

## **Broken Treaties**

### **2 Samuel 21:1-9**

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 5-25-2014

## **Introduction**

In chapter 21 we are beginning a brand new section of this book. Most commentators believe that this section was written in topical order, not necessarily chronological order. Chapters 21-24 form a chiasm, where the offense of a king and its expiation in chapter 21 is parallel with the offense of a king and its expiation in chapter 24, the end of the section. The B portions of the outline are lists of military heroes and their exploits. And at the heart of this section are two poems where God gives us His evaluation of the Davidic kingdom and shows it in a very positive light even though it had sins. It gives hope to nations that have problems because it shows God's favor in the midst of sin. In fact, in the second poem David points out that there is no perfect Christian kingdom, yet God's grace can cover a kingdom's sins. In fact, it is high time that Christians start applying the Gospel to politics. So that is the general structure of the next few chapters.

- A. Offense of Saul and its expiation (21:1-14)
  - B. Lists of heroes and their exploits (21:15-22)
    - C. David's praise of Yahweh (22:1-51)
      - C. Yahweh oracle to David (23:1-7)
        - B. Lists of heroes and their exploits (23:8-39)
          - A. Offense of David and its expiation (24:1-25)

And the passage we are going to be looking at today shows the incredible patience of God despite the sin of a nation. And in many ways the mistreatment of the Gibeonites under Saul's kingship parallels America's mistreatment of at least some Indian tribes. And hopefully this tiny introduction to a huge topic will prompt some interesting discussions. But to get the full impact of why this passage was included, we will need a little bit of background.

If we lived in Israel in the days of David, and if they were having a Memorial Day, we would likely be remembering those who had died in the military throughout Israel's history, including the years of the conquest of Canaan. Under Joshua there were many so-called indigenous tribes in Canaan that were dispossessed. They were hostile to God, to His law, to Israel, and to human decency. If you ever have done any study of the

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archeology of that period, you will understand why God said that their cup of iniquity was full. Think of the perverse tribe pictured in the movie, *Indiana Jones: Temple of Doom*, and put that on steroids, and you might have an idea of how disgustingly wicked, cruel, debauched, and degenerate those tribes had become. Jeffrey Dahmer would not have been an anomaly in that day, though obviously not everyone was a Jeffrey Dahmer. But if people *truly understood the criminal conduct of those people*, they wouldn't complain about the Conquest of Canaan. They would cheer Joshua and his men on. And what is surprising is not the conquest of Canaan, but that God would insist that Israel honor a treaty made with one of those tribes – the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites were horrible too; their cup of iniquity was full too. That Gibeon was even spared is a testimony to God's grace. That Gibeon was radically transformed into a tribe that became more faithful to God than most Israelite tribes, is an even greater testimony to God's grace. And that God honored this treaty with Gibeon is also a testimony to God's grace.

## I. What was the broken promise?

### A. Saul broke a treaty made 400 years before (*Joshua 9-10*)

So please turn to Joshua 9 to get a little bit of a feel for what had happened. Many people have been puzzled as to why God would honor this treaty when it had been entered into deceitfully. But let's read the whole chapter. Joshua 9, beginning at verse 1.

**Josh. 9:1** And it came to pass when all the kings who *were* on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon—the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite—heard *about it*,

**Josh. 9:2** that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord.

**Josh. 9:3** ¶ But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai,

**Josh. 9:4** they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended,

**Josh. 9:5** old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry *and* moldy.

**Josh. 9:6** And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, “We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us.”

**Josh. 9:7** ¶ Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, “Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?”

**Josh. 9:8** ¶ But they said to Joshua, “We *are* your servants.” ¶ And Joshua said to them, “Who *are* you, and where do you come from?”

**Josh. 9:9** ¶ So they said to him: “From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt,

**Josh. 9:10** and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth.

**Josh. 9:11** Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, “Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, ‘We *are* your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us.’”

**Josh. 9:12** This bread of ours we took hot *for* our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy.

**Josh. 9:13** And these wineskins which we filled *were* new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey.”

**Josh. 9:14** ¶ Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD.

**Josh. 9:15** So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.

**Josh. 9:16** ¶ And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they *were* their neighbors who dwelt near them.

**Josh. 9:17** Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities *were* Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim.

**Josh. 9:18** But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers.

**Josh. 9:19** ¶ Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them.

**Josh. 9:20** This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them.”

**Josh. 9:21** 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.”

**Josh. 9:22** ¶ Then Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, “Why have you deceived us, saying, ‘We *are* very far from you,’ when you dwell near us?”

**Josh. 9:23** Now therefore, you *are* cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves—woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God.”

**Josh. 9:24** ¶ So they answered Joshua and said, “Because your servants were clearly told that the LORD your God commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you; therefore we were very much afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing.

**Josh. 9:25** And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us.”

**Josh. 9:26** So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them.

**Josh. 9:27** And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.

I think I would have been tempted to say that I was deceived into entering that treaty and therefore the treaty is null and void. I might have sided with the Israelites who were really ticked off that Joshua refused to destroy them. But Joshua's perspective was that a treaty had been made, and though it was foolishly made, it had to be honored. Since the Israelites would not be in sin for honoring the treaty, it was binding. And it was so binding, that when the rest of the Canaanites went to war against the Gibeonites, they appealed to Joshua to defend them. "We are now one of you. Are you going to defend us?" And in chapter 10, Joshua did so with God's blessing.

The cool thing about the Gibeonites is that they actually did embrace the God of Israel as their God and throughout Israel's history were far more faithful to God than Israel was. When Israel apostatized, they remained true. When most Israelites refused to come back from the exile, the Gibeonites came back and served the Lord well under Ezra and Nehemiah. They had remained true to their covenant throughout their whole history. So that gives you a background of who these Gibeonites were. They were a remnant indigenous tribe of Canaanites who had previously been doomed to destruction, but whom God in His providence had rescued and saved. They were basically equivalent to early Christianized American Indian tribes.

***B. Saul sought to exterminate the Gibeonites whom they were in covenant with (v. 1,5) while inconsistently seeking to preserve the Amalekites, whom God had called him to wipe out***

Let's go back to 2 Samuel 21 and see what happened under Saul. Verse 1 says,

**2Sam. 21:1** 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."

Now take a look down at verse 5

**2Sam. 21:5** ¶ 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,

That's what king Saul had done. He had broken an ancient treaty that was almost 400 years old (and by this chapter it was more than 400 years old).

And Saul had planned to wipe out every man, woman, and child of the Gibeonites. Obviously some had escaped. But as far as God and the Gibeonites were concerned, it was cold-blooded murder and was also a serious breach of covenant.

***C. Saul's sons were implicated in this slaughter ("because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house")***

The third fact that is very important to understand is that Saul's whole household was somehow implicated in this murder and this violation of the treaty. Do not think that innocent people are being put to death in verses 8-9. God told David in verse 1 that the reason there was a famine was, "because of Saul *and his bloodthirsty house*, because he killed the Gibeonites." Notice that phrase: "because of Saul *and his bloodthirsty house*." So though Saul ordered the slaughter, his household had followed through on the order, and was therefore guilty. And it is not hard to understand how the adopted children of Michal were guilty of murder, because their dad, who had married Michal's sister, was willing to clearly violate God's laws in order to maintain friendship with Saul. That's quite clear in 1 Samuel 18. He blindly followed any of Saul's orders. So I am convinced that all seven of these men who were executed were directly involved in the murders and attempted genocide. In fact, if you don't take that position, verse 14 makes no sense. God was pleased with what David did.

***D. It was a treaty made with non-Israelites (vv. 1-2)***

We have already dealt with point D, that the treaty in question was made with non-Israelites. But let me read verse 2:

**2Sam. 21:2** 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.

The key point is that God is upset with the broken treaty despite the fact that it was made with a pagan Amorite indigenous tribe. Covenants must be kept, even when those covenants have been foolishly entered into. And one application of this principle is in 1 Peter 3 where God says that a believing wife needs to stick with her unbelieving husband. The fact that he is an unbeliever does not break the covenant. And the fact that the Gibeonites were Canaanites did not make that covenant null and void.

***E. In Saul's nationalistic zeal to serve Israel he failed to serve the Lord (v. 2c)***

The last fact that is important to understand by way of backdrop is that verse 2 shows that Saul sought to exterminate the Gibeonites out of nationalistic zeal. God had not commanded him to do so. Instead, the text says that “Saul had sought to kill them in his *zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.*” This was a man-centered political reason. Well, in the same way, the American violation of Indian treaties was often done with a great deal of public approval and even public pressure. People wanted Indian land, so they kept pushing them North and West. And in the same way, Saul broke this covenant out of some kind of public pressure. Saul’s attempted genocide was done out of zeal for the people.

**II. Consequences of broken promises**

***A. Cultural blessing removed by the LORD (v. 1a)***

With that as a background, let’s take a look at how seriously God took this violation of the covenant. And I think we can see the seriousness just from the consequences. The first consequence was the famine. Verse 1 says,

“Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year...”

Three years of famine could produce a lot of loss of life back in those days. It was a horrible devastation to the country. If you were used to saving up one year’s supply of food, and had planted seed that was lost two years in a row, the third year would likely involve selling major assets to stay alive. And since it was already harvest time, there would be another year without food. This was a pretty major consequence of violating a covenant. The whole nation was suffering.

***B. The land defiled by blood (v. 1b)***

The second consequence was that the land had become polluted by blood. The second part of verse 1 has God saying by prophetic revelation, “*It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites.*” We will see later that Numbers 35 clearly says that if murder is not atoned for, the land will become polluted, and nothing but the death penalty can cleanse the land of that pollution. Well, here was a situation where many lives had been deliberately snuffed out and nothing had been done about it.

Though we don’t know the exact date that this event took place, since Saul died in 1056 BC and Mephibosheth was raised to David’s table in 1040

BC, the event could have taken place anywhere from 16-22 years before, making each of the seven men slaughtered here, grown men when the slaughter of the Gibeonites took place. But even 16 years is quite a long time between the sin and the judgment. To me that indicates that when it comes to murder, there can be no statute of limitations. And we shouldn't think that just because there is no immediate cause-and-effect judgment, that national catastrophes have no connection with sin. We just need to realize that God is patient. But His patience does not mean His indifference to sin. In this case, God was being patient for at least sixteen years, and possibly longer.

### ***C. God did not listen to their prayers (v. 14b)***

The third consequence of this broken treaty was that God was not hearing the people's prayers. Verse 14:

**2Sam. 21:14** 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. And after that God heeded the prayer for the land.

This indicates that God was not hearing the prayers of the nation. He would not listen. Their prayers were being hindered. In some ways this is parallel to 1 Peter 3:7, where it says that if husbands do not dwell with their wives with understanding and if they fail to give honor to their wives, their prayers will be hindered. But this is on a national scale. God would not even hear the righteous prayers of David until the issue of this broken treaty was dealt with. This is an important passage for understanding why nations can be in miserable circumstances for such long periods of time. Their national sins have never been put under the blood of Christ.

### ***D. Lost blessing (v. 3c)***

Verse 3 gives the fourth consequence – lost blessing.

**2Sam. 21:3** ¶ 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?”

That's an amazing situation. Until that minority group was willing to bless Israel, God was withholding that blessing. That is the power of your lips to curse or to bless. A country can have lost blessing simply because the plight of a minority is being ignored.

So those were the four consequences. They show that God treated this seriously. Unfortunately, we westerners are skeptical that such consequences can flow from a broken treaty with indigenous tribes. We are skeptical of attributing famine or weather patterns to anything but chance. But God's

providence rules every aspect of a nation's life, including droughts and famines, and there are always consequences when national sins are ignored. Does that mean that every catastrophe can be attributed to a given sin? No. I think that Luke 13 is quite clear on that. But we shouldn't go to the other extreme and think that all catastrophes are isolated from a nation's sin. Of one thing I am certain – God does not ignore unconfessed national sin, and whatever a nation sows, *that* it will also reap. Though it is not guaranteed that every catastrophe is a result of sin, it is always guaranteed that national sin will result in catastrophe, unless it is confessed.

There is a lot that has been written about the War Between the States as being God's judgment upon both the North and the South over our treatment of black slaves. And I do think that *was* a contributing factor. But I have always wondered why two other despicable issues in America have been completely ignored as factors that necessitated God's judgments. Those two despicable issues would be Imperialism via the Manifest Destiny Doctrine and our treatment of the Indians. You tie those two things together with slavery, and we had every reason to be judged. Now, I understand that the Indians tribes themselves broke many of the treaties. I'm not talking about those treaties. I am talking about the many times that our national government deliberately broke the treaties that we made with Indians, forcing them to leave their native lands, and occasionally even engaging in attempted genocide. And yet Christian books that deal with that era tend to overlook those things.

I have only looked at the timeline between broken Indian treaties and national disasters in a big-picture way. I have never dug very deeply into the details in my research. But I have seen enough potential correlations that I think it would make a fascinating study to take every broken treaty with Indians (where we were the ones who broke the treaty), and look for a national disaster within a few years. The little research that I have already done makes me think that there is a strong, strong connection between those two issues (imperialism outside the nation and broken treaties inside the nation) and the droughts, locust plagues, wars, economic troubles, and other disasters that have hit us. I don't know of any study that has done this, but I firmly believe that just as there was a famine that hit Israel within half a generation of this mistreatment of the Gibeonites, there have been numerous disasters that have hit America after our ungodly actions. I think it would make a fascinating study. So though this passage shows God's patience and mercy, nations eventually reap negative results of their ungodly policies. I don't think there can be any questioning of that thesis.



### III. David sought to make things right

#### *A. He discovered the sin (v. 1b)*

Anyway, David did not consider three years drought to be a coincidence, and he investigated. David inquired of the Lord. And I wish Christian historians would do so too. I wish they would be less deistic, and would inquire of the Lord about what possible connections could exist between American bloodshed and the downhill slide that we have been experiencing into judgment under humanism. Don't think we are awaiting judgment – we've been experiencing judgment since Abraham Lincoln, and even before. If America is to find healing, it must first of all discover the sins that we need to repent of. And I'm not saying that I have it all figured out. I don't. But this would be a worthwhile project – writing down national sins that have not yet been repented of by our leaders, and beseeching God to raise up David's who would do so.

#### *B. He talked to the Gibeonites and sought to accomplish three things (v. 2-3)*

##### **1. Make things right with them (v. 3a)**

Once David found out that there was national guilt that had offended Almighty God, He immediately set about to rectify the problem. Verse 3 says,

2Sam. 21:3 ¶ 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?”

That verse shows three things that David was attempting to do. The question, “What shall I do for *you*?” shows that he wanted to make things right with them. So there must be a horizontal mending of ways with those who have been wronged. America has done some righting of wrongs with American Indians, but not in a Biblical way. In fact the whole Reservation system was designed to further subjugate the Indians. It really was horrific. But that was the first thing David asked – “How do I make amends on some level on a horizontal plane?”

## **2. Make things right with God (v. 3b) – side note, the word “atonement” always deals with removing God’s wrath.**

Then there is the phrase, “And with what shall I make atonement,” which shows that David also wanted to make things right with God. And by the way, the word atonement is to be preferred to the NIV’s lame translation, “amends.” The word atonement always refers to removing God’s wrath. That’s why liberals don’t like the word “atonement.” They don’t believe that God can have wrath against individuals and nations. But both the Old Testament and the New Testament make it very clear that God can be angry with even Christian nations. And we must plead the atonement of Christ’s blood for our nation.

## **3. Return God’s blessing to Israel (v. 3c)**

The third thing that David was looking for was a return of God’s blessing and favor upon the nation – “that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD.” So there was making things right with men, turning away God’s wrath from the nation, and restoring God’s blessing.

Now, I will be the first to admit that imperialism and broken treaties with Indian nations is just the tip of the iceberg of what we have done wrong. That’s what makes a study of judgments in a nation like America such a difficult study. Our nation will obviously need to repent of a lot more things that imperialism and broken treaties. It will need to repent of abortion, homosexuality, rejecting God’s law, kicking God out of the courtrooms, and so many other sins. But I believe that we must also deal with the curse that hangs over America from its broken Indian treaties and gross mismanagement of the Bureau of Indian Affairs since that time. In R. J. Rushdoony’s book, *The American Indian*,<sup>1</sup> he shows that we have a great deal of guilt on our hands. And though he doesn’t mention the Gibeonites in that book, I believe the parallels between Saul’s mistreatment of the Gibeonites and our own government’s mistreatment of the Indians (especially under Andrew Jackson) have strong parallels.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.amazon.com/American-Indian-R-J-Rushdoony-ebook/dp/B00GCS3G7S/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1400782693&sr=1-1&keywords=Rushdoony+indians](http://www.amazon.com/American-Indian-R-J-Rushdoony-ebook/dp/B00GCS3G7S/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1400782693&sr=1-1&keywords=Rushdoony+indians)

### ***C. The Gibeonites were not bitter or mercenary***

#### **1. Consider their patience**

Now, what is so encouraging about this situation is that the Gibeonites do not appear to be bitter or mercenary in their reply. The first evidence of that is obviously an argument from silence, but several commentators have pointed out how remarkable it is that the Gibeonites had not complained or sought redress earlier. They had been patient for God to rectify their persecution.

#### **2. Consider their request – not seeking liberty, money, or vengeance on any but the guilty (v. 4)**

But consider the explicit evidence in verse 4:

**2Sam. 21:4** ¶ 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 said, “Whatever you say, I will do for you.”

They are not seeking liberty from their position as temple servants. They are quite willing to stick to their covenant responsibilities that they had promised 400 years before. Nor are they looking for money. Nor are they looking for vengeance on anyone in Israel who was not explicitly involved in the crime. That would be sort of like making the general population of America pay for crimes and thefts that they did not commit or that their ancestors did not commit. The Gibeonites wanted no part in such things. Their goal was for the guilty alone to pay.

And this is such a refreshing contrast with the modern socialistic attempts at restitution for wrongs done to minorities. Modern white guilt has made matters worse for Indians by keeping them indefinitely on a welfare dole. And Rushdoony does an outstanding job of showing that. The reservation system robbed them of the last vestiges of self-respect and initiative that they may have had. Rushdoony quoted one Indian who understood how socialism in the reservation system had absolutely destroyed the Indian tribes, their character, and their initiative. But he made an interesting observation about us. The Indian said,

“I’ve been across the country two or three times now in the last few years, and I’ve learned something: the white man isn’t much better. He has reservation fever now. He wants someone to put a fence around the whole North American continent and take care of him. He wants the government to give him a handout and to look after him just like Uncle Sam looks after us. And he’s going to get it. If some outfit doesn’t come in and do it for him, some foreign country, and turn

the whole of the United States into a reservation, he'll do it to himself. You wait and see. 'Cause he's got reservation fever."<sup>2</sup>

And Rushdoony said, you know what? He is absolutely right. But the Gibeonites refused to have reservation fever. Modern liberal attempts to right wrongs that were done to slaves 150 years ago is to saddle people who had nothing to do with those wrongs with welfare expenditures, unfair treatment via affirmative action and quotas, apologies by white people who had zero role in slavery or its abuses, etc. That is not Biblical justice, and the Gibeonites only wanted what the law allowed. The law did not allow for compensation in place of capital punishment. Numbers 35:31-32 is quite clear that there can be no money ransom paid for murder. Nor did the law allow for people who were not guilty of the crime to be punished for the crime. There could be only one answer to David's question if the Gibeonites wanted to follow the law – capital punishment for those who were involved in the murder. As The New American Commentary states,

Compensation was not to come in the form of money or land, but in a manner prescribed by the Torah. In cases involving the unsanctioned taking of human life, the Torah called for retribution-in-kind (cf Exod 21:23; Lev. 24:21; Deut. 19:21), even though the case might involve aliens (cf. Lev. 24:22).<sup>3</sup>

So this passage stands not just as a rebuke to the Federal Government and the States for their treatment of the Indians; it stands as a rebuke to minorities within our nation who have allowed abuses in the past to excuse them when they become socialistic parasites. This passage cuts two ways. It speaks against self-pity and envy on the one hand and greed and covenant breaking on the other. It calls upon all of us to look to the law of God for our answers.

### **3. Their request was very moderate compared to the holocaust they had faced (vv. 5-6)**

The next evidence that the Gibeonites lacked bitterness or a mercenary spirit can be seen in verses 5-6.

**2Sam. 21:5** ¶ 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,

**2Sam. 21:6** 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 the king said, “I will give *them*.”

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<sup>2</sup> R. J. Rushdoony, *The American Indian* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2013), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Bergen, *1,2 Samuel* Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), p. 445.

In view of the fact that they had been subjected to a genocidal holocaust, this was a very moderate request. Surely there were other soldiers who had been involved in the slaughter. But they appear to only ask for Saul's descendants that had been involved in the slaughter to be executed. They wanted the leaders hung just as Moses had stipulated that the leaders be hung in Numbers 25. On that Baal-Peor incident, Moses left the rest of the guilty parties for God to ferret out in His justice, but the leaders were very clearly singled out for capital punishment and hanging. And to me, both of those passages show that God holds military and political leaders far more accountable than he does those who are further down the chain of command. But actually, all of those who were involved in a Numbers 25 suffered in some way - 1000 leaders and 23,000 others.

Why did they come up with the number seven? Was it just arbitrary? I don't think so. And the first hint that it was not arbitrary is the reference to Saul being from Gibeah. Gibeah was not only one of the cities of the Gibeonites, but it was also a Levitical city, and the city where king Saul had resided. With Saul's household residing in that city, and with the close relationship between the Gibeonites and the Levites, we can safely assume that they would have known which of Saul's descendants had been involved in this criminal activity. Maybe they had already done their own war crimes investigation. But they come up with the number seven.

The second hint that the number seven was not arbitrary is that David agreed to it. Commentators point out that David would not have approved of execution of the innocent, because that would have brought further divine displeasure. His whole goal would be to remove God's displeasure, not to extend it. So it is likely that at least seven of Saul's descendants had in some way been involved. I believe there were more, but they had already died in battle in 1 Samuel 31.

#### ***D. David agreed to the justness of their request***

##### **1. Note that he does not break a covenant in order to honor a covenant (v. 7)**

But verse 7 is introduced to this thematic story to theologically show that it is not proper to break one covenant in order to honor another covenant. Verse 7 says,

**2Sam. 21:7** ¶ 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.

When David is determining which descendants of Saul would be executed and which ones would not, Mephibosheth was one of the ones who was spared. Now you might be tempted to think that because the text says that David “spared” Mephibosheth, that the Gibeonites wanted his neck. But that’s not necessarily the case. Depending on whether the holocaust was 16 or 22 years earlier, Mephibosheth would have been a baby or unborn. There is no way that he could have been implicated in the crime. And besides, he was a cripple. So why does the text say that David “spared” him? Well, I think that it is a thematic contrast with King Saul. Unlike king Saul who did not keep a covenant made with the Gibeonites, David kept his own covenant with Mephibosheth despite the fact that he was the grandson of his enemy. Though King Saul spared Amalekites whom God had commanded him not to spare and though he had not spared the Gibeonites when God called Israel to spare, David did not spare the criminals, but he did spare Mephibosheth. In other words, though Mephibosheth’s life was never in danger, the writer is setting up a deliberate contrast with Saul. Saul’s sparing of the Amalekites cost him the kingship. Saul’s failure to spare the Gibeonites cost Israel many lives. In contrast, David’s sparing and not sparing followed God’s justice perfectly. It is highlighting the fact that David is a guy who believed in keeping covenants, and who followed God’s law.

## **2. He carefully picks which seven descendants will be executed (v. 8)**

But in verse 8 David carefully picks which seven descendants would be executed. It says,

**2Sam. 21:8** So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth [this is a different Mephibosheth, and would be an uncle of the Mephibosheth of verse 7], the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite;

Liberals love to say that this is a contradiction, since earlier we were told that Michal did not have any children till the day she died and yet this passage speaks of five sons of Michal. But all you have to do is keep reading. If you keep reading you will see that it says that she brought them up *for Adriel*, whom 1 Samuel 18 says was married to her sister. So these were her nephews. Ancient Jewish commentaries, called Targums, say that this was “the five sons of Merab whom Michal reared.” Her sister and brother in law obviously died, and Michal raised these five sons for them. But in some way, these five sons must have proved to be guilty of being

involved in the holocaust along with their dad, Adriel. And from what we know of Adriel, that is not surprising.

***E. David handed the guilty parties over to the Gibeonites to be executed (v. 9)***

Finally, in verse 9 we see that David handed the guilty parties over to the Gibeonites to be executed. That would be like Andrew Jackson, Chivington, and others involved in Indian massacres being handed over to the leaders of the Indian tribes that they had massacred, and allowing the tribal leaders to bring the death penalty. Instead, many of these American butchers were awarded medals. They were honored for butchering women and children.

Verse 9 says,

2Sam. 21:9 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 in the days of harvest, in the first *days*, in the beginning of barley harvest.

**1. Publically (v. 9c)**

There are five quick things that this verse shows. First, this was not a secret execution, but a public one. The Bible always speaks against executions that are done behind walls. All executions were supposed to be done publically. This tended to discourage injustice in the courts. But it also tended to be a deterrent to crime. This was a public statement that even government officials are not above the law and cannot escape from justice in David's nation. Even David's nephews were not above the law. Of course, from the previous chapter we know that was not always true, was it? David wanted Joab executed for murder, but was unable to accomplish it. He asked Solomon to accomplish what he could not do. But in any case, he wanted to, and this was a public statement that even public officials are not above the law.

**2. Before the Lord (v. 9d cf. Numb. 25:4)**

Second, it was said to be before the Lord. This was being done with a God-ward motivation – to turn away God's fierce anger. The other time that this phrase occurs was in Numbers 25:4 where the leaders who were involved in fornication with the Moabite fertility cult women were hung before the Lord to take away His fierce anger.

Until executions follow God's law and are done for His glory, we will not see success in deterring crimes. Criminals are voted into office with impunity. We must once again have a God-focused criminal system.

### **3. By means of lawful hanging (v. 9e; Numb. 25:4; Deut. 21:22-23)**

The means of execution was hanging. Most scholars doubt that hanging was ever used as execution, and they say that Numbers 25 and Deuteronomy 21 is only talking about the ritual exposure of bodies after they have been killed. But the text here seems quite clear. The word "so they fell" is describing the hanging. They clearly have all been up on a platform, or stools, or something elevated, and they all fall into a hanging position. And the hanging does not start after they are dead. The Hebrew text indicates that the consequence of their hanging or falling at the same time is that "they were put to death." So death comes after the hanging, and the hanging is described as their falling together. I think it perfectly describes a gallows where stools (or some other platform) is kicked out from under their feet.

But whether or not you agree with that, everyone seems to agree that this very deliberately parallels the hanging of the government leaders in Numbers 25:4 to put away God's fierce wrath, and the statement in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 where hanging was a declaration that these men were seen as cursed before the Lord. In other words, while there were other forms of the death penalty allowed, this form of execution (or, this form of display after execution) was considered to be a curse. It was the worst way to be executed. And again it highlights how serious covenant breaking is to God. It is far more serious than we tend to make it. It's interesting that Paul quotes the Deuteronomy 21 passage to teach that Jesus became a curse for us. And the connection to this passage shows that the Gospel of Jesus relates even to nations and blood guilt. There is hope for America if we will plead the execution Jesus.

### **4. At the time of barley harvest as a recognition that this was designed to remove the famine (v. 9e)**

They also waited to do all of this until the time of the barley harvest to symbolically connect the crimes of these men with the famine. They saw sin and judgment as connected. And I think it is imperative that we start seeing sins in our nation as connected to judgments as well.



## **5. Did the execution go beyond the law? (vv. 10-14 with Numb 25:4; Deut. 21:23; cf. hint in verse 14)**

The only part of this whole mess that may have violated the law of God was allowing the bodies to remain exposed for so long after they were dead. But there is a lot of debate on that. Some commentators think that Numbers 25 justifies this in the case of people who were to be treated as cursed. Others think that this violates Deuteronomy 21:23, which says that the bodies must not hang on the gallows beyond sundown. I won't settle that debate, though I strongly lean in the direction that this *did indeed* violate God's law. The last phrase of verse 14 seems to give a hint that the Lord did not start answering the people's prayers until the bodies were taken down and given a proper burial. And that didn't happen until David was shamed by Rizpah's devotion. And we will look at her devotion in a couple of weeks. But I didn't want to get into that whole controversy of whether this was lawful or not.

### **Conclusion**

#### ***A. Learn to recognize God's hand of chastening and don't treat troubles as meaningless events.***

But in any case, let me end with seven brief additional applications. The first is that we should learn to recognize God's hand of chastening in our lives, in our families, and in our nation. We should not treat our troubles as meaningless events. While it is true that the disasters that came upon Job were not the result of his sins, many (if not most) disasters in the Bible appear to be. So while we can't say that everyone who suffers a disaster has committed a sin, we can say the reverse: I think that we can say that flagrant sin does result in disaster. But at a minimum we should ask, "Lord, is there something in my life that you are disciplining me for? And if not, is there something in our family or in our nation that is causing these things to happen?" It's worth asking.

#### ***B. Realize that God treats promise breaking very seriously, whether with believers or unbelievers***

The second application is that we should realize that God treats promise breaking extremely seriously, whether those broken promises are made by individuals or by nations. It's one of the reasons I don't like our nation entering into all these United Nations treaties. Now, if a treaty would involve our nation in ongoing sin (in other words, violation of other law), it must be repented of and it must be broken. But if it does not involve us in

ongoing sin, we are stuck; we are obliged to keep the treaty, even if the treaty was foolish. Psalm 15:4 speaks of those whom God honors, and one of the descriptors is “He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change.” Ecclesiastes 5:5 says, “Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.” Christians of all people should be known as those whose word is as good as gold. Are you a promise keeper? I think this passage admonishes us to be promises keepers. George Washington didn't like the fact that our nation had entered a treaty, but once it had been made, he honored it.

***C. The passage of time does not lessen the responsibility or the guilt***

The third application is that the passage of time does not lessen the responsibility or the guilt. Just because 400 years had gone by did not mean that Saul could get away with breaking the treaty with the Gibeonites. Just because 16-22 years had passed since Saul's sin, did not mean that God was not going to discipline Israel. It doesn't matter how long ago a sin may have occurred, we should seek to remedy the fault.

***D. God gives “time for repentance” (Rev. 2:21), but see Is. 26:10; Eccl. 8:11***

Fourth, this passage shows that God was giving time for repentance, but when repentance was not forthcoming, God had to bring out the paddle. Don't ever interpret God's slowness to deal with sin as evidence that He doesn't care. Don't confuse patience with indifference. Revelation 2:21 says, “I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.” And it goes on to speak of the severe discipline he would bring to that woman in Thyatira for presuming upon God's patience. But He said, “I gave her time to repent.” Slowness of judgment is time for repentance, not evidence of indifference.

***E. Capital punishment is critical to cleanse the land of murder (cf. Numb. 35:30-34)***

The fifth application is that capital punishment is critical to cleanse the land of the bloodguilt. And this includes the murder of millions of babies. Our land is utterly polluted, and it makes it impossible for me to sing that song, “God bless America.” How can I ask the Lord to bless when the land has such bloodguilt? Please turn to Numbers 35. Too many Christians in the prolife movement ignore this critical verse, which calls for capital punishment for abortionists. Our own Unicameral is trying to do away with

capital punishment completely, and it is important that they not be allowed to do so. Anyway, Numbers 35, beginning to read at verse 30.

Num. 35:30 Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not *sufficient* testimony against a person for the death *penalty*.

Num. 35:31 Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.

Num. 35:32 And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest.

Num. 35:33 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.

Num. 35:34 Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.' ”

This is the chief verse that makes me worry that America cannot avert judgment – the land cannot be cleansed without the shedding of the blood of its murderers. And Deuteronomy 21:1-9 says that when this cannot be achieved, the leaders must symbolically plead the blood of Jesus through a sacrificed bull and public confession by the leaders of the nation. But it was all a symbolic picture of Christ's atonement for the sins of a nation. We need the blood of Christ to cover our nation's sins.

And when the nation's leaders do not take that role seriously, God brings His own judgments to cleanse the land. He does it through war, disease, famine, and other forms of death. Could the enormous loss of life in America's wars since 1775 be in some way God's execution of vengeance? Possibly. America has been involved in 120 wars since 1775, at enormous loss of life. It's at least worth thinking about.

### ***F. Praise God for His covenant grace and that He is a covenant keeper***

The last application is that we can praise God for His covenant grace and that He is a covenant keeper. Like Gibeon, we all deserved to die. We deserved the *herem* warfare, which was a type or picture of God's judgment in hell. And the Gibeonites were rescued from that, and Rahab was rescued from that. We would have no right to complain if God were to send us to hell. But praise God, He not only saved us, but He also promised to keep us for eternity. And praise God that He not only saved us, but He has promised to be a God to us and to our children to a thousand generations of those who love Him.

I find it remarkable that the Gibeonites had a history of faithfulness to God for 400 years up to this chapter and for another 470 years up through the time of Nehemiah. That is 870 years of covenant succession. And the fact that there is no mention of them after that time does not mean the covenant succession stopped. We just don't have a record of them after Nehemiah. But they are a remarkable example of people whose lives were so turned upside down that they put many Israelites to shame. We can pray that we would have many generations of covenant faithfulness in our descendants. So be encouraged and be challenged by this passage on covenant faithfulness. Amen. Let's pray.

## Broken Treaties 2 Samuel 21:1-9

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 5-25-2014

### Introduction

- I. What was the broken promise?
  - A. Saul broke a treaty made 400 years before (Joshua 9-10)
  - B. Saul sought to exterminate the Gibeonites whom they were in covenant with (v. 1,5) while inconsistently seeking to preserve the Amalekites, whom God had called him to wipe out
  - C. Saul's sons were implicated in this slaughter ("because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house")
  - D. It was a treaty made with non-Israelites (vv. 1-2)
  - E. In Saul's nationalistic zeal to serve Israel he failed to serve the Lord (v. 2c)
- II. Consequences of broken promises
  - A. Cultural blessing removed by the LORD (v. 1a)
  - B. The land defiled by blood (v. 1b)
  - C. God did not listen to their prayers (v. 14b)
  - D. Lost blessing (v. 3c)
- III. David sought to make things right
  - A. He discovered the sin (v. 1b)
  - B. He talked to the Gibeonites and sought to accomplish three things (v. 2-3)
    1. Make things right with them (v. 3a)
    2. Make things right with God (v. 3b) – sidenote, the word "atonement" always deals with removing God's wrath.
    3. Return God's blessing to Israel (v. 3c)
  - C. The Gibeonites were not bitter or mercenary
    1. Consider their patience
    2. Consider their request – not seeking liberty, money, or vengeance on any but the guilty (v. 4)
    3. Their request was very moderate compared to the holocaust they had faced (vv. 5-6)
  - D. David agreed to the justness of their request
    1. Note that he does not break a covenant in order to honor a covenant (v. 7)
    2. He carefully picks which seven descendants will be executed (v. 8)
  - E. David handed the guilty parties over to the Gibeonites to be executed (v. 9)
    1. Publicly (v. 9c)
    2. Before the Lord (v. 9d cf. Numb. 25:4)
    3. By means of lawful hanging (v. 9e; Numb. 25:4; Deut. 21:22-23)
    4. At the time of barley harvest as a recognition that this was designed to remove the famine (v. 9e)
    5. Did the execution go beyond the law? (vv. 10-14 with Numb 25:4; Deut. 21:23; cf. hint in verse 14)

### Conclusion

- A. Learn to recognize God's hand of chastening and don't treat troubles as meaningless events.
- B. Realize that God treats promise breaking very seriously, whether with believers or unbelievers
- C. The passage of time does not lessen the responsibility or the guilt
- D. God gives "time for repentance" (Rev. 2:21), but see Is. 26:10; Eccl. 8:11
- E. Capital punishment is critical to cleanse the land of murder (cf. Numb. 35:30-34)
- F. Praise God for His covenant grace and that He is a covenant keeper

Chiasm structure of this next section of 2 Samuel 21-24:

- A. Offense of Saul and its expiation (21:1-14)
- B. Lists of heroes and their exploits (21:15-22)
  - C. David's praise of Yahweh (22:1-51)
  - C. Yahweh oracle to David (23:1-7)
- B. Lists of heroes and their exploits (23:8-39)
- A. Offense of David and its expiation (24:1-25)



Trail of Tears



Sand Creek Massacre. When asked why he killed the children, officer Chivington said, "nits make lice."