



FEED MY SHEEP

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How “Saul” Politicians Serve... (Themselves) and Bring about National Guilt

Last month we left off by setting the stage by recounting the story of the treaty Joshua had made with the lying and deceiving Gibeonites (Joshua 9). Centuries later, King Saul tried to exterminate or drive them all out of Israel. In the days of King David, the land suffered a severe famine. The famine was because of what Saul had done.

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

4 And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do for you.

What would satisfy the Gibeonites? Well, they weren't going to be bought off. Since these people were intimately connected with the tabernacle service of the Levites, having been hauling wood and water for them for several centuries by this time, it is likely they also became very familiar with the divine law. They knew that the law stated in...

Numbers 35:31 Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.

“[T]ake no satisfaction” refers to a payoff of any kind. So these Gibeonites would not take a monetary settlement. Nor did they desire that just any ordinary person be put to death. They went straight to the source of the crime. Instead, the Gibeonites insisted on the divine law's principle of *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation:

an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. But Saul was dead, and apparently he had been responsible for the deaths of untold numbers of the Gibeonites, so how could they exact a life for a life?

2 Samuel 21:5 And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel,

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

Because God had sent a famine for Saul's crime, it is evident that the Gibeonites had done nothing to merit Saul's viciousness. They were not seditious, not rebellious; just trying to hew the wood and carry the water. In both a literal and figurative sense, they were water boys, weren't they? What could have caused Saul to try to exterminate them? Well, it might have been that Saul's jealousy of David had something to do with it. Do you remember when David got tired of playing javelin practice with Saul? ...especially since David was the one with the bull's eye on his chest? David fled into the wilderness and then just before Doeg tells Saul “Hey, I saw David over at Nob conspiring with Ahimelech the high priest.” That is when Saul reveals his anger and jealousy.

1 Samuel 22:7 Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds;

We have to wonder: *where* did Saul get all the fields and vineyards to dole out to his fellow Benjamites? Hmm. Remember that Gibeon was in the land of Benjamin, so it seems likely that Saul was in the process of killing or driving out the Gibeonites and then confiscating their land and passing it along to his political supporters. Of course, things like that don't happen anymore, do they? That is a prime example of the nature and actions when Sauls are in leadership positions...whether in church or state, it doesn't matter. Saul-type leaders misuse their offices and authority to keep themselves in power and to grow wealthy in the process.

Have you ever wondered why someone would spend 15 or 20 million dollars to win a U. S. Senate seat that pays what? ...around \$250,000 a year? Or to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars or more to win a mid-level judgeship that pays about \$100,000 a year. If a person has even average attorney skills, he or she can easily make several times that amount in private practice. How did Lyndon Johnson who spent his entire life in "public service" and who was a high school teacher before that—how did he become a multi-millionaire even before he became president? Do these people seek these offices out of the goodness of their hearts so they can simply serve the people. There might be a few. Or do you think those jobs can be very highly profitable by being bought off, by taking bribes?

In King Saul's case, we conjecture that he had done all these illegal shenanigans under the political and moral smokescreen of doing the right thing. I can hear old King Saul even now as he explained to his subjects, "I'm just doing what our venerable Joshua should have done in the first place centuries ago." I can just see Saul the politician as he goes on national television to speak to the nation to justify his campaign against the Gibeonites. From his desk at the "White House," he looks into the camera and says:

"I tell you, my kinsmen: treaty or no treaty, contract or no contract; Joshua should have killed them all and let God sort 'em out. Now Joshua was a great man, but he wasn't perfect; so what Joshua didn't do; I will! And all of you will benefit from it. And may God bless Israel." And all the gullible masses cheer the king. So while Saul gave the lion's share of the profits from the confiscations to his political cronies in his own tribe of Benjamin, he made sure to dole out some benefits to people in the other states of Israel and Judah as well. Because, verse 2b says that...

2 Samuel 21:2b ... Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.)

So he pretended it was all for the good of the people, of course. But all the time, he was trying to curry favor to offset the rising popularity of David. Incidentally, if Saul could be so vicious in trying to exterminate the Gibeonites, then a long time before that, when he spared Agag of the Amalekites, it was *not* out of humanitarian motives, was it? After being in office only a short time, everything he did was *always* for his own selfish aggrandizement.

The Gibeonites demanded *seven* sons of Saul be turned over to them for execution. Seven is a sacred number in Hebrew. It denotes perfection, completion and totality. The Gibeonites, being well acquainted with Israel's God and His laws, thus demanded *seven* sons as being *representative* atonement for the deaths of *all* the Gibeonites. They left it up to David to choose which seven sons. The word *sons* here is used loosely to include grandsons as well. We recall that when Saul died at Gilboa, Jonathan and two other sons of Saul died in the battle that day. Another of Saul's sons, Ishbosheth, reigned over all the tribes except Judah, which David had ruled over.

But then in 2 Samuel 4, we saw that Ishbosheth was assassinated by two men who saw themselves as both *patriots* and as doing God's work by slaying David's opponent. Would it be fair to call them the ancient equivalent of "Christian patriots" since they loved their country and wanted to *help* God? We taught concerning modern "Christian patriots" at considerable length in our lecture called *Patriots and Politics*, CDs or audiotapes #411 & 412 (\$10 ppd.). We recommend that pair of Bible lectures for all our friends who are involved in any way with the modern Christian patriot movement in America. It will give you a biblical perspective which you might not have seen before. Meanwhile, David now has to choose which of Saul's posterity to turn over to the Gibeonites.

2 Samuel 21:7 But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD'S oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

Recall that early in these studies, David had sworn an oath to his best friend, Jonathan, that when he, David, became king, that he would not do as all other Oriental monarchs of that day were accustomed

to do, in that David would not exterminate the entire family of Saul. (In this regard, the reader might wish to obtain our two-part lecture, *A Bible Story about YOUR Covenant*, which provides about two hours of teaching based on the covenant between Jonathan and David, and how it affected Mephibosheth. CDs or audiotapes #540 & 541 [\$10 ppd.]. They are part of a series concerning *The Covenants of the Bible*, which is 14 lectures long so far and still much more to go.

David had been true to his word. Another king would have come to the throne and would have had every relative of Saul put to death. But now, knowing David as we do, it must have truly pained David to have to give up seven sons of Saul for execution. It was a *national* sin, since not only had Saul been the head of the nation, but also that many of the citizens (subjects) of the king of Israel had profited from Saul's murderous policy of ethnic cleansing toward the Gibeonites as well. It says in ...

Numbers 35:33 So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.

I don't think we fully understand yet all the ramifications of exactly *how* the bloodshed of murder defiles the *land* or how the shed blood of the murderer *cleanses* the land. But God said it. I believe it and I know we will understand it some day. Because the land was defiled, hence, the famine; and the only way the nation could be blest again was by the execution of Saul's sons. So David spares Mephibosheth because he was Jonathan's son...

2 Samuel 21:8 But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite:

Rizpah was one of Saul's concubines. Obviously, there are two Mephibosheths in this story, which is why the Bible gives us the extra words to designate one as the son of Jonathan and the other as the son of Saul's concubine. The last part of this verse, concerning Michal, causes some confusion. First of all, remember that Michal, the daughter of Saul, was promised as a wife to David, and they did marry. But when David was on the run, Saul, in a fit of spite,

gave her as wife to a man named Phalti. (1 Samuel 25:44) When David finally took her back, she ultimately came to despise him. I suspect it was because David never slept with her after she had been with that Phalti fellow (pun intended: *faulty*). We are not told if perhaps David ultimately divorced her. In any event, we also learned that...

2 Samuel 6:23 Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.

That statement leaves no room for her marrying again after David and having any children. Yet we have just read that five sons of Michal were among those "sons" of Saul who were given to the Gibeonites for execution. Most Bible scholars that I have read contend that this was simply a scribal error (v. 8) and it should have read Merab instead of Michal. Merab (not Michal) was Saul's eldest daughter (1 Samuel 14:49) and she (Merab) did in fact marry Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite. This Barzillai is, of course, not the same Barzillai we encountered in our study a few months back. That was Barzillai the Gileadite.

A valuable clue to the dilemma might be that in verse 8, the words *brought up* come from a Hebrew verb which was translated some several hundred times as *bear, born, or bore* or their cognates. Only twice is it translated "brought up." To translate it that way is really a stretch. *Unless...*, there is the possibility that Merab and Adriel had five sons and then both parents died and Michal adopted them. Then, in fact, it would not be a scribal error at all. Whatever the case, these five men filled out the seven sons to expiate the crimes of their (grand-)father. Which brings us to another question: What about Deuteronomy 24:16?

Deuteronomy 24:16 The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

Doesn't this execution of Saul's sons violate that law? At first glance, it would appear to; but—look again at 2 Samuel 21:1 again.

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

Being over 4,000 years of history in one small book, the Bible does not always give us all the facts, but here it is at least hinted at, that members of Saul's family were also involved in the slaughter of the Gibeonites because it says "and for his bloody house." Saul set the policy and gave the orders but quite possibly some of these—at the time *young*—men had a hand in the crime. And they certainly benefited from it.

Secondly, we are talking about a *national* sin here so that God sovereignly caused a famine to bring about justice in this way. Look at it this way. In America today, our people have been in great sin for decade after decade after century, sliding further and further into idolatry and wickedness of every sort.

Now think of Pearl Harbor—and for the sake of illustrations here—disregard any conspiracy theories about who planned it and who knew about it and when, etc. I am well aware of these facts and theories—just look at the fact that 3,000 "innocent" people were killed at Pearl Harbor. Or take the bombing of the federal government's Murrah building in Oklahoma City in 1995 where 168 "innocent" men, women and children lost their lives.

Please understand that I am not saying this is absolutely the case, but just as a thought—is it possible that these tragic disasters and many, many other national tragedies are part of the punishment God has inflicted upon this nation for the sins of our fathers committed decades or generations ago?

We gave a series of eight lectures years ago on the curses which God promised to inflict on the nation when we are in national disobedience. The curses are listed in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. Do you think God does not act that way today, just because Jesus died for our sins?

Well, let me ask you: did not His death also atone for the sins of the Old Testament saints as well, and yet they were hit with these national curses? Jesus died for our sins so that we can have eternal life, but that does not negate His disciplinary judgments upon us when we are in national disobedience.

Take another example: Since Roe vs. Wade in 1973, over 30 million babies have been murdered in the womb. Does that go unpunished? Since it was a U.S. Supreme Court decision which legalized these murders, it is *national* policy; therefore, it is national

sin, as well as personal sin. Did the events of September 11, 2001, where 3,000 "innocent" people lost their lives have anything to do with 30 million *truly* innocent babies being murdered?!

David turned over seven sons of Saul to the Gibeonites for execution. Hypothetically, did President Bush turn over 3,000 sons of a "Saul system" to Muslim terrorists for execution to make *representative* atonement for 30 million aborted babies? Not that President Bush had any conscious knowledge of that, of course. But would God do that, you ask?

Think: Did God allow WW I? Did He allow millions more to slaughter each other in WW II? If God is sovereign, then of course He did that. He could have stopped it or prevented it, couldn't He? If not, then He is not omnipotent. But since He did not prevent those worldwide conflagrations, then it has to be part of His divine Plan, doesn't it? Now let us compare the verse about not punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to this...

Numbers 14:18 The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

This talks about what is called "generational sin" and it has application both on a personal family level and on a national level. David knew that the only way for the famine on the nation to be lifted was for the bloodguiltiness of Saul's house to be expiated by the execution of the seven sons, therefore ...

2 Samuel 21:9 And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and they fell *all* seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.

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