

The Conquest of Canaan and the Gibeonites, Part 2

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Scandalous Texts

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Bible Text: 2 Samuel 21:1-14; 1 Peter 3:13-16
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Our Scripture lesson is taken from 2 Samuel 21 beginning at verse 1.

1 During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, ‘It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death.’ 2 The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.) 3 David asked the Gibeonites, ‘What shall I do for you? How shall I make amends so that you will bless the Lord’s inheritance?’ 4 The Gibeonites answered him, ‘We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death.’ ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ David asked.

Now remember the people that are stating this are not believers. They were unbelievers who were never part of Israel, but Joshua and the leaders of Israel had sworn an oath to them in the name of the Lord to spare them, even though they had been deceived by them. And so, when you read this verse 5, you need to remember this is not what God wants people to do in any way whatsoever. It’s the demand that these pagans make in order to lift the curse that they had put on Israel that had a substance to it because Israel had sworn in the name of the Lord.

5 They answered the king, ‘As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel, 6 let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul—the Lord’s chosen one.’ So the king said, ‘I will give them to you.’

And then skipping down to the next page, page 508, we read these words in verse 14, page 508,

14 They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul's father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded. After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land.

The word of the Lord. ["Thanks be to God."]

May we pray.

Help me, Lord, to present Scripture clearly, concisely, compellingly, with the winsomeness of the Holy Spirit for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

Turn with me, if you will, in your Bibles to 1 Peter 3. 1 Peter 3 and beginning at verse 13. 1 Peter 3 beginning at verse 13.

Excuse me. I'm glad to be down where there's some humidity in the air because it's pleasant for a moment, but those altitudes affect everything, including this Bell's Palsy, so I'm glad that I'm back.

1 Peter 3 beginning at verse 13.

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.' 15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

May God add his blessing to his word.

I want to give you the reason why I'm preaching this little series called "Scandalous Texts." What is a scandal? Biblically, and using the Greek word, it means a stumblingblock (próskomma, πρόσκομμα), something that people trip over. I had to be very careful as I did some walking with my daughter, son-in-law and grandson and Sandy in Arizona. I always look down. I looked down so that I wouldn't trip on a rock or put my foot in a hole or something else. There are things that trip us up, that cause us to fall down, and believe me, I don't need another fall at my age.

So scandalous texts are texts that cause people to stumble, to fall, and we live in an era of nonsense. What do I mean?

I look back at Dr. Reap, a medical doctor who devoted many years of his life to become licensed to practice medicine, but I'll guarantee you that Dr. Reap has encountered people with their degree in Googology, that is the ability to read Google, who will challenge what he says.

“Well, that’s not what I believe because da, da, da, da, da, da, da.” And people, remember this, in the modern world with Google and Bing and all these other search engines, people can post virtually anything they want to post, and nobody really is doing fact checking.

In fact, I’ve learned with the internet that fact checkers sometimes maliciously malign the truth and say that this isn’t true when it really is true. We live in an era in the modern world unlike any other in the history of humankind, where people who know virtually nothing about anything can string together nonsense that sounds so compelling, and nowhere is that greater than in the area of religion and the Bible.

And so people that know virtually nothing about the Bible itself, but because of one reason or another, perhaps how they were raised by parents that were ultra-strict, ultra-mean, and did not communicate in any way the love of Christ, have an anger and a hostility towards God and towards the Bible, and they write things and they will challenge people and say, “Well, did you know the Bible says this? Do you know the Bible says that?”

One of the things that I enjoyed at our General Assembly this past year was sitting under an hour-long lunch with my former associate pastor who makes movies, and Ritchie gave a critique of how to watch a film, and he described certain things and said, “Well, would this be a Christian film?” And he gave some illustrations that websites that critique films from a Christian standpoint rate them a certain way. He said, for example, they’ll say it had 14 “S” words and this, that, and the other. And he said to himself, “I wonder, do they just sit there and count?”

And he gave a critique of a film that’s not a Christian film, but is a profoundly Christian film, and that’s “Groundhog Day,” and he showed how it has redemption in it, it has this in it, it has that in it.

And Ritchie makes movies, in fact, his film that he produced, “The Author,” is about to be publicly released, and it looks like it’s going to be a great movie. But anyhow, so you look at the world around you, and you examine the world in light of things, and oftentimes Christians are very poor in their

analysis of the world around them. They give glib, ridiculous comments about things when the reality is something is very often the opposite.

So, I want to address scandalous texts, texts that make people stumble, and perhaps that's made you stumble because I have a two-fold purpose in this little, short series, "Scandalous Texts."

One is to try to remove the doubts that Christians have about God and his word, and two is, and this is what's so important, is to enable you, and I mean you, I'm talking about you, being able to defend the faith, the Christian faith, to other people because why are you still alive?

Think about it. Why has God spared your life? Why has God spared my life? There's one fundamental reason: It's to glorify God by reaching other people with the good news about Jesus.

Do you know that most people really don't understand the gospel? They've grown up in a church that was a certain way. Do you know that my wife's church, when she was a little girl—and it was a huge mega church in Jacksonville, Florida. It was called originally Beaver Street Baptist Church, and then when they outgrew their facility and decided to move, they renamed it the Jacksonville Baptist Temple.

And so, when Sandy while I was a student pastor of a little Presbyterian church in 1969 near Clinton, South Carolina, she joined that church. And the person who typed the bulletin said, "Today we receive Sandy Vincent by transfer of letter from the Beaver Temple of Jacksonville, Florida."

Is that like the Moose Lodge or Elks?

Anyhow, but her pastor, when she was a little girl, taught this from the pulpit: That black people are not human, they were created by God to serve white people. Now, to us today, that sounds bizarre. I mean to us today. But believe me, when I was growing up, that wasn't so far from what people generally believed, and we've come a long way.

In many ways, we've come a good way. In many ways, we've come a bad way. The important thing in assessing where we have been and where we are is does it line up with Scripture?

So, scandalous texts, trying to deal with things that have caused people to stumble, and hate God, and reject the church, and so, listen to his counsel here. He says in verse 15, 1 Peter 3:15,

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

I want my life, how I conduct myself, what I speak, I want my life to remind people of Jesus. I want people to be provoked to ask me questions. I want people to say to me, “You seem very different. Why?”

I want that to happen. That’s the reason I want to continue to live. If I can’t do that anymore, let me die and go be with Jesus. Seriously. The reason I live is I want people to see Christ in me.

Now, they don’t always see Christ in me. When I had a person wheeling a wheelchair in the Dallas airport after our plane was delayed for an hour coming out of Denver, and I couldn’t understand the man who was speaking to me, because I’m not sure where he was from—some people were from Nepal, other people were from Ethiopia, but I couldn’t understand, and I became angry.

I became angry, and as I was passed off to someone else, a lady who was from Nepal who was very sweet, I began to be convicted. Now that really wasn’t the way I want people to remember me because I have a booming voice! And I began to speak loudly to get somebody’s attention other than the man who was from—I could never figure out where he was from because I couldn’t understand him.

“I need help! I understand that the plane to Texarkana has not yet left.”
And I got help. But then as I’m being wheeled by this sweet lady who was from Nepal, and I was able at the end, in thanking her to do this (I put my palms together), which is the Buddhist way of saying thanks, and, no, I don’t always exhibit Christ. Sometimes I get angry.

Thank God that his using me doesn’t depend on my personal perfection because if it did, I may as well go, “Okay, I’ll see you later.”

But I want my life to reflect Christ in such a way that people say, “You seem so different. Why are you happy?”

Do you know that happiness is an amazing phenomenon in our modern world? Most people are terribly depressed. Suicide is at an all-time high, and the use of psychotropic drugs to cope with life’s sadness is higher than it’s ever been in the history of humankind. I want people to say, “Why are you happy? Why do you have hope? Why are you an optimist?” I’m stuck on a thing called hope. And so, he says, “Always be prepared to give an answer

to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have.” Be prepared.

What is my task as your pastor, a pastor/teacher? It’s to equip you to do the work of ministry (Shepherds and teachers, ποιμένας και διδασκάλους, Ephesians 4:11-12). This church will not survive if you hire somebody to do the work of the ministry, and that’s why churches throughout America are dying. The job of a pastor is to equip **you** to do the work of the ministry and that’s what I’m trying to do today, is to equip you to do the work of the ministry. It’s to give you answers to these texts that maybe your children or grandchildren have been alerted to somewhere and they say, “I can’t believe the Bible, Grandpa. I don’t believe that stuff. This is ridiculous. How could a God da, da, da, da, da” and so on.

So, he says, “I want you to be prepared to give an answer.” Peter’s not writing this to pastors. He is writing it to pastors, but he’s also writing it to the people of the churches to whom he was addressing himself and he says, “Always,” he says, “be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you.”

What’s the first thing you do when you get asked a ridiculous question? Pray. Because you’re not smart. You say, “What do you mean I’m not smart?”

Well, that’s what I do. I say, “Lord, I’m not smart. I don’t know how to give an answer here, and I need help. I need you to tell me what you want me to say. Please, Lord, put it in my mind. Help me recall things that I’ve heard and even things I’ve never heard about and just give me wisdom as I respond to this person because what comes out of my mouth has eternal consequences.”

And so, he says, notice here, he says, “the hope that you have.” Notice how he says to do it in that next sentence, top of page 1890,

“But do this with gentleness and respect.” Let’s think about it for a moment. Do this with gentleness. The Greek word that’s translated “gentleness” there is a word that means not really being hung up on your own importance (πραῦτης, πραῦτης: “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance,” BDAG, p. 861).

Guess what? I have trouble with that. So do you. Because I think I’m important. I think that it’s very important how people treat me—Like putting people to work in the Dallas airport and the Denver airport who don’t speak English clearly enough to be understood.

I'm grateful that people that speak other languages have somebody they can understand, but that annoyed me. And I think I'm important. I paid for those tickets. I paid for the help. I think I'm important. Don't you think I'm important?

But you know, that's what we all deal with, isn't it? I'm important. I'm important. And I'm kind of stuck on myself. Are you stuck on yourself? And you know, here's the problem when I'm stuck on myself, when I'm focused on my importance, I need to get to that plane so that I don't have to spend the night in the Dallas airport.

And in the beginning, there was only one other person around us in that section. It was a lot of fun exploring places there and able to buy a bottle of water and some potato chips so we could take our vitamins before we went to sleep. And then people would come in, and they would talk and wake us up. It was surreal. Wow. But I think I'm important. We all do.

But listen, here's the issue: I want to be like Jesus. I want the man from whatever country in the world he was saying he was from to think for a moment and say, "Wow, sir, tell me."

And I can say truly that God was with me as I repented for being focused on my own importance. God enabled me to be gracious to the lady from Nepal and even to pray with her. Wow!

So, it's when I forget about myself and how important I am, and that's really hard to do if we're honest, if I can focus on what's really important.

What is the big thing? The big thing is the Lord Jesus and not presenting a stumblingblock, so that people can get in touch with him because religion has never done anybody any good. Marx was right on one point: It is the opiate of the people. But Jesus does great good for people.

The great goal of the Christian is to connect other people with Jesus. And so, he says to do it with gentleness and again, gentleness is an inadequate translation. It's true as far as it goes, but the gentleness flows out of a heart that says, "You know, I'm not really important. I'm not going to be focused on how people view me. If I look like a fool by being sweet and kind and gentle and turning the other cheek and forgiving other people, so be it."

He says, "with gentleness and respect."

The Greek word there is the word for fear (phóbos, φόβος, "b. reverence, respect, α. toward God . . . β. toward humans, respect," BDAG, p. 1062), and what does he mean to fear people? It's not really fearing people, it's

what the Christian has towards God. For the Christian, there's no fear in the sense of terror, fear of consequences. For the Christian, it's simply respect ("There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." 1 John 4:18).

And you know it's important for me to show respect towards everyone, from the youngest person—

"Good morning, Theo; you're the youngest one here today. Normally it's Iona, but today you win the contest."

—And to show respect. Do you know that God has called me to show respect to Theo?

"And Theo, thank you for helping your mom make a great poster that greeted us in the Texarkana airport yesterday, 'Welcome home Bob and Sandy.' I wouldn't be surprised you didn't have part in that."

So, to show respect, my obligation is to show respect to everyone. You know, I'm struck with that when I eat out, and we've had to eat out a lot this week, so, past two weeks, so I'm sure I probably put on a pound or two, hopefully not more, and I'm struck with how waiters and waitresses deal with you. Now, I have the power of the tip, but I always tip 20% because those people don't make a lot. And I was struck last night as we ate a meal, and the guy kept calling me "Buddy." And I thought, "Okay, all right, okay." I almost talked to him, but then I thought, what matters most? His name was Oscar, and he kept calling me "Buddy," and he was probably at least probably close to 50 years younger than I am.

You know what I say to people? I say "Sir" and "Ma'am" to everybody. Everybody. I say "Sir" and "Ma'am." Why? It's a habit I want to get into. Why? Because it's a way of showing respect.

I remember as a boy saying "Sir" to someone who did not look like me, and I was corrected and told, "Don't say 'Sir' to somebody that looks like that." And I thought, "Wow, that's nuts." No, I want to be in a habit so that even, "Yes sir, Theo," even to Theo, I'm going to say, "Yes sir," because it's important to show respect, and if I get in a habit of doing that, well, then I'm not going to show disrespect.

So, he says to show them, with gentleness, kindness, putting yourself in their place with a genuine humility that's focused on their need, not my need, and with real respect, and he says, "keeping a clear conscience." What's that?

Verse 16. That's what happened to me in a wheelchair in the Dallas airport as the lady from Nepal wheeled us to another location. I walk with a cane to keep from falling, and as long as I walk slowly, I have no problem, but if I had to try to run, I couldn't do it, so we get wheelchairs, and that was good.

What had happened? What happened is, I became convicted. The Holy Spirit began to talk to my conscience, and he began to alert me to how, **"I need somebody to get me to the gate where the plane for Texarkana is getting to leave because I've been told by my contact on the phone that it hasn't left yet."** So, as I'm being wheeled to that gate, I began to get my conscience cleared, keeping a clear conscience "So that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

Let me say this. Many things are written against the church that are true and not slanderous, because if you look at the history of Christianity, from about AD 325 on, Christianity has not had a very good track record. What happened in 325? The Edict of Milan of 313, granted by the Emperor Constantine I, enabled Christianity in 325 to become the official religion of the Roman Empire. And all you have to do is read history and you discover, "Huh, Lord, these people weren't acting like Christians at all."

They did terrible things. Church history is a record of the atrocious ideas and actions of the church. Wow! It really is, with rare exceptions.

I think about the Moravians. you know the famous Moravian hymn, "Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness," written by Count Zinzendorf?

Do you know what the Moravians did? They were a missionary group, and they wanted to be missionaries to everyone, and so two young men sold themselves into slavery so that they could minister to the slaves that were, I believe, on Barbados. That's nuts. That's crazy. Isn't that insane? Nobody would do that who thought of their own importance, would they? Why would you ever sell yourself into slavery in order to become a slave so you could share Christ with slaves? Wow! What an example.

(A popular narrative about Christian Missions concerning Johann Leonhard Dober and David Nitschmann, describes how these two young Moravian Brethren from Herrnhut, Germany, were called in 1732 to minister to the African slaves on the islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix in the Danish West Indies . . .

'The missionaries did assert that they were willing to become slaves if it was the only way to reach the slaves. Many sources claim that they actually followed through, sold themselves, boarded a ship, and were never heard from again. In fact, after being sent out by Count Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf, the two traveled from Herrnhut to Copenhagen, Denmark, where their plan initially met with strong opposition.

“We shall work as slaves among the slaves.”

“But,” said the official, “that is impossible. It will not be allowed. No white man ever works as a slave.”

“Very well,” replied Nitschmann, “I am a carpenter, and will ply my trade.”

‘After some difficulty, the missionaries found support from the Danish Queen and her court, and although the Danish West Indian Company refused to grant them passage, a ship was eventually procured. Leaving Copenhagen on Oct 8, 1732, they arrived in St. Thomas two months later on December 13. While in the St. Thomas, they lived frugally and preached to the slaves, and they had a certain amount of success.’

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moravian_slaves]

And so, they may be ashamed of their slander. Here’s what I want to say. Most evil things that are said about the church are not slanderous, but let me say this, anything that’s said evil about Jesus is a slander.

And I want people to be able to introduce Jesus to other people because what I offer you is not myself. It’s not my message. It’s not my eloquence or my knowledge. It is simply a relationship. I have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly, as I read church history, it seems apparent to me that most people who led Christianity since 325 didn’t really have a personal relationship with Jesus at all. I can’t defend the church in that sense, but I can defend the Lord Jesus Christ, and I can defend his Bible, and that’s what my goal is for you, to be able to defend the faith by giving you a little bit of information that will help you to reach others.

So, what is my message, and I address this particularly to those of you who may be watching. My message is simply this:

Don’t get hung up on how you’ve been treated by so-called Christians, because all Christians are imperfect. We all stumble in many ways. We all come short of being what we ought to be. And don’t, don’t reject Jesus because of what you’ve been taught.

Know this, no matter what you’ve done, no matter what your lifestyle is, no matter what your goals in life are, you are welcome today to come to Jesus. “Don’t let conscience make you linger, nor a fitness fondly dream. All the fitness he requires is to feel your need of him.”

Come to Jesus just the way you are, and this I can promise you, as God is my witness, you will not be disappointed (kataischunō, καταισχύνω, “3. disappoint, of the shame and disappointment that come to one whose faith or hope is shown to be vain . . . b. pass. be disappointed . . . Ro 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pt 2:6 (on all three cp. Is 28:16),” BDAG, p. 517).

No one has ever come to Jesus himself and left disappointed. That's a fact.

Jesus loves you, and he wants you to come to him, and he wants to establish a relationship with you.

Now you'll say, "But you know, Bob, I'm in a relationship that, well, I know it doesn't, well, I'm not sure I can really come to Jesus."

And I'm going to say to you this, come to Jesus just the way you are. Don't worry about the relationship you happen to be in now. As he begins to walk with you and talk with you along life's narrow way, you'll discover in him a breadth of joy and peace, and he will change your desires, and he will change relationships around you.

So, the big deal is this: Don't let something get in the way of you and Jesus; don't let texts that you've heard about and read and said to yourself, "How could a good God have permitted this," don't let those things get in the way. Come to the Lord Jesus Christ just the way you are. Pray a prayer like this.

"Lord Jesus, I know I've messed up. Lord Jesus, I know that I fall short of being what I want to be. Lord Jesus, I've got a lot of doubts. Lord Jesus, I've got a lot of struggles. Lord Jesus, help me. Help me that I can come to you just the way you are, knowing that you will receive me just the way I am, and give me your Holy Spirit so that I may know you and know that I know you. And lead me. I want to give up on myself and give my heart to you.

"Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today. Come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.' Amen."