

Elijah: Prophet of Courage

It was Saturday morning, and Elise sat looking at the “No Contracts” sign above the fitness center reception desk. She was biting her lip and going over what the Lord told her to tell one of her closest friends.

Kandace was dating a man who belonged to a group that calls themselves “Christians” but do not believe Jesus is God, that salvation comes only through grace by faith, and other things that strike at the heart of Christianity. Elise and Kandace came to Christ as teenagers. However, in their early 30s and still not married, Kandace had become discouraged. When Elise learned about Jamal, she had hoped he was an answer to prayer. He was not.

The closer Kandace got to Jamal, the further she moved from God—and Elise. Eventually, Elise learned of Jamal’s religious beliefs, and she asked her dear friend if she now shared these views. Kandace’s reply was frightening.

The Lord had given Elise her marching orders. She could either obey and risk losing her friendship, or disobey and incur God’s displeasure.

“Elise?” a startled Kandace said as she entered the lobby of the 24-hour fitness center.

“I’ve been waiting to talk to you,” Elise said. “I can no longer watch you drift away from God. You must leave Jamal alone and run back into the arms of Christ. Trust the Lord to bring you the man of God that He wants for you, not a counterfeit one.”

- 1.** *Give an example of a time you’ve allowed fear to stop you.*
- 2.** *What is a good way to address and overcome our fears?*
- 3.** *Why does Scripture often tell us to be of good courage?*

Searching for Water

1 Kings 18:5-8, 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.

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.

1 Kings 18:5-8, NIV

⁵Ahab 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." ⁶So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.

⁷As 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.'"

King Ahab supported his wife Jezebel's establishment of Baal worship in the land. In response to this wickedness, Elijah predicted that God would bring a severe drought upon the land (1 Kings 17:1). Baal supposedly controlled the elements of nature, so the drought showed Baal's powerlessness.

The severity of the drought caused Ahab and Obadiah, his "palace administrator" (vs. 3), to look for grass to feed the livestock before they perished. Ahab had also been hunting Elijah down to call an end to the drought, but he had repeatedly failed to find him. However, the Lord had already told Elijah to tell the king to announce after three years that rain was coming (vs. 1). On his way to do so, Elijah encountered Obadiah, who recognized the prophet and bowed to the Lord's messenger.

4. *Why was there a drought in the land?*

5. *How was King Ahab trying to address the "no rain" problem?*

Obadiah Finds Elijah

1 Kings 18:9-15, KJV

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.

1 Kings 18:9-15, NIV

"What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?"¹⁰As 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.¹¹But now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.'¹²I 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.¹³Haven'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.¹⁴And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!"

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

Obadiah was a faithful servant of God, even though he had been caught up in the service of a tyrannical ruler and his wife. When Jezebel sought to cut off the Lord's prophets, Obadiah took the initiative to hide 100 of them in a cave (vs. 13) without the knowledge of the king and queen. Elijah told Obadiah to inform Ahab of his arrival, but Obadiah hesitated. He even wondered if Elijah's instructions were some sort of discipline for inappropriate behavior by the faithful servant.

Through his reply to the prophet, we are given a glimpse of the measures Ahab had taken to find Elijah. The king had sent emissaries to multiple nations looking for the one who had called down a drought upon the land. If the residents claimed not to know where Elijah was, the king would make them swear an oath to that effect. Obadiah reminded the prophet that he had remained faithful to God, even though was forced to serve a king who was full of spiritual apathy (at least for the God of Israel). By hiding the prophets, Obadiah was risking his life. At least with this exploit, it was possible to cover up his involvement so that he would not have to answer to the king for what happened. Telling the king that he had found Elijah, however, was an entirely different matter. If for some reason, Elijah did not show up, surely Obadiah's head would be removed from his shoulders for upsetting an already-paranoid monarch.

Obadiah was afraid that if he told the king of Elijah's arrival, and the Spirit of the Lord suddenly transported the prophet to sights-unseen, the servant would lose his life. In order to assure Obadiah and assuage his fears, Elijah promised the faithful servant that he would be there if Obadiah announced his arrival. In fact, Elijah did so with an oath to the God they both served. He was willing to meet the consequences of his obedience head on—even if that meant his execution. This may have given Obadiah the courage to move forward with the prophet's message, even at the possible cost of his own life.

6. *What were Obadiah's concerns?*

7. *What did Elijah promise to Obadiah?*

Name Calling

1 Kings 18:16-18, KJV

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.

1 Kings 18:16-18, NIV

¹⁶So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷When 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 finally got what he wanted—a face-to-face encounter with the prophet who had called down a drought upon his kingdom. However, when Elijah came to visit Ahab, the king refused to accept responsibility for his actions. Instead, he focused on the inconvenience to him that the response to his destructive actions was causing the kingdom. Not only did he refuse to acknowledge his contribution to the current situation (and that of his idolatrous wife), he attempted to deflect responsibility for the consequences of his actions on to the prophet himself, by describing Elijah as the one who brought "trouble" upon the king and the land.

But Elijah directly placed responsibility for the drought on the shoulders of Ahab and his household. Also, Elijah made it clear as to why no rain had come—Ahab had forsaken the Lord and followed the pagan gods, "the Baals" (vs. 18) worshiped by his wife. The spiritual adultery this represented was vile in the eyes of God, and a contest between God and the Baals was coming soon.

8. *What title did King Ahab give to Elijah?*

9. *How did Elijah react to Ahab's accusation that the prophet was responsible for the troubles in Israel?*

A Man of Like Passion

James 5:17-18 tells us, “Elias [Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (KJV).

Elijah had the passions we do, but he didn’t yield to those passions; he yielded himself to the will of God as an instrument of righteousness, service, humility, and obedience. The capacity was there to ignore the Lord, follow what the rest of the country was doing and worship the Baals, but Elijah’s will and decision were set to please the Lord. Although Elijah was courageous in faith when he confronted Ahab and later when he challenged the prophets of Baal, he became afraid (as we likely would have) when murderous Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him (1 Kings 19:2-3).

Although we have faith, we too have to resist the urge to fear the threats of men. When we abide in God’s presence, we can be courageous and peaceful, knowing that He is with us; the battle and the victory are His. When we fret over all the worst-case scenarios, passion turns into panic. When the servant of the prophet Elisha saw the city surrounded by an army, the prophet opened the servant’s eyes to show him the Lord’s army and said, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6:16, KJV).

The Lord helps us even when we’re unaware of His caring hand. We can trust Him no matter what we face. A key element of faith is this: if the problem wasn’t greater than our capacity, then it wouldn’t require courage!

10. *What is the relationship between having God’s power and submitting to Him?*

11. *How would you describe your present obedience to Him versus your fears?*

12. *How can relying on God’s strength and mercy help our fears?*

Finding Courage

In the world, courage is bravery; it is the nerve and audacity to run into danger; it is selflessness and valor. Those are admirable attributes and characteristics. However, our battle for courage is first spiritual, then physically tangible. The true power and authority behind our courage is Christ our Savior, the hope of glory. We go forward fearlessly when we understand that the battle belongs to the Lord.

► *As a class, read Deuteronomy 31:6 and Psalm 27:14 together. Make a commitment this week to show courage and overcome any fear you have of doing what God asks you to do. You may want to write that commitment here.*

KEY VERSE

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. —1 Kings 18:18, KJV

"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

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 29 through April 4

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 52:13–53:3—Isaiah Foretells the Suffering Servant.
- Tues.** Acts 8:26–35—Jesus, the Suffering Servant.
- Wed.** Luke 18:31–34—Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection.
- Thurs.** Luke 24:1–12—Jesus Raised from Death.
- Fri.** Luke 24:13–27—The Risen Christ Appears to Disciples.
- Sat.** Luke 24:28–35—Christ Revealed in Breaking of Bread.
- Sun.** Isaiah 53:4–11—Christ Suffered and Interceded for Sinners.