy and idolatry. Israel's line of wicked rulers worsened their guilt by promoting idolatry rather than confronting it. God sent prophets to confront the kings in their sin and call them to repentance. Judah's faithful kings were compared to the godly example of King David, while the evil kings of Judah and Israel were described compared to the wicked King Ahab. The writers of the book of the Kings described Ahab as more evil than all the kings of Israel before him (see 1 Kings 16:30). His sin was compounded by his marriage to Jezebel, the daughter of a Sidonian king and worshipper of Baal. With the support of her husband, Ahab, Jezebel established the worship of Baal and Asherah as the official religion in Israel. This provoked God's anger against Ahab more than any of his predecessors had done (see 1 Kings 16:33). God sent the prophet Elijah to confront Ahab and challenge the nation's worship of Baal with a three-year drought. Through the prophet Elijah, God demonstrated His power over Baal, the false god whom the people credited with sending rain and fertility in the land. Ahab's leading God's people to turn away from Him to idolatry was the cause of God's judgment on Israel. At the end of the drought, God sent Elijah to Ahab again, giving Him yet another chance to repent.

## ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

### A Futile Search (1 Kings 18:5-6)

#### KJV

**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.**

#### NIV

**5 *Ahab* had said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals."**

**6 So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.**

The tendency to refuse to acknowledge our own responsibility for a fault or wrong is often accompanied by attempting to search for ways around the consequences. The three-year drought had led to a period of famine in Israel and had not convicted Ahab to repent and turn the nation and him back to God. Instead, his response was continued rebellion and his priority was to seek fodder for his horses and mules needed to draw chariots he had pledged to provide to assist his allies in fighting Assyria. He commissioned Obadiah, his household manager, to join him in searching for some grass in the valleys or springs where these most necessary animals might graze. Ahab wanted to prevent the unpleasant prospect of having to kill a portion of them (verses 5-6). Ironically, he was searching for a physical solution to a divine judgment against him and the nation of Israel. His initial face-to-face encounter with Elijah had laid out God's requirement for ending the drought before it began—repentance of his apostate behavior. Let us not be too quick to condemn Ahab's futile attempt to turn to other means of solving spiritual challenges other than contritely going to God, admitting our sin, and seeking His forgiveness. We can be just as guilty if it means losing face or being seen as incapable of making wise choices when we deliberately disobey God.

### **What Do You Think?**

Why does it appear to be easier to use our own selfish means of solving self-generated spiritual challenges?

### **Fearing the Wrong Authority** (1 Kings 18:7-16a)

#### **KJV**

**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 today.**

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

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**NIV**

**7 As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, “Is it really you, my lord Elijah?”**

**8 “Yes,” he replied. “Go tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’”**

**9 “What have I done wrong,” asked Obadiah, “that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?”**

**10 “As surely as the LORD your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you.**

**11 “But now you tell me to go to my master and say, ‘Elijah is here.’**

**12 “I don’t know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn’t find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the LORD since my youth.**

**13 “Haven’t you heard, my LORD, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord? I hid a hundred of the LORD’s prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water.**

**14 “And now you tell me to go to my master and say, ‘Elijah is here.’ He will kill me!”**

**15 Elijah said, “As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today.”**

**16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him,**

Obadiah was the manager of Ahab’s palace in Samaria. He was a god-fearing man who risked his life to save at least one hundred prophets of the Lord by hiding them in caves. On one occasion during the drought, Ahab instructed Obadiah to look for grass to feed Ahab’s cattle and horses. As he searched, Obadiah ran into Elijah (verse 7). Obadiah immediately recognized the prophet. His question, “Is this you?” was not uncertainty, but surprise at seeing Elijah under the circumstances of Ahab’s wrath against him. Elijah acknowledged that he was the long-missing prophet and ordered Obadiah to go and inform Ahab that he was back (verse 8). Initially, Obadiah did not receive this order well. In fact, he was horrified by it and feared for his life because of Ahab’s murderous pursuit to find Elijah (verses 9-10). Obadiah feared that Elijah would disappear by the leading of the Spirit before Ahab had a chance to meet with him, and that Ahab would then kill

him for giving a false report concerning Elijah's return (verses 11-12). Obadiah pleaded with Elijah to honor his faithfulness toward the Lord's prophets by relieving him of such a dangerous assignment (verses 13-14). Obadiah had proven his genuine commitment to God by his deeds of righteousness. Elijah set Obadiah's mind at ease by swearing an oath in the name of "the Lord of hosts." He assured Obadiah that he would show himself to Ahab based on God's royal majesty and power (verse 15). Obadiah believed Elijah, found Ahab, and delivered Elijah's message (verse 16a). Suddenly, the stage was set for Elijah's confrontation with King Ahab and the prophets of Baal and Asherah at Mount Carmel before the people of Israel.

### **What Do You Think?**

What do you think of Obadiah's reluctance to deliver Elijah's message? Why do you think he recounted his commitment to God and compassion for God's prophets?

### **Confronting the Source of Evil** (1 Kings 18:16b-18)

#### **KJV**

**16 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**

**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*.**

.....

#### **NIV**

**16 and Ahab went to meet Elijah.**

**17 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"**

**18 "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the *Baals*."**

When Ahab heard Elijah's message, he went to meet him (verse 16b). Ahab immediately described Elijah as a troubler of the nation, implying that he was the cause of the drought in Israel (verse 17; see 1 Kings 17:1). Ahab maintained his obstinate attitude and greeted Elijah with bitterness and sarcasm. Elijah maintained his stance as God's spokesman and rightfully placed the blame where it belonged. Elijah told Ahab that the drought resulted from his and his family's decision to abandon God's commandments (verse 18). Elijah took command of the confrontation and challenged Ahab's unfaithfulness and disobedience. He called for a meeting on Mount Carmel that would be a showdown between God and Baal (see verses 20-40). When confronted with the consequences of their own sin, many people refuse to take responsibility for their own actions or contributions. They place blame with the devil, their biological makeup, family legacy, changes in societal expectations, and even the church's supposed failure to meet their needs. Those who

courageously confront sin are often labeled as judgmental, especially by those whose sin is being addressed. God's Word is clear: every person is accountable to God for his or her own actions (see Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 7:21-28; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12; Galatians 6:7,8). It is not God's desire that any should perish (see 2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, the church must not be afraid to raise a standard against sin and proclaim a message of truth rooted in God's love and holiness. Yes, God punishes sin, but by His grace, He lovingly offers a way of escape for all who are willing to repent.

### **What Do You Think?**

How would you rate your church's boldness in biblically confronting sin? To your knowledge, does your church have policies governing the public or private discipline of leaders or members who commit known sin?

### **A CLOSING THOUGHT**

It is challenging and unpopular to openly confront sin in today's world. Those who do so are often branded as haters, self-righteous, or judgmental busybodies. God is holy and calls His church to walk faithfully in love and in opposition to sin. Believers must have the courage and character to stand for what matters to God.

### **YOUR LIFE**

This week, reflect on your own willingness to speak up or stand up with courage against those things that displease God in your community and congregation. Pray for God's strength to stand boldly even when other believers oppose you.

### **YOUR WORLD!**

The declining spiritual condition of Israel in Elijah's day parallels the spiritual condition of our world in this generation. The Lord is looking for more Elijahs who have a true passion for helping backslidden people return to God.

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Dear God, we pray for boldness and compassion to reach out and challenge those around us to live faithfully for You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **CONCLUSION (Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)**

Where can you find hope in the midst of oppression? Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:4-11 reminds us of the ultimate source of hope as we celebrate Resurrection Sunday next week.

## **HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**(March 29–April 4, 2021)**

### **The Suffering Servant Brings Salvation**

MONDAY, March 29: “Isaiah Foretells the Suffering Servant” (Isaiah 52:13–53:3)

TUESDAY, March 30: “Jesus, The Suffering Servant” (Acts 8:26-35)

WEDNESDAY, March 31: “Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection” (Luke 18:31-34)

THURSDAY, April 1: “Jesus—Raised from Death” (Luke 24:1-12)

FRIDAY, April 2: “The Risen Christ Appears to Disciples” (Luke 24:13-27)

SATURDAY, April 3: “Christ Revealed in Breaking of Bread” (Luke 24:28-35)

SUNDAY, April 4: “Christ Suffered and Interceded for Sinners” (Isaiah 53:4-11)