

Resolution
2 Samuel 21:1-14
August 12

Modern day readers of the Bible often fail to realize the significance of the covenant concept in Scripture. The Bible highlights key covenants that reveal principles of the relationship between God and humans as well as communicate key concepts in the redemption narrative. Key divine covenants include the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the New Covenant. Covenants stipulated the nature, terms, and, in some cases, the stipulations for violations. For example, the Mosaic covenant outlined covenant blessings and curses in a special ceremony (Deut ???).

What does this passage teach about the nature and ways of God?

First, God is a God of accountability. The phrase “during the David’s reign” lacks chronological detail. Since members of Saul’s family remained, the time of the famine must have been early in David’s reign prior to the events of 2 Samuel 9 in which David search for descendants of Saul. As a result of a three-year famine, the king of Israel sought a personal audience with the King. God revealed that the famine was a judgment due to the actions of Saul. “It is due to Saul and to his bloody family, because he killed the Gibeonites.”

The Bible does not describe Saul’s atrocious actions against the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites were descendants of a Canaanite people group that lived about eight miles from Jerusalem. During an encounter with deceptive Gibeonites Joshua failed to consult the Lord (Josh. 9.14) and entered into a covenant treaty with them (Josh. 9.15). Saul violated the terms of the treaty and attempted to destroy the Gibeonites. Saul’s violation of the sacred treaty brought guilt upon the entire nation.

Second, God is a God that provides a way of release from guilt. After God revealed to David the reason for the famine judgment, After God revealed the divine cause of the famine, David sought to correct matters in the relationship between Israel and the Gibeonites -“How can I make atonement?” Or how can I make things right?

From the brief description of the narrative, Saul inflicted great bloodshed on the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites requested the death of seven representative descendants of Saul to make things right. Seven probably serves as a symbolic number for completeness. The seven descendants of Saul represent the complete lineage of Saul.

Was David’s action of killing Saul’s descendants the right action? By acquiescing to the request of the Gibeonites, potential rivals to David’s throne were eliminated. Should David have consulted God regarding the means of setting matters right rather than asking the Gibeonites? The Bible does not provide any negative evaluation on David’s granting of the Gibeonites request.

The concept of “atonement” is one of the key theological concepts in the Bible. Atonement entails both satisfaction of a wrong committed as well as making matters right with an injured

party. The cross of Christ serves as the greatest picture of the meaning of the biblical concept of atonement. Atonement involves a penal judgment; Christ suffered the judgment of God for our sins. Atonement involves substitution; Christ died as our substitute. The Gibeonites, therefore, requested that David provide substitution for a penal judgment for a grievous wrong committed against them.

Third, God is a God that affirms the honorable treatment of the dead. Based upon the demand of the Gibeonites, David killed the two sons of Rizpah, Saul's concubine. For several months, the grieving mother watched over the bodies of the seven descendants of Saul to prevent their desecration by animals. Her response challenged (or perhaps shamed) David to provide a honorable burial for the seven as well as Saul and Jonathan. The Philistines had desecrated Saul's body by cutting off his head and hanging his body on a city wall (1 Sam. 31.9-10). Men from Jabesh-Gilead traveled fifty miles to retrieve the body of Saul and provide a burial. David reinterred the bodies of Saul and his descendants.

2 Samuel 21 begins with a description of a severe famine. The famine was the judgment of God due to the sinful actions of Saul. David made amends to correct the issues caused by Saul's actions. David's final action of the honorable burial of Saul's family brings resolution. "After this, God was receptive to prayer for the land (2 Sam. 21.14). The famine ended.