

# Obadiah—Man in the Middle

1 Kings 18:1-15

## Elijah and Obadiah

<sup>1</sup> After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land." <sup>2</sup> So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.

Now the famine was severe in Samaria, <sup>3</sup> and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of his palace. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. <sup>4</sup> While Jezebel was killing off the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.) <sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.

<sup>7</sup> 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?"

<sup>8</sup> "Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.' "

<sup>9</sup> "What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death? <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> But now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!"

<sup>15</sup> Elijah said, "As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today."<sup>1</sup>



*Obadiah- Elijah Series, Watercolor on Paper by Steve Stuckey*

## Questions

1. Obadiah means "Servant of Yahweh." Compare him to Elijah whose name means "God is Yahweh."
2. What character traits might Obadiah possess that enabled him to be the person he needed to be?
3. What is it about Elijah that frightens Obadiah? Who are the godly people who frighten you?
4. Obadiah stands as a link between Elijah and Ahab. One possessed political power; the other spiritual power. Reflect on the situations where you are the person in the middle between differing cultures.

5. When have you used your position or authority to protect someone?

## Reflection

His name means servant of Yahweh. He was in charge of King Ahab's palace and livestock. Like Joseph, Nehemiah, and Daniel he was called to serve a faithless king. He managed people and things. I imagined him to be hardworking, responsible, loyal, and attentive to details. Day by day he quietly did his job. He may have been so good at what he did that over time he became invisible. That allowed him to work in a clandestine way when Jezebel ordered the killing of the prophets.

Elijah confronted apostasy by standing outside or above the social/ political system. Obadiah sought to reform the system and mitigate its evil influences from the inside. Both men experienced the power of God as they carried out their mission. Elijah could be as unpredictable as the wind of the Spirit whereas, predictability and steadfastness were the chief traits that kept Obadiah alive. Both men faced danger and had to hide in order to survive. Obadiah's hiding was much trickier because it was in plain sight. To be God's person, I imagined that Obadiah had to create a variety of personas that he would wear depending upon the situation. Reformers working in modern secular institutions must often do the same today.

## Quotes

He's got to find out who he is and accept himself, warts and all, or how is he going to be of use to those who come to him for pastoral care? A healer must achieve a high degree of integration and self knowledge before trying to work among divided, damaged souls; if he doesn't, he'll unwittingly project all the unassimilated aspects of his personality onto those vulnerable people with disastrous results.

*From the Wonder Worker by Susan Howatch page 125*

We live lives of tortured complexity. Inside each of us there is both a saint and a sinner and enough complexity to write our own book on abnormal psychology. Our hearts are a murky caldron of grace and sin, angels and demons. Always, it seems, we are torn in a way that leaves us feeling unsure, guilty, and tense. It is no simple task being a human being.

*From Prayer, Our Deepest Longing by Ronald Rolheiser*

The authors of the Bible attempt to show God's purpose through historical events, but a purpose deeply complicated by human disorder, freedom, and finiteness. In this sense, the biblical writers tell the human story through particular cases and characters. What is it like to be a human with a divided consciousness—intermittently loving your brother but hating him even more; resentful or perhaps contemptuous of your father but also capable of the deepest filial regard; stumbling between disastrous ignorance and imperfect knowledge; fiercely asserting your own independence but caught in and inwardly an unstable vortex of greed, ambition, jealousy, lust, piety, courage, compassion, and much more? Fiction fundamentally serves the biblical writers as an instrument of fine insight into these abiding perplexities of man's creaturely condition.

*Robert Alter in The Art of Biblical Narrative Page 176*