

David Avenges the Gibeonites, Part I

Call to Worship: Psalm 105:1-6

1st Scripture: Joshua 9

2nd Scripture: 2 Samuel 21:1-9

Hymn #5 (Supp)- I Sing the Mighty Power of God

Hymn #50- Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Hymn #216- Crown Him with Many Crowns

Introduction:

Following the reestablishing of David's kingdom, the author of 2 Samuel brings us through a few more relevant events, surrounding the life of David, before ending his divinely inspired Book. And then, 1 Kings, picks up where 2 Samuel has left off, recording the establishing of Solomon's reign and the death of David.

And so, this morning, we move on then, to consider one of those few remaining, relevant events, which the author would have us ponder, before ending his sketch of the life of David. And I trust, that by the grace of God, we might reap some significant, practical benefit from what we will consider here, and in the remaining chapters of this Book.

I. An Important Historical Preface

Now, before we directly address our main text, it is important that we lay out an important historical preface (taken from our first Scripture reading), which will serve to set the stage for our understanding all that transpires here in chapter 21:1-14.

We begin this historical preface then, by answering the question, "Who are the Gibeonites and what is their connection to the nation of Israel?" Well, you may recall that when the Israelites, led by Joshua, had first entered the Promised Land (the land of Canaan), they were called to destroy all of the present, pagan, idol worshipping inhabitants, who resided in the land. This was both as a means of judgment upon the heathen, for their idolatrous, ungodly practices, and also as a means of preserving the Israelites themselves, unto a holy heritage, so that they would not be influenced by the gross, idolatrous practices of the heathen, who dwelt in the land.

Now, to this end, God had commanded them to wipe out, entirely, all of the nations, who presently lived in the land of Canaan. They were to make no covenant with these foreigners; they were certainly not to intermingle or intermarry with them, and in fact, they were to wipe

them all out, man, woman and child, clearing out the pagan infection. That said, the Israelites were permitted to make covenants with those foreign nations, which were outside of the Promised Land, forcing them to pay tributes and to serve them, in some respect. The danger of immoral penetration and pagan influence was not as severe, coming from those, outside of their inheritance.

Well, here is where the Gibeonites come in. The Gibeonites were foreigners, who lived within the Promised Land. And so, in keeping with God's command, the Israelites were supposed to eliminate the Gibeonites, thereby removing their pagan influence, and securing their land for themselves. However, because of a lack of seeking God, on the part of Joshua and the Israelites, as well as the shrewdness of the Gibeonites, the Gibeonites were able to deceive the Israelites into making a covenant with them, which would keep the Israelites from destroying them. We read about how they had done this in our first Scripture reading. We saw there that the Gibeonites, deathly afraid of the Israelites, and in anticipation of their imminent doom, had dressed themselves in raggedy old clothing and worn out sandals, and they had packed large amounts of stale bread and food, to carry with them, as they traveled to where the Israelites were located. And when they had come upon Joshua and the elders of Israel, they had pretended that they had come from a far away land, seeking to make a covenant with Israel, which would guarantee their safety and protection. When Joshua and the elders had questioned the Gibeonites as to how they could confirm that they were from without the land of Canaan, the Gibeonites showed them how throughout their lengthy travels, their clothing and sandals had worn out, and the food which they had brought to gift to Israel had become moldy along the way. Well, needless to say, Joshua and the elders, without seeking guidance from the Lord, had fallen for the deception, leading them to hastily make a covenant with the Gibeonites. And although, upon finding out the truth, the Israelites had made the Gibeonites their servants and slaves, they could not harm them because of the covenant, which they had made with them.

And so, the Gibeonites became carriers, stone cutters and helpers to the Israelites, and most particularly, to the priests, from that day forward. The Gibeonites were content to do this, because, certainly, it was better to succumb to slave labor, than to no longer exist! And so, the

Gibeonites had faithfully served Israel from that time forward, and they were guaranteed by covenant, to remain under the safety and protection of Israel, for as long as they lived in the land.

Well, now we can fast forward to our present text, with a readiness to understand and appreciate all that takes place.

II. A Famine in the Land

At some point in David's reign, there is a famine in the land, which lasts three years. And sometime during the third year, David begins to grow concerned that maybe this lengthy famine was a consequence of some sin. And so, naturally, he inquires of the Lord, so as to find out if something was wrong, which might have provoked the Lord to bring forth this judgment upon the Land, which was supposed to be blessed of God. And God responds to this inquiry with the words found in verse 21b, "It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites." And again, in verse 22b, we are given an additional parenthetical note, which helps explain things a bit more, "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."

And so, here we find the problem; the great offense, which had provoked the Lord to curse the land of Israel, with this unrelenting famine, which was already three years strong. At some point, during the reign of King Saul, Saul had decided to impress and win the favor of the children of Israel and Judah, by attacking and destroying the Gibeonites, who still remained in the land. And so, Saul, his household and Israel had broken covenant with the Gibeonites, because of Saul's sinful desire to impress Israel by removing the foreigners and taking their land and assets for the Israelites. Israel had covenanted to protect Gibeon, and they had broken this covenant, by seeking to destroy them.

Now, the interesting thing here, is the fact that God did not execute judgment on Saul (or his house, or Israel for that matter) for this crime during the reign of Saul. God delays this judgment until after Saul has long been dead, when David is the king of Israel. And here, this ongoing famine, is the consequence of that broken covenant, necessitating an atonement (legal satisfaction) of some sort, to appease God's enduring wrath against Israel.

III. The Atonement

And so, what does David do, to alleviate the guilt of Israel, with the hope of lifting God's curse upon the land? He humbly calls the Gibeonites to come to him, and he asks them what he could do for them, to make things right. He wants to atone for the sins of Saul and Israel, in whatever way the Gibeonites would deem right and proper, so that they would be willing to forgive the debt and bless the land.

And the Gibeonites then respond by saying, "Look, we are not looking for any silver or gold to be given us, by Saul's house, nor do we want to see any man in Israel killed." And so, David then responds by saying, "Whatever you say, I will do for you" (vs. 4). And then we are told in verses 5-6a, "Then they (the Gibeonites) 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, let seven men of his descendants be delivered to us, and we will hang them before the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord chose.'" And David then agrees to do this.

Sparing Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, in accordance with David's own covenant with Jonathan, David takes Armoni and Mephibosheth (a son of Saul with the same name as Jonathan's son), who were Saul's sons through his concubine, Rizpah (the daughter of Aiah), and he delivers them over to the Gibeonites, along with the five sons of Merab (Saul's daughter), who were cared for by Michal, David's wife (vs. 7-8). [Apparently Michal took care of Merab's sons; maybe Merab died, or as a nurse... etc].

Following this then, we are told that the Gibeonites hanged these seven descendants of Saul on the hill before the Lord in Gibeah. And they did this, right at the beginning of the barley harvest; that is, at the time in which Israel would have reaped and celebrated the Feast of the Firstfruits. Now, the timing of this was obvious, because they were seeking to appease God, at the beginning of the harvest, having just suffered through three years of famine. It was during this time, when the firstfruits of the harvest had begun to blossom, that the people were called unto a holy celebration of giving thanks to God, for blessing the land, and for bringing about the beginnings of the harvest reaping. And so, the timing of this, albeit, violent atonement of appeasement, was in due order.

Now brethren, before we close, it is important that we address the following two questions, which obviously jump out at us here:

Why would God bring judgment upon seven of Saul's descendants, because of the sins of Saul? And secondly, why would God delay this judgment until the reign of David, especially since David himself, had nothing to do with this? Well, let me work toward answering these two questions, by working through a few important facts:

1) We must understand, that as a general principle, especially in the New Covenant, children are not punished for the sins of their parents. Certainly, wicked parents, sadly, can and do, influence their children by their wicked acts. There is an advantage of being raised in a godly home, where there is light (and there is also a greater accountability for how that light is responded to). But ultimately, children are not judged or condemned (or justified for that matter) by the acts of their parents, because they themselves can still seek and find Christ, (or reject Christ, in the case of being raised in a Christian home). And if they seek Christ, as in the case of any true believer, who has unsaved parents, God will bless them, in spite of the sins of their parents. Everyone who dies condemned, ultimately suffers for their own sins, and for their own fallen nature in Adam.

And so, as a general principle (see Ezekiel 18:2ff & Jeremiah 31:27ff), everyone is condemned for their own sin, and not for the sins of their parents. We cannot blame our upbringing for the consequences that we suffer for our own sins. The Israelites, who went into captivity, attempted to blame their parents and their predecessors for their present condition in Babylon, even abusing the Proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Rather than recognize their own culpability and responsibility for the judgment they now suffered, they tossed the blame behind them. And so, Jeremiah and Ezekiel corrected that false notion. And Furthermore, Jeremiah moved on to say, that in the coming of the New Covenant, that Proverb would no longer be used, because all of the New Covenant members, unlike all of the Old Covenant members, would be truly regenerated and converted, having their sins completely blotted out by the Christ.

And so, I do not believe that Saul's seven hung descendants here, were eternally judged or condemned because of the sin of Saul. That said, there are still, at least two possibilities of why God, by way of the Gibeonites, called for the execution of these seven men.

A) It might be that these men themselves, directly, took part in Saul's sin against the Gibeonites. In this case, being directly involved would more than justify their execution. Notice, in verse 1, when God first reveals to David, why the famine exists, He states, "It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites." This would seem to indicate that Saul's household; at least some from within his family, were involved in massacring the Gibeonites. Again, if these seven men were directly involved, then that would clearly seal the deal here. [Quick note: The irony of Shimei calling David a bloodthirsty man and a rogue]

Now, personally, let me just say that I don't think this is necessarily the case, but it is worth mentioning the possibility. My reason for doubting this, at least as a necessity, is because we are told that David "had spared Mephibosheth," Jonathan's son, keeping him from being one of the seven chosen to be hung. If David were to choose amongst only those, who were directly involved in the crime against the Gibeonites, then Mephibosheth would not have been a viable option. He was only a very small child, when King Saul was killed, and very likely, not even born, when the massacre of the Gibeonites had taken place. And so, we can presume that some, if not all of these seven men, were not directly involved in the massacre. How then do we justify their death?

B) There is a place for temporal, immediate, consequences, to be suffered by the innocent, for their direct association with the wicked, even if they themselves, have done nothing wrong. Now, this does not violate the most significant aspect of the principle of "children not suffering for the sins of their parents," because, we are not talking about being condemned here, but rather, suffering or even dying, as a consequence of the sins of others. To be sure, innocent people die and suffer every day for the sins of wicked people, do they not? Being condemned eternally and suffering (or even dying) temporally are two different things. Let me illustrate this in a few very relevant ways:

Are there not Christian people, living within the borders of a nation, which has suffered some form of national judgment for their sins? Are there not a minority of Christians, amongst a majority of idolators, who experience the same temporal judgments due the idolators (because of their idolatry), who have continued to walk faithfully with the Lord? Are there not Christians, who suffer and die amidst national disasters, which come, in part, to bring judgment upon individuals and nations?

There are national sins, which affect the whole nation, regardless of the spiritual life of every individual. The sin of Achan led to the death of some Israelite soldiers, and the loss of the first battle against Ai, for Israel. Isaiah and Jeremiah, had gone into the captivity with Israel, along with other godly men and women, who were righteous in the sight of the Lord. They had to leave their inheritance and blessing in the land, because of the sins of their compatriots and kinsmen. But, because they had a home in glory, whose Maker and Builder is God, the temporal suffering and loss was just that, temporal! And so, their enduring of the temporal, national judgment, spoke nothing of their eternal position in grace. In fact, their remaining faithful through the temporal, better prepared them for the eternal.

Now, I am certainly not saying that Saul's descendants here, were just and righteous. I am just saying that although Saul's sins, were, in a temporal sense, brought to bear upon their backs, Saul's sins were not the source of their condemnation. Rather, their own sins would have condemned them eternally. And if they were righteous, they'd have borne the temporal curse brought about by Saul, but to no harm against their immortal souls. [works for + as well]

To be sure, King Saul, as a representative king of all Israel, brought sin and guilt upon the whole nation. The Israelite army submissively followed through with his orders, and the whole nation was affected by the sin of one man, bringing a shared guilt upon the nation, which Saul's leadership represented (kind of like Adam in a reflective sense). When Saul, as Israel's king, led Israel to break covenant with the Gibeonites, *Israel* broke covenant with the Gibeonites, and thereby shared in Saul's guilt. And for this reason, Israel was still indebted to the Gibeonites, even though Saul was long gone, and David was reigning.

Now brethren, let's bring this home, by pushing into the main point here, which brings this all together:

2) God deals with this during David's reign, because it has yet to have been dealt with, at all, and Israel still bore this guilt. And David, not Saul, was the man to deal with this issue, in a pronounced way, which would not have happened during the reign of Saul. And it needed to be dealt with, properly and emphatically, from the standpoint of the Gibeonites, Israel and God, because there is something far more at stake here, which will highlight a main principle for us, to be lifted up high in bright colored neon lights.

A) From the standpoint of the Gibeonites, a great national injustice had occurred, in Israel's violation of the covenant made with them, from Joshua's day. The Gibeonites remained faithful; they fulfilled their part of the covenant, remaining stone cutters and helpers and servants to Israel, and most particularly to the priests. And now, God's people had not kept their word, and the Gibeonites could do nothing about it.

In fact, all they could do was wonder about the integrity of the God, who had adopted Israel as His own special people. How could this God, allow them to break covenant with the Gibeonites; to massacre the Gibeonites, without any repercussions? Was this alleged "holy" God, really holy and righteous and just? Could He just look away from so unholy an act against the Gibeonites? Or maybe He was just impotent and incapable of doing anything about it? Maybe He was not all powerful and all sovereign?

It was important that the Gibeonites received confirmation concerning the good, righteous and holy nature of God, who looks upon no evil in a favorable way, even the evil acts of His own people. Wrong thoughts of God had to be corrected. He must be morally unbiased, if He is the true and living God! This famine, leading Israel's new king, David, to subject himself to the will of the Gibeonites, would bring about that justified confirmation, in a very clear and pronounced way! Saul's seven hanging descendants would speak loudly to God's vindication of the Gibeonites, before all, for the wrong they had suffered at the hands of Saul.

B) From the standpoint of the Israelites, this great sin, which was all but forgotten, needed to be brought up, and properly dealt with, for their own benefit. They needed to know that what Saul had previously initiated was wicked, unjustified, and not forgotten by God. They needed to know that God takes covenants very seriously, lest the Israelites retrace the same pattern even in having a low view of their covenants with God.

This brought their attention to God's holiness in a new, unique and fresh way, reminding them that nothing escapes God's notice, and that, in due time, wickedness is always recompensed. Saul's seven hanging descendants would be a living billboard, placed right in Saul's own hometown, reminding all Israel of God's ultimate vindication of the righteous and his judgment of the wicked.

C) And then, finally, from the standpoint of God, God found great cause to put forth a reminder of His jealousy for His own glory. Israel was inevitably attached to God, by His choice and to their great benefit. But, with such a blessed privilege, came a sobering responsibility. They needed to properly represent God before the nations. And, in their failure to do so, by breaking covenant with the Gibeonites, a bad light was put upon their God.

And so, God had vindicated His own character, setting His people apart from Him, when it was necessary unto the preservation of His own perceived character and glory! God did not approve of what His own people did to the Gibeonites; God Himself is a God of His Word; in fact, every element of the faith, which God requires of His creatures, finds its full strength and support in the fact that God cannot lie; God cannot break His covenant; every promise of God (unto blessing or judgment) is true and must be fulfilled! Should this atrocity have been left unchecked, the entire faith of God's people, which is based upon the perfect integrity of God, would no longer have a reliable foundation to rest upon! And God will never have that! And so, He singles this issue out, in the most obvious of ways; He delays unto the reign of a godly king, to highlight His properly and righteously dealing with this great injustice, so that, not only will His integrity remain intact, but furthermore, it would actually be highlighted and greatly emphasized, years later, after a lengthy delay! The famine is God utilizing a past, undealt with issue, to grab the attention of His people, and us today, in a most unmistakable way, because God is most concerned, first and foremost, with His glory! And He has every right to do all that He wishes to do, in accordance with His will, in His perfect time, when He deems that it would most serve this proper and righteous end! Sometimes, there is immediate action on the part of God (Uzza touching the ark), and sometimes there is a delay (even very long delays, like this), but whatever the case, He speaks loudly and clearly, whenever He speaks, according to the right and proper design, that He ought to, and will be, glorified in all things!

Now brethren, there are a heap of applications, which we can draw from these first nine verses alone. Lord willing, we will spend the entire time, next week, going over several of them.

Amen!!!