

39. The Book of 2Samuel—21:3-14

“A Promise is a Promise” Pt.2

(5/28/17)

Last time we met we began looking at 2Samuel 21—and as I said at that time, the first 14 verses are considered by many to be, a blatantly unfair, unjust and altogether repulsive section of the Bible.

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...

As we have already pointed out—Israel is an arid land, and a year or two of drought wouldn't be unusual normally speaking.

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

Because God had promised His people that when they entered the Promised Land if they remained faithful to Him and obeyed what He had commanded them to do, He 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—that He would bring draught and famine upon the land:

Deuteronomy 28:23-24 (NLT)

²³ The skies above will be as unyielding as bronze, and the earth beneath will be as hard as iron.

²⁴ The LORD will change the rain that falls on your land into powder, and dust will pour down from the sky until you are destroyed.

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.

As we said when we first studied this a couple of weeks ago—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 still stood!

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.

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.

II. Justice Demanded

A. David' request

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?"

David knew that until this sin was atoned for—God's judgment would not be lifted.

It's interesting that David didn't ask God what atonement *He* required to remove His hand of judgment from the land—instead, David asks the Gibeonites themselves (those who had been wronged) what they would accept in the way of requital for Saul's sin against them.

B. The Gibeonites response

2 Samuel 21:4 (NKJV)

⁴ And the Gibeonites said to him, "We will have no silver or gold from Saul or from his house, nor shall you kill any man in Israel for us."...

Verse 4 is poorly translated in the New King James—what the Gibeonites are really saying is,

"Silver or gold (money) isn't going to give us justice in this matter, nor do we have the authority to avenge ourselves by putting any in Israel to death (they were foreigners and slaves in Israel and didn't have the legal right to execute anyone for Saul's crime)".

Look, the Gibeonites had been living among the people of God for 400 years—and during that time they had gotten to know the law of Moses fairly well.

Leviticus 24:22 (NKJV)

²² You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I *am* the LORD your God.' "

Numbers 35:31 (NKJV)

³¹ Moreover you shall take no ransom [money] for the life of a murderer who *is* guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.

That's why the Gibeonites wouldn't accept money to atone for the murders of their relatives that Saul had put to death—it would require the blood (life) of the guilty party.

Numbers 35:33 (NKJV)

³³ So you shall not pollute the land where you *are*; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.

And yet Saul was already dead—so they asked to have seven of his descendants turned over to them so they could execute *them* for the genocide Saul had committed against their people.

2 Samuel 21:4-6 (NKJV)

⁴ And the Gibeonites said to him, "We will have no silver or gold from Saul or from his house, nor shall you kill any man in Israel for us." **So he [David] said, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."** ⁵ **Then they answered the king, "As for the man who consumed us and plotted against us, *that* we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the territories of Israel,** ⁶ **let seven men of his descendants be delivered to us, and we will hang them before the LORD [Yahweh] in Gibeah of Saul, *whom* the LORD [Yahweh] chose."** And the king said, "I will give *them*."

And so, the Gibeonites requested that seven of Saul's descendants must take his place in death.

The Hebrew word translated **"hang"** (v. 6) means "*to execute in a way that the body suffers public humiliation*"—this meant that after these seven men were executed, instead of their bodies being buried, they would be left hanging out in the open for everyone to see.

“**Before the LORD**” underscores the judicial nature of the executions—since Saul’s crimes against the Gibeonites had been public and horrific—the punishment itself needed to be public and horrific if God’s wrath was to be appeased—

Numbers 25:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel."

One author added this—

*“**Gibeah** was Saul’s home. It was selected by the Gibeonites as the spot where the bodies should be exposed to add to the humiliation and shame of the fallen dynasty. That Saul was **the LORD’s chosen one** aggravated his guilt and made his crime a national offense. That these heathen people made use of the name of Yahweh is not unexpected since the original covenant with the Gibeonites had been made in Yahweh’s name.”*

Now look, many think that this whole incident was barbaric—however, I think that the Gibeonites were being incredibly gracious here.

It seems from what they said, Saul had all but wiped them out as a people—and yet they’re only asking that *seven* descendants of Saul be handed over to them as retribution for all the Gibeonites he had murdered.

I see the request of the Gibeonites as being motivated by a sense of justice and not out of a sense of hatred and revenge.

In the law of God, justice was all about “*an eye for an eye*”—

Exodus 21:23-25 (NKJV)

²³ ...you shall give life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

The law clearly said that, if someone killed another in cold blood (first degree murder)—they (most often the wealthy) couldn't *buy* their way out of the penalty by paying off the family—justice demanded “life for life”.

But, as I've already said, on the face of it this seems incredibly unfair and unjust to make the ‘innocent’ sons and grandsons of Saul pay for his slaughter of the Gibeonites (Saul himself had been dead for 30 years by this time)—however, maybe we feel that way because we don't have all the facts.

Remember, when David inquired of the Lord as to why He was judging the land with draught—the Lord said to him, “*It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites.*” (v.1)

The term “**bloodthirsty house**” implies that Saul's descendants (probably these seven men themselves) had an active part in the slaughter of the Gibeonites.

The idea that these were not innocent men who were being put to death unjustly for the sins of their father/grandfather Saul is further bolstered by what God commanded in His law—

Deuteronomy 24:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* children, nor shall the children be put to death for *their* fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.

Having all the facts, it seemed that these executions were righteous, lawful and just.

2 Samuel 21:7 (NKJV)

⁷ **But the king spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the LORD'S oath that *was* between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.**

Jonathan was one of King Saul's sons—and David's best friend.

He was a righteous man who loved the Lord and supported God's plan to put David on the throne in place of his father Saul (even though Jonathan was next in line for the throne).

Because Jonathan supported David and helped to protect him from his father who was trying to kill him to remove him as a threat to his (Saul) reign—David entered into a covenant with Jonathan that, once he became king, he would protect Jonathan and his family for the rest of his life. (1Samuel 20:12-17)

Because of this, David spared the only remaining son of Jonathan whose name was Mephibosheth. (See also, 2Samuel 9)

C. The sentence requited

2 Samuel 21:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul; and the five sons of Michal [the better Hebrew manuscripts have 'Merab'] the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; ⁹ and he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill before the LORD. So they fell, *all* seven together, and were put to death...

So David spared Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, but singled out others of Saul's offspring for execution.

The first two, we're told, included Armoni and Mephibosheth (another by that name)—these were sons of Saul that were born to him thru his concubine Rizpah (2 Sam. 3:7).

The other five men were Saul's grandsons, the sons of his daughter Merab and her husband Adriel (1 Sam. 18:19).

"...and he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill before the LORD." (v.9)

As I said earlier, after 400 years of living among God’s people, the Gibeonites knew the law of Moses—which is why they chose to hang these men from trees.

You see, the *method* of death was important because it fulfilled the promise of Deuteronomy 21:23: “*he who is hanged on a tree is accursed of God.*”

These descendants of Saul bore the curse that Saul had brought upon the land—and in so doing delivered Israel from the national guilt of their sin against the Gibeonites.

But this is also important for us (Christians) to understand because the promise of Deuteronomy 21:23 explains why Jesus died the way He did as well.

Galatians 3:13 explains: *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”).* (Explain)

“...and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first *days*, in the beginning of barley harvest.” (v.9)

This happened during barley harvest in the middle of April, and the seven corpses were exposed for about six months—until the rains arrived and the drought ended in October.

D. Rizpah’s reward

2 Samuel 21:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Now Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven. And she did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night.

Rizpah ... took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock—rather, *against the rock*, so as to form a little hut or shelter to protect her from the glaring and blazing sun beating down on her during the summer months.

One commentator—

“Rizpah represents perhaps the supreme expression of maternal loyalty in the Bible. Death had taken her two sons from her, but through her selfless efforts she made sure it would not also rob them of their dignity. Thanks to her efforts, her sons and relatives were given the honor of a mourned death. Her sackcloth bed [‘shelter’] provided for her a spartan abode in which to grieve among the corpses. Furthermore, until the Lord lifted the curse that had eventuated the death of her loved ones through the sending of drought-concluding rains, she protected the corpses from being dishonored by birds and wild animals. By vigilantly seeing to it that none of the bones were stolen or destroyed, Rizpah preserved the possibility of a dignified and proper burial for her sons and relatives.”

2 Samuel 21:11-14 (NKJV)

¹¹ **And David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.**
¹² **Then David went and took the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, from the men of Jabesh Gilead who had stolen them from the street of Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, after the Philistines had struck down Saul in Gilboa.** ¹³ **So he brought up the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from there; and they gathered the bones of those who had been hanged.** ¹⁴ **They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the tomb of Kish his father. So they performed all that the king commanded...**

When David saw the selfless devotion of Rizpah in protecting the bodies of her sons and nephews from the carnivorous birds and beasts—he was moved by her respect of the dead.

But it also reminded him of the shameful way the bodies of Saul and Jonathan had been treated by the Philistines after the battle on Mount Gilboa (1 Sam. 31:11–13) as they hung their bodies on the walls of the city of Beth Shan in open shame.

And even though the men of Jabesh Gilead had marched all night to take the bodies down and give them a proper burial—their bones were buried far from Gibeah, Saul’s family home.

So David resolved to gathered up the bones of Saul and Jonathan, along with the bones of the men that the Gibeonites had executed—and to bring all of these bones together and place them in their family tomb in Saul’s hometown of Gibeah.

And then we read—

2 Samuel 21:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ ...So they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God heeded the prayer for the land [and the rains came again—probably in the fall as normal].

The coming of rain showed that the famine was over, that justice was satisfied, and that Israel was delivered.

What are some of the lessons we can take away from this passage?

1. When God gives us a promise He’s faithful to keep it—and He demands the same from us.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount—“*Don’t make vows* (simple promises, not including marriage vows or vows in the service of your country etc.) *but let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no’.*”

But He said if we *do* make a vow—it is a sacred covenant and it must be kept—or else, like Israel found out, there will be consequences.

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

How was atonement made in our story of the Gibeonites?—they didn’t want silver or gold—it had to be thru a blood sacrifice.

How is atonement made for us in the new covenant?—the same way:

1 Peter 1:18-19 (NKJV)

¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

If you've received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and you've broken the sacred covenant of marriage unbiblically (no infidelity)—that is a serious sin in the eyes of God, but it isn't an unforgivable sin.

1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:7 (NKJV)

⁷ ...and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

2. The sins of the father can be and often are passed down to the children—in the form of consequences

Exodus 20:5 (NKJV)

⁵ you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me,

The Bible teaches that *consequences* are passed from one generation to another—in other words, the children of alcoholic and/or abusive parents will have a tendency to follow in their parent's footsteps—that's been proven by many studies.

Moreover, the descendants of those who hate God are more likely to grow up hating Him because of the example and indoctrination of their parents.

The Hebrew word for ‘hate’ in Exodus 20:5 means “*bent*”—parents can and do pass on to their children certain bents whereby they cause their children to grow bent toward the world and away from God—and in some cases it can be a *radical* bent.

Which means it could lead them into destructive behaviors that could end up destroying their lives physically, and their souls eternally—parents take note, often the consequences don’t show up in our kids’ lives until years later (30 years in Saul’s case).

3. We learned that the covenant (promise) of life is stronger than the covenant (promise) of death

2 Samuel 21:7 (NKJV)

⁷ But the king spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the LORD'S oath [*covenant*] that *was* between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

David’s promise of life to Jonathan’s family was stronger than his promise of death regarding the seven (number of completeness) descendants of Saul.

The “covenant of death” came about in the Garden of Eden when God promised that all of Adam’s descendants would die because of sin—“*the soul that sins shall surely die*” (Gen.2 & Ez.18; also, “*in Adam all die*” (1Cor.15:22).

But the “covenant of life” came thru the gospel of Jesus Christ (the Son of David)—

2 Timothy 1:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

Romans 8:2 (NKJV)

² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

4. Finally we learned that as Rizpah loved her dead sons sacrificially and ministered to them in death—David honored her efforts and gathered their bones into one place.

Rizpah pitched a tent out in the open field (‘world’) and “*grieved among the corpses and honored them in death.*”

All of our unsaved loved ones—are dead in trespasses and sins—and we grieve for them every day our ‘tent’ (physical body) is pitched in this world.

But if we will love them and sacrifice our lives for them—not putting them down, but lifting them up in prayer.

Honoring them in their deadness—not honoring their sinful lives but honoring the fact they have been made in the image of God.

Well, hopefully, Jesus will honor our sacrifice and love, open their eyes, save them and “gather their bones” into one place—heaven!

And of course, this would include resurrecting them from the dead and giving them new glorified bodies!

1 Corinthians 15:51-52, 58 (NKJV)

⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed...[and taken into the presence of the Lord—‘gathered into one place’]

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.