

The Discipleship Project-Summer 2021

Series 1: Who's to Blame

A Study by Eugene Wilson

Blaming the Enemy

Series Big Idea

Because Jesus Christ took our blame through His death on the cross, we must assume responsibility for our own choices and trust in His grace and mercy.

Lesson Big Idea

Because Jesus Christ took our blame, we must assume responsibility for our own choices and refuse to blame the enemy for our rebellion.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: I Samuel 13:11–14 (PPT)

Antonina adored the wild outdoors Mostly she loved nurturing the cuddly offspring of wild animals. She was grateful that her husband, Jan, was the keeper of the Warsaw Zoo. Every morning Antonina awakened to the sounds of one of the largest menageries of exotic animals in Europe. She turned the grounds of their villa into a Garden of Eden where she and her young son bottle-fed a variety of orphan cubs during birthing season.

“On any given day, visitors could see wild antelopes and zebras grazing on the Zabinskis’ property. If asked to explain her love affair with wild animals, she would quickly say that, as a Christian, she was responsible to care for God’s creation.

“But the serpent stole into her Eden when the German blitzkrieg rolled across Poland and the Luftwaffe bombed Warsaw into rubble. The zoo was almost obliterated, along with many of the world’s most exotic animals. Antonina was devastated when the Nazi SS arrived to round up what was left. Most of the surviving animals were shipped to Germany. The SS turned the ruined grounds into their private game preserve, hunting down the few creatures that were left behind. After their killing spree ended, the renowned Warsaw Zoo was eerily empty. When the Nazis unexpectedly made Jan the superintendent of parks, God opened doors that would turn a massacre into a miracle.

“Not far from their deserted zoo, one of the monstrous evils of the twentieth century was taking place in the Jewish ghetto. No lions or tigers could be more beastly than the SS predators who were systematically starving thousands even as trains were arriving to transport the rest to death camps. So the Zabinskis hatched a plan to turn the rubble of dashed dreams into building blocks for something far better.”

Antonina and her husband did not give up. They replaced exotic animals with pigs; they turned the zoo into a pig farm. Petterson writes,

“The Nazis were amused. They could never imagine that the zookeeper was cleverly using his position as the director of Warsaw parks to smuggle pork into a starving ghetto to feed Orthodox Jews. Nor did they know that the empty cages in the zoo had been turned into a labyrinth of hiding places for more than three hundred Jews smuggled out of the ghetto”

(Robert Petterson, *The One Year Book of Amazing Stories*)

FRAME

The old adage “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade” is easier said than done. Sometimes the difficulties we encounter in life are enormous and seem outside our control. Many, given circumstances similar to Antonina, would struggle in identifying an opportunity to turn a negative into a positive. Most would be more inclined to blame the enemy for destroying a good thing. Wallowing in our misery though, does not move things forward. Instead, it keeps us chained to yesterday.

The point is simple—**we can blame the enemy for causing our trouble, and we can wallow in our misery, or we can turn our trouble into a blessing.** (PPT)

Saul is a biblical example of someone who blamed the enemy. (PPT) Scripture tells us he was anointed to be king over God’s people. But that’s not all. Along with his anointing came an assignment. God said, “I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not” (I Samuel 15:2–3, KJV).

The directive was clear—utter destruction. But that is not what Saul did. First Samuel 15:9 reveals, “Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them” (KJV). Saul had been given an assignment. But instead of doing as he was instructed, Saul did his own thing.

- **Why is blaming the enemy so tempting and easy to do?**

Saul’s response to the prophet Samuel is quite interesting. Having been forewarned by God of Saul’s disobedience, Samuel went to confront the man he had anointed to be king. When confronted by the prophet Samuel, Saul spoke first and said, “I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.” Samuel, however, responded, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?” (I Samuel 15:13–14, NIV).

Saul then changed his tune. At first he said, “I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.” But having been confronted with the noise of sheep and oxen, Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed” (I Samuel 15:15, KJV).

Notice, first he said he had done as God instructed. Then it was the people’s fault. They were the ones who spared the sheep and the oxen. And then it was for a supposed “divine purpose,” to worship God.

Saul passed the blame to the people. (PPT) “I had nothing to do with it. I know I did not do what God said, but it was out of my hands anyway. The people were the ones who were responsible.” And then, in saying the people had only spared the best, Saul attempted to minimize what had been done. “See here, Samuel. It really isn’t all that bad. We got rid of all the bad stuff. We only kept the best.” In other words, “Do not blame me. And if you do insist on blaming me, it really is not that big of a deal because we only kept the best.”

Saul attempted to minimize things, and then he attempted to spiritualize things. (PPT) “We kept the best to use as sacrifice unto the Lord.” Samuel, however, was not impressed with Saul’s disobedience. Samuel saw it as it was—Saul had chosen to do his own thing rather than fulfill God’s commands.

- **Saul sought to first minimize and then over spiritualize his disobedience. Describe ways a person might over spiritualize the enemy while failing to accept personal responsibility.**

Saul tried to do everything he could to deflect any responsibility. He played the blame game. He was not responsible. It was someone else’s fault, someone else’s responsibility.

This was not the first time Saul sought to blame someone else. In I Samuel 13:5, the Philistines had assembled to fight with Israel. They were “thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen” strong. The Scripture says they were “people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude” (KJV).

As one might suspect, the people were greatly afraid. “When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait . . . then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits” (I Samuel 13:6, KJV).

Saul, to his credit, waited on the prophet Samuel to arrive with direction as to what Israel should do. But when Samuel took longer than expected to arrive, Saul moved forward without the prophet and offered up peace offerings unto the Lord.

As soon as Saul had finished offering up sacrifice unto the Lord, however, Samuel, the prophet, showed up. Confronting Saul, Samuel asked, “What have you done?” Notice Saul’s response:

And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. (I Samuel 13:11–12, KJV) (PPT)

Samuel, however, was not impressed with Saul’s actions, nor his reasoning. Samuel told Saul that what he had done was foolish. Samuel said, “You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God” (I Samuel 13:13, NKJV).

These stories showcase a character flaw in Saul—he **refused to take ownership of his mistakes.** (PPT) Instead, he was always seeking to pass the buck, to blame someone else. It was the people’s fault—they were fearful. It was the enemy’s fault—they were mighty in number. It was Samuel’s fault—he did not come during the stated time frame. Everything was always someone else’s fault, always someone else’s responsibility.

Much can be derived from this story. One, the enemy is not the central issue. For Saul, the enemy was not his foremost problem. **Saul’s foremost problem was self.** (PPT) Saul was the one who disobeyed God. Saul was at fault. Saul was to be blamed, not the Philistines.

Why do we often blame the enemy? In our case, as Christians, we blame the devil for things for which we are responsible. Plainly stated, **the devil does not do most of the things he gets blamed for doing.** (PPT) Furthermore, the devil would not need to do much anyway; we can mess things up fairly well all by ourselves.

Much of the problem is that we lack a proper understanding of trouble. (PPT) We encounter trouble and do not know what to do about it. Dealing with trouble, however, is part of life, even for the Christian man and woman.

- **How might our understanding of trouble cause us trouble? What does a proper understanding of trouble entail?**

Consider Paul’s writings to Timothy. Paul encouraged Timothy to endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Timothy was Paul’s son in the gospel, so it was not out of place for Paul to tell Timothy to toughen up, stand strong, and endure hardship. Paul wrote, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 2:1, KJV).

In I Timothy 1:18, (PPT) Paul said, “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare” (KJV). Paul understood that life is not a bed of roses. There will be battles. But the key to the battle was in Timothy holding on to the prophecies that had already been spoken. In other words, Timothy was to hold on to his faith in God.

Paul knew what it was like to encounter trouble. He wrote in his letter to the church of Corinth that things got rough when he was in Asia. He said, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.” He added, “But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us” (II Corinthians 1:8–10, NIV).

So, when Paul said, “Be strong . . . endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” he was speaking from personal experience (II Timothy 2:1–3, KJV). He understood that things can get tough, but he also understood that God knows where we are. God knows what we are going through. When we get to the place where we have no alternatives left but God, we are not in a bad place. We are in the best place we could ever be.

Here’s the point—if **we are always blaming the enemy, then we are never accepting personal responsibility.** (PPT) We are rendering ourselves helpless. Furthermore, we are missing out on a great blessing. How is this possible?

James wrote, “**Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations**” (PPT) (James 1:2, KJV). How is that possible? James was referring to a blessing that comes through a test. The word temptation, as used in this text, is not referring to temptations given by Satan to cause us to stumble. This is in reference to a test that is either sent by God or allowed by God, and the purpose of the trial is to help us learn how to be steadfast.

- **What does it mean to “count it all joy” in connection to properly handling trouble, especially in ending the blame game?**

The word divers means multi-colored and multi-sized. The Greek word for divers is the word from which we get polka-dot. When we read “divers temptations,” we could say: life is filled with trials, like polka-dots, spread out all over our lives. Our lives are dotted with trials. These trials or hardships come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. They may be in the form of affliction, sorrow, or sickness. They may be physical trials, financial trials, psychological trials, or spiritual trials.

James gave some direction or instruction on how to deal with trials—problems that dot our lives like polka-dots. James said, “Count it all joy.” How do I count trouble as joy? “Count it” is a phrase that means “lead” or “look ahead.” **We are to “look forward,” and in our looking forward, we discover joy.** (PPT) James was saying, “Look ahead. See what is coming our way. Connect the dots.”

What are we to look forward to? What is coming our way that causes us to have joy in the midst of trouble? The answer is: the good thing God will bring forth from the trouble. We must not let our feelings have reign over our knowledge. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28, KJV).

The challenge is not our enemy. Our enemy is defeated. Our submission to God—to His plan, His will, and His purpose—is the key to victorious living. (See James 4:7.) We do well when we stop blaming the enemy and start trusting God, who never fails.

- **Why is it difficult for us, at times, to take responsibility and trust God to take care of everything?**

FINISH

Life is not without its challenges. But that does not mean we cannot be overcomers. Consider the following:

The beginnings of the twentieth century—at least in one way of looking at it—were some of the worst times of humanity. Consider, for a moment, if you were born in 1900. On your fourteenth birthday, World War I began; on your eighteenth birthday, it ended. Twenty-two million people lost their lives. The same year the war ended, 1918, the Spanish flu pandemic hit. Within one year, five hundred million people—about one-third of the world’s population—were inflicted. An estimated fifty million people died from the virus.

On your twenty-ninth birthday, the Great Depression began. Starting in the United States and spreading around the world, the Great Depression had a devastating impact on both rich and poor nations. Unemployment skyrocketed. The stock market fell. And many suffered for several years. Then at the age of thirty-nine, World War II began. It lasted six years and one day. Between seventy and eighty-five million people lost their lives.

MANUSCRIPT

Yet despite all the tragedies—war, famine, and economic despair that occurred between 1900 and 1945—here’s another perspective.

In October 1900, Charles Parham founded the Bethel Bible College, located in Topeka, Kansas, and began teaching that the Holy Ghost would be received with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. On January 1, 1901, a student by the name of Agnes Ozman, having asked that hands might be laid upon her to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, received it with the evidence of speaking in tongues.

In 1905, Parham traveled to Orchard, Texas, located near Houston, to hold meetings. A great outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred, and the entire community was transformed.

Leaving Orchard, Parham began ministering in Houston. Thousands attended meetings at Bryan Hall. Healings and miracles occurred, and many received the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

In 1906, Parham sent Lucy Farrow, a student, to Los Angeles, California, to start a work. A few months later, William Seymour, another student, joined her. As they preached the Pentecostal message, thousands attended the services. Many miracles, signs, and wonders occurred, and many received the baptism of the Holy Ghost in what would be known as the Azusa Street Revival.

In a short period of time, the fires from the Azusa Street Revival began to spread. Multiple organizations were formed. In 1945 the United Pentecostal Church International was formed. Today the Pentecostal message is being preached around the world and is the fastest growing movement within Christianity.

The point is simple—what might have been one of the worst times for humanity, the beginning of the twentieth century, was also a time of great revival. Despite what you might be going through, don’t get caught up in blaming the enemy. Connect the dots. This could be one of the greatest moments of your life.