

Civil Disobedience in the Bible, Part One (Old Testament)

Various Passages

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 17, 2023

Good morning, everyone. This morning, we are continuing our series on the government, and we're in our fourth sermon on the subject. We have a number of sermons after this. We're not done just yet. But we are going to talk specifically today, as you've seen in the handouts in your bulletins on the subject of civil disobedience in the Bible, specifically in the Old Testament to be exact.

A little background on this, last week, we talked about the purpose of government in the Bible. And if you recall, we saw in passages like Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 that it is the purpose of government to be an authority over our lives and to be a minister of good and bear the sword, and to punish what is evil and praise those who do right and all these good things that the government is intended to do.

But this week, want to answer the question that has to come into your mind when you hear all that, and that is this question, "What do you do when the government doesn't do that?" Anybody ever wondered that? Are you living in this world today? Of course you wonder that; it's good question. How are we supposed to respond when the government fails to do its God ordained role? Because when you look at passages like Romans 13, and 1 Peter 2, they set off alarm bells; they should anyway. They make red lights flash in your mind, and you say to yourself, "Okay, the government is an authority, I get that. It's in the text. And it's supposed to punish what is evil, I see that, but it doesn't always act that way." Sometimes, instead of being an authority, the government acts like a bully over us. And sometimes, instead of praising what is right, it condemns what is right. And sometimes instead of punishing what's evil, it rewards it by supporting things like abortion, and suicide, and transgender operations. And we could talk about this stuff all day long. So the question is, what does God want us to do, then? It's a pretty realistic question.

And the answer is that we're going to see this morning is that you can defy because God has given you the freedom to do that. And you can resist them when you need to, He's given you liberty to make that decision because the government is an authority for us, it's just not an ultimate authority. And it has power, it just doesn't have unlimited power; that belongs to God alone. And so there's certain restrictions as to what it can and cannot ask us to do, and we follow that. Jesus told us in the passage, Matthew 22, that we are to render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God, what is God's. Do you remember that? And what that means is that there is God and there is Caesar. There's Christ and there's the government. And the government doesn't have the right to ask us to do anything without any restrictions whatsoever, and we obey it as Christians. There's just more to the conversation than that.

The reason I mentioned this, and the reason it's important is because when Covid started, there were some people who were saying otherwise. And when the troubles with the government began back in 2020, there were Christians who were telling us that there's never a time when you can defy the government. Because they would look at a passage like Romans 13, which says "be in subjection to the

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governing authorities,” and they would say, “Well, there it is, that's it. Close the book. The Bible says to submit, you need to submit. Nothing more to say.” Or they would come to a text like 1 Peter 2 which says to honor the authorities, and they would say, “Okay, well, it says to honor them, you need to honor them. Give them respect, give them respect. End of story.” But the problem is that's not the end of the story. There's more to say because the same man who told us to honor our leaders in 1 Peter 2 also defied them at times, do you get that? And the same apostle who said to respect the governing authorities, also looked at them in Acts chapter five, and said that “We must obey God rather than man.” Same guy said both. Because Peter understood that we don't answer to the government first we answered to God. Now we do respect the government and we do honor them, and we submit; we talked about that last week, but it comes with this understanding that God is over the government.

Peter wasn't the only one who said this kind of thing by the way. James did it. John did it. All the apostles had this kind of mentality. That's why they were killed in many instances by the government. Timothy did it. Silas did it. So did the man who came after him. In fact, there were even times when I think you could argue that Jesus himself defied the government. Which means God is not opposed to the idea of this. If the sinless Savior acted this way, at times, He accepts the idea.

I think one reason this is so hard for us to get our minds around is because we haven't had to deal with this much in North America. Let's just be honest, we've had it pretty good with the government in Canada and the United States because for the most part, they've left us alone and stayed out of our lives. But during the past three years, a lot of that has changed, as you know. And so we need to go back to the Bible and see how the people handled it back then; we're not the first ones to deal with the issue of crazy government. We're not the first ones to wrestle with the doctrine of church and state and civil disobedience and how that works. They did as well. And when we go back to Scripture, we can learn a lot from them.

So what I want to do this morning is to give you a survey of the times in the Bible when someone disobeyed the government. In preparation for this series, I shut myself in my office for a couple of hours, and opened the Bible and I wrote down all the times I could think of when someone chose to resist the political authorities. That's what you have on the handouts in your bulletin. This is just a sample of some of them. I was kind of surprised as I looked at this because there are quite a few. It wasn't a small list; I want to take a few weeks to walk you through them. This is just the Old Testament this week. Next week, we'll get into the New Testament, and this is just a sample as well. So there are going to be some men in the list here and some women that we can't get to. But today, I want to talk to you about six examples of civil disobedience in the Old Testament.

So, if you're taking notes, this is our outline for this morning: In several passages, we're going to look at six examples of civil disobedience in the Old Testament. If you're wondering, “Is civil disobedience in the Bible?” I think after this morning, you'll see that it is. I think it'll answer that question for you. But let me give you six of these.

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The first one is the example of the Hebrew midwives. So the first example of civil disobedience in the Old Testament that I could think of, some of you may think of one that's earlier than this, but that is the Hebrew midwives. This refers to the Jewish women who were asked to drown the male babies in the Nile River in the book of Exodus, and they said, "No." They chose to disobey. And if you want to turn in your Bibles to the book of Exodus, I want to show this one to you. Exodus, the second book of the Bible, and as you're turning there, we're going to look in Exodus 1. And as you're turning there, I want to point out to you that the people of God have always wrestled with the issue of government. It's nothing new. And here you are in one of the first books of the Bible, and you're going to see it here in a couple of examples. Because in the book of Exodus, the Jews found themselves under one of the most powerful governments in the world at the time. And that was the government of Egypt, the Empire of Egypt. And not only that, but they find themselves growing in population.

If you look in Exodus one, verse seven, this is the background it says, "But the sons of Israel were fruitful, and increased greatly and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty so that the land was filled with them." Now, if you want some more color to this, if you want to write this verse down Genesis 46:27, says that when they went into Egypt, the Jews had 70 people in number. That's just a few. But by the time they leave Egypt in Numbers 1, they're going to be somewhere in the vicinity of one to 2 million people. It's about the population of Vancouver after Covid. I think before Covid, it was bigger. After Covid Vancouver kind of cleared out. It's a leap from 70 to a few million in a few years. That's interesting. You can't explain that as a work of nature. That was a miraculous thing, the growth. One Old Testament scholars said, "Nowhere in history has anything like this rate of growth ever transpired. Even if you think of several 100 years it is supernatural, because if the Jews continue to grow at this rate, they would be 2 billion people by the time of David, they would be 2 trillion people by the time of the exile into Babylon, and they would be two quadrillion by the time of the Lord Jesus Christ." The point is that in the book of Exodus, the Jews have just kept growing and growing and growing. And as they did the land keeps filling and filling and filling up with them, which made the Egyptians nervous. Because that's how empires started back then. Your race or group of people would become bigger than everybody else, and you would take over.

And so the problem is that every time they turn around, there's a Jew. And everywhere they look, they bump into one. And so the Egyptians did devise a strategy to stop it. And if you look in Exodus 1:15 verse 15, this is the strategy. It says,

Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see *them* upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live."

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You can stop there, and you have to ask the question, what's going on here? Why is he talking to the midwives? These are people the king typically never bothered with. And the reason is because he is trying to stop the population of the Jews from growing. And he goes to the people who are responsible for helping them give birth and ask them to kill the male babies. Why the male babies? Well, the males were the ones who could raise up an army. And so that's why he's focusing on them. The Egyptians did not have the technology to do abortions. It had not been invented yet. So they would kill a child if it was unwanted after it was born. If that sounds cruel to you, let me remind you it was not considered cruel at the time; it was a very common practice. The Babylonians did it along with the Persians. The Greeks did it along with the Macedonians. The Canaanites did it. The Assyrians did it. The Phoenicians did it. The Romans did it after that. The Romans were a little more humane because they would just take a baby and leave it by the side of the road for someone to come pick it up. Which could have caused these Hebrew ladies to say, "Well, if everyone else is doing it, why don't we do it? If it's so popular, what's the problem? It can't be that bad, the king is asking us to do it. It can't be that bad." This is a command from the government, the government's good. But look at what they say in verse 17. It says, "But the midwives, "and you need to underline this in your bibles, "feared God, and they did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but they let the boys live."

That phrase "feared God" if you need to put stars beside that, highlight it, whatever you have to do to remember it because it means the midwives did not fear the king, they feared God. They weren't concerned primarily with what Pharaoh wanted. They were concerned primarily with what God wanted. And they knew God did not want them to kill the babies. So they didn't do it. The Lord hated that kind of thing, so they hated it too.

And I mention this because this is where civil disobedience begins in the Bible. It begins when you fear God, not man. And this is where the issue of resistance starts, the political authorities. It starts when you're more concerned with what he thinks then with what they think. It doesn't start when you're mad. There's no indication that they're angry here. And it doesn't start when you're so fed up with the politicians that you say, "I can't stand Pharaoh. I think he's so stupid. Who does he think he is?" There's nothing civil about that. Civil disobedience starts when you lift your eyes to heaven, and you realize there's a greater power than the king and that's the One I'm going to bow down to first Amen?

Listen, friends, the fact is there are times when the government tells you to do something that's wrong. And there are moments when they ask you to act in ways that are sinful to God. Let's just be honest, when it happens, you have a choice to make. You can either please God or please the government. You can follow Christ, or you can follow the king, but there are times when you can't do both. It's not an option for you. Despite what some may say, the government is not neutral when it comes to the things of God. There are a lot of people in the government, there are some that are saved, but most of them, I think we would all agree, are lost. And so, they do what lost people do, and they often make sinful decisions and sinful choices and that type of thing. Which means you can't just go along with everything

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they tell you; you have to have discernment. You've got to learn how to pick and choose the good from the bad. This is what these two women are doing here.

The passage doesn't say they disobeyed everything the king told them, they're slaves. Slaves can't do that. It doesn't say they went off and did whatever they wanted. That was not a choice for them. But they made up their mind they were not going to go along with this. I mean, how could they face God if they did this? How could they face the women in Israel, if they did this? They couldn't, so they resist it.

And it brings you to another example of civil disobedience found in the same section of the Bible. And that is the example of Moses' parents. So, a second example of civil disobedience in the Old Testament is the example of Moses' parents. Which refers to the time when his parents disobey the King for the same reason. The king told them to kill their child, and they wouldn't do it. If you look in Exodus 2, starting in verse one, it describes their situation this way. And it says, "Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi, the woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months." Now, if you notice, that's a short passage, it doesn't give you a lot of information about Moses' parents here. But it does tell you how they got married, and they had a son who's called Moses down in verse 10, which is a wonderful thing. Anytime you have a child, that's a cause of great celebration. In fact, you guys, many of you have had children lately. And you know, when you do that, you can't stop talking about that child. You show pictures to everybody, even when they don't ask. But that's not what they did here, right? They couldn't celebrate that way. They couldn't tell everybody because Exodus 1:22 says the king had told everyone in Egypt, all his people, that every son who was born you are to cast it into the Nile, into the river, drown it, suffocated put the child to death. And so these parents would do the only thing that they could think of and that is to hide him for three months.

Now, some have wondered, why did they do it for three months? We don't really know. It could be because the soldiers searched the houses of the slaves every three months to see if they were concealing any children there. It could be that after three months, Moses became too big to hide anymore. We all know babies grow a lot in that amount of time. But whatever the case, the time came when they had to move the kid. Verse three says what they do is pretty drastic, they get a wicker basket. That means they got a basket made out of papyrus, a tall thin plant that grows along the banks of the Nile, it's so thin, you could make paper out of it or make parchment out of it. And as they do that, she coats it with tar and pitch to keep things out of it, keep water out of it. The problem is it wouldn't keep out other things like snakes. I looked it up some time ago and found the Nile River is home to more than 10 species of venomous snakes, including the black mamba and the Egyptian Cobra, which can grow up to eight feet in length and that would be very dangerous for a child. They couldn't keep out crocodiles, the Nile is home to a lot of crocodiles as well. So it's not a good situation here. This is why the passage goes on to say Moses' sister stands at a distance to see what will happen to him after he's placed in the water because if something bad was taking place, she could step in and help. At which point the story says

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Pharaoh's daughter comes down to bathe in the river finds him there, adopts him, takes him home to raise in the palace, which is all a miraculous thing as well.

But the idea is that this happens because Moses' parents are willing to do what the midwives did, and that is to obey God rather than the government. They do the same thing as well; they follow the Lord over the king. Now, the interesting thing about them particularly is they didn't know how things would turn out when they did that. And they had no idea God was going to save their baby like he did. But they did it anyway because it was the right thing to do. When you make a stand like this, God doesn't expect you to have all the answers first. And when you choose to obey Him over the government, the idea is He doesn't expect you to have it all figured out. He just wants you to be faithful. These parents are just being obedient. That's all. There's no long-term answers. There's no long-term plan. Where's the plan here? I mean, where's the strategy? They take a wicker basket and put a baby in it. They put tar and pitch on it and drop it in the Nile, but the Lord took this simple act of faith, and He used it.

Listen, you don't have to be someone great to serve God. You just need a great God. Amen? And you don't need to be anybody special to stand up to the government when you have to. You just put your life in His hands, and He takes care of the rest. As you're going to see this morning, none of these people in this list are special. They're all nobodies. The Hebrew midwives are slaves. Moses' parents are slaves. Moses himself was born a slave before he's adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. You can't get any lower on the society's ladder than that. But they stepped up and did something anyway because they put their hope in the Lord.

You know, people say all the time, they say, "What can I do about the government, Pastor Jeremy? I'm nobody? And how can I stand up to them and tell them abortion is wrong?" Or something like that? "How can I convince them to stop murdering innocent children? They won't listen to me, I'm so small." Well, are you smaller than these people? No. Are you tinier than a Hebrew slave? Not hardly. The principle is that God just wants you to put your hope in Him first and let Him deal with all the details.

That brings it to another example here, and that is the example of Moses; some of these are going to be kind of short, just for the sake of time. I just want you to see how they stack up one after the other. But another one is the example of Moses. This is also taken from the nation of Egypt. And it refers to the time when this little baby grows up, and he delivers the people of Israel from the hand of Pharaoh. The Lord uses him to do that. It may be the greatest example of civil disobedience in the Bible. I mean, Moses goes to Pharaoh, and he asked him to release a free group of Hebrew slaves, one to 2 million strong. And he eventually does it.

If you look in chapter five, this is the first time these two butt heads over this issue. And Exodus 5:1 says,

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And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”² But Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go.”

You can't read that without picking up a tone of scorn and Pharaoh's voice, right? Do you hear it? Just the sarcasm in there's dripping with it. Why? Well, there's several reasons. One is because Egypt was a polytheistic country, it was covered in gods. Some said that it was easier to find a god in Egypt than a man. They had God's for the land, gods for the sea, gods for the sun, gods for the moon. And here is this man, Moses, telling Pharaoh about another God. And saying to him, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel,” and so what does Pharaoh do? He just says, “I'm sick of this. Go away and leave me alone. Who's the Lord? Don't know him. Never heard of him. I don't have to listen to anything your God says. I got my own gods Moses.” At which point in the story. The Lord says, “Oh yeah.” And He does what you remember. The 10 plagues.

And the reason He does the 10 plagues is to show pharaoh that your gods are nothing like this God. You are going to listen to this God whether you want to or not, because each of these plagues correspond to a god in Egypt, to show that Yahweh is greater than all of them. So you have to obey Him Pharaoh, you don't have a choice. And just to go through a few of these. For example, if you look in Exodus seven, when Moses tells Pharaoh to let my people go, Pharaoh refuses and the plagues come down, they start to come down. And as they do, it says they begin with the plague of blood over the Nile River, which the Egyptians would have seen as an affront to the god Hapi, the god of the Nile River. Because it would have been like, Yahweh is slapping Hapi in the face, he can't stop the plague. No matter how many times the Egyptians call to him, sacrifice to him, pray to Him, it doesn't do any good. He can't make the blood go away. Then in chapter eight, the same thing happens again. Moses speaks to Pharaoh. Pharaoh refuses to listen, so the Lord sends down a plague of frogs, which would have been an attack on the Egyptian goddess Hecht. She had the head of a frog in the body of a lady. And it would have shown Hecht that she couldn't prevent this from happening either. No matter how many prayers were given to her, it was useless, they fall on deaf ears. In the same chapter, the same thing happens again, the Lord sends down a plague of flies now, which would have been an insult to the god, Shu, the God of the air, and we could go on and on and talk about this all day. But all this happens to show you, the Egyptians' gods don't hold a candle to Yahweh. He is sovereign over all of them. Which would have humbled Pharaoh. It would have been a source of national shame to see his gods being treated this way. It would have been embarrassing for him to have a foreign power step in and overcome them. But that's the point here, the Lord wants to show pharaoh that no matter how strong you are, you still have to listen to me. And no matter how great your kingdom, you still have to obey. Pharaoh doesn't get a pass on this just because he's Pharaoh. He doesn't get an exception just because he's king over the land of Egypt, this great and awesome place.

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It shows you here that no matter how great a nation is, it still has to bow to God. This applies to everybody, by the way. It applies to the nation of Egypt. It applies to the nation of Rome. It applies to the nation of Babylon, and it applies to the nation of Canada. Our leaders don't get a pass on this type of thing either just because we're living in the 21st century. And our nation doesn't get some kind of exception, just because we're ruling in North America, this wonderful place. God will still hold them accountable for the things that they do. If He held Egypt accountable, He'll hold Canada accountable. Canada has done some wonderful things. I mean, like Egypt, it has a lot to be proud of as a country. But if our leaders are not careful, there can be a tendency for them to become proud and arrogant and puff their chest out and say, "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" Right? Don't know Him. Never heard of Him. And God will not hold it lightly if they do.

I heard one pastor say, "So many people say, 'God bless America today.' It will not happen until America blesses God." God is not interested in America primarily. He's not interested in Canada primarily, or any nation on the earth, for that matter. He is interested in His glory. He wants people to worship Him. And when they don't do it, it makes Him very, very angry.

I looked it up some time ago. And it wasn't too long ago, that the leaders of Canada understood this on some level, just in an outward way. And what I mean is that in the centennial prayer of the nation of Canada given on Parliament Hill, on December 31, 1966, the chairman of the Commission prayed this way. We quote this to you. He said, "Almighty God who has called us out of many nations. Gratefully, we remember all the ways You have led us through these 100 years together, to humble us and prove us and know what's in our hearts. Grant Your blessings upon this celebration and give us a deeper understanding of the dreams that gave this nation birth, so that with flame in our eyes, we may magnify Your name among men, as one nation serving You. Amen." Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear that I am shocked to think a politician in Canada pray that way. When's the last time you heard that? I can't believe a leader would say that sort of thing out in public. But he did. Because there was a time when people talked that way openly about God.

Now, whether he meant it or not, I don't know. And whether they were saved or not, I can't tell. But my point is that all that's changed. And I mean, now our leaders seem to be doing their best to keep God out of the conversation in this country. And they want to do everything they can to make us forget about Him entirely.

And you need to be praying for that to change before something terrible happens. I mean, the lesson here is that God holds nations accountable for how they look at Him. Now He holds people specifically accountable, but the wrath will come out on the nation as well.

It brings me to another example of this kind of disobedience, civil disobedience from the believers in the Old Testament. And that is the example of Rahab. If you want to turn to the book of Joshua. Another example of this is an example of Rahab in the book of Joshua. Her story occurs after Moses, because

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after the plagues come down the Lord takes the people of Israel out of Egypt and brings them into the wilderness where they wander for 40 years. After which time He tells them to invade the promised land. And this is where Rahab comes into the picture in the book of Joshua because she lived in the promised land; that was her home.

And Joshua chapter two tells us in preparation for conquering this area, the Jews sent two spies to scope it out. And verse one says they end up in a place called Jericho where she lived. She had a home in the walls of Jericho. And if you look in verse one, it says “Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab and lodged there.”

Now, the word “harlot” here is a term that has been debated because some people don't like to use it because of all the negative connotations that go along with it. So they try to translate it as innkeeper or maid or something like that, but really what it means in Hebrew is harlot. That's what Rahab was. She was not a godly woman. She did not have a good reputation. She was a prostitute who made her living selling herself to the man who came to town, which is what makes this story so interesting.

Because verse four says that when the spies come to see her, she hides them. As soon as she learns who they are, she takes a risk, saves them by stowing them away in defiance of the king. Verse three says, “And the king of Jericho sent *word* to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” And what does she do in response to that? The passage says she goes on to refuse. Verse six says she hides them on her rooftop under some stalks of flax.

That makes you think, well, why did she do that? What on earth would cause a woman like this to help some random people that she just met? What's the motivation here? And verse 10, says she does it because she heard about the Lord. In other words, Rahab acts this way, hides these men, save them, puts her life on the line because someone told her about Yahweh, and she believed. They gave her word about this great God who ruled Israel and she liked what she heard so she gives everything up for Him.

That would have gotten her in trouble with the king, by the way. I mean, he would have been furious if he found out what she did. This was treason. She's helping an invading army in war time. So he could have killed her or tortured her or impaled her for this. He would have arrested her, imprisoned her, put her in chains for life. Even if he didn't do all of that, he would have banished her from Jericho. She would never see her family and friends again, but she does it anyway because she thought it was worth it.

Rahab's story illustrates the fact that salvation makes you change your loyalty, doesn't it? It makes you swap your allegiance from this to that. You start off saying, “I'm a Gentile,” you end up saying, “I'm with the Jews.” You begin by telling yourself, “I'm a child of Jericho,” you end up telling yourself, “I'm

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a child of God.” That's all that matters to me. That's what's most important. I don't care about anything else. In modern terms, you might say, “I don't care if I'm an American first. I don't care if I'm a Canadian first. I don't care if I'm South African, Australian, New Zealand, or Dutch, Filipino, all that's secondary to me, what matters to me is the Lord. And if He tells me to disobey the king, I disobey the king. And if He leads me to say no to the political authorities, I say no to the political authorities. If that's what it cost me everything, so be it.” It's a beautiful story. And she starts off as a prostitute, she ends up as a saint.

And that brings you to another example of all this turned to the book of First Kings, because you can see the example of Elijah. Can't leave him out. He's so loud, he just kind of shouts from the Old Testament when you think about Elijah. This is the story in 1 Kings 18 of Elijah when he challenges the prophets of Baal, who were under the government's protection at the time. That's where the civil disobedience comes into play. If you remember, they're highly favored by the wicked Queen Jezebel. And that's why this becomes of interest of us today. And I have to confess this is one of my favourite stories in the Bible. I've often thought it would be really neat to watch while this took place, except I remember the fact they would have spoken Hebrew, and I don't speak Hebrew. So I would not have really known what's going on. But it would have been very interesting because this is how God takes one person and makes him stand up to the nation. This is how He takes one individual and causes him to confront an entire country over its sin.

By the time you get to the book of First Kings, the Jews have conquered the promised land now, they set up their own nation with a system of kings and queens to rule it. The issue is that the kings and queens are ruling it wickedly. The government's gone bad because they're worshipping a god called Baal.

Baal is the ancient god of fertility that supposedly brought rain to the crops. That's why he's popular in Israel. Because the Jews lived in a dry climate that was dependent on rainfall to make crops grow. So they turned to Baal to get it. So Elijah calls them out on it, and it goes like this. If you look in chapter 18, verse 17, when Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is this you, you troubler of Israel?” That's the way to start off a story. He can't even get past one verse and it's already confrontational.

He said, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house *have*, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals. Now then send *and* gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, *together* with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.”

So, Ahab sent *a message* among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long *will* you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word.

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In other words, Elijah stands in front of the nation, and he says, “Make up your mind Israel. Pick a side. If you want to follow Yahweh, do it. If you want to follow Baal, do that. You want to go this way, go this way; go that way, go that way. Whatever you do, stop wavering like a child. You're driving me crazy.”

I don't know about you, but I want to say that to the church right now in North America. Stop wavering. If Jesus is Lord, serve Him. If Baal or the green movement, or the LGBTQ stuff, or the liberal agenda, all that, serve that. Whatever you do, make up your mind. Gotta love this guy. You can preach this stuff very easily.

And in order to bring it to a climax, the passage says Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to a contest. He's preached a little bit of a sermon here. Now he's gonna give you a sermon illustration. And in verse 23, this is the illustration. He tells them they're going to both take an ox and slaughter it and cut it up and put it on an altar. And they're going to call out to the name of their god, and the God that answers with fire will win. Now, the interesting thing about this is that Baal's symbol that he was recognized by was fire, or lightning. He was depicted as a god holding a lightning bolt in his hand, because lightning symbolizes there's rain coming. And so what Elijah is doing is he's telling them, “Okay, if Baal is god, prove it. And if he's the Lord of Fire, have him send fire down, that should be easy. He's got it in his hand. All he's got to do is drop it.

And if you've read the story before, what happens? Well, he can't. There's no fire from Baal. Priests call out to Him. They dance and cut themselves until the blood flows. It says they did it all day long. At which point, Elijah just prays. Now that in itself is fascinating because Elijah does not dance around. And Elijah does not cut himself. And Elijah does not call out to the Lord all day long. He does it once. One time and the Lord sends so much fire that it consumes the ox, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and the water that was in the trench, you've got to have a lot of fire to consume water. I used to illustrate this to my boys when I would tell them the story when they were babies. And I would say that the fire came down and then went whoosh. And they would go whoosh. And the people see it. And they fall on their faces. And say, “The Lord, He is God.” What else are you going to say? They capture the prophets, and all this stuff is interesting, they kill them. They don't talk to them. They don't have a dialogue. They don't try to get to understand them better. This is the Old Testament times. They slay them on the spot to rid the land of the filth.

Which makes the government mad, but Elijah doesn't care. It makes the Queen furious so that she comes after Elijah because she loved the prophets of Baal. They were under her benefaction. But that doesn't stop him. He does it anyway. Because the wickedness was so bad, he had to do something about it.

And when you look at this story, I think we'd all admit, the church is far too passive when it comes to the evil in our world today. When you see the example of Elijah, we've all got to be ashamed some and say we're way too apathetic when it comes to what's going on in the government. I mean, people aren't

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worshiping Baal here, thankfully, not yet anyway. They're not bowing down to that, but they're doing other things that are just as bad and many of us are doing nothing about it. We just sit back and watch. And often in my mind, I picture what would Elijah do if he came to Canada? This guy would have a fit. He would say, "What are you doing? They're aborting babies here; that's wrong. I don't care who you are, when you live, where you live. That's evil always has been always will be." They're killing the elderly in some situations; that's wrong. God doesn't want you to murder people at the beginning of life. He doesn't want you to do it at the end. Life is sacred to Him. It's too precious.

They're tampering with the institution of marriage. They're saying a man can marry a man, a woman can marry a woman and they can do it in church. What would Elijah say? He would say that's an abomination. That's evil. And I think he would say it's our job as believers to tell people that. If we don't, who will? And as Christians, if we don't make God's will known in these things, how is it going to happen? Are they going to hear it in the public schools? No. They're going to hear it from the politicians? No. The mayor? No. The premier? No. The MPs? No. Parliament? No. The Prime Minister? No. The White House? No. Will Joe Biden tell them this? Not at all. Most of them have no concept of God at all. How can people hear if we don't warn them?

Now, to balance this out, we have said in previous weeks, we believe in a separation of church and state. And we don't think it's our job to turn Canada into a Christian nation, which means we're not supposed to enforce all of this at the point of a gun. And take things back to the way they were in the Middle Ages when people were killed for doing things like homosexuality and committing acts of adultery. The New Testament never tells the church to do that. We preach the gospel to them, we offer Christ's forgiveness and mercy, but that doesn't mean He's not calling us to do anything. There are times when I think he wants us to take a cue from someone like Elijah and confront the nation over its sin.

Now, if you're wondering, how do we do that? I'll get into that in a moment. And if you're asking yourself, what does it look like? Well, we'll talk about that in a second. But before we get there, let me give you one more example of civil disobedience in the Old Testament, just to review some of these other ones. So far, we have looked at the example of the midwives, and seen how they feared God more than the king, which is what led them to defy the midwives did not defy because they were mad. They didn't do it because they hated his politics, or something like that. They did it because they understood there was someone greater than the king that they submitted to. That's how all these people approach this issue. The midwives, Moses' parents, Moses himself, Rahab, Elijah, they all believed there's the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. There's a domain where God is in control, and He rules and reigns and calls the shots. And there's a domain where man does in a smaller capacity in his own lesser degree, and when they clash, we go with God. We always go with God. That's what believers do. We are citizens of heaven first. And that brings it to one more example of this kind of disobedience in the Old Testament. And that is the example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

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A sixth and final example from the Old Testament that we're going to talk about this morning, is the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, which is found in the book of Daniel. Now, to be honest, I did want to talk about Daniel too, I just didn't have time to get it all in here. We read about him earlier, so you got kind of a taste of what he did in response to the government.

But I want to talk about these guys as well, because they lived at the same time Daniel did in a period known as the exile. This is when the Jews are cast out of the Promised Land, because they kept doing things like worshipping the god, Baal. Which made God so angry that he sold them into slavery. He sends them to live in a place called Babylon.

And while they're there, the king takes the nation and tells them to bow down to his statue in Daniel 3. And it's not just any statue, if you do look at some of the dimensions here, and some of your Bibles will say in the notes that it was a massive edifice, something like 90 feet tall and nine feet wide, put out in an open plain in an open area. So that on a certain day, every person in the kingdom who is nearby would show up in front of it and worship it. Not just bow down but praise it. And not just fall flat on their face, but give it glory, or else he'll throw them in a fiery furnace.

Which is where these three men Shadrach Meshach and Abednego come into the picture because they say, "No," Now If you put this in your mind for a moment, everybody's bowing down, there could have been thousands of people there, except for three guys. And when I say bowing down the way they did it, and in the ancient east, they didn't just bow down on their knees, they would prostrate themselves flat on the ground and hold their hands out, to show that this is the ultimate complete devotion to the statue. They're holding nothing back; everything's being given to worship this idol. And as everybody's doing that, there's Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They are disobeying the king.

So the king sends for them, and he says, "Maybe you misunderstood something, guys. So I'm gonna say it again. If you don't bow down when that music plays to that statue in that place over there, I'm going to kill you. I'll put you in the furnace. Not playing games. I'm not messing around." And they say, "We understand, but the answer is still no." In fact, if you look in verse 16, there's a famous statement that they make that sheds a lot of light on what's going through their minds. If you look in Daniel 3:16, this is their response to the king says,

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

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In other words, “Our God can save us, Nebuchadnezzar, don't worry about that. Ang He can deliver us from the flames. That's not a problem. We just don't know if He wants to or not, we're not aware of His will in this. But either way, we are not going to bow.”

Do you ever wonder if civil disobedience is in the Old Testament? They are bold here. They're brave. And what they're saying is that they understand it's dangerous to stand up to the government. It doesn't always end well when you do that. There's a happy ending to this story. But there's not always a happy ending.

I need to say this here at the end, because after looking at all these other examples, you might get the impression that it's fun to resist the government. And it's easy to do this. And every time you do it, everything just works out just right. This is a reminder that it doesn't. Sometimes it cost you your life; you could end up in a fiery furnace. In fact, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego might have said this because there's lots of stories of Jews at this time in the exile being tortured and starved and burned alive because they resisted the government. And the Lord didn't save them from it. And there's lots of tales of them being beaten and whipped and humiliated and run through with a sword and impaled because they would not bow down to a statue. They are interesting people in their history. They would bow down to a statue at certain times in the Old Testament. They go into exile; they won't do it. They just won't do it. And it reminds you that this is a serious thing to consider this morning. This could easily lead to martyrdom. It often did.

I read this week that in the past year 360 million Christians suffered some type of persecution and 6,000 of them were martyred. Lifeway Christian research did a survey on that; that number seems small, but it's not small when you consider the fact that it comes to about 16 people per day. Every day, somewhere in the world 16 Christians are murdered for their faith. And a lot of it comes at the hands of the government, place in countries like China, or North Korea or Iran or Iraq where the communists or the Muslims have taken over and squashed anyone who stands in their way. Because the truth is that this is not just an ancient thing. It's very modern. And anyone who's ever undergone that will tell you it's not pretty. It's very, very ugly. But the people still did it because they believed it is what God wanted them to do. They were still bold because they understood the words of Christ, “If anyone will come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” That's what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are doing in the Old Testament since. They're having this conversation with the king is they're about to walk into the flames because they believe the Lord was worthy of the sacrifice.

And I want to say more about all these things, but let me just stop here for a moment, and let's just ask this question. What do we learn from all this? When you look at the life of someone like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and Rahab, and Elijah, what does it teach us about the government? If we could put it in one big lesson? I think if you could boil it all down, it teaches us two things. And if you're taking notes, let me just mention them here. You can write them down. There's two basic reasons that I could find why someone disobeyed the governing authorities back then. They did it to keep from

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sinning, and they did it to keep from hurting their conscience. They did it to keep from sinning; they did it to keep from hurting their conscience.

You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, if you go back over the handouts that you have, you can look at the life of someone like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and you can see they defied the government to keep from sinning. They did it because they could not bow down to that statue, or else that would be disobedience to God as a clear-cut thing. It's very straight. The second commandment says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol or worship it." That means you can't worship it in Israel, you can't worship it in Babylon, you can't do it here, you can't do it there, even if it costs you your life. That's what those men believed. But on the other hand, you could take the case of someone like Rahab, and see that she disobeyed the government over another issue. And that was conscience. She did it because there was something inside of her compelling her to act this way because the Bible doesn't tell you what to do with spies. I couldn't find anywhere in Scripture where it tells you how to handle it when a when a Jewish spy shows up at your house and needs to be hidden from the government. But she handled it this way because her conscience was telling her to do it. And she listened.

You say, "That's interesting, Pastor Jeremy, but what does it have to do with my life today?" Well, it means that there are going to be times when the government does something wrong, and we have to defy and some of us are going to do it one way, and some of us are going to defy another way. Because of conscience. They're going to be moments when they make a bad decision, pass a bad law, hand some bad policy down, and some of us will handle it like this, and some of us will handle it like that for the same reason and it's okay. It's okay. Now, there are going to be times when it's not like that. And there going to be other moments when everyone needs to act the same way because the Bible is very clear on the response. But there are times when it will be different.

Let me give you a practical example of this. How is the church supposed to respond to abortion today? We've been talking about that a lot this morning. What's our reaction supposed to be? Can you point to one verse in the Bible to answer the question? Well, not really. There's lots of different ways to handle that. For example, you can protest. You can write letters. You can pray, you need to pray. You can march in Washington march on Ottawa. You can run for office politically, you can pass out tracts and pamphlets, you can go down to a shelter for pregnant women and offer to adopt a child that's unwanted, but it goes back to this issue. Is abortion wrong? Yeah, that's not a conscience issue. And is it sin? It is absolutely sin, but there's not just one place in Scripture that tells us what to do when the country allows it.

Let me give you another example of this, we talked about this at our care group, but how is a Christian supposed to respond to something like sensitivity training in the workplace? You guys know what I'm talking about? The kind of training that tells you to treat everyone equally but what they really mean is you need to embrace the gay lifestyle. What are you supposed to do with that? A lot of answers to that question. You can protest, you can march on the Capitol, you can quit and find another job, you can sit

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through the training and ignore the wicked stuff and face the consequences at work; but it goes back to the conscience.

When you look at some of these stories here, you see conscience mentioned quite often. I didn't have time to get to all of these. But in 1 Kings 18, Obadiah, hides a group of prophets to save them from Queen Jezebel even though he didn't have to do that. There might have been another way to handle it. Murder is wrong, killing prophets is bad, but the response, he had some freedom there. It's the same way when Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman in Esther 3. As far as I can tell, that was not a gesture of worship, it was supposed to be a sign of respect, but Mordecai couldn't do it because he didn't respect Haman. The same way when Jehosheba saves Joash, from the slaughter of the Queen in 2 Kings 11. But the point is, people defy the government for many reasons.

And in fact, to help you see this next week, I'm going to finish off this list by taking you through the New Testament to show you some more times when people disobey the government in Scripture. And just in case you thought we were done with the list, we're not just yet. We haven't gotten to the New Testament yet. So we want to look at the examples of people like Peter and Paul and James and Jesus. And I'll show you that next time we're together.

At this point, let me just say this, if all this talk about the government is a little confusing for you, I understand it's a lot to think about. But as we've been saying, there really is one government or Kingdom you need to be focused on this morning, and it's the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen? You get that right, you get everything right. You understand that, you understand the one thing that really matters in this world.

The Bible says Jesus came to be a king for us. He showed up on this world to be our Messiah. And as the perfect Son of God, He took on flesh. He was conceived by the Spirit born of a virgin, whereby He went on to live a perfect life until He reached the age of manhood, at which time His enemies killed Him to try to stop his reign. They didn't want Him to be a king or to be Messiah, so they murdered Him. But it didn't stop Him. The Lord took Jesus' death and blessed it. He took His sacrifice and used it to pay the price for all our sins in His blood. So we can be forgiven and free. Our sins can be transferred to Him. The King's righteousness could be transferred to us. And we can be made righteous in that. That's how the Kingdom works. You trust in Him, and you're forgiven. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you go to heaven. You don't earn it first. You don't work for it first. You don't have to do a bunch of deeds so you can be a good person. Give your life to His Lordship, and He'll save you. Look, let's put all the talk about the government on hold for a moment. The question is, have you done that? Don't worry about politics and all these other things. Have you bowed the knee before His throne? Do that and He will put the kingdom of God into your hearts. He won't wait. He won't hesitate. He'll do it right now. And let me pray that you would do it this morning if you have not done it yet. Let's pray.

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Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank You for this study that we have undertaken this morning, to try to wrap our minds around how believers have responded to the government. Lord, it's not always easy, because it's a lot of history. And it's a subject that goes over the course of a thousand years. And there's different governments that come and go and kings that are here and there and gone tomorrow and yet there's a principle that remains and that is that Your kingdom reigns forever. You're a king that never leaves the throne; You're always sovereign. And as such, You are calling people out to Your name, whether they be the Hebrew midwives, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Daniel, Rahab, all of them. And as You do that, Lord, You uphold them through the principle of faith alone.

Lord, I pray for those who are here today that if there are any who have not put their faith in Christ, I pray that all these conversations and all this these messages and everything we do this morning would drive them to Him because they need to be in Your kingdom. The kingdom of Canada will not save them. The kingdom in North America or Europe or anywhere in the world will not get them into heaven. There's only one king that will do that, and that is King Jesus. Lord, I pray that salvation would come to some hearts this morning that Christ would be glorified and exalted.

Father as we continue this study, our greatest prayer for these things is for sober mindedness and wisdom, that we will know how to approach how to live in a fallen world with fallen leaders, fallen decisions, that we may glorify Christ in it all. And we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.