

Lesson 5 5 March 2013

The Land Is Cleansed

Lesson Scope: [2 Samuel 21](#)

Lesson Focus

The final chapters of 2 Samuel are somewhat of an appendix to the story of David's life. It was likely near the beginning of David's reign that a three-year famine took place. This famine triggered the events recorded in this lesson. David was apparently struck by the unusualness of the famine and asked direction from the Lord, who revealed that the actions of Saul and his sons toward the Gibeonites was the cause.

Several hundred years prior, Joshua had made a league with the Gibeonites, solemnly promising to protect them instead of destroying them as they otherwise would have. God honored this covenant. In breaking it by slaying some of the Gibeonites, Saul defiled the land with innocent blood. God was displeased with this misguided zeal and allowed a natural disaster to occur to bring this deed to judgment. Only after David corrected the situation could Israel again enjoy peace and plenty.

This account clearly shows how God views the shedding of innocent blood. No people or nation can ultimately escape God's judgment when sins such as this go unpunished.

Shedding of innocent blood defiles the land. God requires atoning blood to cleanse the land of this pollution. This historical account of David dealing with the crimes of the former king has implications that can still affect modern societies. Today, bloodshed through homicide, genocide, and infanticide (abortion) is rampant; yet nations are pushing to abolish capital punishment and legalize abortion. They try to appease totalitarian regimes through diplomacy or even simply by ignoring them. We must always understand that capital punishment for the shedding of innocent blood was a God-given directive in the Law, and when societies neglect to punish the shedding of innocent blood, it reveals a cheapening of life and sets nations up for judgment, as history has repeatedly shown. We must stress the sacredness of life, which is the whole reason for laws such as this. It may be good to include a discussion about safe-

ty laws, responsible driving, and so forth, as protecting human life should be our first priority.

Lesson Aim: To discover principles related to cleansing the land from defilement.

Theme Verse: [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.

Lesson Text

The Land Defiled

[2 Samuel 21:1-2](#) 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. ² And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites *were* not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.)

The Land Purged

[2 Samuel 21:3-9](#) 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. 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*. 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 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: 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.

The Land Blessed

2 Samuel 21:10-14 ¹⁰ And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. ¹¹ And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. ¹² And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabeshgilead, which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: ¹³ And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. ¹⁴ And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land.

Questions for Study

The Land Defiled

1. What purpose did the famine serve?
2. Why did Saul desire to slay the Gibeonites? Why was this wrong?

The Land Purged

3. Was the Gibeonites' request a desire for revenge? Explain.
4. What Old Testament Law was satisfied by the execution of Saul's sons (Numbers 35:33)?
5. What responsibilities has God assigned to civil authorities? to the church?

The Land Blessed

6. What do Rizpah's and David's actions reveal about their attitude toward the dead?
7. Why is it important to have a proper attitude toward the dead? Lesson

Analyzing the Passage

No other account in the Scriptures records the events of this lesson. The exact timing and the way in which Saul sought to destroy the Gibeonites are not known. The fact that the bones of Saul and Jonathan were also buried at this time suggests that it was early in David's reign.

The Law prohibited the punishment of the son for the sins of the father (Deuteronomy 24:16). This leads to the belief that these descendants of Saul were chosen for execution because they had taken part in the slaughter of the innocent. God also referred to Saul's "bloody house."

Sons (21:6) can include sons or grandsons.

In Middle Eastern and Oriental history, this method of execution by hanging was done by first executing the offender, and then hanging or crucifying the dead body until it rotted, thus dishonoring the offender and adding great humiliation to the death penalty. Rizpah sought to lessen the disgrace upon her sons by protecting the bodies from scavengers.

David spared Jonathan's son Mephibosheth (21:7) because of the oath he had made. He was more faithful in keeping a covenant than Saul was.

Principles and Applications

The Land Defiled

1. The shedding of innocent blood defiles the land (21:1). Shedding innocent blood is destroying human life, which God considers sacred. After Cain slew Abel, the Lord told Cain that "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10). Murder that is not avenged defiles the land, leaving a debt of judgment that must eventually be paid. In this way whole societies may become ripe for God's judgment.

2. Shedding innocent blood and breaking covenants bring God's wrath (21:1, 2). God's long-suffering and mercy alone explain the reason for the delay of judgment that certainly will come for all the wanton taking of innocent life. No people or nations who commit such deeds will go unpunished.

Considering the value God places on human life will cause us to avoid careless risk. We must drive responsibly, keep shields in place on our equipment, provide proper banisters, and cover openings in floors.

3. Breaking a covenant is a breach of moral integrity (21:2). By slaughtering the Gibeonites, Saul became guilty of breaking a covenant as well as of murder. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou halt vowed" (Ecclesiastes 5:4). We are responsible to fulfill the vows that we make. Vows made to God, such as baptismal or marriage vows, should be held especially sacred.

The Land Purged

4. Cleansing the land from defilement requires atonement (21:3). God introduced the concept of capital punishment after the Flood (Genesis 9:6). Governments are authorized to mete out this punishment (Romans 13:1-7). If they fail to execute justice, God will settle the account by whatever means He sees best. Nonresistant Christians cannot administer civil justice, but they are content to let the matter in God's hands.

5. The blood of the guilty is required to appease God's wrath (21:5, 6). The Gibeonites' request was consistent with the Law, which states that the land cannot be cleansed of bloodshed except by the blood of the guilty (Numbers 35:33). The cities of refuge protected only those who caused accidental deaths, not intentional manslaughter. Justice is an attribute of God; therefore, the guilty must die. If a person commits murder, he can be forgiven through the provisions of Calvary if he repents. However, he may still have to pay the price of civil justice.

6. Cleansing is effected when God's direction is followed (21:7-9). Only after the death of Saul's sons could the land have relief from famine. God's wrath was appeased, and the nation of Israel could again experience His blessing on them.

Today, many societies have little respect for the laws of God. Capital punishment is often questioned for its supposed cruelty, and many would want it totally abolished. However, a nation that does not deal with crime according to God's way will eventually face His judgment.

The Land Blessed

7. Cleansing the land involves showing respect for the dead by an honorable burial (21:12-14). Acknowledging divine ownership causes one to respectably care for the dead. Today, cremation is a popular practice. We do not believe this is an honorable way to dispose of the human body. In many cases, those who choose this method do so in open defiance of God and denial of bodily resurrection and eternal judgment.

Man is created in the image of God. Expressing light attitudes about death destroys respect for human life and for the Creator of life.

8. Cleansing the land satisfies the justice of God and brings His blessing (21:14). God is satisfied when man follows His direction in cleansing the land from the shedding of innocent blood. Responding favorably to God's chastening on the land will gain His favor and restore equilibrium in the land and bring peace among men.

Important Teachings

1. The shedding of innocent blood defiles the land (21:1).
2. Shedding innocent blood and breaking covenants bring God's wrath (21:1, 2).
3. Breaking a covenant is a breach of moral integrity (21:2).
4. Cleansing the land from defilement requires atonement (21:3).
5. The blood of the guilty is required to appease God's wrath (21:5, 6).
6. Cleansing is effected when God's direction is followed (21:7-9).
7. Cleansing the land involves showing respect for the dead by an honorable burial (21:12-14).
8. Cleansing the land satisfies the justice of God and brings His blessing (21:14).

Answers to Questions

1. What purpose did the famine serve?

God sent famine as a chastisement on the nation of Israel to bring to attention the injustices the Gibeonites suffered at the hand of Saul.

2. Why did Saul desire to slay the Gibeonites? Why was this wrong?

The Gibeonites were not true Israelites, and it seems he had a patriotic zeal to protect the interests of Israel as a nation and may have considered any outsider a threat. It was wrong because of the covenant between Israel and the Gibeonites that had been established over four hundred years before.

3. Was the Gibeonites' request a desire for revenge? Explain.

Probably not. If they desired revenge, they would not have been quiet about it for so long. It seems that they understood that atonement was needed to cover the shedding of innocent blood and that this was the only solution for the national distress Israel was experiencing.

4. What Old Testament Law was satisfied by the execution of Saul's

sons (Numbers 35:33)?

God had planned that any shedding of innocent blood needed to be atoned for by the blood of the murderer. Hanging the sons of Saul was necessary to appease God.

5. What responsibilities has God assigned to civil authorities? to the church?

God has ordained the civil government to mete out punishment for crimes against society.

The nonresistant church cannot take part in the justice systems of civil authorities. Instead, the church is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Her mission is to free people from sin through salvation, not to punish people for sin.

6. What do Rizpah's and David's actions reveal about their attitude toward the dead?

Rizpah, in protecting the bodies of the dead, and David, in gathering the bones of Saul and his sons and burying them in the family sepulcher, demonstrated a proper respect for the dead. David's actions also show his compassion and sympathy for the family of the dead and a desire to help them to properly dispose of the bodies of their loved ones.

7. Why is it important to have a proper attitude toward the dead?

To show respect toward the dead is to acknowledge the life that preceded death, which is a gift from the Creator. Other forms of disposing of the dead, such as cremation, often accompany a lack of respect for or open defiance of God. Belief in the resurrection of the saints helps us understand that the burial of the dead in Christ is merely temporal, as they "shall rise first" at the coming of our Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

Summarizing the Lesson

"For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain" (Isaiah 26:21). At the culmination of time, the Lord will require all unsettled accounts to be exposed and will judge them accordingly. "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy" (Revelation 16:5, 6).

Research Guide

1. *Bible History, Old Testament*, by Alfred Edersheim, may offer interesting insights to this passage.
2. Numbers 35:9-34 gives laws concerning murder.