

38. The Book of 2Samuel—21:1-2

“A Promise is a Promise” Pt.1

(5/14/17)

As we come to the last four chapters of 2Samuel—they are an appendix to the book.

2Samuel 20 was the last chapter chronologically in the life of David as recorded in this book (1Kings 1 & 2 records the end of his life).

In chapters 21 and 24 are recorded two national calamities—a drought and famine caused by King Saul’s sin (21:1–14) and a plague caused by King David’s sin (24:1–25).

Between these two national judgments—four victories are mentioned (21:15–22).

Chapter 22 contains a psalm that David wrote.

Then in chapter 23:1-7 we have recorded the final words of David.

And finally, in chapter 23:8-39 there is a list of David’s mighty men.

Now, as we come to chapter 21 and, in particular, the first 14 verses—we come to, what many consider to be, a blatantly unfair, unjust and altogether repulsive incident.

I. Judgment Determined—v.1-2

2 Samuel 21:1a (NKJV)

¹ Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD...

The land of Israel is, for the most part, an arid land.

And therefore, for them to see a year where there was drought conditions wouldn't alarm anyone—it might have been caused by some unexpected change in the weather—it happens.

In fact, as the drought continued into the second year, I think most people probably said, “*O well, things are bound to improve*”—again, not a big deal.

But as the nation moved into and thru the third year—everyone including the king knew something, out of the ordinary, was wrong—why?

Because back before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, God made a covenant with them that if they remained faithful to Him and obeyed what He had commanded them to do, the Lord promised He would bless them abundantly—and rain and plentiful harvests would be part of it.

Of course, if they violated what God had said and were living in sin—He promised that the opposite would be true.

Deuteronomy 28:23 (NKJV)

²³ ...your heavens which *are* over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you *shall be* iron.

Leviticus 26:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.

Therefore, when the drought and famine reached three full years, David knew it was time to get serious and to seek the LORD—obviously, He was holding the nation accountable for some sin and before they could make it right, they had to know what was wrong!

2 Samuel 21:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, "It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites." ² So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites *were* not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; the children of Israel had sworn protection to them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.

To understand what's going on here—we need to back up 400 years in Israel's history—all the way back to the days of Joshua (Joshua 9—Comment).

Now I want you to understand something—even though the Gibeonites deceived God's people into making a covenant with them—in the eyes of God the covenant was still binding!

You say, *"That's not fair! These people lied to them, they deceived them, Joshua and Israel shouldn't be made to honor this covenant!"*

Hey, Joshua and the leaders of Israel could have taken time to pray about this (Jos.9:14)—no one was twisting Joshua's arm to make a covenant with these people on the spot.

But since they didn't bother to ask the Lord and entered into a covenant with them—the covenant was binding!

So binding, in fact, that 400 hundred years later when King Saul broke the covenant and started killing the Gibeonites—God sided with the Gibeonites and brought judgment upon Israel.

A covenant is a binding contract—a solemn promise in God’s eyes, not to be entered into lightly but once entered into is legally binding and not to be broken.

Why Saul killed some of the Gibeonites remains a mystery—except for the only clue we are given on the matter in v.2—he did it **“in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.”**

It sounds like Saul started killing the Gibeonites in a misguided attempt at “ethnic cleansing” and genocide.

His ‘zeal for the children of Israel and Judah’ seems to have been zeal to purify the land of foreigners (heathens)—although Saul was the kind of man who never did anything unless it benefited him in some way.

You see, the Gibeonites lived in the city of Gibeon—a city located in the land of Benjamin.

Benjamin was the tribe that Saul was from—in fact, Gibeon was located only a few miles from Saul’s home town of Gibeah.

I think that this could have been the main reason Saul did what he did to these people—today we would characterize it as a clear case of racism.

One author put it this way—

“It was bad enough to have the pagan Gibeonites alive and well in the land of Israel, but did they have to reside in Benjamin? One of Saul’s “leadership” tactics was to reward his men with houses and lands (1 Sam. 22:7), and perhaps to do this he confiscated property from the Gibeonites. Whatever his motive and method, Saul [from his grave] brought judgment on the people of Israel as the drought and famine continued for three years (21:1, 10).”

You see, by this time Saul had been dead for over thirty years—which raises a couple of important questions.

1. *Why was the whole nation punished with famine for the sin of one man (Saul)?*
2. *Why did God wait thirty years to seek justice for the Gibeonites—long after Saul was dead?*

First of all, the Bible teaches that God holds people accountable for personal sins—but that He also holds nations accountable for national crimes—in this case breaking a centuries-old national non-aggression treaty with the Gibeonites.

“Yes, but it wasn’t the whole nation that killed the Gibeonites—it was only Saul! Why then did God judge the entire nation of Israel with famine?”

Look, Saul was the king of Israel—in that regard he was the *federal head* of the nation so that when he acted, he acted for all the people.

The dictionary defines the term this way—

*“**Federal headship** refers to the representation of a group united under a federation or covenant. For example, a country's president may be seen as the **federal head** of their nation, representing and speaking on its behalf before the rest of the world.”*

Saul’s actions, as the federal head of Israel, brought the whole nation into his sin—a national crime since he broke a national treaty.

This really gets into the importance of a nation choosing its leaders in a responsible, rational and sober way—because their actions will bring upon the people of that nation the blessings or the judgment of God depending on what it is those leaders do.

But let’s be honest—often what leaders do is supported by a majority of the people in that nation because their actions benefit those people in some way.

God didn't just hold Hitler and his SS responsible for the atrocities they committed during the Second World War—He held the whole nation of Germany accountable.

And that was because, for the most part, the people supported what Hitler was doing because it was prospering the nation.

I'm not suggesting that all Germans supported the idea of gassing Jews—but many turned a blind eye to it (or refused to believe that it was taking place altogether) simply because the nation was being benefited by Hitler's policies and actions.

Saul didn't physically kill any Gibeonites—either it was his soldiers or the people who lived around the town of Gibeon (fellow Benjamites) that did the killing.

Why, because Saul probably promised them they could take the houses, property and any possessions that the Gibeonite families possessed after they were slaughtered.

So, in other words the people were complicit in that (1) they permitted their king to act in this lawless manner, (2) they assisted Saul in carrying out his ethnic cleansing policy, and (3) they took advantage of the result of Saul's attacks and thus gave their approval to them.

Alright, but what about the second question—*Why did God wait thirty years to seek justice for the Gibeonites—long after Saul was dead?*

This to me is a little more difficult to answer than the first question—but not impossible.

The first explanation comes out of something Paul articulated centuries later in the book of Romans—

Romans 2:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

God always gives us time to repent on our own—it's called a 'grace period'.

Parents will often do this with their children, knowing they have done something wrong, they will wait to see if the child will confess the transgression on their own—it's a test of character.

God does the same with His kids—but after enough time has elapsed and no confession and repentance has taken place—He then 'forces the issue' and brings judgment in some form—as He did here in our passage to force them to make things right with Him.

I think a second explanation for why God waited so many years to bring judgment for what Saul had done was to teach His people that when an atrocity is committed by one administration under the leadership of a king, a president, a prime-minister or whatever leader is in charge—that sin or atrocity isn't against a people (like the Gibeonites) it is ultimately against God. (Ps.51:4)

And since all sin is ultimately against God and God lives forever—the guilt (and consequences) of that sin continues in the eyes of God until it is atoned for.

2 Samuel 21:3 (NKJV)

³ Therefore David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?"

Conversely, if a covenant made 400 years earlier being broken brought consequences upon the nation—God was also trying to teach His people that when they give their word and make a promise (in this case a legally binding covenant)—it doesn't have a 'shelf-life' or expire with time.

This of course is consistent with the character of God Himself—that His promises (unconditional promises that relate to salvation) never expire and will always be honored—no matter what!

But also, I think God was communicating that if one administration makes a covenant with a group of people like Joshua made with the Gibeonites—that covenant is to be honored by every other king and administration that follows.

The reason is because it's a national covenant and as long as that nation exists the covenant is to be honored.

I personally believe this was one of the reasons Saul didn't honor the covenant with the Gibeonites—he reasoned that it was an old covenant, so why should he have to honor a promise made by Joshua and the children of Israel 400 years ago?

A man of character and integrity (which Saul was not) wouldn't have reasoned that way.
(Prov.29:2)

Alright, let me transition into application and we'll close and pick up the chapter next week.

I think we've established how seriously God looks at the covenants we enter into as His people—both nationally and personally.

Once again, a covenant is a binding contract, a solemn promise in God's eyes, not to be entered into lightly but once entered into God expects it to be honored—or else there will be consequences.

And of course the obvious example I'm thinking of here is marriage—although there are many other examples we could think of—marriage is the one that really stands out.

Let me say this—if you're not married don't get married until you've absolutely sought counsel from the Lord in prayer (and I would recommend with fasting as well).

And if you're one of those who got married before you got saved and now you're a Christian but your spouse is not;

Or maybe you were a Christian before you got married and your boyfriend or girlfriend told you they were also a Christian, and even though you felt some uneasiness in the pit of your stomach (maybe like Joshua felt that something wasn't quite right) yet you ignored it and went ahead and got married anyway.

Only to find out after the honeymoon that they lied to you and he or she is not the person you thought them to be—so what are you to do now?

Well, you ask God to forgive you for not seeking Him diligently enough and for making an important life decision without His approval—but know this the covenant is still binding in God's eyes!

There have been numerous times in ministry when someone who was in a bad marriage has said to me, *"I wasn't walking with the Lord when I married my spouse. I know now that this marriage wasn't God's will—so I believe it's OK for me to get divorced."*

Or, *"My husband/wife told me they were a Christian before we got married and now I come to find out they lied so I believe I can divorce them and find a real Christian to marry—right?"*

And the answer to those questions is NO YOU CAN'T—the covenant and commitment still stands!

Matthew 19:9 (NKJV)

⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."
[for a detailed explanation of this verse, go online and listen to the Matthew 19 study]

The main lesson we learn from Joshua 9 is that the commitments we enter into hastily without seeking wisdom and guidance from God, when we find out we have been deceived or that we made a mistake—if we confess our sin of self-dependence and presumption, the Lord will forgive us but the reality is we have entered into a solemn covenant and God holds us accountable to keep it.

That's why Solomon's admonition in Prov.3:5-6 is so important (recite) because the devil will try to make the situation we're facing look good from a human standpoint—like it's a 'slam dunk' and a 'no brainer' but watch out that's when we need to take time—and the bigger the decision the more time we need to take, to pray and seek the Lord for discernment and direction.

Remember, God will always give you time to pray about an important decision and if you're feeling rushed to make a hasty decision—that's the devil trying to pull one over on you so stop before you make the kind of mistake that Joshua made.

But listen, if you got married out of disobedience, divorcing your spouse without biblical justification (infidelity) is further disobedience toward God and will not remove negative consequences from your life—as the old saying goes, *"two wrongs don't make a right"*.

If you divorce your spouse you simply exchange one set of consequences for another but you don't escape bad consequences—further disobedience is no solution to the bad consequences of a prior disobedience.

The consequences Israel experienced was drought and a lack of fruitfulness—and so will you in your walk with God.

Obedience is the only solution—but understand, all is not lost, there is still hope for a future of happiness in marriage.

It may take a little longer than some couples to achieve happiness in your marriage—especially if your spouse is unsaved, but, if you trust God and be the husband or wife He wants you to be to them He will make all things beautiful in His time.

Let me show you how this was communicated to us by the Holy Spirit in Joshua chapter 9—

Joshua 9:21-27 (NKJV)

²¹ And the rulers said to them, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them."

The Gibeonites were made *wood cutters* and *water carriers* for the people of God.

Later we are told that the wood they cut was to be used for the fire of the altar of sacrifice and the water for the cleansing ritual of the Temple.

So in other words, God used these unbelievers, these deceivers to be the very instruments that God would use to cause the fire of the altar to burn and to purify and cleanse God's people for worship.

Listen to me; we are all going to make our mistakes.

All of us are going to do stupid things from time to time, but when you do don't get discouraged all is not lost!

God is able to take our mistakes and use them to be the very instruments that will make us stronger, purer and more on fire Christians for Him.

And do you know what that means?

It means that Gibeonite you're married to, that 'mistake' that you are now bound to in marriage that right now brings so much heartache into your life—is being used by God to be the very instrument to drive you to your knees every day and make you a deeper worshipper.

There is nothing like tribulation, persecution or even the consequences of bad decisions to drive us daily to our knees to spend time in the Lord's presence and draw strength from Him.

And that causes the altar of our hearts to burn hotter as well as making them more pure and holy for worship.

Look, our God is a God of miracles—can't God break the hardest heart and bring that Gibeonite of yours to a place of brokenness, surrender and salvation?

But you'll never see it if you lose heart and bail on your marriage.

- *400 years later David put the Tabernacle in Gibeon and it became the center of the worship of God for a time.*
- *We know that at least one of David's mighty men was a Gibeonite.*
- *After the Babylonian captivity a group of Gibeonites were listed among those returning to the land of Israel—they stayed faithful not because they were forced to but by this time because they wanted to.*
- *In Nehemiah's day the Gibeonites were mentioned as being among the people who helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.*

There is hope for your Gibeonite! So hang in there and honor the covenant you made with your spouse—and God will honor you with future blessings for your obedience to Him.