

2nd Samuel Ch 21

Vs 1

Now because of the reference of Saul, and the fact that he's been out of the equation for some 30-40 years there are those who want to rationalize this and say that this must've happened early on in the life of David's reign. And it's recorded here sort of like the "Lost episodes" of David's life that were found in a vault somewhere and shown years later for your viewing pleasure. And they say it's because they just can't see or understand why God would wait 30-40 yrs before bringing this thing full circle and confronting the nation with the ramifications of Saul's sin. But I don't agree with that and this is why, I see no problem with God giving a span of time for the nation to repent of the wicked deeds that they've engaged in as represented in Saul.

In Nehemiah chapter 9 we read where the Lord is ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, *slow to anger*, and abundant in kindness. David recorded in Ps 145:8, "*The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy.*" And I for one am glad that God will (in His mercy) at times not bring immediate judgment upon me when I somehow sin, or lash out in a way that I shouldn't have, but that He gives me space to repent, and respond to the conviction of His Spirit. In the days of Noah God gave the world no less than 100 years (as Noah was building the ark, and preaching righteousness to the people) to repent. We know that God gave the land of Canaan 400 years to repent of their wickedness before He issued the decree to Moses and Joshua that they were to be completely eradicated and ultimately eliminated from the face of the earth in that they'd filled up the wine cup of the wrath of God and it was time for them to drink of the wrath of God. And so we know that God give peoples and nations time to repent of their deeds, things done wrong, actions taken that are out of sync with His will and His ways. And so there's no discrepancy here, or reason to believe that just because it's been 30-40 yrs since Saul has been dead that God couldn't give to Israel a generation of time to repent of Saul's dishonorable deeds.

And so having established that there are some things in this vs that we want to look at and consider, because there are some things that we can glean that will hopefully serve to help us in practical ways if we can but learn from what we see here. And the 1st thing that grabs my attention is the solid balance that David seemed to have on the spiritual vs the practical. There was a famine in the land, drought, no rain, dry times, perhaps you know the feeling. But David didn't immediately freak out and begin to wonder what they'd done wrong or why God was judging them. Now God had told them in the law that if they responded to Him and His word in obedience that He would bless their nation, but if they disobeyed or somehow violated their relationship with Him that it would bring about a curse. And in the 28th Ch of the book of Duet we find that the Lord said that because of the wickedness of their doings in which they had forsaken Him, "*...your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron.*" Deut 28:23 Or to understand that another way, famine, dry times will be one aspect of God's judgment in their lives, and until they confess that (whatever it may be) and make atonement for that, the waters that give them life, and sustenance, and refreshing times will be dried up. Dry times will visit them in their sin.

And so that's both a practical and a spiritual application for us, we see it practically in their lives, but spiritually this can happen in our lives, if you're dealing with unconfessed and unresolved sin and dry times are upon your life, perhaps it's time to take inventory. Because the bible is clear that sin separates us from God, and when we're separated from God in our sin then it stands to reason that the living waters of His Holy Spirit which are constantly renewing and refreshing us will dry up.

Now that's not to say that you're no longer saved, but that there's been a breach in the relationship, it's like taking a water hose and placing a kink in it. The water's still there, still desiring to flow, but I've somehow restrained and constrained it by my actions. And so if there's a famine in the land of your heart and your life, perhaps it's time that you inquire of the Lord, and like David you say, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.*" Ps 139:23-24

Now if you're harboring sin in your heart and in your life, that's a no brainer, give it God, repent of it, and get right, but I'm taking the notion that I'm not sure *why* this dry time is upon me. And so, "Lord, if there's something that I'm doing, or have done, or said, some action that I've taken that I need to repent of because it wasn't of you, some emotion that I'm entertaining or whatever, than show me Lord, I want to make it right." And here's the deal, if you approach the Lord in that manner, than we need to be prepared to take action upon what He reveals to us, that's what we're learning here. David didn't learn of this situation and then go, "Well, what's that to me? It may've been wrong but say la vi, that's life, and bygones are bygones," no he took immediate action upon what the Lord revealed to Him. So if there's been dry times visiting your life lately, and it's been for no small period of time, perhaps it's time to begin inquiring of the Lord, and preparing yourself to take action on what He reveals to you.

But that's another thing I want you to see here, David didn't over spiritualize every thing that came into his life, sometimes things happen, and we don't walk by feelings but by faith and sometimes the Lord will allow that sensation of His presence to be with drawn from us, just so that we can learn to walk by faith. It's not that there's sin, or any rebellion in our hearts, the Lord is simply growing maturing us, and it can be a difficult lesson, but I want you to notice that the 1st year of famine, David didn't inquire of the Lord regarding it. And I'm not trying to advocate that there are times when it's unnecessary to seek the Lord, but what I am saying is that David recognized that not every seeming negative thing that came into his life had spiritual connotations. Sometimes the rain comes, sometimes they don't, it doesn't mean I'm walking any closer, or am somehow more distant from the Lord. Now surely the situation was a concern to David, but he didn't immediately freak out and think that he was in trouble with the Lord because dry times came into his life. But what's the lesson, don't just ignore it and let it go, and let it go, there's point of concern, whereby I need to be seriously inquiring of the Lord, because this has the potential to go bad for a lot of people.

And so the balance, David didn't immediately suspect sin, but he didn't delay either when he realized that there may be more to this than simple weather patterns and high and low pressure systems. Sometimes there's high pressure in your life, other times it's low right? But when it dried up altogether and things were at a point of problematic potential, David went right to the Lord.

And notice, "The Lord answered," (underline that) if you're looking to be made right with the Lord, and you inquire of Him regarding an issue in your life that may be out of sync, if you really want to know and are prepared to take action, the Lord will reveal it to you. And the Lord told David here, (read last ½ vs 1).

Now we don't have record of Saul's doing this outside of its mention here, but this brings up further points of interest for us. One thing that we see here, that is a theme often repeated throughout scripture is that my sin, and your sin, impacts and affects other people's lives. This is something that Saul had done a generation or so ago, and yet it's affects are rippling throughout the entire nation towards the end of even David's reign.

What's the point, don't be deceived whatever a man sows that will he reap, and though it may seem as though you or I are getting away with something for the moment, God is very aware, and will call us to account in due season.

But why is God so upset with Saul's dealing with the Gibeonites? Weren't they to totally and completely eradicate all the inhabitants of the Promised Land? Yes, but do you recall what happened there in Joshua Ch 9 some 400 yrs before David's time? Joshua was busy about the business of taking the inhabitants out of the land as God had commanded, Jericho had fallen, Ai had been taken out, and the Gibeonites were just over the next ridge sort of a thing and so when they heard what was happening they grabbed some guys set them up like ambassadors of a far away country. And they took these old dried out wineskins, and ratty old patched together sandals, some bread that was as moldy and hard as they could find, clothes that looked like they should've been burned long ago. And they rode over to the camp of Israel and met up with Joshua. And they said, we've come from a far away country, and having heard about the Red Sea event and the deliverance from Egyptians and all, we want to make a covenant of peace with you. And Joshua said, well, the Lord has forbidden that we should make a covenant with any of the inhabitants of the land. And they said, "Oh, we're from a far away country, see these shoes? They were brand new when we took off, these wineskins were fresh, the bread still warm in our hands, look how moldy it is, and these clothes were straight out of the market the day we took off to come to you, that's how far we've traveled."

And we read there where Joshua and his men observed their supplies so to speak, but didn't ask counsel of the Lord, and based upon their own judgment considering how things looked, they made a covenant of peace with them. 3 Days later they learned that they were the people who were next on the hit list camping just over the next ridge, and so they rode over to them and said, "You guys deceived us!" And Joshua tried to make things right, and said, "We'll protect you just as we said, but you're going to be our wood cutters and our water carriers." And they said, "Hey, that's real fine, we just don't want to be killed."

So even though the Lord didn't want them to make any covenants, once they did, He expected them to keep it. Because they're the representatives of the Lord, and once the Lord has spoken something, it's a done deal, the Lord doesn't relent from His word. Therefore His people aren't to go back on their word, but Saul here had gone back on the covenant that Israel had made with the Gibeonites. But the fact is, God expects us to keep our word, to keep our promises, even if it's to our own hurt. The bible says that the Lord honors the one, "*...who swears to his own hurt and does not change;*" Ps 15:4 And I know that this is an elementary point but one that needs to be reiterated in the day and age in which we live, God expects us to keep our word! If you make a business deal with someone, and then someone else makes you a better offer, stick to your word. If you're married to someone, you've given them your word, till death do you part, and taking for granted there's no biblical violations there, stick to your word. I mean so many people get married and then they want out because it's no longer convenient, or they're unable to do all that they want to do because they're married, or perhaps the person isn't everything they originally supposed them to be, you stood before God saying that you pledged your life to that person, now keep your word. "Well that was years ago, Jeff." Big deal, Israel gave their word 400 years prior to this, time doesn't erase promises, people think their word has an expiration date on it like a gallon of milk or something. "My word is good if used by such and such a date." No, once you give your word, God expects you to fulfill it. On a personal level, and on a national level, right now our nation has made a pledge to Iraq, to see this new regime through, now should that pledge have been made?

I don't know, that's open to debate, but once it's been made, we do well before God to follow through, Saul thought perhaps that since that covenant was made hundreds of years ago it was null and void, but God says, "No." Time doesn't diminish the validity of a covenant, and Because the Lord expects us to keep our word, we can trust that He'll keep His. And aren't you glad that a couple thousand years removed, God doesn't say, "That whole covenant through Jesus thing, that was a long time ago, I'm done honoring that, you guys are on your own." Now God had commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites, and he wouldn't do *that*, but for whatever reason he opted to do some ethnic cleansing in Israel and eradicate the Gibeonites. He liked to give away land to reward his men for services rendered and so perhaps it was the Gibeonites land that he was giving to them, but either way after this span of time that the nation didn't repent of Saul's actions, now they're faced with the consequences. And so David inquired of the Lord, the Lord told him the deal, and so Vs2.

Now zeal can often be a good thing, but misguided zeal can be a dangerous thing, this is zeal that's not according to knowledge, and so even good intentions followed by sinful actions don't justify the actions. Obviously it's better to have good intentions than wicked intentions, but good intentions don't justify sinful actions. And again we're seeing here that the moment the Lord revealed to David what was wrong, he took action upon it, took the necessary measures to correct the situation.

Vs3-6

So David goes to the Gibeonites and says, "What do I need to do to make this right." And they say, "Well, we're not going to file a class action suit and demand billions of dollars as retribution for the massacre of our people, nor do we want an eye for an eye, we really don't want you to just kill some folks to get even." And David says, "Then ask what you will and I'll do it." And they say, "We want 7 of Saul's descendants hung up before the Lord in Saul's home town, and even as he tried to destroy our people, so may his name be taken from the earth." (Sort of a thing), and so David says, "Ok, I'll give them to you."

Now a lot of people would take issue with this, why should these innocent men be executed for Saul's sins? 1st of all we don't know that they're innocent, vs 1 tells us plainly that it wasn't solely Saul, but that he had a bloodthirsty house as well. In other words there were men around him, in his family that were all about it as well. Whether they took part directly as the young executioners, or perhaps approved of Saul's actions or benefited somehow from the spoil, and so it's possible that these 7 men had a direct, or indirect part in Saul's actions to say the least.

But another way we can view this is as God's own way of doing for David what he refused to do for himself. It was the custom at this time that when one dynasty fell to another, that everyone in the house of the fallen dynasty would be wiped out. Because that way you would eliminate the potential for rival threats to the throne, and sure enough some of the trouble that David had to endure during his reign came from guys of the household of Saul. Be it Shimei, or Sheba the Benjamite or whoever, and so the Lord is removing or at least allowing the removal of Saul's household to further establish David's throne.

And I don't want to tell you all that besides all that this was just how they did it in those days, but this is just how they did things those days. This was no surprise to David; it wasn't at all unusual to punish the household of a man, on the behalf *of* that man. Saul was gone, but his heritage is being punished through his descendants. So these 7, perhaps innocent men, would die on the behalf of the guilty, so that God's blessing might be poured out upon His people once again.

Vs7-9

Now this phrase here, “Before the Lord,” is to say, “In approval of the Lord.” Which is to say, this isn’t human sacrifice, but legally recognized and approved retribution in the sight of the Lord. And the method of execution is relevant, there’s a reason they weren’t stoned, or beheaded or whatever, and the premise is found in Deut 21:23 which says, “... *he who is hanged is accursed of God.*” So they deliberately placed these 7 (which happens to be the # of completion) supposedly innocent men in the place of being accursed, so that the curse that was upon them would be satisfied in, and come upon these men. So the idea is that these men, 7 in # would complete, or fulfill the curse upon Israel, thereby allowing the blessing of God to rest upon them once again.

Vs10

So Rizpah takes sackcloth and makes a little sun shelter out of it kinda like that little flap that sticks out of the front of a tent. And she protects the decaying bodies of her sons, and these other 5 men, for 6 straight months, refusing to let any birds feed on them, or wild animals ravage them, until the rain comes again. She refused to let the bodies of these men be further disgraced in their deaths than what they’d already been in having to bear the sins of Saul. The Gibeonites let them sit out there and rot before all the people, and she refused to allow disgrace upon disgrace, and we read here that she did this until she received the answer from the Lord, until she knew their deaths were not in vain, but that the curse had been lifted and the rains came again. And the Lord did just that, He brought the rains again.

Vs 11-14

In other words David was touched by this mother’s fortitude and determination to honor what these guys went through for their nation, and he went and got Saul’s bones, and the bones of Jonathon and gather all these guys together and gave them a special burial in Saul’s ancestral home. God honored, these men hanging, accursed on the behalf of the nation, that He might fulfill His covenant of blessing towards them. And of course the analogy is obvious, we’ve all sinned and fall short of the glory of God, we’re the ones who’ve sinned, but the innocent One Jesus Christ hung on a tree, the cross for you and me, and in so doing absorbed the curse that had been imputed to us. He became accursed of God, that we might be blessed of God in Him, the innocent, dying on the behalf of the guilty.

Vs 15-17

“David, you’re getting to old for this stuff, when you were a bit younger, you could handle it, but you need to retire.” He’s like 65 yrs old-perhaps older, he just can’t do it all himself like he used to. Couple things briefly here and then we’re done, #1 Notice David is still fighting giants towards the end of his life. Perhaps you’re thinking, “I’ve been a Christian now for 2 yrs, or 10 yrs, or 25 yrs, when does it start getting easier. Answer, it doesn’t in this life, and that’s not to discourage you, but to encourage you, so that you won’t be bummed because things are difficult for you, you’ll be fighting giants you’re entire life, and so will I. The fight is over when we’re in the presence of the Lord, but until then there’s ground to take for the kingdom and it’s not always going to be easy, that’s why it’s called the good, “fight” because it’s a struggle.

But 2^{ndly} we see here that God will allow us to be placed in those positions purposefully at times whereby we have to rely on the strength of others around us. And we don't like those positions, they're definitely humbling to say the least, but the bible is clear, *"Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up."* Eccl 4:9-10 And again, *"Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him."* Eccl 4:12

And so there are those times when the Lord will allow us to be placed into those positions whereby we need the strength of other godly brothers or sisters to come to our aid in time of personal weakness, those people who will rally around us, and help hold us up. And David submitted to the wisdom that they gave to him, it's time for him to retire, and focus on the kingdom, not be the sole killer of giants.

Vs18-22

The point being that God was still raising up men to carry on the work, even though David himself wasn't personally apart of it. Sometimes we look at these great lamps in our time, the godly leaders that have sort of forged the way for us. And we think, "Man what's going to happen when the Lord calls Chuck Smith home, or Billy Graham home?" I'll tell you what's going to happen, God's going to continue to raise up godly men to carry the torch, it's no dilemma for Him, David was doing it before, but now there's 4 other guys busy about it. And so the work is continuing on in a multiplied way, 1 giant killer in David, but as he's preparing to pass from the scene we see 4 others taking his place.

So it's no worries for the Lord, and when it says here, "These 4 were born to the giant" the Hebrew more literally says, "Were born to the Raphah" which is to say they belonged to the race of the giants. And obviously it seems as though they were in someway related to Goliath, be it his sons, or his brother or whatever. And to me, though some explain 5 stones that David selected for his confrontation with Goliath as David trusting in God, yet being practical just the same and being prepared, doing his best, committing the rest kind of a thing. I personally believe that we have right here the reason he chose 5. One was for Goliath, and the other 4 were for his family should they choose to enter the battlefield, David had every confidence in God that day to take down that giant. And you and I can have the same confidence in the Lord, so as we say so often, trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, seek counsel of Him, and He will direct your paths, and take care of your life.