

Elijah and Obadiah

Christ Church: 6th March 2022 10.00 am. & online
1 Kings 18:1-15

The passage this week is a one act drama with three players. It is incredibly relevant to the world situation we find ourselves in today and I make no apology for relating it all to that. We need to address Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the passage has much to teach us. The Bible speaks into the number one news story of the moment.

Ahab Seventh king of the Northern province: Israel c 874-852 BC. So he reigned for 22 years (as has Putin interestingly enough) – see 1 Kings 16:29. His greatest sin was to marry Jezebel, pagan daughter of King of Sidon. She built pagan temples dedicated to Baal and developed a large group of Baal's prophets (1 Kings 16:32,33). The Bible says Ahab angered God more than any previous king.

Obadiah Not the same as the prophet who wrote the OT Book of Obadiah. This was Ahab's chief of staff. He was a secret believer in Yahweh and somehow managed to hold senior office for Ahab while quietly doing what he could to protect Yahweh's prophets and keep them safe when Jezebel was out to kill them. So he was working very dangerously behind enemy lines.

Elijah A great prophet. We have already heard two sermons on him. His name means "Yahweh is God". He defiantly countered Ahab on the issue of Baal-worship, his prayers brought about the three plus years drought and famine, and he had to flee, first at Cherith brook (two Sundays ago) and then with the widow at Zarephath (last week). The whole story is heading towards the encounter with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel – but that is for another week.

The Elijah story this week

Chapter 18. On God's instructions, Elijah gets ready to come out of hiding and confront Ahab (vv1,2). Think of the courage this required. It is like you or me going up to Putin and putting him in his place. But God often uses weak people to face up to those who are strong: Moses to Pharaoh (Ex 6:12), Nathan to David (2 Sam 12:1), Ananias to Saul (Acts 9:10-17). But get a feel of what this must have been like. Scary!

Meanwhile Ahab and Obadiah go off in different directions to find water for the horses. There were probably about 2,000 to feed and water. Obadiah meets Elijah and recognises him (vv 7,8). So Elijah tells him to find his master and say Elijah is here.

Feel the terror in Obadiah's mind. He will tell Ahab, they will come back here and Elijah will have made a run for it, so Obadiah will be for the chop. If Elijah appears brave at this point, Obadiah makes no pretence to be anything other than terrified!

He makes excuses and shows all he has done. He hid 100 of God's prophets and fed and watered them while Jezebel searched (v13,14). But Elijah makes a solemn promise to be found again. And so Obadiah goes off to fetch Ahab, no doubt quaking in his boots.

Our story this week

Frightened disciples

Consider Putin as a modern-day Ahab. He holds all the power, he has huge forces (tanks not horses and chariots), he is a tyrant, he is utterly cruel, he is totally unpredictable. And we are frightened.

It's OK to be frightened. We have no idea where this might go. But we have Yahweh, the Lord Almighty (v15). Romans 8:31-39 is a promise to claim: 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'. Frightened disciples need to trust in God – and pray.

Faithful disciples

Obadiah saved God's people's lives by hiding the prophets. He worked behind enemy lines (very dangerous) but was faithful to God. He was, like us, frightened, terrified of his master. But he did God's will and he did what Elijah commanded. We need to be faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus in these times. We model being a follower of Christ to our families, in our work-places, in our local communities. See Clive Myrie last week on Christian believers.

Fearless disciples

This may not be us, called to be an Elijah rather than an Obadiah. But we can pray for Christian leaders in Ukraine and here in the West. Pray for out-and-out leaders in our society. We need Christian leaders to stand for truth, for what the Bible teaches not what the world follows. The battle is being fought in Ukraine but also here on the issues of sexuality, on absolute truth, on sin. Pray for fearless disciples like Elijah.