

2 Samuel 21:1-22

Revenge of the Gibeonites (Vows come home to roost)

This chapter records incidents that probably happened earlier in David's reign.

Famine was one of the "four sore judgments" of God (**Ezekiel 14:21**).

Not every drought or famine was the result of sin, but it could be.

Solomon prayed:

- **1 Kings 8:35-36** - "When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance."

It occurred to David that this could be the case with the current famine. When he determined that the land seemed to be free of idolatry and sexual sin and the people were giving to the poor with an open hand, he thought the fault must be his, and so he "sought the face of God."

2 Samuel 21:1 - "Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites."

There is no record of Saul's attack on the Gibeonites, but it would have been more than just another battle. The Gibeonites - originally one of the Canaanite tribes in the land - had a claim on Israel from the time of Joshua.

In **Joshua 9**, the Gibeonites had portrayed themselves as ambassadors from far away, and tricked the Israelites into vowing to not harm them. Instead they were made servants, responsible for hewing wood and carrying water "for the house of my God" i.e. the Tabernacle services and sacrifices.

For this reason, Rashi says that Saul killed seven Gibeonites at the same time that he murdered the priests at Nob when he suspected them of helping David (**1 Samuel 22:19**).

Although that initial vow had been rashly made without consulting God, the vow still had to be kept.

- **Deuteronomy 23:21** - "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee."

This is one of many examples of terrible consequences resulting from rash vows.

This is why Jesus said:

- **Matthew 5:34-37** - "...Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne...But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of the evil one."

2 Samuel 21:2 - "And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.)"

Maybe Saul had felt like he was finishing the commandment to conquer the Promised Land by finishing off this remaining pocket of Amorite/Canaanites (**Deuteronomy 20:16**). Or he felt that service in the Tabernacle should be restricted to true Israelites. Some suggest that he felt the vow was not valid since it was obtained by deception. Whatever the case, it was misguided zeal.

- **Numbers 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."

The whole nation suffered because Saul's actions were not judged. So since the Gibeonites drew water for Israel, water would be withheld in a drought as judgment.

2 Samuel 21:3 - "Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD?"

The Gibeonites told David they wanted only one thing:

2 Samuel 21:6 - "Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose. And the king said, I will give them."

But another oath, this time by David, restricted his options.

2 Samuel 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."

Nevertheless, David found the remaining descendants of Saul and turned them over to the Gibeonites. Because it was an emergency situation, he overruled the normal judicial process.

2 Samuel 21:8 (NET)- "So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth [*not* Jonathan's son], the two sons of Aiah's daughter Rizpah whom she had born to Saul, and the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab (Michal) whom she had born to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite.

Rashi says that Merab bore the five sons mentioned but Michal raised them. "therefore they were called after her name; for one who raises an orphan in his house is as if he had begotten them and he is called after his name."

2 Samuel 21:9 - "And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and 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."

How could this be just? The rabbis explained it was "Divine justice" rather than human legal judgment.

- **Exodus 20:5** - "...I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;"

But only if the descendants continue in the wicked ways of their fathers or condone their sins (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 27b). So the rabbis say that these sons of Saul either participated in, benefitted from or condoned the killings. This was proven when all seven were passed in front of the Brazen Altar (or the Ark) which indicated then supernaturally their guilt. Or alternately, the Urim and Thumim signaled their guilt.

Their death, being cursed by being hanged, took on the curse for Saul's sin and off of Israel, and served as an "atonement" (**vs.2**). In this way it was a shadow of Christ's atonement.

Rizpah's Devotion

Rizpah, the mother of two of these men, spread out sackcloth as a kind of shelter for herself on a nearby rock, and from the second day of Passover when the first fruit offering sheaf is cut down, to the month of Tishrei in the fall when "water dropped upon them out of heaven" indicating the end of the drought, she remained guarding the bodies from birds and beasts.

David heard of her care of them, and moved by her devotion, brought up the bones of Saul and Jonathan from where the men of Jabesh-gilead had kept them after recovering them from the Philistines. He also gathered the remains of the seven who were hanged, and they were buried together in the sepulchre of Saul's father, Kish.

Care for Strangers -

- **Exodus 22:21** - "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."

One thread of interpretation focuses on the Gideonites a strangers. Leaving the bodies suspended and "cursed" was severely harsh. **Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13** - "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." But the rabbis said God wanted to emphasize that no one should ever again seek to take advantage of innocent strangers. Seeing this punishment, onlookers would say, "There is no nation in the world with which is more befitting to become associated with than this nation! ... if this is how they defend the honor of the foreigners among them, how much greater is the honor due Israelites!" As a result, they say, 150,000 Gentiles converted and became Jews.

A Series of Battles with the Philistines and the Giants

2 Samuel 21:15 - "Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint. And Ishbi benob, which was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David."

Ishbi, called one of the sons of Raphah, was more accurately a Rephaim, a descendant of the giants like Goliath (**1 Samuel 17**) and Og king of Bashan (**Deuteronomy 3:11**) or the Anakims (**Deuteronomy 2:10-11**). Rephaim are also equated with the spirits of the dead.

These vignettes are included to focus our attention on the certainty of the defeat of those who had once ruled the Promised Land. These are the old gods we used to serve, who like Ishbi here desire to kill David or the son of David in us.

Like Jesus in the wilderness or in his final hour on the cross, the son of David is faint and weak. But God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

This is how Isaiah describes the Rephaim:

- Isaiah 26:13-14 - "O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased (*rephaim*), they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."

The seeming defeat at the cross turned into a victory at the resurrection! Like Israel was to forget Amalek, the memory or consciousness of the Rephaim is also to perish!

2 Samuel 21:17 - "But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David swore unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel."

This was a turning point - David would no longer personally enter the fight. His followers would engage in the battle, but the rabbis explained that David would be praying and interceding for Israel.

This is what happened at Pentecost. Christ sent the comforter to empower us, while He remains the mediator, interceding for us with the Father, "that thou quench not the light of Israel."

Abishai ("my father is a gift" or "gift of my father"), David's nephew, seems to represent the Holy Spirit - succouring or comforting David in his weakened state while at the same time taking the fight to the enemy, killing Ishbi the giant.

Three other battles are mentioned, in which three other giants are defeated.

vs. 18 - Sibbechai ("weaver") the Hushathite slew Saph ("tall, expanding") or Sipai ("the lintel of a door"), which was of the sons of the giant.

vs. 19 - Elhanan ("God has been gracious") the son of Jaareoregim ("forest weaver"), a Bethlehemite, slew [the brother of] Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. In **1 Chronicles 20:5** his name is given - Lahmi ("full of food") from lechem/bread.

vs. 21 - Jonathan ("Yahweh has given") the son of Shimea the brother of David slew an unnamed giant who had six fingers and toes. Like Goliath, it says he "ridiculed Israel."

The names are significant pointers to the revelation and knowledge that brings the victory.

Bottom Line: The lesson from this chapter is to, first, realize that the vows and expectations and promises we use to pump ourselves up and prop up our self esteem are "from the evil one," as Jesus tells us. They give us a false impression that we are strong. Instead we need to know ourselves, realize our weakness, surrender to God and in faith be expecting Him to perfect His strength in us.

Then the scary giants in our life, the intractable gods who have lorded over us, can be exposed as defeated by Christ, the Son of David.