

Title: The Blood of Atonement
Scripture: 2 Samuel 21:1-14
Series: The Promise of the Messianic Kingdom

1. Introduction:

- a. Past actions can sometimes bring terrible consequences to our present.
 - i. That is the situation in 2 Samuel 21:1-14. Something King Saul had done years ago placed King David's Israel under God's curse.
 - ii. We have learned and continue to be confronted by the truth that sin always has consequences.
 1. Sometimes, those consequences are immediate; other times, like in our passage today, consequences ripen over time, but the results are always the same. Sin ultimately produces pain, death, and destruction.
- b. What is important for us to note, and what our passage deliberately teaches us, is that sin is a messy business that usually requires a steep price. Today, we will look at the Doctrine of Atonement.

2. Verses 1-2 - God's Mercy Reveals Sin - Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." (2) So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had

sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.

- a. Our passage opens with a three-year famine plaguing the land. David wonders if the famine might result from covenant curses because of infidelity within Israel.
 - i. Remember, God had promised that covenant-breaking would incur national judgment. **Leviticus 26:14-15** “But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, (15) if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant,
 - ii. **Leviticus 26:19-20** and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. (20) And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.
- b. So David **began to seek the face of God**, which is always the right thing to do. Seeking **God’s face** brings illumination into our lives. God’s answer was shocking. **There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.**
 - i. But who were the Gibeonites? The Gibeonites were pagans who lived in the land of Israel before Israel conquered it. God had commanded Israel to destroy all the pagans of the Land. However, the Gibeonites flattered, lied, and tricked Israel's leaders into making a covenant to

spare their lives by insisting that they were not from within the land but outside the land. Israel, without consulting the Lord, made a covenant of peace with the Gibeonites. Though the Gibeonites deceived Israel, the leaders of Israel did swear in God's name to spare them and, therefore, had no choice but to grant Gibeon immunity.

1. **Joshua 9:15** And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.
 2. After they realized that they had been deceived, Israel could not kill the Gibeonites because of the oath made in God's name. We read in **Joshua 9:18-19** But the people of Israel did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. (19) But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them.
- c. Four hundred years later, Saul had tried to wipe out the Gibeonites. He did so to please Israel, which had always harbored animosity toward the Gibeonites that lived among the people of God.
- i. In so doing, Saul violated Israel's covenantal oath to the Gibeonites.

- ii. Swearing an oath in God's name and then violating it discredited God's reputation.
 - 1. So Saul had broken the third commandment. He **took the name of the Lord in vain** (Exod. 20:7).
 - iii. Swearing an oath in God's name also meant that the swearers asked that God would bring the curses of the covenant upon them should they fail to keep their word.
 - iv. That is what is happening here: **Saul's fervor** violated the covenant. Beloved, the consequences for sin were not brought about by the Gibeonites or David but by God Himself (**famine**).
 - v. The issue in 2 Samuel 21, then, is not just blood revenge; the Lord's name had been desecrated, and there was a curse on Saul's descendants because of it.
- d. All of this is revealed to David when **David sought the face of the Lord**. God plainly tells David why the famine had persisted. Israel had broken its covenant with the Gibeonites and, therefore, had trampled upon God's Holy name.
- i. We come to a great truth in this passage. We learn that God honors prayer, even when it comes from confusion.
 - 1. Beloved, God is not cruel. He does not keep David (or any of us) in the dark. If we ask, God reveals guilt. Then Guilt can be faced, and, hopefully, atoned for. Because God is merciful, He makes guilt clear.

2. Read the Scriptures, and you will see that God never punishes His people without revealing why. He does not play games with us. Therefore, when in doubt, we must be a people who pray and seek sovereign direction.

3. Verses 3-9: The Cost of Atonement: And David said to the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?” (4) The Gibeonites said to him, “It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel.” And he said, “What do you say that I shall do for you?” (5) They said to the king, “The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, (6) let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD.” And the king said, “I will give them.” (7) But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. (8) The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; (9) and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.

- a. Because David had prayed, he now knows what Israel's trespass was. But what must be done? David asked the Gibeonites: **What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?**
 - i. Notice that David is concerned with **atonement**. To atone is to suffer the penalty for sins, removing the effects of sin from the repentant sinner and allowing the offending party to be reconciled to God.
 - ii. In other words, atonement is payment for sin.
 - iii. Beloved, this is what is at stake. David wants to atone for Israel's sin so they may again enjoy covenant blessings.
- b. The Gibeonites informed David that this was not a case to settle out of court with payment for damages. Death shall produce death, yet the Gibeonites did not have the authority to execute the offender. We read:
 - i. **2 Samuel 21:5-6** They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, (6) let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give them."
- c. The king consents, selects the candidates, and hands them over. The Gibeonites carried out their gruesome task - **they hung them on the mountain before the LORD.**

- d. Beloved, is this story difficult for you? In these modern times, we have nothing to compare our story. We ask: Why has God brought this to pass?
- i. First, Saul's killing of the Gibeonites polluted the land with their blood.
 1. **Numbers 35:33** You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it.
 - ii. Secondly, Saul's offense had violated a covenant oath. According to Scripture, when Israel's leaders swore an oath, they would ask God to bring wrath upon them should they ever break their word.
- e. To make a covenant, an animal was cut, its pieces opposite one another, and those taking the covenant obligation upon themselves would walk between the pieces. By this, they said, as this animal is cut in pieces, so may we be cut up if we do not keep this oath.
- i. The Gibeonites demanded that this curse be carried out. But don't make the mistake of thinking this is strictly a Gibeonite thing. God's wrath stood behind Gibeon's request. Ultimately, the sin committed was not against the Gibeonite but against the majesty of God. God's wrath must be satisfied, propitiated, and atoned for. The curse of the covenant had to be carried out.
 - ii. Our last verse says that **after the execution, God responded to the plea for the land.** This bottom

line tells us that God sovereignly accepted the measures taken to turn away his wrath for covenant-breaking. Now, Israel could move from famine to favor.

iii. But how can God call for this? Doesn't it run against **Deuteronomy 24:16** “Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.

1. Does the execution violate Deuteronomy 24:16? No, beloved, it does not!

Deuteronomy regulated individual criminal cases, but this situation is much broader.

Saul did not trample on the Gibeonite covenant merely as an individual. He was the king of Israel, its representative,

2. Therefore, all of Israel had sinned. The offense was national and not individual because Israel's leaders swore the covenant with Gibeon on behalf of the whole nation.

iv. When the covenant had been broken, all Israel was guilty, even if only one man (Saul) was the primary criminal.

v. King Saul violated the covenant with the Gibeonites, and yet, by the time of our narrative, Saul was not alive to personally suffer the curses. However, covenant-breakers knew that they, their families, and Israel would be considered guilty. The price for atonement is always heavy.

f. The text teaches that atonement is horrible to look at; it is gory. Atonement is always gruesome. We need to

see this because we easily fall into the trap of thinking of atonement as just another doctrine.

- i. The Old Testament teaches us the violence of atonement. The saint of the Old Testament realized this when he brought a young bull to the Tabernacle and had to slit its throat, skin it, cut it in pieces, and wash the insides and legs (Lev. 1:3-9).
- g. The stench of death hangs heavy wherever the wrath of God has been quenched.
 - i. Look at the Garden of Eden. There, you will see death cover man's nakedness and the spilling of innocent blood.
 - ii. Look to Gibeah and see seven men hanging, rotting, and decomposing for months to bring relief to a sinful Israel.
 - iii. Look at the Day of Atonement. There, you will see the altar dripping in blood so that Israel might have their sins forgiven.
 - iv. Look at Calvary, and there you will see the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, in gruesome agony, dying in terrible pain, and all this while the ground is soaked with His blood. This is God's love for you and me. God the Son atoned for your sin and mine to spare us from the wrath of God the Father. Our covenant curses for disobedience have fallen on him.
 1. We learn another valuable lesson. God's wrath for sin is real.

- a. **Psalm 90:11** Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?
- b. In other words, who stops to consider the wrath of God? The answer is almost no one. But our writer says we should.

4. Verse 7: The Safety of Covenant Love: But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

- a. Verse 7 is almost a parenthesis. David must hand over seven of Saul's descendants to the Gibeonites and does so, but in the midst of it all, **the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.**
 - i. The **oath of God** refers to the covenant between David and Jonathan in which David promised to show devoted love to Jonathan's house (1 Sam. 20:15). David was faithful to that promise in 2 Samuel 9, and here he continues to be faithful by exempting Jonathan's son from the Gibeonites' demand.
- b. Though our passage focuses on an instance of covenant-breaking and its tragic results, it also includes this example of covenant-keeping in David's treatment of Jonathan's son.
 - i. Beloved, Saul had been a covenant breaker, but David was a covenant keeper.

c. There is a king who keeps covenant. Beloved, David's covenant-keeping points beyond itself to David's greatest son, King Jesus Christ. We are more secure than Mephibosheth could ever be. You and I will not be hung because of sin, but Christ was hung so that you and I may live. Beloved, we are Mephibosheth. We have been passed over from death to life because of Christ's covenant fidelity. We are kept and will be kept all the days of our wandering here on earth.

- i. **John 6:39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.
- ii. **John 10:28** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
- iii. **John 17:12** While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

5. Verses 10-14: The Greatness of Covenant Love: Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night. (11) When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, (12) David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of

Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. (13) And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. (14) And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land.

- a. The Gibeonites carried out their work; the executions happened, and the bodies were hung. All this happened at the beginning of what would generally be the barley harvest.
- b. Here, we see a scene that is both reassuring and heart-wrenching. Rizpah, the mother of two of the hung men, came out of Gibeah to the place of death carrying her sackcloth. She camped outside and kept vultures of the sky and predators of the earth from picking and consuming the bodies. She acted out of motherly love and loyalty toward Saul's whole family.
- c. She could not prevent the executions or the bodies being exposed to the elements. This is the price of atonement. There was so much she was helpless to change, but she resolved to do what she could. With vigilance by day and sleeplessness by night, she guarded and defended the rotting flesh of her dear ones.
 - i. **Commentary**: When we allow our imagination to think about the details of Rizpah's situation, we are overwhelmed: the bodies just hang there,

- exposed to the elements. The stench and the sight of decay must have been overwhelming and Rizpah is a mother who, day in, day out, week in, week out, is forced to experience this with her own children! The horror defies description.
- ii. No one knows how long Rizpah's tireless vigil went on. In any case, the day came when the rain came and signaled the end of the famine on the land and the end of the wrath of God.
- d. Someone reports to David Rizpah's devotion. Moved by her sacrifice, David, as an act of tribute, gathers the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh-Gilead, along with those Rizpah had protected, and gives them all an honorable burial in their home territory of Benjamin.
- i. Beloved, learn this lesson: love does what it can. It does not concern itself with what it cannot do. Rizpah could not spare her sons. The Lord had spoken. But it would not be a sin against the Lord to protect her loved ones' bodies from desecration. She devoted herself to this task with the greatest measure of love possible.
 - ii. Beloved, you and I are called to love deeply as well.
 - 1. **John 13:35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
 - 2. Rizpah demonstrated this Christ-centric love in death. May we do so and more in this life.

6. Benediction:

- a. **Titus 3:5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

Public Reading of Scripture
Matthew 27:27-36