Playing the Blame Game
Ezekiel 18:1-- 19:1- 14

“We battle the odds. But we don’t look for excuses to accept failure. We look for ways to succeed,” said Bob Shannon, varsity football coach for East Saint Louis High School, whose city is a sinkhole of crime and violence, yet his football team has won five state championships and one national title.

The natural tendency is to the blame others when you fail at something; it’s human nature not to take personal responsibility.

To blame others for the bad things that happen to you is playing the role of the victim, or what journalist Pete Hamill calls “victimization;” in his article titled It’s Not My Fault, young blacks and Hispanic men in the South Bronx were protesting a speech by General Colin Powell when he encourage these youth “not to let your environment determine your future, but take personal responsibility and make something of yourselves;” the protesters were saying that Powell didn’t know anything about poverty and suffering.

Playing the blame game is as old as human history; it goes all the way back to the garden of Eden and the first sin; ultimately it was God who was blamed (Genesis 3:1-13).

In our text, with the warning of the Babylonian captivity imminent, the younger generation was blaming their parents for their plight and sinfulness.

The Taking of Personal Responsibility (Ezekiel 18:1-32)

The proverb from Israel... “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (18:1-2); a similar proverb in Lamentations 5:7: “Our fathers sinned are no more, but we bear their iniquities;” these proverbs avoid personal responsibility.
The principles from God... “You will no longer quote this proverb in Israel” (18:3); there are 8 principles God lays out in Ezekiel 18:4-32.

1. All souls belong to God and the soul that sins it shall die (18:4)
2. If a man is just and keeps God’s judgments faithfully he shall live (18:5-9)
3. If a righteous father has a son who is a villain, the son will die. The righteousness of the father will not save him (8:10-13).
4. If an evil father has a righteous son, the son shall live but not the father (18:14-18).
5. If a wicked man will turn away from all the sins that he has committed he shall live and none of his transgressions shall be remembered (18:19-23).
6. If a righteous man commits sin and does the same detestable thing as the wicked man does, he shall die (18:24-29).
7. God is judge and He will judge according to the ways of mankind. “Therefore says the LORD: ‘Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin... get yourself a new heart and a new spirit, for why should you die, O house of Israel?’” (18:30-31).
8. God has no pleasure in the one who dies; therefore turn and live (18:32).

The problem of generational sins... God said to Moses: “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:5; Numbers 14:18).

I once preached a sermon titled: If You Could Choose Your Parents; in it I said we are born with both the physical as well as the personality traits that go back four generations; these traits become weaker the further back we go in the family tree.

This principle becomes more complex when we consider disobedience to God is more strongly imbedded in the male sperm than is obedience; it’s the sins of the father that are passed down (Exodus 20:5; Ezekiel 18:2); the sins of the mother are passed down too, “like mother, like daughter” (Ezekiel 16:44), but disobedience is more strongly found in the male sperm than the female egg; could this partly explain why women are more spiritual than men?

Life is not fair; some children are born with a far greater propensity to sin and to disbelieve in God; the Ammonites and Moabites, because of their hatred for
Israel, could not enter the assembly of the Lord up to the 10th generation; the Edomites and the Egyptians up to the third generation, and the Canaanites were to be excluded forever from the land of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3-8; 7: 1-4; Exodus 34:11-15); does this not suggest that a child born into a non Christian home has a more difficult time coming to know the true God than one raised in a loving Christian family? Yet we are all held accountable for our own decisions; you cannot blame your parents, or grandparents for your sins or your lack of a relationship with God.

The plan to overcome bad heredity...

1. Realize you are a unique person (Psalm 139:13-14).
2. Recognize your own “way” or bent (Proverbs 22:6)
3. Resolve to take responsibility for your actions (James 4:8b).
4. Rely on the Holy Spirit to help you overcome your weaknesses (Romans 8:13; Ephesians 3:16).
5. Recommit your life to Christ for the sake of your heritage (Ezekiel 16:44; Lamentations 5:7).

The Treachery of False Hope ( Ezekiel 19:1-14)

The dirge of two parables...

The parable of Mother Lioness (19:1-9)... A lioness was raising her own whelps; one grew up to be a furious beast; he was caught and sent off to Egypt; she reared another which too was ferocious; this lion was captured and sent off to Babylon.

What was the meaning of this poetic funeral dirge? The lions were two kings of Judah who were half-brothers having the same mother Queen Hamutal: Jehoahaz and Zedekiah (2 Kings 23:31; 24:18); both were evil; Jehoahaz was carried off to Egypt (2 Kings 23:31-33) and Zedekiah to Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-6). One was already in captivity, the other yet to be taken captive.

The parable of Mother Vine (19:10-14)... Mother Vine is planted by a river and grows into a beautiful plant with strong branches fit for a king’s scepter; she is uprooted by an east wind and stripped of all her fruit; fire burns her branches; a
barren vine is transplanted in the desert; a second fire spreads and consumes the vine so there is nothing left for a king’s scepter.

In the parable Mother Lioness becomes Mother Vine; Queen Hamutal was like a vine in a well watered spot; she had the opportunity to be a godly influence on her two “whelps” or sons, but she raise them to do evil; she gave birth to King Zedekiah who alone is addressed in this passage; he was the one branch exposed to the east wind and carried off to Babylon as Judah’s last king; the last sentence sums up the story: “This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation” (19:14b).

The delusion of the people in exile... The people in exile had a false hope that the royal line of Judah would continue and they would soon return to their homeland to be ruled by a king; Ezekiel' parables said that will not happen; there is only reason to lament.

There are many people who put their trust in a false hope; they think they are Christian because their parents are Christian; the Jews based their security on the fact that they were descendants of Abraham; Jesus had a heated discussion with the Pharisees that being Abraham’s seed was no guarantee they were children of God (John 8:31-44); there are those who think they are going to heaven because they are a good person, yet their righteousness is like a filthy rag to God (Isaiah 64:6); no one can be good enough for God; that is why we need Jesus, the perfect righteous One who became unrighteous, that we, the unrighteous ones might be made righteous ( see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Too many people have a false hope; “The road to hell is paved with good intentions;” even the devil believes and trembles (James 2:19-20); Jesus said not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21).

Everyone is responsible for their own decisions; playing the blame game will get you nowhere for “ the heart of man is deceitful above all things...” (Jeremiah 17:9).

Let’s make an honest evaluation of our lives, stop blaming others for your troubles; secular counselors and psychologists tend to cause their clients to blame their parents or their environment for all their troubles; God’s Word says that you and you alone are responsible for your problems and your own relationship with God! Stop playing the blame game and begin to take personal responsibility for yourself! Remember the words of Coach Bob Shannon: “We
battle the odds. But we don’t look for excuses to accept failure. We look for ways to succeed!” Amen!