

Resolved  
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2 Samuel 21:1-6, 10-14

Opening question: **When you are suffering through a trial or your prayers go unanswered what questions or assumptions might you have? What action do you take?**

- This passage is another account with some strange and puzzling details.
- It touches on an age-old question: are natural disasters God's judgments for the sins of a nation and its leaders, or simply reality in a fallen world?
- We see the issue of how the sins of a father impact future generations.
- We see the contrast of two kings, David, a promise keeper who sought God's direction; Saul - the other a promise breaker doing his own thing.
- We see a loyal, self-sacrificing mother who went way beyond just mourning for her dead sons.

Big Idea: Though we see several lessons, the big one I see is that actions have consequences. In some cases the actions of a parent can result in serious negative consequences for their children even after the parent is off the scene.

Actions have consequences; consequences that can last a long time.

2 Samuel 21:1–6 (NLT)

*David Avenges the Gibeonites*

There was a famine during David's reign that lasted for three years, so David asked the Lord about it. And the Lord said, "The famine has come because Saul and his family are guilty of murdering the Gibeonites."

- A drought/famine for one year was not uncommon; two years in a row was rare. A famine for three years raised the possibility of divine judgment.

- David asked the Lord about it, perhaps through the high priest using the Urim and the Thummim, by a dream, or through prophets.
- The point is David sought God's direction about the famine.
- To contrast that with King Saul let's look at Saul's "obituary" in 1 Chronicles 10:13–14 (NLT) <sup>13</sup> *So Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord. He failed to obey the Lord's command, and he even consulted a medium <sup>14</sup> instead of asking the Lord for guidance. So the Lord killed him and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.*
- God took Saul out for disobedience and part of that disobedience was a refusal to ask the Lord for guidance and to wait in faith for God's direction.
- Saul was like modern drivers in traffic – *"I need to get there faster than everyone else, there must be a short cut!"* (Susan's observation)
- Failure to prayerfully seek God's guidance is looking for a short cut. What looks like a short cut can turn into extended, painful consequences.
- Actions have consequences; consequences that can last a long time.
- **What action by Saul did God reveal caused the famine?**
- The story of the Gibeonites goes back to Joshua chapter nine. *"Following the fall of Jericho and Ai, the Gibeonites tricked Joshua into making a treaty with them as vassals. They were reduced to menial service and cursed when their deceit was discovered."* <sup>ii</sup>
- Key verses:  
<sup>14</sup> *So the Israelites examined their food, but they did not consult the Lord.* <sup>15</sup> *Then Joshua made a peace treaty with them and guaranteed their safety, and the leaders of the community ratified their agreement with a binding oath.*  
<sup>16</sup> *Three days after making the treaty, they learned that these people actually lived nearby!* <sup>ii</sup>  
*The people of Israel grumbled against their leaders because of the treaty.* <sup>19</sup> *But the leaders replied, "Since we have sworn an oath in the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel, we cannot touch them.* <sup>20</sup> *This is what we must do. We must let them live, for divine anger would come upon us if we broke our oath.* <sup>21</sup> *Let*

*them live.” So they made them woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community<sup>iii</sup>*

- Even though the Gibeonites tricked Joshua, a promise before God was sacred. The Gibeonites had to be allowed to live.
- Obviously, Saul ignored that! Nowhere else in scripture do we learn the exact details but clearly Saul had tried to wipe out all the Gibeonites in violation of this 400 year old covenant. He tried to commit genocide.
- David knew the Gibeonites had to be appeased for the famine to end.

<sup>2</sup> So the king summoned the Gibeonites. They were not part of Israel but were all that was left of the nation of the Amorites. The people of Israel had sworn not to kill them, but Saul, in his zeal for Israel and Judah, had tried to wipe them out. <sup>3</sup> David asked them, “What can I do for you? How can I make amends so that you will bless the Lord’s people again?”

<sup>4</sup> “Well, money can’t settle this matter between us and the family of Saul,” the Gibeonites replied. “Neither can we demand the life of anyone in Israel.”

“What can I do then?” David asked. “Just tell me and I will do it for you.”

<sup>5</sup> Then they replied, “It was Saul who planned to destroy us, to keep us from having any place at all in the territory of Israel. <sup>6</sup> So let seven of Saul’s sons be handed over to us, and we will execute them before the Lord at Gibeon, on the mountain of the Lord.”

“All right,” the king said, “I will do it.”

- God connected the dots and David took action. Look at Paul’s words in Romans 12:19 (quoting Deut. 32:35?) **How does this story align?**
- David chose two sons and five grandsons of Saul and handed them over to the Gibeonites so they could execute them.
- One exception in verse seven: <sup>7</sup> *The king spared Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth, who was Saul’s grandson, because of the oath David and Jonathan had sworn before the Lord.* – 2 Samuel 21:7 (NLT)
- Again, the contrast between David and Saul. David was a promise keeper.

- The seven men were executed and their bodies hung or impaled on posts "...before the Lord." (21:9)
- The bodies were left to rot, exposed to the elements and animals.
- Actions have consequences; consequences that can last a long time.
- It begs the question, why would David agree to this terrible plan?
- Why should Saul's descendants pay for his sin? What about Ezekiel 18:20: *The child will not be punished for the parent's sins,*<sup>iv</sup>
- Keep in mind: There is a difference between God's wrath due to sin and judicial capital punishment. Ezekiel 18 speaks of every person being held personally accountable to God for our own sin.
- This incident was more about the ancient criminal justice system of that day that called for an eye for an eye, etc.
- Some speculate the men were accomplices to the crime – unlikely.
- We also need to remember, God didn't command David that these seven men be executed. David decided to turn them over to the Gibeonites. We could look at it as excessive punishment by the pagan Gibeonites.
- Another way to look at it is not as punishment of the sons/grandsons, but as consequences of the sin of Saul. Example: a parent drives intoxicated and their children are killed or paralyzed in an accident.
- The reality is though it's a difficult scene to absorb in our minds, the fact is David accepted how the Gibeonites handled it, and verse 14 says that God ended the famine. That relief also came after two acts of decency.

2 Samuel 21:10–14 (NLT)

<sup>10</sup> Then Rizpah daughter of Aiah, the mother of two of the men, spread burlap on a rock and stayed there the entire harvest season. She prevented the scavenger birds from tearing at their bodies during the day and stopped wild animals from eating them at night.

- This woman, the mother of two of the men went to tremendous extremes to protect the bodies of these men. The text indicates she stayed there as long as six months braving the elements in an unselfish vigil.
- David was moved by her display of care and concern and he again took action to set things right despite the sad, sinful legacy Saul left behind.

<sup>11</sup> When David learned what Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had done,  
<sup>12</sup> he went to the people of Jabesh-gilead and retrieved the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan. (When the Philistines had killed Saul and Jonathan on Mount Gilboa, the people of Jabesh-gilead stole their bodies from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hung them.) <sup>13</sup> So David obtained the bones of Saul and Jonathan, as well as the bones of the men the Gibeonites had executed.  
<sup>14</sup> Then the king ordered that they bury the bones in the tomb of Kish, Saul's father, at the town of Zela in the land of Benjamin. After that, God ended the famine in the land.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- We've really not had time to explore the difficult topic of why God allows natural disasters. Sometimes it's punishment; sometimes it's simply a reality of living in a fallen world. What we know for sure is that God holds men and nations responsible for their disobedience to his commands.
- Actions have consequences; consequences that can last a long time – even into future generations. That's a sobering reminder for each of us.
- Saul saw no need to honor the covenant Joshua made with the Gibeonites. He had an agenda and wasn't to be stopped. We've seen that throughout this book. Saul wanted short cuts to get his way, and God took him out. Saul's descendants also paid the price for his disobedience.
- David and his family also suffered consequences for David's sin, but there was a difference between David and Saul. David confessed his sin and asked God for forgiveness.
- He was forgiven, but the consequences remained.
- Some questions to ponder as we reflect on this passage:

- When trials come or my prayers are going unanswered do I turn to God to determine if there might be unconfessed sin in my life?
- When I've been mistreated by someone do I leave "room" for God to settle that score in His perfect timing, or do I take matters into my own hands?
- Do I seek God's direction daily as I live my life knowing that actions have consequences even for generations to come?

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<sup>i</sup> Millard, A. R. (1996). Gibeon. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 410). Leicester, England;

<sup>ii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Jos 9:14–17). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>iii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Jos 9:18–21). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>iv</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Eze 18:19–20). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.