

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 2 Samuel 20 as we continue our journey through the historical books and the stories that God wants us to consider.

A couple of different directions we're heading in tonight. We are finishing chapter 20 which will give us the end of a story that we began several chapters ago, and I'll kind of summarize it for us in a couple of minutes. And then chapter 21 through the end of the book are individual teachings that God gives to us from David's life - much of them early on in his life, a couple from later on - but they're not any longer in chronological order nor do they fit the narratives in the sense of chronology or times of years. In fact, we won't go back to chronology after chapter 20 until 1 Kings 1 and 2, where we find David losing his life and then his son, Solomon, coming to the throne for forty years. So, chapter 20 goes with what's come before, and chapter 21 stands on its own two feet.

If you've been with us, David is a man after God's own heart. We've pointed out to you that narratives are meant to be learned by standing next to the characters involved. God tells us the stories; you put yourself in their shoes, and you learn with them. We don't always get all the information we would like. God gives us what He wants us to consider. The questions you just kind of have to leave as questions. We can't really fill in the blanks for you because I don't know....unless the Bible tells us.

But one of the things we learned about David - he was certainly a man after God's own heart because he was willing to forgive quickly. He didn't, for the most part, keep much of a record of wrongs. When he fell, he got up pretty quickly and said, "God forgive me," except for that incident with Bathsheba which took well over a year to confront him with his sin. David was a guy that either was really wrong or really right, and when he found out he was really wrong - and there were some definite wrong periods in his life - God continued to take care of him and strengthen him even though he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Which ought to be pretty encouraging to us. You know, you mess things up, and you think God's done with you, and then you go, "Oh, He wasn't done with David." And so He's probably not done with you either. He'll continue to use you, He'll continue to work with you. And God's very patient.

On the negative side for David, he loved women, got married a lot, had terrible homes and didn't do much as a disciplinarian or a father, a parent. The sin with Bathsheba, which took place when he was probably about 50 years old, was a disaster - disaster for his family, a disaster for his life, disaster for his rule. God continued to bless David, and when David repented and when he was confronted a year later, he knew that the consequences in his life would be real. The LORD said, "You've done some things in secret. I'm going to do them to you publicly and openly, and you're going to suffer for them, and you're going to pay the price (and your family) for the things that you've done." And indeed he had.

So, a lot of these last seven-eight chapters talk about the fallout of David's sin. Now understand David had repented years earlier. This wasn't an issue of unrepentance anymore. This was an issue of consequence. And God saw fit to give to us the consequence in great detail but also His blessings upon David continuously. By the time we got to the last couple of chapters where David's son, Absalom, after years of being isolated from his father - first because his father didn't deal with the rape of his sister by a half-brother, then exiled to Syria, then back without any kind of meeting, and finally when the meeting took place, it was just cold and ugly - Absalom decided he would overthrow his father, and he was almost able to get away with it except God had other plans. So David, as angry as he was with his son - the alienation that had taken place for seven or eight years - God continued to bless David, and yet this unresolved family relationship was not good for anyone. Absalom eventually got enough forces together. In his overthrow, David had to leave Jerusalem (in his early 60's). He would die at 70. He left the kingdom, his family, the prestige, the ark, the priests, his friends behind, and he went to the wilderness, thinkin', "Hey, if this is how God wants to get rid of me, that's fine." He hadn't done anything wrong at this point; this was just fallout. And so he took it in a godly manner, with great trust, great faith in the LORD. We told you, as we went through there, some of the psalms that David had written during that time - I hope you wrote them down - and the consequences of the sin, though. But David wasn't about to presume on God's restorative power. He left and said, "If God wants me back, I'll come back." As we know from the story, Absalom eventually was killed - killed by Joab, David's nephew through his sister; was told not to do that, did it anyway, and we find out that Joab was a pretty mean guy. We're going to get through some of that tonight. But needless to say, David would come home, and yet he would suffer. He did the right thing. He trusted the LORD in everything he did. The consequences were years later, and yet he hurt, he suffered. Things don't go away so easily all the time.

Before David comes back to the town fully, the antagonism between David's Judah tribe and those in the North that, for the most part, had stood with Saul's family in the rebellion and Absalom, was already building up. Israel actually sent to David in the wilderness the northern group and said, "Come home, David. We'd love to have you." They, I think, did so because they were afraid they had picked the wrong side, and now they were exposed. Eventually his own tribe said, "Yes, please come home." David was a little hurt that they hadn't been the first ones to write. But I only mention that to you because it is the framework for chapter 20, and it is also what boils over forty years down the road when Solomon dies. So all of that tension that started here will boil over forty years from now - that will lead to the division of the kingdom where the Jews really have only had three kings over a united kingdom before this big schism takes place.

So, if you go back to chapter 19:40, we read, "Now the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. And all the people of Judah" (those are the folks of his tribe) "escorted the king, and also half the people of Israel" (in the North). "Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, 'Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David's men with him across the Jordan?' So the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, 'Because the king is a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?' And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, 'We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more right to David than you. Why then do you despise us - were we not the first to advise bringing back our king?' Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel." So there was already this division and this struggle between the two, which is where we'll pick up the story tonight.

When we get to chapter 11 of 1 Kings (it won't be that far), when we get to Kings we're gonna go a lot faster. We're gonna do four and five chapters a night because the stories are more compact, and we want you to get the full effect of them. But I plan to bring you lists and handouts (that I think you should keep in your study notes) of all of the kings in the North and in the South - when they were elected or began to rule, who they were related to, how they died, how long they ruled, were they a good king or a bad king, where do you find them in the Scriptures. And if you get those in your notes, along with a couple of other things we'll give you, I think the rest of the Bible goes fine for you. Because after these historical books, all of the Prophets fit into the times of the Kings and the Chronicles. So all you

have to do is kind of fold your Bible in half, and those Prophets, at some point, are gonna fit into the stories that we're gonna learn, especially in Kings and Chronicles. So you get that down, I think you'll have the Prophets, and you'll understand the context in which they were delivered, and I think the Bible will get a lot smaller for you. And just the four or five charts that you can take with you and keep them in your Bible and learn from there and get the dates and the times right, and I think we'll have you well on your way to learning the Old Testament. So it'll be a good resource for you, and I hope that you'll come and commit yourself to doing that work.

All right. So let's pick up tonight chapter 20:1. And we'll go through this chapter and then look at that stand-alone chapter 21. We read, "And there happened to be there a rebel," (now we just read the division between the North and the South) "whose name was Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite." (In other words, he came from the tribe of Saul.) "And he blew a trumpet, and said: 'We have no share in David, nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!' So every man of Israel" (in the northern area) "deserted David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah, from the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, remained loyal to their king." So in the midst of this.....poor David. He's been walkin' with the LORD, but, man, he can't get a break. In the midst of this death of his son, rebellion of a lot of people, the disloyalty, this king who's been a king for thirty-five years or so, kind of goes to the sunset of his life with another civil contention that arose because there's this opportunist named Sheba who decided hey, he could rebel; maybe he'll be the next one to lead the charge.

Whenever you find crowds that are discontented, I guess the door is always open for a selfish, ambitious ruler to rise. You'll see a lot of that in the years to come in the Bible. Years earlier, in fact just days and weeks earlier (if you go back to chapter 19), the northern group of Israelites had proclaimed their loyalty to David. "Come home. We can't wait to have you rule over us. You delivered us. We forgot about how you stood with us all those years, and we weren't very faithful to you. We have ten shares in you" (we just read). All of the things that you'd want to hear. But then the minute they get an opportunity to rebel, the agenda now reveals their hearts. It reminded me of the crowds on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21). You remember them. "Hosanna. Save now. Let Your donkey walk over my jacket. We welcome you with open arms." And it wasn't five days later that we heard (Matthew 27), "Give us Barabbas. We have no king but Caesar. We will not have this Man to rule over us. His blood, may it be upon us and upon our children." Same

crowd. Five days. They picked sides. They picked the winning side, they thought. That's what Israel had done here. They picked the winning side with Absalom. Absalom lost. "Oh, sorry. We love you, David." Got another leader? "Oh, we hate you, David." The crowds are fickle, aren't they? You gotta be careful about running with the crowd. But there's nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

So Satan finds another trumpet to contend with, and through selfishness and through pride, poor David is now having to face the next consequence of years of problems. And yet he'd been faithful many years. There's that balance, isn't there? Judah was the only group who stayed faithful to David. Remember God had called David, raised up David, returned David to the throne. I think it is wise that you submit to those that are over you in the Lord. There's a well-known verse, at least to pastors, in Hebrews 13:17, which says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." So, pick a side, but stay there. Pick where the Lord is, and stay with that. Don't be so open to follow the crowds.

Israel in the North showed their hearts as religious people that were out of step with God, and we will find that to be really a big problem down the road. They had treated Moses kind of the same way. When he came, remember, they were, "Oh, a deliverer has come." And then, when things got harder because Pharaoh pushed back, they wanted Moses to leave. "You brought this all on us. This is all your fault." When they got out into the wilderness, "Oh, we're free." They got to the Red Sea, "Thanks a lot for bringin' us out here to die." They got through that, "Oh, God is so good, and the God of Moses, that's great!" Three days later, there's no water, "Oh, Moses, you're a jerk!" It never stopped, you know? They just jumped from side to side, and when the going got tough and things got worse, Moses suffered. They were moved by sight, by short-term vision, never by faith, tossed to and fro. Don't join folks like that. They were glad to be out of Egypt on Monday, wishing to go back there on Tuesday, said to Moses - actually had the nerve to say, "We were far off better in Egypt." All you have to do is go back and read how life was there. "Oh, we had great dinners and food to eat." Is that true? You made bricks with spit! You really believe that? But the grass is always greener, isn't it, when you're out of step with God.

So, for King David, this was just another nightmare of betrayals and upheaval and rebellion. And it continued to come (kind of) from one tribe, from Saul's group.

Notice we read here, in the first couple of verses, that Sheba was a "rebel." The word "rebel" in Hebrew translates "a man of Belial." The words mean "an empty man" or "a worthless man." Whenever you read the word "Belial" in the Scriptures, that's exactly what the analysis (of the person that it is applied to) meant. His call to Israel was that David was illegitimate, so the nation should all go home. And like stupid sheep with a mob mentality, they do just that. So David comes home from the news that his son had died, that there'd been a big upheaval, and he's welcomed by all of Judah, half of Israel. But the other half is now following a guy that has caused a national emergency and embarrassment to David.

Verse 3, "Now David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten women, his concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in seclusion and supported them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up to the day of their death, living in widowhood." If you've been with us, when Absalom came to the throne, one of the things that the advice of Ahithophel was that he should take some of his dad's wives and sleep with them in public, up on the rooftop, where everyone could see that he had violated these women so that everyone could be concluding that he was in charge. It was a real common practice for heathen nations, certainly never God's intention. But now David comes home, and he takes these ten women, and he now puts them in a position where, for the rest of their lives, they live like widows. The sin continues. Right? The compounding David's, Absalom's.....the fallout doesn't ever stop.

Verse 4, "And the king said to Amasa, 'Assemble the men of Judah for me within three days, and be present here yourself.' So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah. But he delayed longer than the set time which David had appointed him. And David said to" (another one of his nephews, Joab's brother) "Abishai, 'Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom. Take your lord's servants and pursue him, lest he find for himself fortified cities, and escape us.' So Joab's men, with the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all the mighty men, went out after him. And they went out of Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri," this guy that we just met in verses 1 and 2, the leader of this latest rebellion. David had demoted Joab, his nephew, for killing his son. You remember? He had told him not to lay a hand on him. And he had promoted this fellow, Amasa, back in chapter 17:25. Amasa led the rebellion for Absalom. But he figured if he took this guy on to run his army, then everyone who was in the rebellious group would realize they have a chance; they could come back. It was smart on David's part to be very merciful and forgiving. The problem is this fellow, Amasa, was not so wholehearted

with David. And so this gesture of forgiveness and reconciliation didn't last for very long. He sent this fellow out to get his army together so they could go after this latest rebel, but he doesn't really show up at all to do David's bidding. He doesn't get the army together. Nobody seemed to respect him (or at least in David's side). And so David then turns and - waiting too long, he didn't want him to organize - he calls Abishai, Joab's brother (his sister, Zeruah's three kids, those were two of them), and eventually he gets Joab, his brother, to go with him and the family. And they had pull in the army. They were there for a long time. They were influenceable. People looked up to them. They got the army together fairly quickly. So they went out after this fellow, Sheba.

Verse 8, "When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came before them. Now Joab was dressed in battle armor; on it was a belt with a sword fastened in its sheath at his hips; and as he was going forward, it fell out. Then Joab said to Amasa, 'Are you in health, my brother?' And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that was in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not strike him again. Thus he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri." Joab is a heartless guy. He continues his life of godlessness. He removes another possible successor to the throne. He's killed Abner. He killed Absalom. He now kills Amasa. He's going after this other guy as well. I think David had lost influence in Joab's life years earlier because he's the fellow that had put Uriah to the front and had him killed. He had the goods on David, I guess. Amasa was a rebel; not a good guy like Uriah. But David had very little power to deal with these guys, and he didn't. And so Joab had plenty of leeway. So, at the rallying point where the army was to meet, they found this guy, Amasa. Joab takes charge. He did the old, "Oops, I dropped my sword" trick and killed.....and, by the way, Amasa was one of his cousins - 2 Samuel 17:25. That was his cousin. So, pretty brutal. But now Abishai and he go off like two hounds across the country lookin' for a hare.

Verse 11, "Meanwhile one of Joab's men stood near Amasa, and said, 'Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David - follow Joab!' " (Well, if I was in that group, and he's layin' there dead, I'm goin'.) "But Amasa wallowed in his blood in the middle of the highway. And when the man saw that the people stood still, he moved Amasa from the highway to the field and threw a garment over him, when he saw that everyone who came upon him halted. When he was removed from the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. And he went

through all the tribes of Israel to Abel and Beth Maachah and all the Berites. So they were gathered together and also went after Sheba. Then they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth Maachah;" (there in the northern territories) "and they cast up a siege mound against the city, and it stood by the rampart. And all the people who were with Joab battered the wall to throw it down." So they pursued this rebel (from verse 1) to a place named Abel. The word "Abel" means "meadow." The little city that's mentioned here is about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee; it's a very unusual town in the Israeli frontier, even then, that was known for giving good advice and sound counsel. It sounded a little bit like the place Naioth which, years ago, Samuel had had his school of the prophets. So I suspect that this fellow Sheba, who's running for his life because he realizes that didn't work too well (his call in verse 1), runs there maybe for advice. "What do I do now because I really made a mess of it?" In any event, it was a walled city, and the troops, knowing how to fight, knew how to get in. They would build a ramp, they would batter the walls. These folks in town didn't stand a chance. These were warriors.

So we read, in verse 16, as they battered the walls, "Then a wise woman cried out from the city, 'Hear, hear! Please say to Joab, "Come nearby, that I may speak with you."' When he had come near to her, the woman said, 'Are you Joab?' He answered, 'I am.' Then she said to him, 'Hear the words of your maidservant.' And he answered, 'I am listening.' So she spoke, saying, 'They used to talk in former times, saying, "They shall surely seek guidance at Abel," and so they would end disputes. I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?' And Joab answered and said, 'Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city.' So the woman said to Joab, 'Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall.' " (This is a tough woman.) "Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent. So Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem." Wise woman. Can never ignore the wisdom of a woman. And she saved her whole city from ruin. Now, in the Law (Deuteronomy 20:10), it says that if a city is under siege they should be given a chance to surrender before they were destroyed. So I think she came in the wisdom of God's Word. Joab listens to this woman representing the city's history, her

ancestry, pleading that he not eliminate her from the city. He said, "My intentions are not to wipe you out, just to get this one Benjamite who's been against me." And so they had a council meeting - tough council meeting - and they decided one guy's head was worth the whole city, and they went for that. End of story. End of the whole story. End of all that the LORD gives us.

The only thing we have left here, in verses 23-26, is what David is reestablished in Jerusalem. We are given some of his cabinet, folks that were in charge. Joab would be given back to running the army; this is the third time he's been reinstated. Maybe we can learn from David it's not always so good to give your family members jobs. (Laughing) It doesn't always work out so well in the Bible. But anyway, you read there that Joab was the head of the army again. And then there was a fellow who was over the warriors. There was another fellow over the revenue, another guy who was a recorder, a scribe, a couple of priests, a chief minister. And so David's governmental offices were listed there. Well, that brings us to the end of the stories of David. It ends with this putting down of the last rebel until we get to David's death here in about five chapters or so. So that's the end of the historical, political record of David.

And we start, tonight, just one chapter of the four. But this is kind of an appendix in a book. It's just additional insights that the LORD wants to give you from David's life. We can guess when they happened because some of them are dependent upon early in David's life; some of them are dependent upon later. Some of them we can just guess at. There is, in chapter 21 for example, a famine early on in his reign. There is a pestilence that occurred towards the end of his rule. There are some brief notes on his wars with the Philistines and what that was supposed to mean to us. There is a list of David's heroic men. There are a couple of David's psalms that he wrote and then a conclusion to the historical record of David in the first two chapters of 1 Kings. If you want to know more about David, this is all that we get until you go to 1 Chronicles 22-29. So there're nine chapters there, which give you information that isn't found here. It's isolated there by itself. We'll get to it when we go through those books. But if you want to read ahead or want to go back and get the information, just mark that in your Bible, and go read that on your own.

Verse 1 of chapter 21, "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.'

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. 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?' " A couple of things. We know that this had to take place early on in David's ministry. If this had taken place forty years later, whoever would have benefited from the lesson would have been dead. They would have been long gone. They wouldn't remember the treatment of these folks in the least. So we suspect it happened early on, maybe shortly after Saul's death, maybe right after David took Jonathan's son in. But early. It had to happen on the heels of Saul no longer being around. Look at verse 1. A famine, a drought plagued the land, and the famine and the drought plagued the land for some three years. Behind the cause was spiritual. Now I don't know if anybody in the world would have come to that conclusion. Maybe you hear sometimes preachers blame something that we're going through, that the United States, "Well, it's because we've done this, or we've done that," and really I can't argue with you that's right or wrong. I guess if the Lord shows you that, you deal with that. I think the Lord has to show you because we deserve a whole lot more than we're getting, if that's the case. But, in any case, the LORD, dealing in discipline with His people, was angry with David's rulership because nothing had been done to rectify the government's horrible treatment of the Gibeonites which took place under Saul's reign. He wanted them to be made right. He wanted justice to be served. He expected David to bring that justice.

Now, the story of the Gibeonites, if you don't remember, is found way back in Joshua 9. When the LORD brought the children of Israel into the land, He said to them, "Everyone that lives in the land is slated to be destroyed. There're no deals with them. There's no hope for them." The LORD waited until their sin was fulfilled. It was time for judgment, and Israel was going to be the judgment hand of God against the Canaanites and all those other "ites." "However," the LORD said, "if they live outside the parameters of those borders, you can give them an opportunity to submit. They can pay you tribute, they can pay taxes, they can be your servants. You don't really have to wipe them out. But if they fight against you, you certainly should dominate them." So there were two groups of people - those that lived in the land, those that lived outside. Well, the Gibeonites lived right smack in the middle of the land. And as this conquering began with Joshua, as they came into Jericho and all, the Gibeonites went, "Man, they're comin' for us,

and we're gonna be wiped out!" And the rule of God was, "We don't get to survive." So, "Here's our plan. We'll send some people to Joshua. We'll make 'em look old and tired like they've traveled for miles and weeks, and the bread will all be molding, and they'll come and say, 'Oh, Joshua, we heard what God's doing with you, and we don't want to be destroyed. We live way away from you, but we thought we'd come early and make peace. We don't want any trouble. We're peace-loving people, and we recognize your God and you. Will that be all right?' " And Joshua went "high five" and signed a deal with them. Joshua didn't pray, didn't ask God for wisdom, didn't talk to his council of people that he looked up to. He just made a snap call, bad call, and gave these guys a pass. Well, obviously, "They look like they've been traveling, and they look like they're worn out, and they look like they're tellin' the truth, and, boy, they seem real sincere," and he signed a contract with them. The problem is two or three weeks later, as they kept conquering, here are the Gibeonites with that signed document. "Hey, buddy, how you doin'? You can't wipe us out even though God said so because you said we could live and serve you." And Joshua had to go, "LORD, what do I do?" and the LORD said, "We have to honor that. You signed it." And so they took the Gibeonites, and they made them slaves, servants, and they had had that relationship for many years. They lived in the land. They belonged out, but they had made a deal. Joshua had signed God's name to it, if you will, and so they lived in the midst of the people. And they were fine. You don't read of any trouble between them and the children of Israel. In fact, they lived for 400 years through the times of the judges, through the times of 2 Kings, through the times of Samuel. And it wasn't until Saul came to power that he wanted to make a name for himself. And so these folks living in their midst was always kind of "they aren't part of us." So he thought, "Well, I'll just exterminate them, and everyone will love me for it," and he went about to do ethnic cleansing, if you will, or genocide on these people. And that's all we know. All we read here is because he tried to kill the Gibeonites in his zeal for power in Israel. Now, the action of Saul, like I said, is only mentioned here. There's no record of it in the Bible except for this verse. It is interesting to me that when God sent Saul to wipe out the Amalekites (who God was through with, their judgment had come), Saul refused. When Saul thinks he can get a name in a ledger somewhere and honor from the people, he systematically, in his great brutality and in clear violation of God's will, would go to wipe these guys out. So, the LORD said, "You never fixed that, David." The Gibeonites had acquired their status in the land through deceit. But once confirmed by the leader, it was confirmed, and God stood behind it as a binding relationship. When David (in verse 1), after three years, goes to seek the LORD about it, the LORD tells him immediately, "This has been

caused because you have failed to bless or to bring restitution to the surviving members of the Gibeonites for what Saul has done to them."

Verse 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.' 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, 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.' " So, from the mercenary cries that I think David anticipated, the Gibeonites just asked for full spiritual atonement for the violation of the Levitical law. In fact, the only way that you could wipe blood from the earth, according to Leviticus and Numbers 35, was that blood would be shed. It was capital punishment, if you will. No doubt Saul's family and his sons were guilty in the collusion. They are mentioned (in verse 1) as the reason. The house of Saul is guilty. His "bloodthirsty house" we read. So his family was definitely involved in this horrible behavior, if you will. Whenever you read the number seven in the Scriptures - when it isn't just a number - it is always the number of completeness. It is always the number of fulfillment. And in the Bible, apparently these seven who would die was far less suffering than the poor Gibeonites who were just about wiped out by Saul's rage. So capital punishment for murderers brought an end to the famine brought by God.

Verse 7, "But the king spared" (as he began to send people from Saul's family) "Mephibosheth" (which is why we think this is probably after he took him in) "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." (They had promised to each other to take care of his family.) "So the king took Armoni" (the designer, apparently) "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; 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." So David delivers - follow along with me - two sons of Rizpah (Rizpah was one of Saul's concubines) and five sons of Merab, Saul's oldest daughter, who had died and left her children with her daughter, Michal, who, if you remember at all, David was married to at one time. But then, when David was seen to be raised up by the LORD, Dad talked her

into leaving him, and she married someone else. So this was a wife that had abandoned him, and she had five sons from Saul's oldest daughter that she had inherited. So, in the process, David spares Jonathan's child. We are told that the events would be memorized for years, later on. And apparently it was so.

Verse 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." So we are told this event began in the harvest time - early on in the wheat harvest - in April. Remember, it hadn't rained for three years, there had been a famine, there was no ability to grow crops. So as the meager crops began to grow, God would meet them there. Rizpah lamented over the bodies of her dead children; stayed with them outside day and night for months on end, just kind of protecting them.

"And David was told," verse 11, "what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. 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. 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. 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." So, verse 11, David is touched with the grief of this poor woman. The judgment was right. David didn't rejoice in it. I know there're a lot of people that are real big on capital punishment today; they believe the Bible teaches that. I don't think that's something you want to rejoice in, even if it's the right thing to do. And David does something very kind. He goes to Jabesh Gilead, where Saul's and Jonathan's bones had been taken and buried. Remember, others had gone to rescue Saul and his son from the walls of Beth Shan. In fact, if you go to Israel with us next year, we visit the walls of Beth Shan. It's an amazing place. It's been opened up. The whole city is laid bare. It's phenomenal. But anyway, it's towards the north of Israel. And he takes their bones from the place that they had been buried, and he takes their remains, along with Rizpah's two sons and the Benjamites, and he takes them to this elaborate tomb of Saul's father, Kish, and he gives them a very honorable burial, if you will. It hurt David to see people suffer. He had to do what the LORD said was right, but he did it with great kindness and with great mercy. And so, in

doing what the LORD demanded, bringing justice for the Gibeonites, notice, in verse 14, that God then began to heal the land and those that were praying for the famine to be over and the rains to begin. It's an awesome insight to me in the fact that God likes us to make things right, even in a governmental sense.

With that, this chapter kind of ends very quickly as we are told some of the victories of David over the Philistine giants in the land. According to 1 Chronicles 20, the first eight verses (and you can write that in your margin if you're studying), these battles took place shortly after David's sin with Bathsheba. The lesson is fairly clear. Even in the midst of his sinfulness, God was still protecting His people. So though David was going to suffer, not everyone was going to suffer for David's sin. God was going to watch out for them.

So here's what we are told in verse 15. "When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint. Then Ishbi-Benob, who was one of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose bronze spear was three hundred shekels, who was bearing a new sword, thought he could kill David. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah" (David's sister) "came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, 'You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel.' " So David, in his 50's or 60's now, is told, "We can't bring you out here anymore. You're not the guy you once were." Doesn't that sound like most old men? Leading cause of death in old men - thinkin' they're young men. Right? (Laughing) I'm pretty sure that's how that works. Pretty sure that's the way I feel.

Verse 18, "Now it happened afterward that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbechai the Hushathite killed Saph, who was one of the sons of the giant. Again there was war at Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-Oregim the Bethlehemite killed the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. Yet again there was war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number;" (he was a giant!) "and he also was born to the giant. So when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him. These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants." So, like I said, isolated from the first fourteen verses, intended to say to us great victory God gave to David over the Philistine giants.....outnumbered, outpowered, but not forsaken by God.

And because of where it's placed, "David, you're older, don't come out here no more, you're gonna get us killed," we realize it was well after David's fall with Bathsheba, and yet God continued to care for His people even though the leader, the overseer of the people, was not doing well spiritually. Which ought to give you great comfort that God can take care of our country even if our leaders cannot.

One last thing, and I wanted to point it out to you before we stop tonight - verse 1 of chapter 21. I want you to notice, for a minute, the words "and David inquired of the LORD" or, as the NIV said, "David sought the face of the LORD." But notice when he did - after there had been a famine for three years. And then the LORD, to emphasize three years, said, "year after year." So, it seems to be an amazing thing that we oftentimes will wait a long time before we seek God in our distress. Why didn't David pray in the first year, when no rain? "God, where are You?" Or in the second year? But year after year after year. This national calamity had been going on for thirty-six months. This was the third year without adequate crops to feed his people. And yet things were just getting worse. And then we read that the leader - the spiritual head of the land - then goes to say, "LORD, what's goin' on?" and the minute he asks, God says, "Here's what's goin' on." What if he'd have asked a year or two earlier? David waited until desperate times forced him to seek God. And, unfortunately, I think we do that a lot as well. You'll wait until it's way too late rather than seeking the Lord early on. God would immediately reveal, I think, sometimes what's going on. And the question would be - why did David wait so long? When Job was going through his trials, he said (in chapter 10:2) to the LORD, "Please, God, don't condemn me, but show me why You're contending with me." And God responded. So there's something to be said for taking what you're going through to the Lord early, quickly. Not saying that there's always gonna be a cause-and-effect, but there's always gonna be a God who cares and can fix things and who might very well not fix things until you ask. Because until someone asked, He just waited. "No rain this year. No rain again next year. I hope someone's gonna be knockin' on My door pretty soon." And everyone kind of suffered. But David, as the shepherd of God's people, allowed them to suffer without looking up. Why not seek the Lord early on? How much hurt could have been avoided by everyone had he just taken this seriously? That line about, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit, and what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

So I know that God would rejoice in seeing you coming early. I suspect that you can avoid impending doom. But don't wait until it's hangin' over your head and go,

"All I can do now is pray." That's the words of a person that's waited too long. "All I can do now is pray" as if somehow, well, yeah, you're down to that now, there's not much hope for you. If God could be our first resort rather than our last resort, I think we could avoid a lot of grief and, in the process, be very pleasing to the Lord. I know that, from the Bible, God says that He would rather lead you with a glance than with a bit in your mouth. Psalm 32:8-9, isn't it? "I will instruct you in the way that you should go, and I will guide you with My eye. So don't be like a horse or a mule, that needs to have a bit in his mouth to get you where you want to go." In other words, "Keep eye contact so I can just do one of....." My dad had a look. Did your dad have a look? We could be at dinner at people's house, and I was screwin' around (can you say that?).....we'll cut that out, it's okay (Laughing)I was messin' around (sometimes I get too comfortable), and he would do one of these..... like, "You're gonna die when you get home." (Laughing) And that would be it, man. I wouldn't even have an appetite. "Ice cream?" "No, thank you." I just didn't care anymore. I didn't want to die. The LORD says, "Just look at Me, and I'll do one of these, and that'll be it. Or I can put this painful thing in your mouth and just can drag you around town. I can make it hard on you and make it difficult." But I read verse 1, I think this was hard on David. He should have just been payin' attention. He wasn't makin' eye contact. Painful. David would write in Psalm 25:4, years later, "Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths." That's what you want to do. But he just got it a little late. But then God will show us. Right? He'll transform us. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that "we look with an unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 3:18). We can look up and see God. We can see what God is doing. We can be "transformed into that same image from glory to glory, even by the Spirit of God." So I think there's something to be learned from verse 1. He just waited so long.

You know, all the rest and the justice and God wanting to bring justice and have His nation be righteous, that all makes good sense. But the lesson for me is, "Ol' David, come on, buddy." Now he was young. He was just gettin' started. He'd come out of a lot of pressure. I don't know. But how much value do you see in your life in going to just spend some time with the Lord and seeking Him? How often do you do that for an hour in your life? So I wonder if we couldn't avoid a lot of bad things if we just give a little bit more attention to the Lord early on.

So we get a lot of requests. People will call the church and say, "Oh, could you pray for us?" and we go, "Hey, haven't heard from you in five years!" "Oh, I know. But now I'm goin' through it. All I can do now is pray." Prayer requests from people

that we see precious little of. If nothin' else, just pray for our country. This is a weird year. Election years are weird. I hate 'em. But we have a promise from God that, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). Come on, church. Let's see the Lord heal our land. Pray for that. If the church doesn't seek God, who will? And I don't know about you, but I have no confidence in any of these guys. They're gonna let me down eventually. But God won't.

So David did finally pray, and the minute David prayed, God brought deliverance. It led to blessing for him and the nation. He had set things right. And you get to verse 14, and you read the words, "God heeded the prayer for the land." But, verse 1, it took three years - "year after year." I think those words "year after year" are written there specifically to say David could have picked up on this earlier on. It was three years. Okay. "Year after year." I get it. Three years. It's almost redundant if it doesn't mean something. Just so that He could set things right.

Next week we will go ahead, maybe do all three chapters. We'll see. I don't know how we'll get, but we'll.....you can read the names because I'm not gonna. (Laughing) Especially at the end of chapter 23. Good luck with that on your own. Have the gift of interpretation. You'll need it. All right?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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