

1 Kings Chapter 18

1 Kings 18:1 "And it came to pass [after] many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth."

"Ahab" was the seventh king of Israel, the son and successor of Omri (16:30; in 873-853 B.C.).

His queen and wife was Jezebel, a daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre.

Jezebel influenced Ahab to give Baal equal place with God.

He even built a temple to Baal with a "wooden image" of the Canaanite goddess Asherah (16:33).

Jezebel finally urged Ahab to oppose the worship of the LORD, destroy His altars, and kill His prophets.

Ahab was the first king of Israel to come into conflict with Assyria.

He was also the first to be recorded on the Assyrian monuments, for fielding two thousand chariots and 10,000 soldiers in the battle against Shalmaneser III at Qarqar in 853 B.C.

Ahab had four significant encounters with the prophets, especially Elijah.

The first concerned the great drought predicted by Elijah (17:1), culminating in the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (verses 17-40), where he was present.

The second involved two unnamed prophets; one of whom encouraged Ahab to resist Ben-hadad of Damascus (20:22).

The prophet during this time was Micaiah ben Imlah.

Ahab inflicted such horrors as tyranny (Chapter 21), religious persecution (verse 4), and human sacrifice (1 Kings 16:29; 15:29-22:40).

In an agrarian society, this three and a half year drought would have been an especially dire situation (Luke 4:25; James 5:17).

The time above, is speaking of about 3 and a half years.

This Scripture following is a direct quote of the Lord Jesus.

Luke 4:25 "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;"

James 5:17 "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."

There are so many times in the Bible, when three and a half years are mentioned.

I am of the opinion that these three and a half years is a type and shadow of the three and a half years of the great tribulation.

Notice, it is God who will send the rain at the announcement by Elijah.

1 Kings 18:2 "And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab. And there was] a sore famine in Samaria."

"Famine":

This was to give Ahab opportunity to repent.

He was the cause of national judgment in the famine.

If he repented, rain would come.

Elijah stepped up in a culture marked by spiritual infidelity, spiritual immorality, spiritual idolatry, and spiritual indifference among God's people.

Ahab probably remembers the drought that Elijah had predicted the last time they talked.

Samaria is the capital city where Ahab lives with Jezebel.

1 Kings 18:3 "And Ahab called Obadiah, which [was] the governor of [his] house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly:"

"Obadiah":

His name means "servant of the LORD."

He was the manager of Ahab's royal palace and a devout worshiper of the LORD, who had demonstrated his devotion to the LORD by protecting 100 or the LORD's prophets from death by Jezebel (verses 4, 13), which had put him on tenuous ground with Ahab.

This Obadiah was probably not the one who authored the biblical book by that name. In any case, he was a godly man and an official in Ahab's court.

This is so strange that a man of Obadiah's faith would be the governor for Ahab.

"Obadiah" means servant of Jehovah.

Perhaps Ahab had him in this place of authority, because he knew of his honesty.

1 Kings 18:4 "For it was [so], when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)"

Associations of "Prophets," forming a sort of school of the prophets, seem to have existed since Samuel's day (1 Sam. 10:5-18).

These prophets apparently met together for study, prophesying, service and mutual spiritual encouragement (1 Sam. 19:20, 24; 2 Kings 2:3-7, 15; 4:1, 38; 6:1; 9:1).

Apparently, the great prophets exercised leadership over such schools (2 Kings 6:1-7).

We see that Obadiah, at the risk of his own life, had hidden 100 prophets of the Most High God.

He had put 50 in each place and had sneaked out food to keep them going.

Truly, there was very little more than bread and water for anyone during this drought.

Notice also, that it was Jezebel who had cut off the prophets of the LORD.

Perhaps Ahab did not want them destroyed.

1 Kings 18:5 "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."

Like Solomon before him, Ahab" had a considerable number of "horses," a fact confirmed by archaeological excavations in the Holy Land and in the Assyrian inscriptions.

We see the condition of the land had become a truly serious problem.

If they do not do something fast, the animals will die from starvation.

Ahab sends Obadiah one way and he goes the other, because he knows if Obadiah finds any pasture suitable for the animals, he will come back and tell him.

If he sent someone else, they might stay and eat and drink themselves and not come back and tell him.

1 Kings 18:6 "So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself."

And one took one part, and the other the other part.

"Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself":

Ahab not caring to trust any but Obadiah, who he knew was a faithful man, lest they should be bribed by those that had grass not to discover it.

This shows the great confidence that Ahab had in Obadiah.

1 Kings 18:7 "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?"

In his district, making his observations.

"Behold, Elijah met him":

Where is not said; but he was, no doubt, upon the road from Zarephath to Samaria.

"And he knew him":

That is, Obadiah knew Elijah, having seen him at Ahab's court before he absconded.

"And fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah":

And in saying this, he did both honor and reverence by words and gesture, as being an extraordinary prophet of the LORD.

We see the tremendous respect that Obadiah had for Elijah.

He realized Elijah was a man of God that miracles came through.

He knew that Elijah could pray and God would answer.

1 Kings 18:8 "And he answered him, I [am]: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah [is here]."

He did not desire to be concealed, his orders were to show and make himself known to Ahab, and Obadiah was one of his domestic servants.

"Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here":

In such a place, ready to face him at any time.

Elijah, by calling Ahab the lord of Obadiah, as he tacitly reproves him for calling him lord, shows reverence to Ahab as a king, and yet that he was fearless of him, as he was the prophet and ambassador of the LORD of hosts to him.

1 Kings 18:9 "And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?"

Or in what have I offended God or his prophet that revenge should be taken on me in this way.

"That thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me":

For that he supposed would be the consequence of it, as he argues and more plainly expresses his sense in the following words.

This seems like a normal request for Elijah to ask of Obadiah.

Obadiah fears for his life if he goes and tells Ahab that Elijah is there.

1 Kings 18:10 "[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."

Which is the form of an oath he thought fit to make, to ascertain the truth of what he was about to say.

"There is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee":

Which is either a hyperbolical expression, signifying he had sought for him in many places, and in every place he could think of.

Or it must be understood either of the ten tribes, which were as so many nations and kingdoms as they had been; or were more in the times of the Canaanites; or of the nations round about, that were in alliance with or tributary to the king of Israel.

"And when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not":

Which he might exact of his own subjects, but could not of other nations, unless they were free to it of themselves.

Or he might take it of their ambassadors or merchants that came into his land, of whom he inquired, and adjured them to tell him the truth.

We remember from the last lesson that the LORD told Elijah to go and hide from Ahab.

It seems that Ahab had tried to no avail to find Elijah.

Ahab blamed Elijah for the drought.

He never once dreamed the drought had been sent by God.

1 Kings 18:11 "And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah [is here]."

Which, if I should not be able to make good, would be of fatal consequence to me; and that it is plain he feared, by what he next says.

1 Kings 18:12 "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."

The spirit of the LORD shall carry thee”:

The servant had been asked to tell Ahab that Elijah was present to speak with him (verses 7, 18), but he was afraid because Ahab was seeking Elijah so intensely.

Since Elijah had disappeared from sight earlier (17:5), Obadiah was afraid that the Holy Spirit would carry Elijah away again (2 Kings 2:16), and the irrational Ahab would kill him for the false report of Elijah’s presence.

For the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament (see the note on Judges 3:10).

Obadiah fears Ahab but he fears the LORD even more.

Obadiah fears that if he goes to tell Ahab, God will send Elijah somewhere else, and he will be killed for saying he had found him.

He fears Ahab will find out about him hiding the 100 true prophets of God.

1 Kings 18:13 "Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD'S prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?"

This he said not in a way of ostentation, but to show that it would be very ungenerous and ungrateful, as well as impolitic, to sacrifice such a friend at court to the LORD's prophets as he had been, and might still continue to be.

(See 1 Kings 18:4).

1 Kings 18:14 "And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah [is here]: and he shall slay me." Obadiah is convinced, if he tells Ahab about Elijah, Ahab will kill him.

That is, should he carry such a message to him, and Elijah should be removed elsewhere, and not to be found.

1 Kings 18:15 "And Elijah said, [As] the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto him to day."

In whose presence he was, and whose prophet and minister he was; he takes this oath, to assure Obadiah that he would certainly be upon the spot, or to be found, and not expose him to any danger.

"I will surely show myself unto him to day":

He was determined at all events to present himself to him that day.

For "LORD of hosts" (see the note on 1 Sam. 1:3).

1 Kings 18:16 "So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah."

That Elijah was in such a place, and had desired him to inform him of it, and was ready to appear before him that day wherever he pleased.

For upon the prophet's oath Obadiah was entirely satisfied, and was in no fear of delivering the message.

"And Ahab went to meet Elijah":

Though perhaps the bold message of the prophet might make him fear he had something to say to him not very agreeable.

Now that Obadiah is convinced that Elijah will appear before Ahab, he goes and tells Ahab.

When Elijah promises not to leave, Obadiah believes him.

Ahab wants to see Elijah, to get this drought stopped.

Verses 17-18

"Ahab" called Elijah "he that troubleth Israel", blaming the drought on him.

The irony, of course, is that Ahab was the true cause of Israel's trouble because he had brought idolatry into the land.

1 Kings 18:17 "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, [Art] thou he that troubleth Israel?"

"He that troubleth":

Such was one who brought misfortune on a community by breaking an oath or by making a foolish one (Joshua 6:18; 7:25).

Ahab thought that Elijah had some magic powers to make the drought.

He asks Elijah if he is the one who started this drought.

1 Kings 18:18 "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."

“Baalim”:

These were local shrines where the cult worship of Baal was carried on.

See the note on Judges 2:11-15.

These were the local idols of Baal.

The prophet boldly told Ahab that the calamity of drought and famine was traceable directly to his and his family's patronage and practice of idolatry.

This is a very true statement.

God had caused the drought because of their evil worship of Baal.

They had brought this drought upon themselves with their worship of this false god, Baalim.

1 Kings 18:19 "Now therefore send, [and] gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table."

“Mount Carmel”:

The Carmel range of mountains rising to 1,800 feet at its highest point, extending about 30 miles to the southeast from the shores of the Mediterranean sea into the south of the Jezreel Valley.

A series of rounded peaks and valleys, it became a symbol of beauty and fruitfulness because of its lush tree cover (SOS 7:5; Isa. 35:2).

It is not known at exactly what point along this ridge the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal took place.

The queen cared for 850 false prophets who were associated with her.

The Canaanites built sanctuaries to the pagan weather deities on this mountain.

Thus, Carmel was an appropriate site for a confrontation between Elijah, the prophet of the LORD, and the “prophets of Baal” (verses 19-20), the idolatrous Canaanite priests.

From the crest of Carmel, Elijah observed the coming storm that signaled the end of a prolonged drought.

He then preceded the chariot of Ahab to the gate of Jezreel (verses 42-43).

Elijah may have used the mountain as a spiritual retreat.

Elisha was a familiar visitor to Carmel also (2 Kings 2:25; 4:25).

Today, a monastery belonging to the Carmelite Order of monks is located on the promontory of round earth that juts out toward the Mediterranean sea.

“The prophets of the groves” were the priests of Asherah, whose cult worship was apparently sponsored by Queen “Jezebel”.

These prophets were not present at the contest on “mount Carmel” but apparently remained with Jezebel at Jezreel (verses 45; 19:1).

Three different mountains are prominent in Elijah’s life: Mount Carmel, Mount Horeb (Chapter 19).

And the New Testament, Mount Tabor, the presumed Mount of Transfiguration.

“Mount Carmel”, located on the coast of the Mediterranean sea, long held significance for both worshipers of Yahweh and worshipers of Baal.

Commentator Pal House has observed: “What better place to decide who is God, what prophets tell the truth, and which leaders benefit or harm the people.”

This meeting of all of the heads of the tribes of the people, and all of the people who wanted to come were to meet with Elijah and the false prophets on the top of Mount Carmel.

The highest point on Mount Carmel is 1,800 feet.

It is a beautiful spot overlooking the Mediterranean sea.

Notice all of these false prophets eat at Jezebel's table.

God will manifest Himself in such a way they will not be able to deny that he is God.

1 Kings Chapter 18 Questions

1. The Word of the LORD came to Elijah the _____ year.

2. Who will send the rain, when it comes?
3. There was a sore famine in _____.
4. Who was Ahab's governor?
5. What was unusual about this?
6. What does "Obadiah" mean?
7. Why do you suppose Ahab had Obadiah in this place of authority?
8. What had Obadiah done, that could have cost him his life, if Ahab found out?
9. Where had Obadiah hidden them?
10. What had Obadiah fed them?
11. Where did Ahab send Obadiah?
12. Why were they going to this trouble to find fodder?
13. Who met Obadiah on his way?
14. How did Obadiah greet Elijah?
15. What did Elijah ask Obadiah to do?
16. What was his reply?
17. Who did Ahab blame for the drought?
18. What did Obadiah believe Ahab would do to him?
19. What convinced Obadiah to go?
20. What did Ahab ask Elijah the minute he saw him?
21. How did Elijah answer him?
22. Who really caused the drought?
23. Where were all Israel and the prophets of Baal to meet?