

Lessons from the Life of Elijah



18:7-16
THE LORD PUTS
THE REMNANT TO
WORK IN THE
SERVICE OF HIS
WORD



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18:7-8

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?" Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.' "

- Why does God send Elijah to Obadiah, instead of directly to Ahab? Why not have Obadiah lead Elijah to Ahab? The answer is in the command Elijah gives.
- When we focus on the Word of God, we learn to look less on personal elements and more on spiritual elements, on Elijah as office-bearer. Elijah is functioning as prophet.
- The command is to tell Ahab 'Elijah is here' " on Canaan's soil, within Ahab's territory.
- But Elijah carries out this command by making use of the services of Obadiah who becomes a link between Elijah and Ahab. No mere suggestion, Elijah approaches Obadiah as office-bearer and demands he obey.
- The Word goes forth. And the Word waits. But is the Word really waiting?
- This is the start of the great revelation triumph of the only God on Mount Carmel.



THE LORD PUTS THE REMNANT TO WORK IN THE SERVICE OF HIS WORD

18:8

Go tell your master . . .

- The Word of the Lord was sent only to Ahab, because the matter of covenant breaking must be dealt with before covenant blessing can come.
- By sending this news to Ahab's address, Elijah was telling Ahab the conflict with the Lord was not to be avoided or blurred. God was about to expose the positions that opposed Him. Ahab is forced to enjoin the battle as an adversary of the Lord. Here the Lord is "winnowing", He is "threshing", he is "separating"
- *His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* – Matthew 3:12, Luke 3:17 cf. Jeremiah 15:7.
- The Word of the Lord forces upon Ahab the dispute and defines the terms of the conflict.
- This simple move left the response up to Ahab.



THE LORD PUTS THE REMNANT TO WORK IN THE SERVICE OF HIS WORD

18:9-10

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

- We can be sure Ahab and Obadiah were not touring the countryside alone? So why send Obadiah? Why not send a lesser servant? Especially given Obadiah's strong objections?
- Because the Lord chose Obadiah as one of the remnant the Lord had preserved. Obadiah was functioning as the "Israel of Israel", the true Church. Romans 9:6-33.
- Only the Church could be honored with such a task as carrying the Word of the Lord. Then, why not use Obadiah in the first encounter? Because first announcement was judgment.
- The Word of God would not be brought by servants of Ahab, but through Obadiah. Ahab was to hear the Word calling him and dictating the terms of the conversation.
- Note Obadiah was Ahab's servant. Here the Lord reminded Obadiah of his true allegiances. The Lord coopted Ahab's servant as rightfully His own and pressed Obadiah into action. It is the Church who summons the king, not vis-à-vis.



THE LORD PUTS THE REMNANT TO WORK IN THE SERVICE OF HIS WORD

18:11-14

But now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' 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. . . . He will kill me!"

- Obadiah faced the wrath of Jezebel by hiding 100 prophets. So why this protest and fear?
- He was afraid Ahab would kill him – he says so 3 times (9, 12, 14).
- But again, why would Ahab be more stirred up by the announcement Elijah is here than by hiding the prophets? Because hiding the prophets was in secret. But here the announcement is public. Here the Word of the Lord would thrust Obadiah from behind the scenes to the front ranks.
- The prophet and the king were both mighty figures in the battle over the Word. And nobody wanted to come between them. This applied not only to a messenger sent from Elijah to Ahab, but also to messengers sent from Ahab to Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-12).



THE LORD PUTS THE REMNANT TO WORK IN THE SERVICE OF HIS WORD

18:12

I don't know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

- Obadiah was convinced the Lord would not allow the prophet of the Lord to fall into Ahab's hands. Apparently this kind of thing had happened before. Elijah's sudden appearance before Ahab, then Obadiah, then going into hiding where he could not be found all contributed to this conclusion.
- We know the Spirit had a habit of moving Elijah around – 2 Kings 2:16
- Obadiah was afraid the Spirit of the Lord would steal away Elijah and cause death for him.
- Obadiah was not boasting. He was appealing to the covenant promises that he had obeyed the Word of the Yahweh and expected blessings to follow.
- Obadiah started down the path that the Word of the Lord chose for its return to Israel.



THE LORD PUTS THE REMNANT TO WORK IN THE SERVICE OF HIS WORD

18:15

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

- With a powerful oath, Elijah removed Obadiah's fears.
- Here we also have further assurance for Obadiah when Elijah went beyond saying "I am here" to "I will present myself to Ahab . . . to meet".
- This statement was confirmed with an oath in the name of Yahweh Sabaoth. Here we have a different formula than in 17:1 God of Israel, where the focus was on the honor of Israel's God versus Israel's false gods.
- But here the oath is in the name of the Lord of Hosts (Armies). This would have fully restored Obadiah's equilibrium.



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THE WORD OF THE LORD ORDERS THE KING TO FULFILL THE DUTIES OF HIS THEOCRATIC OFFICE

18:16

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

- It was now up to the king to respond. And now Ahab now goes out to meet Elijah. What motivated Ahab to agree to meet so quickly – rage, fear, hatred, practically?
- When Ahab went to Elijah, it was not simply a continuation of his manhunt.
- By Elijah's first words, we see it was the prophet summoning the king. The prophet was holding court.
- Like Obadiah, Ahab's first response states the confession of his faith, his perspective.
- It was Ahab's fault. Tying the fortunes of Israel to the rich cultural centers of Tyre and Sidon and giving the service of Baal and Astarte a place in Israel did not bother Ahab.
- This entire policy had been shattered by one bold statement from Elijah who pushed another question to the forefront – who was to be recognized as God?



THE WORD OF THE LORD ORDERS THE KING TO FULFILL THE DUTIES OF HIS THEOCRATIC OFFICE

18:17

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

- Ahab's confession confronts us with another side of his sin –he refuses to discharge his duties as theocratic king. The first job of Israel's king is to under-shepherd God's people according to the Word of the Great Shepherd.
- Ahab should have led the way in answering the question of Elijah, "Who is God?"
- Ahab should have determined whether Elijah was a true prophet. That was his duty.
- But prophets are qualified based on their words
- In Ahab's failure to be the shepherd of Israel, he also lost the reason for his existence.
- In the same way Ahab removed the fundamental question from his field of vision, Israel's leaders in Jesus' day (the Sanhedrin) also ignored the problem.
- See Mark 12:1-12 where Jesus teaches the Parable of the Defiant Tenants.



THE WORD OF THE LORD ORDERS THE KING TO FULFILL THE DUTIES OF HIS THEOCRATIC OFFICE

18:18

"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.

- With this answer, Elijah maintains the covenant statute against the king.
- Elijah's first rejects Ahab's slander of Elijah a "troubler of Israel" as what Elijah did in praying for judgement was intended to save Israel.
- Elijah then moves to his second point that the troubler of Israel is truly Ahab.
- What the king calls good, the prophet calls bad. They do not use the same criteria. They live in two separate worlds.
- Elijah's criteria is Scripture alone –same as Moses in Deuteronomy 28, as Yahweh in Deuteronomy 11, and as Solomon in the dedication of the temple in 2 Chronicles 6.
- In the covenant God reveals Himself as imminent, not abstract.
- Elijah's response to Ahab is "Which of us broke faith with the covenant of God?"



THE WORD OF THE LORD ORDERS THE KING TO FULFILL THE DUTIES OF HIS THEOCRATIC OFFICE

18:19-20

Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel.

- The prophet does not expect an answer from the king. He moves to require him to assemble the people. Elijah does not confront Ahab with moral superiority, but with the superiority of his office.
- Elijah did not bypass or undermine the office of the king. He did order the king to carry out the duties of his office, his royal obligation. The king's part was to call the people together.
- Again all the initiative is taken by the Lord – to Obadiah, to Ahab, to the people.
- In preparing for the event at Carmel, the Lord is already building the road that would lead from Bethlehem to Golgotha.