

David And The Gibeonites

A Lesson in Time of Famine
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It seems that modern Westerners want their heroes flawed. In other words, we want them to be just like us.) We want them to reflect what a real person would do in extreme or extraordinary circumstances.

We have an easier time identifying with the flawed, but heroic, Lancelot from the Legends of King Arthur, because he is a lot more like us—he commits sin; he has faults. However, we have a great deal of trouble identifying with or understanding pure, innocent and perfect Galahad. He is beyond us; it does not make any sense.

To put it in a more modern time setting, a lot of people prefer Batman (the dark one), or Spiderman (the geek), to Superman for the very same reasons. The "Man of Steel" is just too perfect, too smart, and too invincible. But, they like the dark one because he is moody, and doing things not for quite the right reasons.

This cultural trait makes it difficult for many people to identify with Jesus Christ. According to a May 2007 George Barna Poll, 63% of Americans, mostly professing Christians, believe that Jesus sinned during His physical life! Yet, the Bible specifically says in Hebrews 4:15 that He was without sin. Nearly two-thirds of American professing Christians believe that their Savior sinned. And if He sinned, then He could not be our Savior. This does not make any sense.

This cultural thing about wanting our heroes flawed is so deeply ingrained in us that we cannot imagine anyone going through life without sin. Of course, a part of it is being able to look at ourselves and see how dirty, nasty, and rotten we are, and saying, "There is no way that anybody could live in this world without sin; even God's beloved Son."

Jesus Christ should be everyone's ultimate hero. But, very few people can relate to Sinless Perfection. The Bible helps us in this way, because it is full of examples of flawed heroes of faith. Hebrews 11 exhibits a whole chapter of men and women just like us who, despite their humanity and frequent foibles, fought the good fight of faith and were victorious in the end through the grace of God. God did not necessarily overlook all their sins, but He certainly forgave them. Then they were able to pick up the pieces of their lives and move forward by the strength that God gave them to overcome and to grow, and to put on the mind—the character—of Christ.

The stories of such people like Abel, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and on through the chapter give us hope that like them we can overcome and be assured of entering the Kingdom of God. As we get to about verse 32 in Hebrews 11, Paul says that he does not have time to get to all the other heroes of faith that the Bible gives us. Nevertheless, he names a few of them. One of them toward the end of this list is King David.

King David is mentioned by name as a hero of faith. But talk about your flawed heroes! There is more space given to David's flaws than anyone else in the whole Bible. He committed colossal sins that whole nations would be held in contempt for. He made huge errors in judgment, both personally and in a larger sense.

In reading the Psalms, on the other hand, we get an idea of just how grateful he was for God's forgiveness and grace, because I believe he was aware of just what a rotten individual he really was. He understood it.

If you read Psalm 51 it is very clear that he understood his own makeup. He had to plead to God for clearing and forgiveness because he knew it was not in himself to do that. He needed God to forgive him. He realized how often, and how far, he strayed from God's way of life.

Today, I want to visit one of King David's lesser-known black marks, and draw some lessons from it at the end.

About two years ago, Barry Watson, our lone member in Namibia, wrote me an email message in which this incident was at the heart of it. He asked me, "How does this incident square with what God says in Ezekiel 18:19-20?"

I am just going to start with the backdrop to the incident. I want you to understand where Barry was coming from in writing the note.

Ezekiel 18:19-20 Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?' [And the answer is...] Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

We have a very simple Biblical principle here: **God is just**. That is the bottom line. God is just. If a person sins, he receives God's judgment for those sins. Other people do not carry the guilt for that person's sin. It is his sin.

Now, if they participated in his sin, then of course, they will bear the guilt for their participation in that sin. However, if they did not participate, they are not going to be given a black mark by God for something that they did not do.

A person dies for his own sins, not those committed by someone else, whether father, son, or black sheep uncle. It does not matter. Up and down your family tree, sin does not go. The person who commits a sin is guilty of that sin, and God punishes that person for that sin. Guilt for sin is not hereditary. It is not genetic.

This is a major reason why the church of God does not subscribe to the traditional doctrine of "The Fall of Man." This traditional doctrine, as heard in a Catholic or Protestant church, would say that this sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden rests upon us still. And we bear the guilt with them for that. However, that is not the case. God punished Adam and Eve for their sin.

What we do inherit of their sin is consequences. The consequences are not the guilt. There is a difference. There is a very important difference. The choice by Adam and Eve in the garden was a sin, and they paid for it through death. But the consequences of their sins—what it means to us; what happened because of their sin—still affects us today. It cut us off from God.

If people grow up in a society and culture that does not have God at their beck and call, they do whatever they want—whatever comes naturally. They do what their flesh tells them to do—what Satan inspires them to want to do—and they do it.

Therefore, the world is full of sin—their own sin. It is not the sin of Adam and Eve; it is their own sin. Only in one sense, there was a fall of man, but certainly not in the traditional sense. We have all followed in the same way of life as our first parents Adam and Eve. We have our own sins to pay for; we do not pay for theirs.

Turn to Exodus 20 and see that right in the Ten Commandments it sounds like it could mean that sin does travel down the family tree. This is in the Second Commandment.

Exodus 20:4-6 You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

If we were reading this quickly, and not really thinking about it, and not understanding God's own character, we might think that this says that God allows the guilt of sin to pass down three or four generations. That is not what it says here. Verse 5 does not say that the guilt of a person extends to his great-great grandchildren. He says that He visits the iniquity upon them.

God is warning here that sin has consequences. When He visits the iniquity upon successive generations, He is saying is that the results and curses that come automatically often go down a handful of generations. These curses are things like diseases that might affect genetics, and they came as the result of sin. It causes a problem in the way that the next generation is formed. Therefore, this curse goes down until the gene pool is able to kick it out—three or four generations.

There is demotion. He gets kicked down the societal ladder for his sin, and it takes three or four generations for the family to recover. There are things like destruction for their sin, and the family takes that long to recover from that destruction. Then there are things of degeneracy. It would take three or four generations for perversion to be kicked out of a society. You might say a whole cycle of generations.

On the other hand, when people do well, like Abraham, and they live God's way of life, this allows God the leeway to show mercy unto thousands of generations of people. God extends blessings far farther into the future than He does the curses. He has mercy, and holds the curses to just a few generations, but He allows the results of doing righteousness to last forever.

This is what we have to learn—understanding the distinction between guilt for sin, and the lingering effects of sin. They are two separate things. One is God's judgment upon the actual person for the actual sin; the other is God's punishment that He has automatically put into the law that allows the effects to last for a few generations.

Now, turn to the episode of King David, which we introduced. It is in II Samuel 21. Notice that I Kings begins not many chapters after this. We are getting toward the end of King David's life. He does not live long past the end of II Samuel.

II Samuel 21:1-14 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." 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. 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?" 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." 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, "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." 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. So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul; and the five sons of Michal [Merab—see margin of most Bibles] the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; 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.

Now Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven. And she did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night. And David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. Then David went and took the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, from the men of Jabesh Gilead who had stolen them from the street of Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, after the Philistines had struck down Saul in Gilboa. So he brought up the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from there; and they gathered the bones of those who had been hanged. 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.

It is easy to read this story blithely, and to think that David righted some longstanding wrongs that had happened, and then God happily sent rain to the parched land of Israel. I know that is how I always read it—as straight history—and I did not think about it very much. Justice seems to have been served. But that conclusion is a bit too sanguine once you begin to look into that which is not said, or what is said elsewhere. There is a great deal more than what meets the eye.

With a careful reading and a bit of thought, you will begin to raise some questions. "There is something rotten in Denmark," as the saying goes. We still need some more background. We are not

finished with that yet, because, who were the Gibeonites? What have they done? Where are they from? Why are they where they were?

The Israelites had been dealing with the Gibeonites, who were Hivites—and as it says here, they were a part of the Amorite people—since the first days in the land under Joshua.

Go back with me to Deuteronomy 7 and see the instruction that God gave to Israel about how to deal with these kinds of people. It is very clear, and very simple—just two little verses.

Deuteronomy 7:1-2 When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.

This is pretty clear. There is not much wiggle room in all this. God says very clearly that Israel was to conquer them, destroy them, and make no covenant with them.

Now, we move forward, not very long in time, to Joshua 9. This may have only been a couple of months later. By this time, Moses had died and was buried. The children of Israel gathered and went across the Jordan River, and set up camp at Gilgal. Then, they went after Jericho, and it fell. After that, they had their problems at Ai, and figured out that Achan was responsible for that. Then they went back and took Ai.

Now, this happens next.

Joshua 9:3-6 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they worked craftily [remember that], and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. 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."

The Gibeonites, we are told, were not necessarily a warlike people. They quailed at what they heard that Joshua and Israel had done at Jericho and Ai. So they thought, "Hmm. We cannot withstand them. Let us see what is in our bag of tricks. Perhaps trickery will be better than war for us."

They did what is recalled in verses 3 through 6 above. They got a couple of their men, maybe elders, and got them to appear like they came along distance. And they sent them to Joshua at Gilgal.

How far away was Gilgal from Gibeon? If you look at a map in the back of your Bible which has something to do with the conquest of Israel, you will see that Gilgal is right over the Jordan River, just on the eastern side of the land. Jerusalem is almost directly west a few miles, but it is quite high from the Jordan to the Jerusalem. You had to go up quite a bit. Gibeon is only a few miles mostly north of Jerusalem. At most it was about ten miles away—not very far at all.

They probably went from Gibeon by some circuitous route so they did not come directly from the west where they actually lived. Therefore, they arrive in the camp of Israel, and say, "Where is your leader? We would like to make a covenant with you."

Joshua 9:14-16 Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD. 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. 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.

Israel was totally swindled and bamboozled. They fell for it hook, line, and sinker, and they were stuck. They have a discussion in the next few verses, and many Israelites want to go ahead and kill these Gibeonites for what they did. But Joshua had the final decision.

Joshua 9:22-24 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? "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." 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..."

See? They knew! It was common knowledge. They had advance warning. They knew all the things God had stipulated about what they were to do when Israel was going to come into the land.

Obviously, having seen what happened to Jericho and Ai, they knew God and Israel were serious. They were going to come in there and just exterminate.

Joshua 9:25-27 "And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us." So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them. 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.

That is the background on the Gibeonites, and their relationship with Israel.

Joshua 9:14 is the key to Israel's problem. They did not seek God in this matter. They did not inquire. They did not ask, "God, what should we do to these people, the Gibeonites? Should we make a covenant with them? We know that you said not to make a covenant with the people the land. But, are these people telling the truth? Would it be a good alliance to have with these people from far away?"

God would have said, "Kill them all!" And it would have been done quickly and easily. It would have been the answer. God is not bloodthirsty, but He had told them what to do. He was setting us an example of what we should be doing in a spiritual sense.

We have to understand that the people of the land represent the things we need to overcome—our human nature and our problems; the world and its pulls to its ways; and Satan and all the ways that he tries to manipulate us.

God tells us that, spiritually, we have to go and wipe them out. We cannot let them linger around. They are going to cause problems. Therefore, one of the first things that Joshua and the Israelites do is they allow a big problem to linger in their midst. Joshua did try to make lemonade out of his lemons. He enslaved them all, and made them wood cutters, and menial laborers at the tabernacle.

We will read the first two verses again.

II Samuel 21:1-2 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." So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them...

Then we have the explanations of which we just went over. A little further down, we read:

II Samuel 21:2 ...but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.

When did Saul kill these Gibeonites? Good question. It is not there in the scriptures. There is no Biblical account of this escapade of Saul and his house against Gibeon. We do not know when it happened. However, this chapter drops a few hints about it. It certainly happened because it says there in verses 1 and 2 that Saul killed a lot of Gibeonites at some point in his reign. Moreover, the Gibeonites who survived remembered, and they wanted blood when they were asked.

The two hints are that Saul and his house had a reputation for violence—Saul and his bloodthirsty house. The second is at the end of verse 2, that Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for Israel and Judah. These are the two hints.

Back in I Samuel 15, Saul was told by God through Samuel to go up against the Amalekites, and to destroy everything in sight, do not spare anything; exterminate them. Saul agreed, and off he went. They engaged in battle, and Israel won, but the people and king Saul said, "Look at all this nice livestock! Such a shame to destroy it all! It will not do anybody any good lying here dead. And Agag, he is a nice guy! Had him over to the palace a few times." So, he spared Agag, and he spared a lot of the good stuff.

Moreover, Samuel said, "What have you done? God said explicitly to destroy everything! It has got to go. You did not do it. Therefore, your kingdom is taken away and given to another. You are out of here!"

That is basically how it was. Samuel turns away; Saul grabs at him and only catches his robe, and tears it. And Samuel says, "See? God has torn the kingdom from you. You are no longer fit to be king." And, that was that.

One other thing: Samuel said that God is not going to go back on His word. If He said that you are out of here, you are out of here. He will not relent. Scripture has said this explicitly.

Saul became a bit strange in the head after this, if you will remember. He got a little weird, throwing spears at David (and Jonathan too, once). He became jealous and he went wacko, basically. Evidently, he thought that he could win back his kingdom if he zealously did God's will.

What might he have done? Perhaps he thought, "Hmm. God told Joshua to get rid of all these foreigners in the land. Perhaps if I go and kill all the Gibeonites like Joshua was supposed to do, maybe God will let me back into the chair."

Evidently, that is what he did. I am putting this all together from history. I also want you to see how warlike Saul was.

I Samuel 14:47-48 So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed them. And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them.

I Samuel 14:52 Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself.

King Saul would conscript them into the army, and off they would go in a bloodthirsty rage against somebody else. Evidently, this is what Saul and most of his family was like, except Jonathan. He received good marks in scripture.

Saul tried to get back his throne from God by doing what he thought was right, what he thought was zealous for God, by getting rid of the foreigners—including the Gibeonites—that were among them. The problem was that God had not told Saul to do this, God had told Joshua to do that. Joshua and that generation did not do their entire job, and so they were stuck. The time had passed.

What Saul did was commit another presumptuous sin. He went after a people that God did not want exterminated anymore. There was a covenant with those people that not only Joshua and the people honored, but also God Himself honored as well. Saul committed a great crime against Gibeon and the Gibeonites.

Now that we have established that there was a horrible massacre at some point in the past, remember there was sin, and there was a crime committed. There should have been payment for it. However, there was not.

II Samuel 21:1 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD...

This incident of the famine took place rather late in David's life. The historical narrative of King David is drawing to a close. This incident appears in time sequence toward the end of his life. It is after Absalom's rebellion. Sheba's rebellion is in the previous chapter, II Samuel 20. You are getting later and later in David's life here. In fact, look down to verse 15,

II Samuel 21:15-17 When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint. Then Ishbi-Benob, who was one of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose bronze

spear was three hundred shekels, who was bearing a new sword, thought he could kill David. But Abishai the son of Zeruah came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel."

King David was probably huffing and puffing, "I cannot lift this thing! It is much too heavy any more!" He was endangering the whole army by being out there, an old man trying to fight like a young man. In addition, his own soldiers had to tell him, "David, you just do not have it anymore. Go coach! Time to retire!" This was obviously later in his life and reign.

Think about this for a moment. If what happened against Gibeon occurred during Saul's reign, even if it was in the latter half, it would mean it was at least (if we are in the last decade of King David's reign) that the massacre of Gibeonites occurred 40 or 50 years earlier. We do not know how long before II Samuel 21 this incident happened. But it appears at least 40, maybe 50 years in the past. This was history now.

Think of it as if it were today. Fifty years ago was 1957. It would be the equivalent of an event somewhere between the Korean War and the Viet Nam War. For many today, this time period is ancient history. Eisenhower was still in office. The "Great Debate" between Nixon and Kennedy had not occurred yet. You had only black and white television if you had television. There were no cell phones. This was a long time ago.

Back to the Gibeonites—most people probably did not remember it. However, the Gibeonites did. They had remembered it for 40 or 50 years. We are starting to get some of the atmosphere around this event now.

As mentioned earlier, there was the rebellion of Absalom. We had before that the episode with Amnon and Tamar. In addition, after this was the rebellion of Sheba, in which there were all kinds of disruptions until Sheba was killed. There was a great deal of turmoil in Israel leading up to this time.

Think about it. My reading between the lines concludes that King David was at a spiritual low point at this time. Why so? Because he may have been still depressed by Absalom's death. My supposition is that he may have been still questioning God about the way his reign seemed to have crumbled, and all he had was enemies around him. Although he had peace at this time, I think he was worried because they just had two successive rebellions, and were almost to the point of victory over King David until they were eliminated.

By this time, having fought all his life since he was a teenager—up against Goliath when he was eighteen or so—and here he was approaching 70 years old, and he was tired. He was tired of life, tired of war, tired of all the politics, tired of all the rebellion, tired of Joab. I think he was looking at Adonijah, and Solomon, and seeing the positioning for the throne, and he just wanted to throw up his hands—flee like some bird (Psalm 139). He wanted to go do something else. I think he was distracted because the turmoil had taken such a toll on Israel, and the famine too, that he was worried about the economy, rebuilding cities and fortifications, and his alliances with Hiram and others. With all the recent rebellions, he was probably worried that his alliances were going to fail, because he may have appeared to weaken. I know that he had other family problems because the prophecies said that he would.

I think he was distracted by all the cares of his office of being king. He had to sit there and judge people with all the little things they constantly brought up to him that seemed to need his decision on. I think he was very low.

Whatever the case, it is very plain to me that he did not pay enough attention to this matter of the famine and drought, and the Gibeonites. In fact, it can be read as if David approached it as only a minor administrative matter. It says a bit later that somebody told him what that woman was doing out there protecting the bodies of the slain men of Saul's house for the past six months and it was as though he said, "Oh really? Is that what happened?" It was as if David earlier said, "Let's just get this out of the way. There are so many things I have got to do."

I do not think that King David thought through the implications of this matter very well. He was distracted. He was thinking about a lot of other things. He was not really on the ball like he should have been.

And how do I know this? "There was a famine in the days of King David for three years, year after year. And *then* King David inquired of the Lord."

If you are on your spiritual game, and famine is occurring in your land, do you wait three years until thousands may have died? There was not a cloud in sight and you are the king.... Why did he not seem to notice the first year and say to himself, "Hmm. This is a bit unusual. Let me ask God about this."

Or even after two years. Two years is a long time. A lot can happen in two years. But, you would think that after two years you would get the idea that this was not breaking. Certainly, after three years you would. Finally the light came on, and David said, "I had better ask what is going on here."

God answered immediately, "It is because of Saul, and his bloodthirsty house. Some unfinished business here needs to be taken care of. Something is wrong, David. Why is it just now that you are waking up to this? This famine has been going on for three years, year after year. Where have you been, David? What have you been thinking about?"

If we would go back to Leviticus 26, we will see that David should have known that famine was no small thing in God's arsenal.

Leviticus 26:3-4 If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.

Leviticus 26:18-20 And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.

You see, famine on the scale like this—three years—is a sign from God that things were not copacetic in the land. There were big problems, and one of them was the consequences and effects of Saul and his bloodthirsty house.

Even so, maybe there were even worse problems, perhaps, and David was blind to them for three years. Things were going wrong.

The chronicler, here—who ever he was—is giving us a big hint that David's attention was elsewhere for three whole years. He was not thinking spiritually. God was not in all his thoughts during this time. This is certainly not the David of Psalm 34, where he wrote,

Psalm 34:4-10 I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

Psalm 34:17-18 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.

It does not seem to me that during this time of the three years of famine David was emulating the attitude that he wrote about in Psalm 34. Had David been righteous and been crying out to God, God would have heard him.

King David was perhaps the only converted person in the entire nation—maybe besides the high priest of the time, but we do not know. But certainly, David was. And as the one righteous person in the whole nation, he could have cried out, God would have heard, and God would have saved.

We have examples of where that has happened, but he did not do that this time. He was far from God during this time. And it very seriously affected his judgment in this matter.

II Samuel 21:3-6 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? 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." 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, "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."

Here we find the Gibeonites demand, and King David counter demands—NOT.

David did not make any counter demands. He did not negotiate at all. He just weakly said, "Oh okay, whatever you want. I will do it." There was no negotiation; there was no calling them on anything. There were no conditions. He just simply rolled over. He did not do a thing that a king or judge should do. He just let them walk all over him.

It is very evident from verse 4 that somebody offered money, either from the palace or from the family of Saul. But they refused the offer. "We do not want any money, for sure not Saul's money. No silver or gold from that house. It is tainted."

This is like offering them reparations for what Saul had done, and they replied that it was not good enough. They wanted blood by putting to death seven male descendants to die for the crimes of that house against the Gibeonites.

David did not come to this with any regal neutrality in the least. He came at this as though he were guilty with Saul; that all Israelites were guilty with Saul and his house. King David came at it from a position of weakness, not of one who knew God's law and could answer these people from spiritual strength. "No, we do not do things like that in Israel. Our God has given us a law that says such and such, so this is what we are willing to do for you."

It looks to me like he tried to work out a political solution rather than a righteous one. He was tired, and wanted to get it out of the way. He tried to come up with a compromise, and that was basically, "What ever you want, you can have." He allowed his actions to be dictated by the Gentile principle of retribution—vengeance—rather than God's law on such matters.

He had a body of law that he could have referred back to and come up with a solution. But, he did not. He decided to let the Gibeonites dictate everything.

Exodus 21:12-13 "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee..."

Exodus 21:23-25 But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

This has become known as the "eye for an eye principle." It was certainly alive and well in Israel. However, there was a difference between Israel's versions and the Gentiles' principle of vengeance or retribution. The Israelite version was a whole lot less absolute. It takes into consideration things like accidental death, and premeditation. It does not require at all times that a person guilty of bloodshed die. It provides the cities of refuge where he could go serve a type of prison sentence—if it was an accidental murder—until the high priest died.

Therefore, there was a different system of justice than what the Gentiles were used to. They had a more bloody and violent system—which often led to blood feuds that may not ever end until a whole family or generation was gone.

Deuteronomy 19:7-10 Therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall separate three cities for yourself.' Now if the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as He swore to

your fathers, and gives you the land which He promised to give to your fathers, and if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and to walk always in His ways, then you shall add three more cities for yourself besides these three, lest innocent blood be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and thus guilt of bloodshed be upon you.

The cities of refuge were designed (among other things) to stop and prevent these feuds from happening. There was justice that was going to take place.

Even though the avenger of blood could kill the person if he caught him before he arrived at the city of refuge—what this verse is saying, here, is that if the nation follows through, and enlarges the lands by obeying God, He will designate more cities of refuge so that they are closer. There is less bloodshed, and there will not be much opportunity like in Gentile nations for these blood feuds to last for years and generations.

What I am trying to show you by going through these different places is that there is plenty of law that King David could have looked back on.

Numbers 35:29-33 And these things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. 'Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses [another layer that comes in]; but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty. 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 [he cannot buy his way out]. 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 [no way of getting out of that either; he has to serve his whole time]. So you shall not pollute the land where you are [this is very important]; 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.*

This is very, very important for this vignette in King David's life.

Numbers 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."

Based on what he knew, and what was available in God's law, David should have been much more judicious. There is no indication in II Samuel 21 that David got advice from any of his ministers about how to deal with this situation. He does not seem to have asked the priest who would know the law the best to find out what scripture said about situations like this. And, it certainly does not record that David took this to God for His solution to it.

David did all this, it seems, off the top of his head. He simply folded, giving the Gibeonites everything they wanted. In verse 7 we see the only thing in the entire situation that was any good at all.

II 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.

So, he kept his own covenant, but he did not go any further to figure out from God's law to know what should be done in this situation.

It seems as though he was spiritually sleepwalking through this whole thing. Except for verse 21, there is very little mention of God in the whole episode. There are references to the Lord, but they are not references in a spiritual sense. There is nothing to give you any indication that God was involved in anything except the famine—trying to teach David a lesson.

II Samuel 21:8-9 So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, 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; 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.

Verse 1 did say that it was "Saul and his bloodthirsty house" who had massacred the Gibeonites. So, others besides Saul were guilty. It was not just Saul, but other members of his family.

Yet, because of the long time that has passed since then until now, when the Gibeonites were asked to bring it up, how many of the guilty ones had died? How many rebellions were there? How many wars were fought? How long was the average lifespan at the time? How many died in sicknesses? How many died in bar-fights? You do not know. You cannot tell.

Forty years, at least, has passed, and had they been involved in it back when Saul was still king—let us say they were 18 to 20 years old—these men involved in this massacre, should they still be alive, might be 60, 65, or even 70 years old. That generation had begun to pass. There were not very many of them left.

Perhaps those first two, Armoni, and Mephibosheth were old enough to have participated in the event. It says that they were Saul's sons. But, the others were Saul's grandsons. They were the five sons of Merab, Saul's daughter. They were probably in middle age, 45-60.

We are talking about the possibility of only two of the seven even remotely having any guilt in this matter whatsoever. And those two are questionable. They may not have been involved at all, depending on how early in Saul's reign this event took place. I do not know when God through Samuel stripped him of the kingdom.

But the massacre of the Gibeonites probably occurred after that. So, give or take, 40 to 50 years have passed. Most, if not all, of those responsible were dead. They were probably innocent of this particular crime. All it is, was, "We want blood, and anyone from the house of Saul will do."

Notice the timing and the manner of the execution. It is the time of the beginning of the barley harvest. This would be in the spring during or after the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Also, they were hanged *on the hill before the Lord*. This is interesting. It said earlier that they wanted them to be hung before the Lord in Gibeah of Saul. That would be a town in Benjamin just north of Jerusalem. Then Gibeon was a mile or two more to the north-northwest.

In effect, what they wanted to do was hang the bodies of Saul's family in Saul's hometown in sight of Jerusalem. Probably what happened was that they put them on the top of the hill at Gibeah, so that God in the tabernacle could "see" the execution being done. God!—before the Lord—in Gibeah of Saul. They wanted the God of Israel to take it in the eye. And King David rolled over and let this happen.

Then there is another thing. *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* comments:

It was a heathen practice to gibbet men with a view of appeasing the anger of the gods in seasons of famine, and the Gibeonites, who were a remnant of the Amorites, though brought to the knowledge of the true God, were not, it seems, free from this superstition.

So, it is very likely that these men were murdered both as retribution and as sacrifices to some pagan god to spite the God of the Bible, and therefore, Israel. They were appeasing their own god to send rain.

Did God hear? No, obviously not.

II Samuel 21:10-11 Now Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven. And she did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night. And David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.

II Samuel 21:14 So they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God heeded the prayer for the land.

What happened?

The rains did not come after the Days of Unleavened Bread when these seven men were executed. It did not come the next week, or the next month, or the month after that, all through the summer and into the fall holy days. This meant the latter harvest has passed, and maybe another month or so went by. Finally, after six or seven months, the rains came in their natural cycle. God did not perform a miracle to end this famine after these men were executed. He just let the natural cycles take their course. So the famine continued for another half a year.

What does this tell us?

This indicates that God was not pleased, whatsoever, with how this situation was resolved by David. God sent the rain, it says specifically, "from heaven," verse 10, "in the latter rains," which is their normal cycle. He just let matters continue naturally and let it rub in for another six or seven months.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you *as* an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

This shows that this portion of the story in II Samuel 21, hanging the bodies for six months or so, was an additional curse upon the land. Another thing that God said to do was not done. It shows you just how far things had sunk in the land.

Finally, someone says to David, "Hey, did you know that Rizpah has been out on a rock for six months, sitting there day after day, protecting the corpses from birds and such, because the Gibeonites will not let her take them down and bury them?"

"She's been doing that for six months? Why was I not told about this?" David may have begun to think about this now, "What is going on here? I have not been keeping up on things. Something is wrong."

So David went out and said, "There are some things that have needed to be done. Saul's bones are still in Jabesh-Gilead. They have not been put in Kish's sepulcher yet. They are still there. And these men, they need to be buried. God is not very pleased that these bodies have been exposed for six months against His law."

Then, I am sure, he started to think about other things that were happening, and he started to make some reforms in himself. After that, God heeded the prayer of the land.

There is another thing that needs to be thrown out there as a possible scenario, and this would have been the very worst and lowest that David could have sunk to. That is that he could have gone along with the Gibeonite's demands in order to get rid of seven possible contenders for his throne. That would be such a carnal thing to do—just let the Gibeonites kill seven of Saul's kids who could claim the Israelite throne and get them out of the way.

I do not know if that was the case, but he had just gone through Absalom's rebellion, and Sheba's rebellion, and maybe he allowed that to cross his mind too.

Can we assume that God was in any way propitiated at the conclusion of this story? It does not seem so. He did not perform any miracle, or any other thing to show that He was happy with the way that things turned out. God only let the rain cycle start again. He did not do anything to directly intervene.

Perhaps these last few verses suggest that, in burying the bones of Saul and Jonathan, David repented of his sins regarding this whole incident. And that is why God heeded the prayer of the land. But it does not say so here in so many words. It only says that God heeded the prayer of the land.

I think that this was a test from God, and David failed spectacularly, except in keeping his promise to Jonathan. He could have done several things differently, perhaps giving the Gibeonites their freedom as a way to repay them.

I do not know. He was the king. He could have done whatever he wanted. But, the big thing was that he did not consult God about what he should do about it. Now, if we would go through II Samuel 24, that even though David made a huge mistake in chapter 21, he did it right in chapter 24. He resolved properly—not without a lot of death, with 70,000 dead in that plague, but at least he had the repentant attitude by the time it was over.

What should we get out of this?

David represents us—Joe Church Member—true Christians in a time of spiritual famine, much like what Amos describes in Amos 8:11, with the famine of the word.

Because of what had been going on, all the turmoil in this life and the kingdom, David was not spiritually prepared to face it. He was distracted by the cares of this world, by the pulls of this, that and the other thing, and so he gives in and compromises with the people of the land. The people of the land stand for our spiritual enemies—our human nature, this world, and Satan the Devil.

He gives them exactly what they want, and look at what happens. We see in this little vignette that innocent people die; grief lingers forever; idolatry is committed; and the curse of famine continues; another harvest fails; and the land remains defiled; everything stinks of death. It is not pretty when we allow the people of the land to dictate to us.

If we would go through Luke 21:7-12, we would see that Jesus gave His disciples indications of what would happen if the time of the end began. One of the things He specifically mentions is famine, which happens to be the third seal—physical famine, but we remember from Amos that there is a spiritual famine as well.

We have all these things coming at the end time, which is very short. Then we have verses 34 through 36. What do we do in a time of spiritual famine? Christ says,

Luke 21:34-35 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. " For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth."

If we think that we have it all figured out, I am sorry, we do not. It comes as a snare, Christ says, on everybody. A snare is a trap. It springs out when you are not ready. And we are supposed to be ready.

Luke 21:36 "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

He says to watch—be aware, be awake, be vigilant; know what your spiritual state is. Then, pray for all you are worth so that your relationship with God and Jesus Christ is strong when the famine hits.

That is how we overcome the dearth of the truth and the dearth of righteousness in our day.