



Studies in the Life of David

Text

Second Samuel 21:1-14

Topic

A three-year famine is ended when seven sons of Saul are executed for their sin against the Gibeonites

Title

“O Brother, Where Depart Thou?”

Introduction

The Great Irish Potato Famine was a period of mass starvation and disease between 1845 and 1852. Approximately one million people died and at least a million more emigrated from Ireland causing the island's population to fall by as much as 25%.

The blight can be attributed a tiny, hidden spore that almost instantly destroyed Ireland's potato crops.

In our text in Second Samuel the nation of Israel was experiencing a severe famine. In its third year King David inquired of the Lord as to its cause. It wasn't a spore; it was something *spiritual*. It was sin - sin that had been hidden, pushed aside, ignored.

Once David dealt with the sin the nation was restored to both spiritual and physical health.

We learn in this story that we can experience spiritual famine in our lives. It can result from any number of things, with unconfessed sin topping the list.

If we will deal with the cause then we can be restored to full health and vigor in serving the Lord.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Talk To The Lord About The Cause Of Your Famine, and #2 Work With The Lord Applying The Cure For Your Famine.

#1 Talk To The Lord About
The Cause Of Your Famine
(v1-7)

Are you experiencing a lack of fruitfulness or blessing in your walk with the Lord? Does it seem as though things are being withheld from you, even though outwardly you are busy serving the Lord?

It could be a trial to encourage you to seek the Lord. One of the psalms describes times like that by comparing them to a deer panting after the watering brook. It's a beautiful devotional insight that encourages us to go on seeking the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

But it could also be a famine brought about by some hidden thing, some neglected thing, some unconfessed sin.

How can you know which it is? **Talk to the Lord the way David did.**

2 Samuel 21:1 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."

The last chapters of Second Samuel are probably out of order chronologically. They are like an addendum that gives us additional information about David's reign. We're not sure, therefore, exactly when this famine occurred - whether it was early or later in David's reign. It was probably earlier.

It wasn't until the third year of the famine that David considered that the cause might be spiritual. Rather than criticize his sluggishness we should recognize that we, too, are capable of overlooking the fact there may be a

cause, a reason, why our spiritual lives seem to be hindered. In fact we have a strange tendency to settle for less in our walk with the Lord. We like to be comfortable, to have everything scheduled and under control.

If there's one thing you can glean from studying the ministry of Jesus and, later, His followers, it's that you should expect the unexpected to be the norm.

The important thing is that God is willing and waiting to reveal to us the condition of our hearts if we will seek Him. He can tell us if we are famished panthers after the watering brook, or if we are in the midst of a famine of our own making.

The famine in Israel was the result of King Saul's cruel dealings with the Gibeonites. Their story is recorded in the Book of Joshua. Some 400 years earlier they had deceived Joshua into letting them live during the conquest of the Promised Land. Joshua swore an oath to them and, even though for their part they lied, the Israelites were bound to the oath. The Gibeonites became their servants but were to be treated kindly.

2 Samuel 21:2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; the children of Israel had sworn protection to them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.

During his reign Saul killed Gibeonites to appropriate and redistribute their land and wealth. Saul ought to have been killing Philistines or Amalekites. He abandoned his mission and it created a void that he ended up filling with something that was counterproductive.

As we seek to serve the Lord, He has His missions for us, His assignments. If we shy away from them it will create a void and we risk filling it with things that are not just insignificant but actually counterproductive.

Sometimes I see Christians, for example, establishing some ministry that is already being done. I want to say to them, "Aren't there some Philistines

you can kill instead? Aren't you supposed to be hot on the trail of the Amalekites?"

God had waited patiently for David to rectify the situation but he had done nothing and, so, a famine came upon the land.

Since they were the ones who had been wronged, David went to the Gibeonites to ask what it would take to right the wrong.

2 Samuel 21:3 Therefore David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the Lord?"

2 Samuel 21:4 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."

After Joshua realized he had been deceived by the Gibeonites he kept his oath to them but he made them servants in Israel, specifically woodcutters and water bearers for the Tabernacle. Take notice of the fact that the Gibeonites did not ask for their freedom. They were content to go on serving in Israel.

Neither did they want to profit, or to have revenge. No, as we see in the next verse, they only wanted justice which would relieve the famine for everyone in Israel. After many centuries they remained selfless servants.

2 Samuel 21:5 Then they answered the king, "As for the man who consumed us and plotted against us, that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the territories of Israel,

2 Samuel 21:6 let seven men of his descendants be delivered to us, and we will hang them before the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord chose." And the king said, "I will give them."

On the surface this seems a little arbitrary. I don't think, however, that they were saying to pick just any seven guys from the descendants of Saul. These were undoubtedly individuals who had profited from the persecution and the killing of Gibeonites, sons who had participated with Saul in his plans against them and who had profited thereby.

2 Samuel 21:7 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.

The writer of Second Samuel includes this detail because his readers would naturally wonder how this affected David's dealings with Mephibosheth. Whether the household of Mephibosheth had profited or not David spared him on account of his own oath to Jonathan.

These oaths in the Old Testament were taken pretty seriously. God held you to them. If you swore something, you swore to your own hurt (Psalm 15:4) - meaning you were obligated to keep your oath no matter the cost.

In making application of these things to our own lives in terms of what causes famine we might start with things we've said we are going to do. Commitments we've made - especially to serve the Lord. The fact we are under grace and not law doesn't mean that our words, our promises, carry less weight. On the contrary, our "Yes" should mean "Yes."

Is there some commitment you made to the Lord that you have left unfulfilled? Or perhaps you are serving the Lord as promised but you're not really doing it faithfully; you're just phoning it in, doing the minimum, just getting by.

If you're experiencing a famine it could be what I've just mentioned or it might be some other hidden 'spore' that has crept into your life.

- A habit that you've adopted that declares your independence from the Lord in some area of your life.
- A hobby that has become a little too consuming of your time.

Or maybe you are giving a place in your heart to anger or bitterness or unforgiveness or lust or covetousness.

Then, too, it could be unconfessed sin.

All these (and more) are the spiritual 'spores' that will bring famine.

The point is to talk with the Lord about it. Find out from Him if you are the deer panting after the watering brook, if you are famished in a good way, or if this is a time of famine that can be alleviated.

#2 Work With The Lord Applying
The Cure For Your Famine
(v8-14)

David kept his word to the Gibeonites.

2 Samuel 21:8 So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite;
2 Samuel 21:9 and he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill before the Lord. So they fell, all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.

Rizpah was Saul's concubine. Michal was his daughter and had at one time been David's wife. Their sons who had (we think) been complicit with their father in spoiling the Gibeonites were delivered over for judgment.

In those days executions were public events and the bodies were left on display for a time as a deterrent. This was a legal, proper exercise of capital punishment under the laws of Israel.

2 Samuel 21:10 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.

Rizpah's boys had, by their sin, brought drought and death upon Israel. Now everyone could see it for themselves as they hung there dead and decaying. What was hidden had been revealed for what it really was.

Apparently Rizpah, in her grief, refused to take them down and bury them. Instead she did what she could to 'protect' them from the birds and the beasts.

Her motives for acting this way are not revealed in the text. We can say regarding her behavior that she was unwilling to face the truth of the situation and move on.

That may sound a little harsh since, after all, she was their mother. Nevertheless it did no one any good to try to preserve her sons' dead, decaying bodies. Bury them and move on.

One application for us would be that, when the Lord does show you a cause for your famine, see that it is put to death, then bury it and move on. Don't mourn for it and try to protect it or preserve it. Don't keep returning to it.

2 Samuel 21:11 And David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.

2 Samuel 21:12 Then David went and took the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, from the men of Jabesh Gilead who had stolen them from the street of Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, after the Philistines had struck down Saul in Gilboa.

2 Samuel 21:13 So he brought up the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from there; and they gathered the bones of those who had been hanged.

2 Samuel 21:14 They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the tomb of Kish his father. So they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God heeded the prayer for the land.

When Saul and Jonathan fell in battle against the Philistines their enemies had shamefully displayed their bodies. The men of Jabesh Gilead risked their lives to retrieve the remains. Up until this point the remains were interred far from Saul's inheritance.

David determined to gather the remains of Saul and Jonathan and these recently executed sons and give them a proper burial in their ancestral tomb.

"After that," the famine ended. In other words, it wasn't just the execution of these boys that was required. There was other unfinished business that was suggested by their deaths. Once they were dead, David could see clearly what further steps needed to be taken. Israel had neglected to properly bury Saul and Jonathan.

Is there anything God has shown you that is left undone?

God wants to lift any famine that might be in your life, or in the life of our church as a whole. He didn't save us to starve us but, rather, to feed us and to fill us.

Let's talk to Him and then work with Him when He shows us what needs to be altered, attended to, or repented of.

"After that" He will "heed the prayer[s]" we offer. He will grant the harvest and the late rains we so desperately need in order to produce His fruit.

Let's close with an appropriate promise from Isaiah:

Isaiah 58:11 The Lord will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

