

The Curse of the Gibeonites

Scandalous Texts

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Bible Text: 2 Samuel 21:1-14; Proverbs 26:2
Preached on: Sunday, July 2, 2023

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During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, “It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death.” 2 The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.) 3 David asked the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? How shall I make atonement so that you will bless the LORD’S inheritance?” 4 The Gibeonites answered him, “We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death.” “What do you want me to do for you?” David asked. 5 They answered the king, “As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel, 6 let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul—the Lord’s chosen one.” So the king said, “I will give them to you.”

The word of the Lord. [“Thanks be to God.”]

May we pray.

Lord, help me, very concisely, very clearly, very compellingly, to explain this Scripture so that any trouble we have with it may be removed and resolved, and that we may find practical blessing from the sermon and the text today through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

What we have here is, very clearly, what is called a curse. What is a curse? Well, I think we know what a blessing is. At the end of the service, I always bless you. I lift my hands after the fashion of Aaron, the high priest, and I often pronounce the Aaronic benediction.

“The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up the light of his face on you and give you his peace.” (Numbers 6:24-26)

So I often do that. That’s a blessing. What does that mean? It means it has power to communicate something to you that is good. It’s such a thing—it’s not unlike the Lord’s Supper that we will observe later today. The Lord’s Supper is not just bread and wine. The Lord’s Supper points to something beyond itself.

When we partake of the bread in a way that I cannot explain, and no one that I have ever read in the history of the church has ever effectively explained, somehow or another, when I partake of that bread, I’m lifted up where I already am seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, according to Ephesians 1:3 and Ephesians 2:6, and I actually feed on Christ.

How do I feed on Christ? I don’t know. It’s a mystery. We believe in the Spiritual presence. What is Spiritual presence? Spiritual presence does not mean a figure of speech, a non-literal thing; it means by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we actually, really and truly, do receive Christ when we partake of the bread and when we drink of the cup.

So Christ is present with his people. He was present with his people in the Old Testament. He was that Rock that followed them in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4).

And so when Aaron lifted his hands and blessed the people of God, he put his name on them (Numbers 6:27). He was communicating something intangible—something real, something that affected them when he blessed them. So when I lift my hands, following that example, you really do receive a blessing from that pronounced blessing with my hands lifted, just as you receive a blessing that is more than simply your stomach being satisfied with a crumb of bread and the taste of wine.

So we know what a blessing is. What do we have here in the case of the Gibeonites? What we have here in the case of the Gibeonites is what is called a curse. A curse is the opposite of a blessing. What is a curse? Does it really have power? And the first thing you have to ask yourself is this question as you look at the text on page 507 and where David has been dealing with a famine.

What happens in a famine in the ancient world? They didn’t have Kroger’s or Albertson’s or Walmart to go down and get food. They didn’t have refrigerators, this, that, or the other.

Thousands of people died in the ancient world when famines took place, and remember the Promised Land was not like Egypt. In Egypt, the ground was watered by their feet (Deuteronomy 11:10). What do I mean? They had dug little canals and using their feet, not unlike a bicycle, they were able to push that water into their fields and water their crops. But Israel, the Promised Land, was utterly different. When God withheld rain, the crops failed, and when the crops failed beyond a year or so, many people died. They starved to death. They couldn't feed their animals.

And so what we have in 2 Samuel 21:1 is, "During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD." You know, a short famine probably people say, "Well, this just happens all the time and we'll get through this," but here with three years, David begins to really seek God. "Lord, what is going on here?"

Have you ever thought that where we are in our country in 2023, God's saying something to us? Have you ever thought about the divisions in our nation? The divisions in our nation are an example of God's curse on our nation. Wow! Because when a person's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (Proverbs 16:7).

And so David is desperate. His people are dying. "What am I going to do? What am I going to do?" And God gives him an answer.

Do you realize that if you seek the Lord, and you need wisdom, you have a promise from God that he'll give it to you? In the book of James, if any of you lacks wisdom, let that person ask of God who gives like a liberal. He gives generously, liberally, and it's a shame that word is twisted. God gives liberally. He gives generously. You can never ask God for too much. God delights to give you things, and the one thing that God will always give you, if you're honest with him and lay your desires before him, is wisdom. So "If any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all generously, liberally, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, because he who wavers is like the waves of the sea." (James 1:5-7)

And so David goes to God and he said, "God, I've got to know, why is this happening?" And God gives him an answer. Notice the answer. He says, "The LORD said," in verse 1, the second sentence, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death." (2 Samuel 21:1)

And that reminds us of a passage back in the book of Joshua, and we're going to hold our hand there and go back to Joshua 9. Joshua 9 and we find

there, beginning at verse 18, Joshua 9:18—you know the story, the Gibeonites had heard about Israel wiping people out, and they had heard that Israel’s God had promised to give them the whole Promised Land and to wipe out all those inhabitants. Why?

Because they practiced sexual perversion, they believed that when they were worshiping their gods, they were actually having physical relation with their gods (Numbers 25:1-9), and they also took their children and oftentimes burned them alive (Leviticus 18:21; Leviticus 20:2–5; 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35). It was a terrible, twisted culture that tortured babies and did horrible things and God said, “I’ve had enough of it,” and he’s wiping them out and he’s using Israel to wipe them out (Genesis 15:16).

Now so in Joshua 9, and you’ll find this on page 344, we find this verse 16 he says, “Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them.” See, the Gibeonites came up with a plan, “We’re going to fool them,” and they took old clothes, old leather, old wineskins, old stale moldy bread, and they had a meal together with them. They entered into a covenant in the name of the Lord, that is the name of Yahweh.

And, “So the Israelites,” verse 17, “set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. But the Israelites did not attack them.” Look at verse 18, “because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the LORD, the God of Israel,” that is by Yahweh, God’s personal name, the God of Israel. Look at the next sentence.

“The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, but all the leaders answered, ‘We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us.’” Think about the consequences: “We’ll let them live **so that wrath won’t fall on us because they swore an oath in the name of the Lord.**”

You know, it’s one thing to tell a lie—we shouldn’t lie—it’s another thing to swear to something in the LORD’s name because when you swear to something in the Lord’s name, you’re calling down his judgment on your head if you break that promise. And so he says, “We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now,” he says, “we cannot touch them now.” (Joshua 9:20)

And so, going back to 2 Samuel 21, what you have here is this: King Saul, who was a religious fanatic, and understand that the Bible has some examples of religious fanatics, he was an amazingly fanatical man. He liked

to fast. He was really into it, and he liked to put people under all kinds of oaths and promises (1 Samuel 14:24-30, 43-45; 28:20, 23).

I've been reading a book recently written by a friend of ours, and it's about a false teacher who would always close his services after he taught stories, not really from the Bible; he would use Bible verses as proof texts, and then he would have the people in the audience, sometimes 10,000 people or more, particularly young people, to take an oath, a vow before God that they would do this thing or not do that thing. That is wicked (Matthew 5:33-37).

That is wicked because what he did was to put a judgment on the head of all those people who made such an oath. Where do you get that in the Bible, that people would take an oath to do this, and that idea, **made up out of thin air** by this preacher?

And so, anyhow, what you've got here is an oath that comes down on the head, and Saul, King Saul, was a religious fanatic, always fasting, doing this, making demands on other people, religious demands. It's really amazing. And so, he had put the Gibeonites to death.

Now, what's important next to see, there is this, verse 2, "The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them." Now, who are the Gibeonites again? They're not Israelites. They were Canaanites who, in fear that they were going to be destroyed, disguised themselves as people from a great distance. And you've got to understand, they're not Christians in the sense—I'm speaking anachronistically—they don't really believe in the God of Israel. They're not followers of the Law of Moses. They are a pagan group of people who deceive the Israelites into entering into an oath—and if you swear an oath to someone in the name of the Lord, even if that person is not a believer, even if that person is a wicked person, you're still obligated; you're still bound.

And so what the Gibeonites do at this point is very obvious, they pronounce a curse on Israel because Israel, acting in their king, had violated the covenant they had entered into with the Gibeonites. Do you see that? I want to make sure everybody sees that. What's at stake here is that an oath had been sworn in the name of the Lord. How many years before? Roughly 400 years before—400 years before an oath had been sworn to the Gibeonites, and now 400 years later, during the reign of King Saul, what happened? Saul breaks that oath. He breaks that covenant and when he did—we're going to see something very interesting.

Turn with me, if you will, to the book of Zechariah. Zechariah 5, page 1,476. Zechariah 5, page 1476, and we look in verse one,

“I looked again—and there before me was a flying scroll! He asked me, ‘What do you see?’ I answered, ‘I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide.’ And he said to me, ‘This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished.’” (Zechariah 5:1-3)

Verse 4, “The LORD Almighty declares, ‘I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.’”

What is that? This is kind of an amazing picture if you think about it.

When someone who is entitled to curse someone, that is, who has been wronged, very wronged, seriously wronged, issues a curse on that person, it’s like a flying scroll, and that flying scroll goes out, and it’ll alight somewhere and what does it do? It alights in the house of the thief and the man who swears in the Lord’s name falsely, and it stays in this house, and it begins to devour the house so that the—“Uh-oh! Oh no!” The timbers come down, and that’s the curse.

Now I want you to turn with me, having left there, go over to Proverbs 26 and verse 2. Proverbs 26:2 and this is what he says. That’s page 1,023.

“Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest.” What is that saying? An undeserved curse does not come to rest.

So again, remember the flying scroll? When a curse is issued in the name of the LORD because the LORD’s name has been taken in vain, that’s what we do when we swear by the LORD that we’re going to do this or do that, and we don’t do it, it’s then issued as a curse.

And so, picture the flying scroll, flying out there—big scroll, flapping, it’s got writing on one side and writing on the other, and it’s flying towards the house, but it doesn’t light, it doesn’t do damage, without what? Without a **cause** and there in Proverbs 26:2 he says, what is it? He says, “Like a flying bird.”

Have you ever had a parakeet get loose in a house? If you had a cat, the cat just got so excited, he probably ripped your curtains trying to get that bird. But if you’ve ever had a bird loose in your house—sometimes you go into big stores like Sam’s, and you’ll discover there are birds up there and somehow or another, they flew inside Sam’s when those big doors opened up and they got in there, and they do a bit of damage. You don’t want to be

underneath one when it's flying. And so there they are, flying around. They're looking for a place to land. So, here's the sparrow loose in the house. He's looking for a place to land and he looks over there, and he sees the exit sign and he says, "Maybe I can light on that." And see, that's the picture.

And so a curse spoken in the name of the LORD with divine authority, because God's name has been profaned by something, that is the releasing of a curse, and it's like a bird loose in here, and there he finds a place to alight.

Now this is—I want to say this because we're about to get—be afraid a bit. We don't want to be afraid. The point is if somebody's cursed you, 400 years ago in the case of the Gibeonites, the basis of the curse is given when Joshua entered into a covenant and the whole leadership of Israel entered into a covenant with the Israelites, with the Gibeonites. Four hundred years have passed, but there was never a condition for Israel to be cursed because of that covenant until Saul, roughly, say ballpark figure, 1000 BC—Saul breaks that covenant and brings that curse by trying to annihilate the Gibeonites.

So suddenly that sparrow that's been flitting around in Walmart, that parakeet's flitting around in your house, it's been doing it for 400 years, and it hadn't had a place to land, suddenly the condition has been met, and there he roosts, right there above the exit sign. So a curse without a cause does not alight. Saul, 400 years after the covenant was entered into with the Gibeonites by the Israelites under Joshua, 400 years later, the cause has now occurred.

So it's very important that we understand this, and so I just want to mention one other one in passing, and for example, going back to the book of Joshua again for a moment, we discover in the conquest in Joshua 6, Joshua pronounces a curse. Look at this. This is fascinating. Joshua 6, Israel has now conquered the first city in Canaan. They've crossed over the Jordan River, and they've taken Jericho, and on page 339, listen to what he says there at the bottom of the page, verse 26,

"At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: 'Cursed before the LORD,' that is, cursed before Yahweh, "is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho." Look at the curse, it's very specific, "At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates."

Now that's interesting, isn't it? Now this is roughly 1406 BC. And they've conquered the city of Jericho. It's now a ruin, and it was, it was *cherem*

(hērem, חֶרֶם). What is *cherem*? *Cherem* means it was given up to destruction. It was dedicated to destruction, and it reminds us of the word harem, doesn't it, because the root there in Arabic (حَرِيمٌ) and in Hebrew (חֶרֶם) is similar, and it's something that's forbidden, something that is dedicated. You don't mess with the Shah's harem. And so, it's *cherem*. It's devoted to destruction. And so again, look at the curse. It's explicit: "At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates."

Turn with me over to 1 Kings for a moment, 1 Kings 16, and we see something interesting. 1 Kings 16 and verse, that's on page 555, 1 Kings 16 and verse 34, "In Ahab's time."

When did Ahab reign? We know that date exactly and precisely because it lines up with astronomical phenomena both in Egypt and in Assyria. We know exactly when Ahab lived. Ahab reigned between 874 and 853 BC. Now think about it, 1406, somewhere between 874 and 853, this event that we're about to read took place, so that's over 500 years later.

"In Ahab's time," verse 34, "Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun."

So is a curse a real thing? Is a curse a real thing? Is a blessing a real thing? Turn with me, if you would, to the book of Leviticus 19. We're going all over the Bible today. Why? Because we need to interpret Scripture by Scripture. So Leviticus 19 and verse 14. Leviticus 19:14, that's on page 185. Leviticus 19:14, 185, and he says here in verse 14,

"Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD."

Now think about it for a moment. If I'm a blind man—and thank God I've had cataract surgery. I'm not blind, but if I'm a blind man, you're taking unfair advantage of me if you put a stumbling block in front of me.

Now I don't want to imitate Johnny Carson, but you can just imagine, here's a stumbling block. That's terrible. You put a stumbling block in front of a man who can see, that's one thing, but you put a stumbling block in front of a blind man, that's terrible because he can't do anything about it. There's no remedy he can take. So that stumbling block is a real physical thing in this world, in this time.

Now, notice what the verse says in Leviticus 19:14, “You shall not curse a deaf man.” “You shall not curse a deaf man.”

Now, I can identify with that a whole lot more. Because of my hearing aids, I can sometimes hear what people are saying under their breath, but not that well. But if you’re completely deaf, and somebody curses you, what does it mean that he’s cursing you?

Is he taking God’s name in vain? Is he using onomatopoeic, physiological, monosyllabic, old Saxon words? (I won’t say them.) Is that what he’s saying? All these words?

No, he’s actually doing something. He’s calling down the judgment of God on your head, and when somebody calls down the judgment of God on your head, you’ve got to take steps to undo it. You see, the curse that’s spoken has real-life consequences, even if you didn’t hear it. Because if he’s just saying vulgar words, it’s better not to hear it. You don’t want to confront your child over every stupid, foul thing they mutter under their breath. But if somebody is calling down the judgment of Almighty God on your head because you wronged them, you need to be able to do something about it.

So he says in Leviticus 19:14, “Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear the LORD your God.”

So, you think about that, it’s important to realize that curses are real, and that blessings are real, and there has to be something to do about it.

Now, if I left it there, I would really fail to be a gospel preacher because I think back, think about what it would be like to be living in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is different than the New Testament in many ways.

There’s a continuity. Everything in the Old Testament is in the New Testament, but it passes through the matrix, or it passes through the events of the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and nothing is exactly the same, but all of it is there in substance (2 Corinthians 3:3-11; *Cf.* Leviticus 20:11 with 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 2 Corinthians 2:5-8). And so, what would it be like to be living back then, to wonder, “Oh my goodness, somebody has cursed me.”

So I want you to turn with me, if you would, to the book of Galatians for a moment. Galatians 3 and listen to what we’re told. Galatians 3 and this is on page 1,812. Look at verse 13, Galatians 3:13. He says,

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of God.” (Galatians 3:13-14)

What is the solution? The solution is Christ. Keep that in mind as we go back again to 2 Samuel 21. 2 Samuel 21, and let’s see what we have there.

2 Samuel 21. There was a curse that was placed on Israel by the Gibeonites, and these pagans demand that Saul’s descendants be put to death. Did God approve of that? No. Did God inaugurate that? No. Did God have anything to do with that? No, they were pagan people. They came up with this idea themselves.

Nevertheless, there had to be something to remove the curse, and so we discover, as we go to the end, and we go over to page 508, we discover this, page 508 in verse 11,

“When David was told what Aiah’s daughter Rizpah, Saul’s concubine, had done, he went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead. (They had taken them secretly from the public square at Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them after they struck Saul down on Gilboa.) David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there, and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up.”

Now look at verse 14. This is very critical. He said,

“They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul’s father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded.”

Now look at the last statement there in verse 14,

“After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land.”

What does that say to us? It says that the conditions for the LORD to hear and answer prayer and to bless his people had been met, but what we’ve just seen in Galatians 3 is this: I can appeal to the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. I can point to the cross of Christ. I can say regarding any curse that anybody, anywhere, anytime has placed on my head, I can appeal to the cross, because on that cross of Christ, the flying scroll of Zechariah, the curse with the cause of the fluttering sparrow, they’ve all alighted on the cross.

See in the cross of Christ, all your sins, all of the judgments due to your sins, everything you've ever done wrong, everything that anybody else has done wrong, if they appeal to the cross, we have the remedy.

The remedy is the Lord Jesus Christ and his precious blood. And I want us, in closing, to look at one other place, and that's the book of Revelation. In the book of Revelation, we discover something and that's in Revelation, the very last chapter of that last book of the Bible. Because the Lord Jesus Christ came in the world to take care of the issue of sin, and to take care of the issue of judgment due to sin, we look there on page 1,938, and we see the Holy City, and it says, no longer will there be any curse.

Listen, dear ones, this is the truth of God. What happened in the case of the Gibeonites and their curse really happened. It resulted in a terrible famine. It resulted in God's saying,

"I can't hear your prayers because there's this judgment on your head that hasn't been dealt with."

But what for you and me is this: God has placed on the Lord Jesus Christ all of your judgments, all of your curses, all of the consequences of your sin.

What is a curse after all?

A curse is a consequence of sin. A curse is a consequence of sin. It's another way of saying it's a judgment. So when somebody—for example, if you have swindled somebody, and they go to court, they obtain a judgment against you, in a certain manner of speaking, that's a curse, and it's going to be enforced. That's exactly what you have in 2 Samuel 21.

You have the Gibeonites, who weren't even part of Israel, appealing to the LORD God because his name had been taken in vain by Israel, and they demand that these sons of Saul are put to death. What they asked was an ungodly thing, but nevertheless, they finally released Israel.

I want to say to you, I am so grateful that I do not have to search and find out for a way to get some curse off my shoulders.

I'm sure my ancestors did all kinds of things. I have no doubt of that as a student of genealogy. I'm sure that people somewhere at some time or another cursed my ancestors and those curses come down the bloodline.

But you know what I'm so grateful for? I am so grateful for the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that was shed on Calvary's cross for me, because when he shed his precious blood, he took my curse, he took my judgment, he took the consequences of my sin. This is an important truth.

Do you know that the moment you become a believer, those terrible things become a blessing to you?

I remember one time I went to see a man. He was in jail in the old Alexandria City Jail. He had stolen money, and he was locked up, and the district attorney sent word through one of my elders, “You ought to have Bob go see that guy.”

So I did. And I’m talking to him, and I presented to him the gospel, how the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for his sins, how the Lord Jesus Christ made it plain that he could be forgiven. And I said this to him—his name was Danny Singleton, I said,

“Danny, the moment you put your trust in Christ, these doors will open for you if that’s in your best interest. If that’s in your best interest.”

And he said, “I don’t believe that,” and he used some crude words. And so, anyhow, he didn’t want me to even pray for him.

So when I went to call the jailer to let me out, guess what? God has a sense of humor, and God will do anything to get somebody’s attention. I leaned on the door of the jail, and it swung wide open. The jailer forgot to lock it.

And do you know what Danny said? He said, “Come back in here and pray for me.”

So what I’m saying is, that when you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the consequences of your sins have been removed, and when it’s in your best interest for something to happen, it’ll happen.

And that frees us to enjoy life, even if we’re in a very difficult situation, like being in the Alexandria City Jail, which was a really old jail. It allows us to say,

“Lord, you’ve put me here as a missionary. You’ve put me here to be a blessing.” And so here we have this wonderful truth as we deal with the Gibeonites. We don’t have to worry about atoning for the sins of our ancestors with the Gibeonites anymore, because all those curses were laid on the head of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore this meal is for you and for me a great blessing.

May we pray.

Lord, we pray that you would bless this bread that as we partake of it in a mysterious way we would commune and have fellowship with you through our Lord Jesus Christ and having given thanks.