

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).

PREPARING THE LESSON

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher’s Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week’s student assignments (“Your Life” and Your World!).
- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.
- Please note that you have the option of using your subscription bundle supplements, i.e., Lesson Scenario, Student Activity Sheet, SSL-AAG.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

People like to go their own way until faced with crises beyond their control. How should we respond to the advice of those who have great wisdom and insight? The book of 1 Kings records Elijah's warning to Israel of impending disaster, and the gospel of Matthew records Elijah's reappearance to affirm Jesus' mission.

THE LESSON IN FOCUS

Most of us try to avoid confrontations with others for various reasons: timidity, fear of failure or of losing face, and fear of damaging or losing a relationship. It can be especially challenging when the person to be confronted is obviously wrong but also in authority. "Blowing the whistle" on authority figures can lead to being branded as a troublemaker. For believers, the courage to confront sin is not optional. At times, God may direct someone to confront a spiritual or political leader who is misusing his/her power, not for the purpose of humiliation but for offering an opportunity for repentance and avoidance of divine judgment. God used Nathan to boldly confront David after he had sinned against Bathsheba and ordered her husband's murder. Consistently, God called other prophets to confront the sins of apostasy and idolatry committed by the succession of kings who reigned over His people after the nation was split into two kingdoms. Those who repeatedly declared "thus said the Lord" regarding the rebellion of the kings and the people were ridiculed, threatened, and branded as "bearers of bad news." Ironically, the evil kings of Israel and Judah refused to acknowledge their guilt and blamed those who delivered His messages of judgment. This was the case when God sent Elijah to confront Ahab at the close of His three-year judgment of drought and famine in Israel in response to Ahab's unrighteous leadership of the nation.

THE LESSON IN CONTEXT

In the Hebrew text, the books of 1 and 2 Kings were originally composed as a single book—Kings. Although the author of "Kings" is unknown, the narrative presents a historical account beginning with Solomon's reign followed by the civil war that divided the nation into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. First Kings closes with the ministry of the prophet Eli. The tragic history of these erring kingdoms is continued in 2 Kings. A systematic account of the nineteen evil kings of Israel ending with the Assyrian captivity is coupled with the reigns of Judah's kings, some of whom attempted to reform the evil of their predecessors. The context of this lesson is the introduction of Baal worship in Israel, beginning with Omri and continued by his son, Ahab (see 1 Kings 16:25-30). Ahab's subsequent marriage to Jezebel, daughter of the king of the Sidonians, intensified the influence of Baal worship in Israel (see 1 Kings 16:31-34). When Israel's spiritual decay had reached its lowest point, God sent Elijah to confront Ahab and to deliver the message of His divine judgment on the nation for its idolatry (see 1 Kings 17:1-2).

OPENING INQUIRY (Choose from the items below.)

1. Why is it often difficult to confront authority figures about their sin?
2. What was Ahab's main concern as a result of the drought caused by Israel's and his sins?
3. What was the cause of Obadiah's mixed feelings when he encountered Elijah?
4. Why could Obadiah be called a "secret" disciple?

INSIGHTS

It is usually obvious to the people of a nation when its leadership hierarchy is misusing and abusing political power. When accusations are leveled or confrontations are made, it is usually the confronter who is branded as a liar, troublemaker, or bearer of bad news. Even within the visible church, some spiritual leaders are guilty of misusing their authority and causing schisms and broken relationships among those they lead. God still uses spiritually mature believers to courageously confront leaders who have fallen and dared to operate outside His ethical and moral standards. The strength and courage to do so comes from a steadfast commitment to righteousness and love for God's people but must always be carried out in a spirit of humility. This kind of relationship positions the believer to confront those who err with a bold spirit of wisdom, discernment, compassion, and love.

EXPLORATION

This lesson challenges students to identify and examine apparent misuses of power and the failure to acknowledge guilt within political and spiritual circles of leadership. As you unpack the lesson's content, encourage the class to discuss what is needed to courageously confront immoral and unethical practices among those in authority. Challenge the students to seek God's timing, methods, and direction in using biblical principles to stand against harmful abuses of power and authority that may hinder His kingdom work.

ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

Commentary on 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.

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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.

In the third year after the predicted drought, God ordered Elijah back to Israel from Zarephath. After Elijah presented himself, God promised to send rain on the land again (verse 1). Rain was vital to Israel's crops and God had withheld the rain because His own people had turned from Him, the true God, to serve other gods. In response to Elijah's prayer for this judgment drought, God had done what He promised. According to James 5:17, the drought lasted three years and six

months. God had used Elijah to prove to Israel the futility of serving Baal, the god of fertility and rain. In desperation, Ahab ordered Obadiah, the manager of his household, to join him in a search for water where grass might be growing to feed his horses and mules (verse 5). Ahab was making a diligent effort to preserve the lives of his animals in the drought. Obadiah and Ahab went in opposite directions to survey the land for grass (verse 6). The depths of Ahab's apostasy can be understood by the focus of his search for water. His desire to keep his livestock alive was humane, but the motive behind it was to keep horses alive to draw the chariots he had pledged to his allies who were fighting against Assyria. More importantly, his search for water was in the wrong place and directed toward the wrong source. His attitude demonstrated unrepentant rebellion against God. Unlike David, who repented when he was confronted with his sin, Ahab refused to repent. Ahab did not see himself as the cause of the drought nor did he consider himself to have sinned against God. He was spiritually blind to the fact that the drought was a direct result of God's judgment—the hard consequences of the nation's spiritual rebellion. For three and half years, Baal had proven impotent and utterly incapable of bringing rain. King Ahab persisted in holding onto a "broken cistern" that could hold no water rather than repenting and turning back to God. Lest we are too quick to condemn Ahab's attitude, let us be reminded that we can be guilty of futilely searching for solutions for self-induced troubles when all we need to do is acknowledge our guilt, confess our sin, and turn back to God.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**
Why does it appear to be easier to use our own selfish means of solving self-generated spiritual challenges?
- **Young Adult Question:**
Share a situation in which you initially did not recognize God's hand in a situation. What happened when you finally realized that God was at work?

Commentary on 1 Kings 18:7-14

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.

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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!"

Ahab's trusted servant, Obadiah, ran into Elijah while on his errand for the king (verse 7). Obadiah readily recognized Elijah's person and position. Obadiah could not hide his surprise at seeing Elijah, for he knew that Elijah was the missing prophet for whom Ahab had been searching for more than three years. Elijah directed Obadiah to return and inform Ahab that he was back (verse 8). This was an unwelcome order for Obadiah. He was aware of Ahab's multiple searches among neighboring nations for the prophet and his hostile attitude toward them when Elijah was not found among them (verses 9-10). Obadiah feared that when he went to inform the king as requested, Elijah would disappear again, and Ahab, believing Obadiah to be a liar, would likely have him executed (verses 11-12). Fearing for his own safety, Obadiah pleaded with Elijah not to send him with any message to the king, pointing out his dutiful commitment to God and his compassion for His prophets (verses 13-14). To set Obadiah's mind at ease, Elijah swore an oath in the name of "the Lord of hosts" that he would meet with Ahab (verse 15). Reassured, Obadiah left to find the king (verse 16). Elijah's order to Obadiah challenged his faith and compelled him to publicly come out as a supporter of Elijah and God's way. In the past, Obadiah had been a secret or "undercover" prophet. His plea to be excused from this task was based on works and not faith. God does reward works of righteousness, but they are not bargaining tools to exempt us from difficult tasks or the circumstances of life.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Questions:**
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?
- **Young Adult Question:** Obadiah hesitated in obeying Elijah. Discuss times when you have had to rely on faith to obey a difficult command from God.

Commentary on 1 Kings 18:15-18

KJV

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*.

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NIV

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, 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*."

Ahab responded immediately to Elijah's request to meet with him. He hurried to confront the prophet with an aggressive attitude of blame and sarcasm. When Ahab saw Elijah, he referred to the prophet as the "troubler of Israel" (verse 17). Ahab blamed the drought on Elijah instead of admitting that his promotion of idolatry in the land had prompted God to judge the nation with a drought. Elijah was unafraid to meet Ahab and tell him the truth. Defiantly, Elijah cast the blame on the right source. The deplorable spiritual and economic condition of Israel was the fault of Ahab and his father's house. They had forsaken God's commandments and adopted the practices of Baal worship (verse 18). There is no record of Ahab's response to Elijah's defiant accusation. This confrontation paved the way for the real contestants—God versus Baal. Those who stand against evil and confront it are branded bearers of bad news. God's Word is often considered bad news to the sinner because it exposes and condemns evil choices. The world often rejects believers just as it rejected Christ (see John 15:18). Confronting evil must always be done according to God's methods, otherwise the efforts may backfire. Those who confront others must not be argumentative and quarrelsome, but kind, patient, and gentle (see 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Questions:**
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?
- **Young Adult Question:**
Have there been times when your faith was privately or publicly tested? Briefly share your initial response.

LIFE APPLICATION

- **Refer to Adult Book**
(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)
— 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.

(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)
— 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.
- **Refer to Young Adult Book**
(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)
— There may be times when God calls you to be the bearer of bad news, speaking a necessary but unpleasant truth in love. If God calls you to deliver unpleasant news, do not be afraid. Just do it.

(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)
— Obadiah was working for an unbeliever. There will be times when you may find yourself employed or managed by an unbelieving employer or supervisor. It is possible to maintain your faithfulness to God even when you feel that you are alone spiritually.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The lesson topic for Sunday, April 4, 2021, is "Finding Hope in the Midst of Oppression." The Devotional Reading is Philippians 2:1-11, the Background Scriptures are Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Luke 24:1-35, and the Printed Text is Isaiah 53:4-11.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, help us to follow Elijah's example of courage in standing for righteousness. Give us the wisdom to courageously confront sin, and the humility to regard our own sin before we seek to correct others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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)