

The Troubler of Israel  
1 Kings 18:1-19  
September 20, 2020  
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CenterPoint Church

Read 1 Kings 18:1-19

*"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times."* (Psalm 12:6)

### **Introduction: The Blame Game**

How many of you remember growing up with siblings and when your parents got mad because something broke or you were fighting, you started pointing your fingers at each other: "it was her fault," "he started it." Even though our parents had good internal lie detectors, we learned from an early age to shift the blame, to find someone else to take the rap for things we'd done. As teens, we used excuses like "everyone else was doing it" and "it wasn't my idea, I was just in the car." If we continue that pattern, we grow up and head to work situations where we blame deadline failures or lack of sales on co-workers or clients. We are constantly finding reasons why our spouses or our children are to blame for our problems. If we don't figure out that the blame game is a poor way of handling our problems, we'll just continue counter-productive cycles in our lives and never take responsibility for the issues and difficulties in our lives.

I constantly recognize the urge to blame someone else when something goes wrong rather than owning up to my part in the failure. I remember when a church where I worked as the youth pastor got a mini-van donated to it, and I could start driving kids around in the official church van. I took some kids and another leader out to participate in a fund-raiser that involved putting pink flamingos in people's yards and demanding donations to the mission trip for us to remove them. It was so goofy, I rejoiced the day I never had to do another youth fundraiser. Anyways, at the end of the night, we stopped at Sheetz (which is almost exactly like Wawa or Royal Farms if you've never been) for snacks. As I was pulling the van out afterwards, a kid was talking to us through the side window, but I was trying to leave, so I was slowly backing up when we felt a big thud and heard a *crack*. I couldn't see out the back window and I couldn't tell from the side mirrors what I had hit, but when I got out I realized that I had run into the metal arch that they installed to keep people from backing into the gas pumps. The bumper was destroyed. And at the next Session meeting, the elders wanted to know how that had happened and did I know that it was going to cost \$2,700, and the deductible was like \$3,000, and we'd have to get rid of the van? They were actually pretty calm and gentle about the whole thing, but I immediately started grasping for things and people to blame: the kid talking to us distracted me, I couldn't see out the back, why did Sheetz build those things where you couldn't see them in tall cars? But thankfully I remembered some advice I had gotten a couple years before when someone said, "Just own your junk. Just admit when you mess up because you will mess up a lot, and you only make it worse when you point your finger everywhere else." So I owned it and we didn't have a church van anymore.

We see the blame game in the Scriptures: When Adam was rebuked by God in the garden for eating the fruit from the tree that God had forbidden them to eat from, Adam replied, *"The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."* (Genesis 3:12) The very first sin in human history was confronted by God, and the first reaction was shifting the blame: Adam didn't just blame his wife but he blamed God Himself! When Moses came down from the mountain after receiving the Ten Commandments and came upon the people dancing around a golden calf idol that

they had made, he rebuked his brother Aaron, who responded with, “*You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, ‘Make us gods who shall go before us... so they gave it (gold) to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.’*” (Exodus 32:22-24). Today’s text shows us a man whose sins have brought disaster on him and on the nation that he ruled as king. But he is so adept at the blame game that he cannot understand what has caused his problems and blames the one person who will be bringing them to an end.

As we get into chapter 18, we get a sense for

### **I. Ahab’s Troubles (vv. 1-6)**

*<sup>1</sup>After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, “Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.” <sup>2</sup>So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria. <sup>3</sup>And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly, <sup>4</sup>and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.) <sup>5</sup>And Ahab said to Obadiah, “Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys. Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals.” <sup>6</sup>So they divided the land between them to pass through it. Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself.*

Jesus said in Luke 4:25 that the drought in Elijah’s day lasted three and a half years. Verse 2 says that there was a famine as well, which makes sense when there’s no rain there are no crops. The people in the land must have been miserable. Ahab was certainly tired and angry. We find out in verse 10 that he has looked for Elijah all over the place, searching other lands and forcing them to promise with an oath that Elijah was not there. Now the Lord declared that the drought was about to be over. So he gave the word to Elijah that it was time to inform Ahab. But before the prophet could reach the king, Ahab had recruited his household manager, Obadiah, to split up and look for grass for the animals. Who cares about the starving people, who cares about the hundreds of prophets that Jezebel has killed? Ahab needs his horses to be fed! That’s his top priority, along with finding and punishing Elijah.

Obadiah is a really interesting character here. In case you’re wondering, this is not the Obadiah who has a book in the Bible in between Amos and Jonah; he lived much later. This Obadiah was not a prophet, but was a believer in the true God, his name means “servant of Yahweh”; proof of that is in verse 3 that says that he was hiding a hundred prophets when their lives were in jeopardy from Jezebel’s murderous schemes. He apparently had access to enough food and water to keep them alive since he was the head of Ahab’s household, and he had some way to smuggle it to them. So he was working for the king even though his loyalty was with God and the prophets. We don’t hear much about his motivations except that he is a mix of courage and fear. We don’t know if he saw himself as a Joseph type who was using his position at the top of the king’s administration to influence things for good, or if he had gotten himself positioned in order to take down Ahab and Jezebel, or if he had been forced to be in that position. I lean towards the first one. We have to remember that the kingship of Israel was not necessarily an evil enterprise; it was set up by God originally and had served for much good in the days of David and Solomon. But after Solomon there was not a single godly king in the Northern Kingdom. God may have placed people like Obadiah in positions of influence to lessen the damage that these evil kings could do. I read some commentators who gave Obadiah a hard time – he should have resigned, his godly integrity and conscience should have kept him from working in the palace with these evil people, and helping them thrive. But I much prefer to see that Obadiah is doing all he can to advance good in a difficult place and time.

Christians in positions of influence in our government (and even in businesses and other areas of culture) have various reasons to be in the places that they're in. God has equipped them and given them a passion for their work. Christians have the chance to be salt and light in every kind of job, career, and position that they're in. And when it's a government or military job, it seems to be especially important that they understand the kind of influence that they can have. If they do their job well, they can advance some of the aims of God's kingdom. I don't mean that they'll evangelize the country or convert all of their coworkers, but that they can help legislation get passed that is God-honoring. They can influence decision-making from a Christian worldview. They can help save people, like Obadiah has done in hiding those prophets – they can work to end slavery around the world, avoid bloodshed and corruption where they can. They can work for religious freedom. If God has placed someone in a position of government, that person should spend some serious time reflecting on how they can strategically leverage their position to advance kingdom goals. And really, every position of influence, even if it's just on the HOA board or the PTA, should help us think how we can honor God where we are. When I was new to youth ministry in North Virginia I tried to get into some of the schools to meet with kids, but schools were very resistant to that. But then I got invited to a High School where the principle asked to pray with the area youth pastors, and he encouraged us to visit students at the school and start clubs there. He didn't evangelize the students, he didn't break the rules, but he made it easier for us to. He leveraged his position to have Kingdom influence.

We shouldn't go to Christians who are gifted and skilled and placed in government, schools, and business jobs and try to convince them to give that up to go into full-time ministry. We need Obadiah's in the workforce, in the business world, in the high tech world, in the armed forces, in entertainment, in education, in retail, in food services, in law. We need Christians to be salt and light in every area of society and every kind of legitimate enterprise and career. Sometimes someone will leave the work force for the ministry – Phil Niceforo is studying towards that end. That can be a great move if God is calling you to it, but we don't need to guilt or criticize our Obadiah's into becoming Elijah's. To go from "secular" work to "sacred" work. It's all sacred work if it's done to the glory of God. Both Obadiah and Elijah were called by God to different roles, and each one of them helped God accomplish good in Israel. It looked really different – Obadiah said, "Yes, sir" to everything Ahab asked but secretly protected a hundred prophets. Elijah got in Ahab's face and confronted him. Two different roles ordained by God.

If we had more time and didn't have a lot to cover, we could go deeper into ideas of how we honor the Lord at work. Colossians 3:23: "*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men*" is the overriding principle for Christians, to remind us to work hard and with integrity for the glory of God, not just do enough to keep our bosses off of our backs. Your paycheck may say BayHealth or Colonial Metals or Deldot or Kent County School District, but you work for the Lord Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Another idea from Myron Rush in his book *Management: A Biblical Approach*: "The non-Christian people in the marketplace of the world develop their opinions of Jesus Christ and His church by observing Christians as they perform their day-to-day responsibilities. They neither know nor care how we act on Sunday morning inside the four walls of the church."<sup>2</sup> I don't have a ton of time to devote to these ideas, but I have a book written by a good friend of mine, Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?* if anybody wants it (but you have to promise to read it).

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<sup>1</sup> This section adapted from part of Bryan Guinness' sermon "The Teammate of Elijah" from 10/19/14, found at <http://www.onwardgospelchurch.com>

<sup>2</sup> Myron Rush, *Management: A Biblical Approach* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2002).

Moving on in the text, in his search for food for the animals, Obadiah found Elijah, who asked him to do something that he's very hesitant to do.

## **II. Obadiah's Troubles (vv. 7-14)**

*<sup>7</sup> And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?" <sup>8</sup> And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" <sup>9</sup> And he said, "How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? <sup>10</sup> As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, 'He is not here,' he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. <sup>11</sup> And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here.'" <sup>12</sup> And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the Lord will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth. <sup>13</sup> Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid a hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water? <sup>14</sup> And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here"; and he will kill me."*

Obadiah ran into Elijah before Ahab did and recognized him, either from having met him before or from the "Wanted: Dead or Alive" posters that Ahab had plastered all over the nation. Obadiah was used to referring to Ahab the King, with deferential terms like lord, but when Obadiah and Elijah met, he called him "my lord" as well. He recognized and respected his spiritual authority. And what did Elijah want him to do? "Tell Ahab I'm back from hiding." And as honoring as Obadiah has been, he then insulted Elijah by implying that Elijah was lying to him or tricking him: "I'm going to go tell him you're here, then you'll disappear, and he'll kill me. He's been looking for you everywhere and can't find you. The man is ready to murder someone and it's going to be me if the Spirit whisks you away when we try to find you again."

I'm reading a little between the lines here, but Obadiah seems to be pretty stressed out. He's showing the strain of straddling both worlds, being a faithful follower of Yahweh in the middle of people who don't honor the Lord. And Obadiah wanted a little credit. He reminded Elijah how he's one of the good guys, he's done some amazing work hiding and feeding the hundred prophets. That's got to count for a lot, right? Proverbs 1:7a says, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*," and Obadiah said he has feared the Lord from his youth. But he had a bigger fear of Ahab here. If it's at all possible, he'd rather not lose his life if he doesn't have to.

Eventually Obadiah got over his objections and brokered the meeting, which boiled down to determining who is

## **III. The Source of the Nation's Troubles (vv. 15-19)**

*<sup>15</sup> And Elijah said, "As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today." <sup>16</sup> So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah. <sup>17</sup> When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" <sup>18</sup> And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. <sup>19</sup> Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."*

Elijah swore to Obadiah: "I won't disappear on you. Go ahead and get Ahab, I'll be right here." So that's exactly what happened. And the warm and fuzzy reunion between the prophet and the king started with Ahab saying, "*Is it you, you troubler of Israel?*" "Nice to see you too!" Actually, Elijah replied, "I'm not the troubler, you're the troubler." Unlike when Elijah first announced the drought,

here he gave an explanation to Ahab and prophetically rebuked him: you and your father have done a poor job leading Israel because you abandoned the Lord and embraced the false gods. You can blame me as the messenger all you want, but it's your fault that this drought happened. It's your fault that Israel is starving and parched with thirst. But Ahab is adept at the blame game. It can't be his fault that the punishment of the drought came, it's got to be somebody else, and Elijah is the easy scapegoat. God had placed both Ahab and Elijah in their respective positions, but only one of them was being faithful to his calling, and it wasn't the king.

So Elijah threw down the gauntlet for a challenge that will define his life and ministry, a showdown between himself and the 850 false prophets that Ahab and Jezebel fed and employed. The showdown at the OK Corral, otherwise known as Mount Carmel. We'll be looking at that unforgettable event next week, you don't want to miss it.

## Conclusion

How many of us really take responsibility for our own sins and problems? How many of us decide to stop pointing at other people and our circumstances and just take the blame, saying, "I messed up here, I sinned, and all this bad stuff has happened as a result. It's my fault and I can't blame anybody else." Few of us are that honest and able to do that because we hate admitting to ourselves and others that we are flawed, that we don't measure up. I'd much rather be like Martin Luther, the great German reformer, who had a man who lived in his town who was one of his biggest critics. One night the man brought a list of Luther's sins and shortcomings to him. Luther read the list, set it aside, and sighed deeply, "Think a little harder. You've forgotten some."<sup>3</sup> He just owned it: you think you know my sins, you don't know the half of it. How freeing to just admit: I am really sinful and flawed and I cause a lot of pain and issues. Not as a way of excuse, but as reality and repentance.

When David was confronted by Samuel about his adultery with Bathsheba and his arranging for her husband's murder, David responded by saying, "*I have sinned against the Lord*" (2 Samuel 12:13a). He stopped ignoring and denying his sin and took the blame and the responsibility for it. Psalm 51:3-4 is part of his longer prayer of repentance: "*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...*" David's repentance didn't happen immediately, it took a prophet getting in his face and confronting him; but when that happened, he came clean.

Ultimately, we stand before our God, our Creator, who knows every bad thing that we've ever done. And that's an uncomfortable, even horrifying thought: all of the things that I did when I thought no one was looking, God saw them. All of my most deepest fantasies, revenge scenarios, ugly jealousies and prejudices – God knows them. And so we can either deny that we're as bad as other people, so "just grade on the curve, Lord, and you'll see I'm not such a bad person." We can rationalize our sins as not that big a deal, or hope that God is OK with flawed humans. But the Scriptures confront us with the fact that God cannot allow us to be in His holy presence with this huge record of sinfulness that we bring. The punishment for our sin is eternal death, separation from God. When we stand before our holy God, there will be nowhere to hide.

But there's an easy answer to this dilemma of God knowing and condemning us for all of the sins that we've committed: we can admit all of it. We can choose not to avoid it, rationalize it, or blame someone else for the sins we've committed. We can own it and we can repent of it. But repentance

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<sup>3</sup> David Roper, *Elijah: A Man Like Us* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1997), p. 147.

by itself doesn't get us into right relationship with God and give us the salvation we need to get to heaven. We still need someone to die for our sins. It can either be us or it can be a perfect person that God put in our place to die for us. And Jesus Christ is that perfect person, who never had to repent of His own sin because He lived a perfect life. And His death was a death that took our sins on His own body and died for us. We can own up to every sinful thought, word, and deed that we've ever done, and acknowledge that we are wretched sinners. But then we can place our sin on the cross, confident that Jesus dealt with it, and God will look at us as pure, righteous people. Amen.

#### Benediction

1 Timothy 6:14-16

*"... (to) keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will display at the proper time – He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen."*