

Where the Trouble Lies

1 Kings 18:17-18 *Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?"* ¹⁸ *And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals.*

This all began with a visit from Elijah the prophet in the court of Ahab three years prior. It is recorded in **1 Kings 17:1** *And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."* The prophecy was soon underway. Drought struck Israel and the nations around. Elijah was hidden away by God from Ahab's attempts during that time to put him to death.

1. The Prophets life and work

Now work of the prophet is to proclaim the future in light of God's Word. And with that in mind I should say that the prophet's job is not so mysterious and challenging as one might think. God in His word has given man road map towards peace and blessings and God in that same Word has mapped out where a person or a nation must not go unless they come into the place of chaos and curses. That map is His laws or commands. Obey them and you put yourself on the right side of a moral universe. You live in your world in agreement with the God who made this world and you find yourself blessed. Disobey those laws and you live in a world defying the God who made that world. God has placed a moral law over his creation and when you break that law you suffer but you live against the grain of God's created order. It will catch up with you.

God has declared his law... Under the all-encompassing command to love Him with all our hearts and souls and minds and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. God has expanded by command how our act of loving Him and others is to be expressed.

- Towards God we are to have not other god before us but we are to have Him.
- We are not to make idols of Him where we whittle God down to a manageable size for ourselves. Instead we are to have God in the fullness of His Spirit.
- We are not to take His name upon our lips lightly or abuse that name to promote ourselves or cast it about gain the upper hand of personal influence. We are not to take his name in this way. But we are to take His name and claim it as life, salvation, as provision for all we need.

- We are to regulate our days with the commitment to come to Him, rest in Him, live in Him and for Him. His holy presence is to be the constant pulse beat behind all the rhythms of our lives.
- We are to bow before God and take Him as our Father and so we are to live honoring our earthly parents as an expression of our submission and honor to God as our supreme father in heaven.

Then as to loving our neighbors as ourselves we are live out before them the attributes of a good God. We are to live godly before others extending to them god's heart for them.

- We are not to murder because God is the sovereign maker of all men and they bear his image. The greatest sin we can commit against another human being is to murder them.
- In the seventh command we are not to commit adultery because God is a god of covenant relationship and he has made us to live in peace and order under covenant with one another. The greatest sin you can commit against human society is to commit adultery. It tears at the core of our order and peace together.
- Next we are not to steal from others. We are to rest under the provision of God. We are to exercise our God given nature to acquire and hold dominion but we are to do so as we live in submission to God and his rule in our lives.
- We are not to bear false witness/to lie. God is a God of truth and His words bring forth life and we are not to use our words to defraud others or to create falsehoods that they must live under.
- And we are not to covet or desire what God has not given to us but has given to others. Breaking this command will lead us to break all the other commands. It is a basic attitude that loves self more than God or others, instead we are to be content with who God is and what He has given us.

Now there are the basic moral laws that govern the universe. Follow them you press into God's blessings. Break them you tread into the ground of cursing. The prophet can tell the future simply because he knows God's laws and he believes in a moral universe. Now obviously there is more to it than that as you dig down into specific outcomes and particular detailed expressions of judgment but there is a general prophetic stance any one can hold when they believe God, believe that God has given us Himself and that when we choose Him we find blessing and believe that when a person or people reject God they will in that rejection suffer. Hasn't God said as much and hasn't the story of scriptures illustrated this over and over again... hasn't life itself proven this to be true?

Now back to our story. The prophet Elijah has in the simplest of explanations added up the math of God's commands and God's word and simply presented the tally to Ahab. This is a part of our role in the world in which we live. We must teach those under our influence that there is an absolute Law Giver and that disobedience to Him has its consequences and obedience to Him does as well. **We must say it when we can and live out because we can.** The righteous life is a prophetic life. It is a life that is lived by taking all God gives to us in His law. When Jesus died for our sins, He took upon Himself all the final penalties of that law in our place. But in so doing He also restored to us who believe in Him all the provisions of Himself found in that law. And through Christ's power we live obediently to that law so that we may lay claim in our experience to all those provisions. Through Jesus Christ we take God for ourselves. We have Him before us. We have the fullness of His Spirit and want nothing to do with idols. We have His name and with it all Himself and all His salvation. We want not to live in the vanity of throwing about of that name above all names while not claiming in all the life we have in that name. In other words, we don't make light of our Savior or His salvation. We have Him as our sabbath rest. We have Him as our heavenly Father. We hallow His image in every man. We treasure His covenant relationship with us in all our relationships with others. We rely on Him as our provider. We treasure Him as the absolute truth over all our speech. We are content in Him. We live prophetically.

Here is where this often get us.

2. We are blamed for people's troubles.

The regular response of those who find their sins exposed by the words and life of the prophets is the blame the messenger. Even attempt to kill him. This is exactly what Ahab has done. But Ahab not an aberration. This is a regular response and we should expect it. Elijah wasn't the first to be blamed and persecuted and not the last. Stephen in **Acts 7:52** preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem ask the question, *Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?* The suggestion is that all of them suffered at the hands of those they spoke before. The further a society or an individual tips away from God's will the more strongly will they fix their judgment on those who call them back to it. But Jesus said in **Matthew 5:11-12** *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

3. We must lovingly tell them where the trouble actually lies...

It lies in a rebellious and disobedient heart. In a will set on self.

Eliphaz's words to suffering Job found in **Job 5:6,7** was *"Truly affliction comes not forth from the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; Yet man is born to trouble,*

as the sparks fly upward.” Did you hear that? Man has trouble but it doesn’t come from the ground. The locus point of his trouble is not our environment. The Bible teaches us that God made man from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, but it is not even the substance of our flesh that cause our trouble. You can’t blame your troubles on others and ultimately you can’t blame it on your own gene pool. It doesn’t come from the dust. It comes from the heart... the spirit of a person... who lives in rebellion and willfully turns from God and His will.

Job 14:1 Job himself says, *“Man is born of woman, is few of days and full of trouble.”* This wasn’t how things were supposed to be from God’s hand when first He made us but it is how things are none the less. The problem with most people is that we fail to appreciate the primary source of our troubles. We blame the dust... We have the pathologies of psychology, psychiatry, sociology and the like. Each discipline searches for an answer and much of time comes up with the conclusion that the dust has given birth to our troubles. The cause is something external to us or something genetically coded within us. Its either the result of the nurture of our environment or nature we were born with that has caused all our troubles. The idea either way is that we are programmed by the dust that flies around us or the dust we are made of for all the troubles we experience in life. I am not arguing that these do not compound our trials but Eliphaz was right. Our troubles don’t come from the dust. I can’t blame my troubles on my environment or my gene pool.

Ahab is being worn down by the hand of God effecting a great drought in his land. It’s God’s judgment on Israel. It was a judgment proclaimed by the prophet Elijah. There years in Ahab is directed to the location where Elijah is waiting to meet him and as he approaches this is greetings. *“Is that you oh troubler of Israel?”*

He is just offering another, *“the trouble is in the dust theory.”* Today we might say, *“The problem is cultural...”* *“The problem is political...”* *“The problem is educational”* *“The problem is developmental.”* *“The problem is psychological.”* *“The problem is genetic.”* No... spiritual... it is a heart matter!

Ahab says, *“Its you Elijah...you did this.”* God’s answer to this, *“Its not in the dust. Its in you. It is in your heart.”* Elijah says, *“Not I but you Ahab and your father’s house.”*

Ahab’s source sin: He has forsaken God’s word, he has disobeyed God’s commandments. He has set himself against the grain of the moral world God has placed all of us in. This is the spring of all his troubles. His own rebellion.

God says to Elijah, “*Go to the brook Cherith.*” And he goes.

God says to Elijah, “*Go to the widow in Zarapeth.*” And he goes.

God says to the widow by Elijah, “*Feed Elijah first and God will feed you.*” And she obeys completely. And God blesses her.

God says to Elijah, “*Go show yourself to Ahab.*” And Elijah goes and shows himself to Ahab.

Let us not lose sight in the life of grace that God pours out his blessing and power and love upon those who will to obey him. Jesus said to his own disciples in **John 15:10,11** “*If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*” What is the secret to experiencing the Father’s Love and the Savior’s Joy? Obedience!

Conclusion: Expect the heat if you live a prophetic life. But know the blame game won’t work... you can’t blame the dust... Trouble begins in the unsundered heart of rebellion. Trouble rises from the consistent refusal to submit to God’s Authority. Trouble issues from failing to obey the commands of God. But still God will make the way for rain and blessing to pour down upon us... The answer will be in a sacrifice for sin and in fire given for cleansing. Trouble is with man but help and life is with God. Submit to him, obey his commands, receive his Son as your sacrifice, and you’ll receive the blessing of his joy in the midst of a troubled world.