

Introduction

1. As I've mentioned on numerous occasions, this book breaks down into three distinct sections:
 - a. The first 10 chapters cover the rise of David as king and focus on many of his righteous attributes and actions (we see examples of how David serves as a type of Christ)
 - b. Chapters 11-20 reveal a different side to David where we see his sin and struggles as a result of that sin (we see examples of how God interacts with sinful people; David serving as a type of Israel and the Church?)
 - c. Chapters 21-24 are a reflection of David's life and covers six different events or episodes from various times throughout his life (they do not follow chapter 20 chronologically and there is no indication as to when they occurred)
2. Almost universally, Bible scholars recognize that these five chapters are specifically laid out in a chiastic structure as follows:
 - a: The Lord's divine judgment and mercy on Israel (21:1-14)
 - b: List of David's warriors (21:15-22)
 - c: David's Song of Thanksgiving (22:1-51)
 - c': David's Final Song (23:1-7)
 - b': List of David's warriors (23:8-39)
 - a': The Lord's divine judgment and mercy on Israel (24:1-35)
3. We begin this last 4 chapter section of 2 Samuel in 21:1-14 and it is without a doubt one of the more (most?) troubling passages in the entire Bible, most notably because on the surface it appears to implicate both the Lord and David in an unjust and unrighteous act—the murder of innocent people
4. As we will see, however, a closer look reveals acts of divine judgment, grace, and ultimately mercy

A. Our passage begins with an act of divine judgment (1-9)

1. Israel is facing a severe famine (READ 1-2):
 - a. The famine has lasted for three years and there's no indication here or in the rest of the Scriptures when this occurred except it had to be after David extended grace to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth (which occurs in 2 Samuel 9 and mentioned here in v. 7)
 - b. David did what he often did and "**sought the presence of the LORD**"
 - c. The Lord reveals to David that the famine is divine judgment against Israel for Saul's attempt to wipe out ("**put to death**") the Gibeonites:
 - 1) We don't know when this happened because the account is not recorded in the Bible aside from a possible and obscure comment in 2 Samuel 4:2-3 which refers to the residents of a former Gibeonite city, Beeroth, fleeing for their lives after two of Saul's sons' commanders apparently attack the city
 - 2) This was an egregious sin because Israel had made a covenant with the Gibeonites:
 - a) Our text tells us that the Gibeonites were not Israelites but descendants of the Amorites and that Israel had made a covenant with them under Joshua (Joshua 9:1-27):

- After Israel defeated Jericho, the Gibeonites realized it was only a matter of time before they would be defeated as well
 - So, they quickly sent an envoy to Joshua and the leaders of Israel, deceived them into thinking they were from a faraway land and seeking peace, offered to become servants of Israel, and convinced Joshua and the leaders to make a covenant with them
 - When the people of Israel learn they were deceived, they want to destroy them but the leaders of Israel prevent them from doing so because the covenant had been sworn before the LORD
 - We learned a little later in the Judges passage that the Gibeonites did what they did because they were convinced that the Lord had given Israel the land and that Israel was commanded from destroying the inhabitants—so, this was a life-saving measure
- b) Verse 2 of our passage today states that Saul violated that covenant when he **“sought to kill them in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah.”**—since this covenant was made with an oath before the Lord, violating it was a sin not just against the Gibeonites but against the Lord Himself
- d. You might be wondering why God was punishing Israel with famine for something Saul did:
- 1) No doubt that is one of the troubling things about this passage
 - 2) The answer comes in understanding the principle of corporate responsibility and consequences found throughout the ANE and in the Bible
 - 3) God not only dealt with individuals and their personal sin, but He dealt with Israel as a whole
 - 4) As Israel’s king, Saul represented Israel and his actions represented the actions of Israel (consider that Saul did not act alone but with Israel’s army, and the fact that had Israel not demanded a king this would not have happened)—so, Saul’s guilt led to consequences for Israel
 - 5) We see this concept of corporate responsibility and consequences portrayed in a number of historical events in the OT:
 - a) Achan’s actions lead to consequences for Israel and his family (READ Joshua 7:1, 25):
 - Israel was defeated at Ai
 - Achan and his entire family were stoned
 - b) In the book of Judges, both the faithful and unfaithful alike face the consequences of Israel’s sin when God brought their oppressors upon them
 - c) The actions of wicked kings and priests led to divine consequences against all of Israel, not just the wicked
 - 6) In the same way, do we not see the same thing in the NT era where God has judged entire countries, and even churches, as a whole?
2. David seeks atonement for Israel (READ 3-6):
- a. You’ll notice David uses a specific word here: atonement
 - 1) Atonement refers to the means through which the penalty for sin is satisfied

- 2) In other words, David is seeking a way to satisfy the need for a penalty for the sin Saul and Israel committed against the Gibeonites
 - a) Notice that David asks the Gibeonites, “**What should I do for you? And how can I make atonement that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?**” (3)
 - b) Notice that David isn’t purely interested in satisfying the penalty but in returning the Lord’s blessings back to Israel

- b. The text doesn’t tell us whether the LORD specifically instructed David to seek atonement, but David clearly understood the need so he sought the input of the Gibeonites:
 - 1) Their first response was that they had no monetary claims against Saul’s house nor the right to seek vengeance
 - 2) When pressed by David, however, they provided an option which for the second time in this passage comes across as troublesome:
 - a) They asked David to hand over seven “**sons**” (descendants) of Saul so they could “**hang them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul**” (6):
 - b) Essentially, what they asked for was most of the remaining male descendants of Saul because he only had eight who were still alive—his two sons by his concubine Rizpah, his grandson Ish-boseth (Jonathan’s son), and five grandsons through his daughter Merab
 - c) Why did they ask for seven and not all eight?
 - It is a number that represents completeness or wholeness in the Bible
 - They may have been aware of David’s covenant with Ish-boseth

- c. The immediate question we may have is how this is just or righteous, after all were these men not innocent? How could God (and David) punish them for something Saul did?
 - 1) That is a difficult question because the Bible clearly states that God punishes us for our own sin, not the sins of our parents (Deuteronomy 24:16)
 - 2) However, the Bible also states that God will visit upon children the iniquity of their fathers when they follow them in their sinful ways (Deuteronomy 5:9)
 - 3) It would seem then, based on God’s nature, that some of these men (his sons) may have been involved in the actual attacks on the Gibeonites, while others (his grandsons) may have been guilty of following in the footsteps of Saul when it came to sin

3. David and the Gibeonites exercise divine judgment against the house of Saul (READ 7-9):
 - a. In stark contrast to Saul’s violation of the covenant with the Gibeonites, David honors his covenant with Jonathan by sparing Mephibosheth (7)
 - b. As for the remaining sons and grandsons of Saul, David hands them over to the Gibeonites (8)
 - c. This is clearly an act of divine judgment:
 - 1) Twice the text refers to hanging them “**before the LORD**” (6, 9)—this phrase is used 259 times in the Bible and every time refers to the presence of the Lord
 - 2) This is also evidenced by the fact that they were hung in “**Gibeah of Saul**” (6; also referred to as “**mountain**” in v. 9)—this was Saul’s headquarters

B. Immediately following this act of divine judgment, we are introduced to two beautiful acts of grace (10-14a)

1. We first read about the actions of Rizpah, the mother of the two sons who were killed (READ 10):
 - a. In the ANE, when people were executed their bodies were often left to rot and be eaten by scavengers; it was the final act of humiliation and shame
 - b. The Law forbid this, but the Gibeonites were not bound by the Law and the text suggests they left the bodies hanging out in the open for some time (e.g. beginning of the spring harvest until it rained)
 - c. So, Rizpah camps out on the rocks day and night, mourning their death and protecting their bodies from the birds and wild animals

2. We then read of David's response (READ 11-14):
 - a. David is moved by Rizpah's actions
 - b. So, he retrieves the bones of Saul and Jonathan from the men of Jabesh Gilead, gathers the remains of the men who were hanged, and gives them a proper burial in the family grave back in the land of Benjamin

3. The dignity and respect that Rizpah and David show to the condemned is a reflection of grace—one could argue that these men didn't deserve the dignity of a proper burial because they had come under the judgment of God, yet they Rizpah and David gave them something they had not earned nor deserved

C. The final act we see is one of divine mercy (READ 14b)

1. Our passage began with a famine, God's act of judgment against Israel
2. It ends with God being "**moved by prayer for the land**", sending rain and ending the famine

Conclusion

1. The main purpose of the OT is to reveal God so we must ask ourselves, What is God revealing to us about Himself in this passage?
2. Let me suggest three things:
 - a. The first is that the Lord takes sin seriously and judges it:
 - 1) We see this individually when God judges individuals for their sin like He did the descendants of Saul
 - 2) We also see it corporately where God sometimes judges a corporate group like nations and even churches

 - b. The second is that justice and reconciliation demand atonement:
 - 1) This is especially true when it comes to our relationship with God
 - 2) The death of Jesus Christ atoned for our sins—he died for us and paid the penalty for our sin—and it is only through Him that we can obtain grace, mercy, forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation and eternal life

 - c. The third is that while God is indeed a God of justice and judgment, He is also a God of grace and mercy