

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 14, Part 2

1 Kings 17-18, Part 2---Prelude to Battle

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Chapter 18, and the first portion of this is verses 1 through 19. I have called this the prelude to battle. Again, it is so interesting to me the proportions of the materials we find in the Bible.

We had 24 verses introducing Elijah. Now, we have 19 fully, leading up to the conflict on Mount Carmel. Well, the conflict on Mount Carmel obviously is the most important and it does get about 35 verses.

No, excuse me, 25 verses. But this material introducing the conflict, setting it up receives 19. This is what in Bible studies called the law of proportion.

And the question to ask is why do God and his inspired author give this much attention to this material. It must be significant. And so we ask ourselves, what is its significance? Why this material? I don't have a canned answer to it, but I have some suggestions as to what's going on here. We're getting a feeling for the situation, and a good author builds suspense as he lays out the situation before us, the readers.

So, what is the situation here? Three years have gone by. And notice chapter 18, verse 1, after a long time, in the third year, what? The word of the Lord came to Elijah. Yes, the God who speaks.

Once again, we emphasize all through here that what's happening is not simply Elijah deciding how he's going to trouble Israel. No, Elijah is responding to what God is saying. Now, I've said to you before it's very important that you see the difference between the prophet in the Bible and the prophet in the rest of the ancient Near East.

In the rest of the ancient Near East, the prophet is a mouthpiece. The God supposedly seizes the prophet and the prophet simply speaks these words. That's not the case here.

What you have here is a dialogue. God does not possess prophets in the Bible. He fills them.

So, Elijah is one person, Elisha is another, but it's the same God filling both of them. And so, yes, Elijah hears a word from God. And the question is, what's Elijah going to do about it? This is not possession.

Yes, he conveys what God wants to convey. He communicates what God wants to communicate. But he communicates it as a partner with God, as a dialogue partner with God.

This is what God invites us to. He does not want to wipe out your personality. He does not want to make you into somebody else.

He wants to use you, your particular shape. You say, well, I'm not a goblet. I'm something of an ugly mug.

That's all right. God wants to take on the shape of an ugly mug as much as he does a goblet. But it's the one God.

And he calls you and me, oh, child, let me fill you with myself. Let me take on your particular characteristics. And let me bless the world with the same golden nectar that is poured out from the goblet as is poured out from the mug.

Go present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land. So, Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now, wait a minute.

He already knows what Obadiah is going to tell him a few verses later. Ahab has been looking for him. And Ahab doesn't have good ideas for him.

But God said it. So, Elijah does it. I think of the book of Genesis.

Abraham said, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and sacrifice him. So, Abraham rose early. And I've often wondered what went on in the night between God's command and Abraham's response.

I think it was a long, sleepless night. But that's not the issue. The issue is he did it.

So here. Now, it's interesting, again, to talk about this law of proportion. Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.

Okay, let's go right over then to chapter 18, verse 16. Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said, what's going on with the rest of these verses? Once again, we're getting a picture here.

Number one of the seriousness of this drought. Ahab and Obadiah, who is, I'm virtually certain, the prime minister of the country. This term palace, literally, he is over the house.

NIV translates that as palace administrator. Well, that could be right. But when I see these persons who carry this title, I see people with a lot more responsibility than just managing the palace.

So if I get to heaven and God says, no, it was the palace administrator. I will say yes, sir. But I think he's prime minister.

Here's the king going in one direction and the prime minister going in another direction just to find a little grass. Because it looks like the cattle are already dead. We got to somehow keep the horses and mules alive.

Why? Because they're the battle instruments. Mules to haul the material to haul supplies, pull the various wagons, and horses for the chariots. If these die, we're helpless before our enemies.

This is a very, very serious situation. Then, I think the other thing to do is introduce Obadiah. I have always liked to read the book of Ruth after I read the book of Judges.

Because I'm reminded that in the middle of that chaos, in the middle of that bloodshed, in the middle of that rampant disobedience, there were people who were faithful. There were people who were keeping the faith, who were going on. This is something that we learn later that Elijah had forgotten.

I'm the only one left, God. God says, no, you're not. I've got 7,000 who are faithful, and Obadiah is one of them.

Here, the prime minister of the country he's not knuckling under Baal. In fact, in fact, he has risked his life to protect 100 prophets of Yahweh from Jezebel's murderous plans. Yes, the drought is terrible.

The situation is dire. But in the middle of it, there are those who have not lost faith. There are not those who have knuckled under the terrific power of this powerful queen.

What does this say to you and me? Oh, there may indeed be times of dire difficulties, such as those that we experienced in 2020, and hope will be alleviated in 2021. But the question is, what has this done to your faith and mine? Has it eroded it? Have we knuckled under to the despair around us? Or have we chosen in the midst of it all to stand firm? Obadiah, as far as we know, had not been given any signs from heaven that his faith was to be rewarded. He simply chose to be faithful.

And that's the choice that stands before you and me. So, in verse seven, as Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him.

He bowed down to the ground and said, is it really you, my Lord Elijah? Yes, he replied. Go tell your master Elijah is here. Obadiah says, oh, what have I ever done to you that you want to kill me? Oh, what is Ahab's attitude toward Elijah? If he will kill the man who falsely reports that he's found Elijah, my goodness, what might he do to Elijah? Now, my question is, why is Obadiah concerned? He says I'll tell my king, hey, I found Elijah.

He's right back there about two miles down the road. And you know what? He'll go to get you, and he'll find nothing. Why? Well, because you'll run away.

No, notice what he says. He says, in verse 12, I don't know where the spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave you. Isn't that interesting? It's not that Elijah will run away because he's scared.

It's not that Elijah will change his mind. It is that Elijah is the servant of God and God may do with Elijah anything he pleases at any time. Oh my, oh my.

Could that be said of you? She just doesn't know where she's going to be next because God has absolute control of her life, and he can do anything he wants to with her at any time. Obadiah has an understanding of God, doesn't he? You say, well, yeah, he understands that God can't be trusted. No, no, that's not it.

What he understands is that although God is perfectly consistent, he will always do what is right. He will always do what is good. He will always do what is for our best.

He's absolutely consistent. He is not predictable. We want a predictable God.

Yep, this is the way he did it yesterday. This is the way he's going to do it today so that we don't have to live in an atmosphere of wonder and possibility and opportunity.

You see, I've said it to you before: God has a very low boredom level. He says, oh, I already did it that way. Let's do it this way this time.

He is; write this down. He is absolutely consistent, but he is never predictable. Put God in a box and you know one thing, you are very shortly going to have a broken box.

And Obadiah knows that. The famine is dreadful. Elijah is absolutely obedient.

There are people who have not given over their faith. Ahab is dangerous. He's looked for you in every country around here.

And when people have said, well, he's not here, he's made them swear that they didn't know where you were. And Elijah says, as Yahweh of heaven's armies lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today. He's taken an oath in the name of God.

May God strike me dead if I don't keep this promise. And so, Obadiah went. So, we've had the prelude to battle.

And we turn now to the battle itself and the central question: who is God?