

February 19, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: *The Life of David*
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from 2 Samuel 21.

1. Who caused the three-year drought in Israel during David's reign?
2. Who chose the price for repayment for Saul's killing of Gibeonites?
3. Can you think of any situations that can clearly be attributed to God that you cannot explain?
4. We know that wars, arguments, conflicts are caused by sin, but what can we do about it?
5. How would you respond if there is worse anarchy and even marshal law in America?

THE IMPACT OF DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD

2 Samuel 21

Baby boomers are now in their sixties and seventies. Please don't look down on us for longing for the good old days. What were those? Those were the days when almost everyone in America had respect for their elders. It was the day when the majority of people went to church. It was a time when a majority of people at least had some respect for the Bible, the church, and Christian virtues. It was the day of baseball, hotdogs, and apple pie. Innocence was normal. In the good old days, the hottest shows on television were Andy

Griffith, Leave it to Beaver, and Father Knows Best. Oh, for those good old days.

But wait, weren't those the days that came right on the heels of Baby Face Nelson, John Dillinger, and Al Capone shooting up Chicago and New York? Weren't those the days when modernism and denial of the Bible's inerrancy swept through the seminaries of America? Wasn't that denial of God's authority followed by Elvis Presley and his sensual dancing, the Beatles singing about smoking pot and enjoying drugs, and the rock band Kiss looking like they were generally under the influence of drugs? Weren't those the days of the sexual revolution and the revolt against all authority under the guise of protesting the Vietnam War? Weren't those the days of the race riots in Los Angeles, Miami, and Detroit? So what was the difference between those good old days and today's good old days?

Maybe what some of us are longing for is a day when we no longer have to live in a world infected with sin. As long as there is sin, people who desire to live righteously are going to be uncomfortable and will have to fight battles. The war is with us from the time we can tell the difference between right and wrong until the day we breath our last breath.

In David's story, we were hoping that once the Absalom revolt was put down, and once the civil war spearheaded by Sheba was settled, and once Joab killed his opponent Amasa so that he could be the number one general in David's army again, that everything would settle down and David could live happily ever after. Nope, that wasn't the case. The problem was that David lived in the flesh among other sinners. Therefore, he had to deal with many different kinds of consequences of sin—both his own and the sins of others.

Often, dealing with those consequences can get pretty messy, and it is difficult for us to understand why things happen the way they happen. Even more difficult to understand is why God allows, approves of or, worse, causes certain things to happen. A quick review of David's life might indicate to us that the day he left the flock of sheep and took on the giant Goliath, his life ceased to be peaceful. That is because God chose David to be a leader. Leaders generally deal with the effects and consequences of sin more than those who are not leaders.

In this part of the story, we find King David cleaning up a mess that King Saul left, and it is not a pretty picture. Then we discover that the time came for him to lay down his sword and shield because the “Giant’s” friends had long memories and wanted to take off David’s head just like the most famous giant Goliath wanted to do. War, fighting, death, pay back is all because of sin. And David was right in the middle of it until the day he died. Your life might feel like it is unfortunately very similar. Thank God for His sustaining grace as we live through the battles that come from people being disobedient to God.

There Was Famine and Sorrow Because of Past Disobedience (vv.1-14).

The story unfolds for us what appears to be a strange way to deal with a past problem (vv.1-9). God brought a past sin to everyone’s attention. He did this very effectively by sending a three-year famine. *Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year (v.1a)*. There is no indication at what point in David’s reign this event came about. It was almost certainly after David had committed himself to Mephibosheth’s care and safe keeping (9:1-13), because we see that his covenant with Mephibosheth figured prominently in David’s solution. It seems to fit better if we put the event before Absalom’s rebellion. In fact, it is possible that this is what Shimei referred to when he cursed David as he escaped Absalom. He railed, *“The LORD has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood” (2 Samuel 16:8)*. Those words would certainly describe one view of David’s actions in this situation.

Also indicating that this might have happened somewhat earlier in David’s reign was the fact that David inquired about God’s will. *And David sought the face of the LORD (v.1b)*. We mentioned recently that seeking God’s will became kind of a lost art for David in his later years. At this point, David was sensitive to God’s leading. The drought meant something to him. He wondered what God was trying to tell him. Arid weather was not unusual in Israel. But three

years of crop failure, three years without rain would cause anyone to wonder if maybe the Lord of the rain was displeased with them.

That would be especially true for people who knew and understood God’s promises in His law. God promised that disobedience to His law would result in judgment from God. Moses promised that if God’s people disobeyed Him, *“Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the LORD is giving you” (Deuteronomy 11:17)*. *“Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock” (Deuteronomy 28:18)*. Judgments like that might qualify as natural disasters like floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, of which drought-induced famine is one.

David talked to God about this. He couldn’t control the weather. But He knew the One who does. Shouldn’t that be a natural response for us who are God’s children? Is it truly contrary to New Testament age and age of grace for God to get our attention through difficulties? If so, what did James mean when he told us in times of difficulty to talk to God about the matter in order to gain wisdom? He wrote, *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him (James 1:2-5)*. Sometimes, many times, God does not reveal to us a particular reason for the trial. Sometimes He does.

In David’s case, God answered. *And the LORD said, “There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death” (v.1c)*. The problem lay with Saul’s treatment of the Gibeonites. We know the history of the Gibeonite people. Early on when Joshua led Israel to settle the Promised Land, the Gibeonites tricked him and the leaders into a covenant. Carelessly, without doing any research, Joshua and the leaders promised to forego attacking the Gibeonites and to protect them as allies. That was around the year 1404 BC. Saul became king in 1043 BC, almost 400 years later. I wonder if the leaders of the United States have broken any covenants that former leaders made with the residents of this great land some

400 years ago? That would be like around 1620, Pilgrims, Jamestown, and so forth.

David became king of the united monarchy in 1004 BC, maybe thirty years after Saul's zealous sin against the Gibeonites. Now God required some kind of reparations from a crime Saul committed years earlier. Is that fair? Is that just? God obviously has reasons for what He commands even if we do not always understand them.

God intended for His people to make reparations (vv.2-7). Verse two describes in some small detail Saul's sin against the Gibeonites. *So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah (v.2).* There is no statement about this action in the history of Saul's reign recorded in the Bible. Here it becomes obvious that Saul killed a certain number of Gibeonites in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah. Why did he do that? Maybe he counted them holdovers of people who Joshua should have eradicated from the land. More likely is the possibility that he used that as an excuse.

The real truth might lie in the fact that Gibeon just happened to be located in the middle of the territory that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was a Benjamite. The evidence indicates that generally Saul's zeal was for Saul's benefit. It would not be surprising if we learned that Saul killed the Gibeonites because he didn't want them living in his neighborhood. Whatever the reason, Saul broke the covenant, the promise, the word of God's people which would bring shame on the character of God. Now 20-30 years later, God required David to fix the problem.

David allowed the Gibeonites to determine the reparation. *And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" (v.3).* God's will was to let the Gibeonites decide the price of reparations. David's desire was to make amends to the offended people so that they would bless God's people instead of having reasons to curse them. Unlike Americans, the Gibeonites didn't want money. *The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house" (v.4a).* They didn't want money, but neither did they feel at liberty to take Israelite lives into

their own hands. And so they pointed out, *"Neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel" (v.4b).*

David was able to pick up on the message as he read between the lines. He opened the offer so they could name the price. *And he said, "What do you say that I shall do for you?" They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give them" (vv.5-6).*

Why seven relatives of Saul? Seven probably represents completion, a symbol of the entire family of Saul. The words *his sons* is literally "men from his sons" meaning male posterity of Saul. The act of retribution would be done "before the Lord." That means it was done in His presence and with God's approval. It was not a matter of personal vengeance to the Gibeonites, but the execution of justice. Their response sounded a lot like Samuel's words when he executed King Agag "before the Lord" (1 Samuel 15:33).

But in this case, David made an important exception. *But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul (v.7).* Whenever this pay back took place, David had already made a covenant with Jonathan's son Mephibosheth and could not break it. Breaking a covenant was the reason for this mess in the first place.

Hearing the price for reparations, the king humbled himself before the Gibeonites (who were Israel's slaves) and obeyed their request. Two of Saul's sons were delivered. *The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth (v.8a).* Five of Saul's grandsons were delivered. *And the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite (v.8b).* Merab was the sister of Michal, wife of David – she was childless (2 Samuel 6:23).

If we stopped for a moment and let this story sink in, we will be overwhelmed by the exceeding wickedness of sin. The king delivered those innocent men to the Gibeonites who killed them. *And he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, and the seven of them perished together.*

They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest (v.9). These were real people. In our thinking they were innocent people. They just happened to be related to a guy who made God look awful.

Note that nowhere did God command this or even instruct this means of atonement. Saul had killed some number of Gibeonites. Now Gibeonites killed seven of his posterity to atone for the crime. How can that be justifiable? Actually that was God's law. God warned, "*But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life*" (Exodus 21:23). He required of His people: "*Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot*" (Deuteronomy 19:21).

Human wisdom really struggles to allow this. How could a good God, a God who is in control, a God who is aware of all things, allow this—much less approve of it—yeah, order such justice? Things like this cause some thinking people to deny the existence of God. Such atrocities must mean that there is no God. In response to that line of reasoning, John Woodhouse stated, "A more realistic answer has to face uncomfortable truths. One of them is the righteous wrath of God. We would all like God to be comfortable. He is not. He is good, but his goodness is not determined by ideas that we find cozy. God's goodness is actually terrifying." (John Woodhouse, *Preaching the Word*, "2 Samuel," Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2015, p.484.)

Therefore, we must admit that we do find the evidence of that truth in many Bible statements like, *And yet He is wise and brings disaster; He does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers and against the helpers of those who work iniquity (Isaiah 31:2).* Or, "*Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?*" (Amos 3:6). God's justice against sin and sinners is hard to accept but remains true none the less.

We are not surprised to read in this story about much sorrow because of someone's sin (vv.10-14). It was the mother's sorrow for her executed sons, and maybe even the sons of her step-daughter. *Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night (v.10).*

The *beginning of harvest* was the barley harvest, a reference to a time of year, not a reality because of the drought. It was when the tragic pay back took place and her sons were killed. Rizpah kept vigil over the corpses until God sent the promised rain.

Someone must have told David what Rizpah was doing and it prompted him to respond in an apparently odd way (vv.11-14). *When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded (vv.11-14a).*

If Rizpah, Saul's concubine could show such respect for Saul's seed, David should also show some kind of honor. The bones of Saul and Jonathan had been buried in Jabesh-gilead ever since the men of that city had retrieved them from the Philistines in Bethshan – maybe 10 or 15 years earlier. Now David brought the bones to Saul's hometown and buried them in the tomb of Kish his father, apparently with great fanfare. This was a memorial to Saul and reminder that David was simply carrying out the Gibeonites' desire for reparations, which God allowed.

God also responded to His people's obedience, humility, and sorrow. *And after that God responded to the plea for the land (v.14b).* This means that He sent rain. There is a wonderful picture in this response. It is a picture of God sending grace and strength to the Gibeonite families who suffered for Saul's arrogant zeal. It pictures God sending healing to the people of Israel who had suffered hunger for three years, maybe even including death from hunger. It especially pictures God sending healing grace to Rizpah and Merab as their sons were honored.

We learn that in times of suffering when we turn to God, whose love is terribly wonderful at times, we always receive solace from the effects of sin in a fallen creation. That is the story of salvation. Christ

came to die in our place because only His blood can pay the price for our sins against God. That story is more tragic than the death of Saul's sons and grandsons for his sin. God's story of salvation is a tragically wonderful story in that He Himself sent His beloved Son to be murdered in order to save us from His righteous wrath.

There Was War Because There is Sin (vv.15-22).

David proved that there is a time to retire from warfare (vv.15-17). David went to war again, at some point. *There was war again between the Philistines and Israel, and David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines. And David grew weary (v.15).* Again we are not sure when this happened. It would appear from David's weariness that maybe this event was later in life. In his younger days, David was the leader, the commander who led with strength and vigor.

A frightening incident caused David's "advisors" to conclude that he would retire. *And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, "You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel" (vv.16-17).* In this one particular battle, David was nearly killed because he grew weary. His commanders decided he needed to stay home at the palace. Was this decision made before the sin with Bathsheba? In that context we read, *In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem (2 Samuel 11:1).*

Sin means we will spend time battling the giants (vv.18-22). The giants in David's life were these particular four guys. First was Ishbi-benob. *And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David (v.16).* These four guys were descendants of giants. Not necessarily descendants of Goliath who David killed. The word for giants (*Rapha*) seems to refer to a special category of fighters who were unusually large and

fearsome, one of whom was probably Goliath who David killed. Ishbi-benob was one of those fighters whose spear head weighed seven pounds almost killed David.

Another *Rapha* was named Saph. *After this there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants (v.18).*

Another was named Goliath. *And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam (v.19).* This seems a bit odd or confusing. Who was this Goliath? Obviously, he was not the same Goliath David killed. It is possible that "Goliath" was a title or a rank in the army – some kind of leader.

Then there was the six-fingered, six-toed giant. He might strike us as stranger than the strange. *And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number, and he also was descended from the giants (v.20).* This fellow suffered with an ailment called hexadigitation - six digits. David's nephew killed him. *And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck him down (v.21).*

These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants (v.22). Why all the fighting with giants or whatever they were? The problem wasn't so much that they were large or fearsome. The problem is that they taunted God's people. This meant that this group of people mocked the true God and anyone who worshiped him. They were convinced that God is not true and the people who worship Him are foolish.

We face the same problem today and should call it the effects of sin. We know that all people are born with the sin nature. Therefore, all people are born deaf to God's Word, blind to God's character, dead to God's Spirit, and rebellious to God's Law. Because this is the normal expectation, these kinds of people get along with each other until greed, jealousy, avarice, or some other trait of sin kicks in. But all of them can easily unite with each other in a war against God, His truth, and the people who hold to His truth.

That is what we are experiencing in life. We wish that all our fellow Americans would at least respect the Bible. But they cannot even believe the Bible much less respect it. We wish that they act morally and ethically. They cannot. The further our culture moves away from the truth of the Bible, the more intense this war against God's people will become. We must recognize this as a natural consequence of the sin principle. We must continue to stand on the truth of God's Word and live it out. We must proclaim the good news of salvation that is the sinner's only hope. We must truly trust God and depend on Him alone as the consequences of a sinful culture come to bear in our lives.