

Dear everyone, greetings.

A couple of weeks ago I was in a Discover B study and we came to 2 Samuel 21.1-14. I groaned, for this is a particularly gruesome narrative that jars my tender sensitivities. For those not immediately familiar with the text, here it is....

“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." ² 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. ³ 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?" ⁴ 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." ⁵ 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, ⁶ "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." 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. ⁸ 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; ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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.”

As I read the text, and looked around the room, I wondered what God indeed had in store for us as life principles and lessons from the narrative. Yet, as we chewed over the story, the life application principles and lessons came thick and fast. Here is what the Holy Spirit impressed upon me as I reflected on the text from the perspective of leadership lessons to be learned from King David's actions:

- 1) There was a famine for 3 years – yes, 3 whole years, BEFORE David decided to inquire of the LORD. This is almost as long as the divinely-ordained drought under Ahab and Jezebel. Still, David, as the leader of Israel, did not inquire after 3 months without rain, or even 1 or 2 years. No, he waited 3 years before the problem was sufficiently large for him to turn to God. In that time, many would have suffered immensely from food shortages, including children and farm animals. The lesson for leaders today is that by remaining in constant communion with God, we can avoid causing unnecessary suffering for those we serve.
- 2) The slaughter of the Gibeonites had taken place when David was a runaway bandit in the Wilderness of Zin. Saul and his sons had tried to perpetrate genocide against the Gibeonites, ignoring the covenant relationship the Gibeonites were in with the Israelites, and out of misplaced religious zealotry. In 1 Sam, when David was on the run, no mention is made of David being concerned about this matter. For most of his kingship, there is no mention of his concern with the attempted genocide of the Gibeonites. It is only near the end of his life, when he turns to God in query about the 3 years of famine, that God highlights this historic injustice to David. The lesson for leaders today is that God does not sweep the

past under the rug. He is concerned today about injustices yesterday, and the leaders of God's people must grapple with and recognize and follow God's leading in righting the injustices of the past.

- 3) The Gibeonites were the lowest rung of Israelite society. They were, quite literally, the hewers of wood and drawers of water. This had been their covenant agreement with Joshua in exchange for not being exterminated with the rest of the Canaanites. Not only in this story is God portrayed as being concerned about injustice in society, but He is also concerned about the Gibeonites, the ancient Israelite equivalent of the modern-day "untouchables" or "Dalits" of India. Yes, God is concerned with Kings and Princes and Presidents, but He is also just as concerned with the street-cleaners, street beggars and the "disappeared" youth living under railway arches in large western cities. The lesson for leaders today is that they are to be concerned just as much for the "least of these my brothers" as with the most significant tithe-returner or donor.
- 4) In this story, the attempted genocide against the Gibeonites had occurred approx. 40 years before. Yet, the pain was still raw for the survivors who had seen their people-group almost exterminated by Saul's zealots. This was not David's direct responsibility, yet he had to deal with the matter. Just as God does not sweep the past under the rug, so in this story David has to learn that leaders must take responsibility for addressing the problems of the past. Historical matters must be dealt with, and cannot be swept under the proverbial rug. No matter how unpleasant the task was for David – and it was a very unpleasant task to impale the 7 descendants of Saul so they would cough their guts out to death – it was David's responsibility to deal with this matter from the past.
- 5) In both the example of Saul and of David, the actions of leaders have wide consequences. In ancient Israel, as the leader went, so did the nation. God-fearing kings led to national revivals. Pagan kings led to national apostasy. Nations do reflect the actions of their leaders, and one could almost say that leaders reflect the zeitgeist of their era. The lesson for leaders today is that how they live their lives – public and private – has immense consequences for themselves, their families, and those they serve. In that context, where the Heavenly Watchers record everything, leaders are called to be transparent with God about who they really are, and to continually seek His grace and forgiveness and guidance in order that those they lead may be blessed through their leadership.
- 6) This story is a web of covenants. The Gibeonites had entered into a covenant with Joshua and the Israelites. Saul acted in willful disregard for that covenant. David knew of that covenant, but had not acted to either uphold or destroy it. David had however entered into a covenant with Jonathan to protect Jonathan's family, and in this particular story, David spared Mephibosheth, Johnathan's son, out of regard for the covenant with Johnathan. No leader is an entirely free agent. In the Catholic world, the Pope has alleged infallibility when speaking officially on matters of doctrine, but he is profoundly restrained by the previous statements on doctrine going back many centuries, supposedly made with infallibility, which severely restrict the current Pope's room for maneuver. Likewise, God-fearing leaders today recognize that they are not completely free agents, but operate within a web of covenant relationships, and must uphold those covenant relationships. When leaders break or act in disregard for covenant relationships / agreements, invariably it is the innocent who suffer, including any who were relying on the underlying covenant relationship for some aspect of their own life, work and ministry.

And so our Discover B Study ended with a profound thankfulness to God for revealing so many lessons on leadership through a passage that seemed at first glance to be a barren wasteland. These are only the lessons that the Spirit impressed on my heart, and around our group there were many more lessons. Truly, God does speak to all through His word, and impresses His will for them at this time as they reflect honestly and openly on His revelation of Himself through time.

May God grant us the discernment to perceive His will for us in His Word and the courage to be obedient to His will day by day.

Kind regards, and have a blessed Sabbath!

Conrad.

