

**Greatness: The Life of Israel's Greatest King and How Yours Can Be Better**  
**2 Samuel 21:1-14**  
**Atonement**

**Introduction:** On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued an Executive Order called the Emancipation Proclamation. At that time, more than 3.5 million Africans were enslaved in the southern states. The order gave the Union Army the legal construct to officially free slaves as they advanced through the South during the Civil War. Later, in 1865, the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified, which made slavery unconstitutional in all of America's states and territories.

However, as important as outlawing slavery was, it didn't resolve the injustice of life for the slaves and their descendants. The vision of America was laid out on July 4, 1776, in the Declaration of Independence. The Founding Fathers wrote,

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all men are created equal**, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain **unalienable Rights**, that among these are **Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness**."<sup>1</sup>

That vision was later formalized in the preamble of the United States Constitution, which became the official Law of the United States on March 4, 1789.

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and **secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity**, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the vision of the United States was to be a place where everybody had the same rights as everybody else to live and pursue prosperity, but the freed slaves and their descendants soon found out they were excluded from those rights. In the late 1870s, states began passing laws known as Jim Crow Laws. These laws legally segregated and discriminated against people of color so that nonwhites didn't have the same opportunities as whites to access education, employment, housing, bank loans, and in some states, even use the same public bathrooms and water fountains! In 1896, the case of Plessy v. Ferguson was heard before the Supreme Court, and the Court ruled that Jim Crow laws and practices were constitutional, and the consequences were devastating.

Many northern unions that had a monopoly on labor jobs refused to allow non-whites to join, and as such, blacks and other men of color had no access to the better-paying working-class labor jobs. After World War 2, when suburban communities began to be built outside of major cities, many of those communities had restrictions that kept black Americans or

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>

anybody else of color from purchasing homes. The practice of redlining also became a serious problem. Areas with a higher density of black residents were redlined as properties that could not receive loans. For instance, in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal created a Federal Agency called the HOLC (Home Owners' Loan Corporation) that created maps with redlines around communities with a high population density of black Americans. These districts were then unilaterally categorized as high-risk properties, making it impossible to attain a mortgage or loan using any of those properties as collateral. Universities refused to allow blacks an opportunity to be admitted, and later, when they were forced to allow the opportunity, still refused to provide access to scholarships, which ironically included athletic scholarships.

Therefore, the society that gave my grandparents' generation an opportunity to pull themselves up out of poverty didn't give that same opportunity to people of color. For instance, my Grandfather Rammell never had the chance to finish the second grade because he wasn't allowed to go to school unless all the things around the family's subsistence farm were finished. In the 1930s, he taught himself how to read, write, and do arithmetic while working in the bottom of a ship shoveling coal into a furnace. In 1940, he went to work at the Newport News Shipyard for \$0.52 an hour while he paid his own way through blueprint reading school and other trade certifications, all while working long, hard hours of manual labor. Through all of that, he was finally able to earn the right to become a supervisor who made just enough money that, combined with a super conservative family budget, he was able to purchase a small home and a car for their family and even pay for my dad to go to college. My grandfather wasn't given anything. He earned every last cent with literal blood and sweat. However, the pathway he was allowed to walk on with his blood and sweat was a path men of color were not allowed access to, and as such, a black man who worked just as hard as my grandfather would not get the same opportunities as my grandfather.

It wasn't until the mid-1960s, a hundred years after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, that laws were passed and Court rulings began to take place that made Jim Crow laws and practices illegal. Until that point, segregation and every other racist practice were protected by the Courts. A legal framework known as Affirmative Action was also created by Federal, State, and local governments, as well as court rulings that gave preferential treatment to people of color and women. For instance, tax benefits and government contracts were given to corporations who met certain hiring quotas, laws were passed requiring government contracts to go to certain percentages of minority owned businesses, Universities had to meet certain quotas to receive government funding, and banks and lenders had to demonstrate certain levels of lending and financial accessibility in minority communities to get favorable treatment from the FDIC and other regulatory agencies.

The rationality was simple. For 100 years, hard-working white men were able to walk a path of opportunity that hard-working men of color and women were not able to walk. A black man who made the same sacrifices and efforts my grandfather made was not allowed to walk on the same path of opportunity my grandfather was given access to, which meant my dad and his older brother were offered opportunities that children of people of color were not given. That in no way suggests my grandfather, dad, or uncle didn't earn

everything they got; it just means they were allowed access to opportunities that men of color were not, and as such, society decided to begin providing favored status and opportunities to people of color to level the playing field.

Now, here's the problem: when you arbitrarily say you're going to limit access to opportunities based on color, no matter which color skin that person has, you begin sowing seeds of bitterness and hatred, and that's also true of generations that have grown up after Jim Crow laws and practices were made illegal. For instance, I graduated from High School in 1991. I wanted to play football in college so I was very sure I was going to pick a school that wanted me to play football for them, but just in case I didn't want to do that, I decided to apply to one particular college known for being a highly prestigious university; one that if I chose to not to play football somewhere that I could go to in order to get on a track for a possible career in politics. The day after I was notified that I had not been accepted into that University, a friend of mine told me he had been accepted; a friend who had lower GPA and SAT scores than I did, and had nowhere near the amount of athletic or community involvement that I had. How could that happen? How could a person who scored lower than me in every category that this truly prestigious university said formed the framework for their competitive admission process get accepted? If I wasn't good enough to be admitted, how could somebody get admitted who didn't perform as well as I did in a single requirement category? The difference was in our racial identity.

Imagine if you were in a race and you finished first, but when the awards ceremony happened, your name didn't get called, and instead, a guy who finished in the middle of the pack was given the gold medal, and you weren't even allowed on the podium! I ended up attending Virginia Tech and Liberty, where I played football while pursuing my education, something I feel so blessed to have been able to do. Furthermore, God was clearly calling me to be a pastor and not a politician. So, looking back, God's sovereign and perfect will was at work in my life getting me right where He wanted me to be. However, that didn't take away from the feeling of injustice and anger I felt when my friend told me he got admitted. I was excited for him for sure because it was a huge opportunity, and he was my friend. I felt no anger towards him at all, but I was mad as a hornet at a system that, had I been black, would have clearly accepted me. I was effectively denied an opportunity because of the color of my skin, which is precisely what had happened in America to people of color for generations prior to mine! I was feeling the injustice that generations of black men were forced to deal with on a much larger scale prior to my generation.

So on one hand, there was a justice in what was taking place but on the other hand there was also an injustice and the courts began to recognize this in the early 2000's when a Supreme Court Justice named Sandra Day O'Connor voted with the majority of the court to uphold the Affirmative Action practices of the University of Michigan but in so doing wrote in the majority opinion that the practice would need to come to an end in the next few decades or it would begin to cause more problems than good. Twenty years later, in 2023, while many liberals in America were trying to massively increase Affirmative Action policies through DEI initiatives, the Supreme Court started the process of ending it. In 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that using race as part of the admissions metrics to a University was unconstitutional. Upon taking office in 2025, Donald Trump issued

executive orders rescinding the consideration of race as a factor in hiring people for the federal government or in issuing government contracts or grants. So up until the mid 1960's America had laws that gave preferential treatment to white people, then in the mid 1960's laws were passed that paved the way for preferential treatment to be given to people of color and women, and now, sixty years later, laws or policies that give preferential treatment to anybody based on their race or gender are being removed, not because they were inherently unjust in their beginnings and prior use but because their continued use would be. In other words, at some point, the just actions to deal with the unjust actions of the past will eventually become unjust themselves if they go too far for too long.

Now, some argue that Affirmative action was unjust from the start, while others, like me, argue that it was entirely just, but it's now time for it to be done, or it will begin to cause more harm than good and undermine the good it accomplished. Meanwhile, some argue that it was unjust from the start because it didn't cut deep enough, while others feel it's unjust to begin phasing it out because they believe it should extend into more generations yet to come. However, it appears that at this point in American history, the majority of Americans agree that Affirmative Action was a totally just process that needed to be done to help level the playing field from the racist policies of the past, but, after 60 years of these policies it's time to phase them out or risk reigniting the racism back to the levels of the 1950's and 60's. It appears that most people now believe the best way to continue erasing racism from society is to no longer give legal protections to any preferential treatment based on race. Furthermore, many people now feel there is a large enough anti-racists ethos in our nation that universities, businesses, or any other organization that justifies treating somebody as a second-class citizen because of their race will end up being excluded from society anyway.

Now, some of you may be wondering why I just brought up a topic that, for some, remains very controversial, while others may be wondering what it has to do with the Bible. Well, the reason is that the ethical complexities involved with atoning and reconciling the injustices of the 100 years of legal racism that followed the Civil War in the United States are very similar to the complexities presented in the need for atonement and reconciliation in 2 Samuel 21. Let me be clear, 2 Samuel 21 is in NO WAY prescriptive to what happened in America or anywhere else, but it is nonetheless how God led David to atone for a great injustice done to the Gibeonites by Israel while they were under Saul's leadership.

**Proposition: There are three parts to the story of how God led David to atone for the injustice Israel had brought on the Gibeonites under the leadership of Saul.**

**In the first part of the story,**

**(1) God used a famine to make David and Israel deal with the injustice they had clearly forgotten. (21:1-2)**

**A. 1 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "There is**

**bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." 2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.**

- B. We don't know when the offense or the famine occurred. Some believe it happened early in David's reign, but I tend to side with those who believe it happened later. Either way, what is very clear is that Saul committed an unjust, genocidal act against the Gibeonites, who were faithfully serving the Hebrew people!
- C. "The oracle of God, when consulted (1), referred to an episode not mentioned elsewhere, an attack by Saul on the people of the city of Gibeon. The background is that in defending Israel Saul had attacked not only the Philistines but any non-Israelites who posed a threat. But the *Gibeonites* posed no threat, and to break the old treaty with them (see Jos. 9) was a serious crime. The wrong had never been put right."<sup>3</sup>
- D. "At some point in David's reign, probably toward the end, Israel was afflicted by a three-year drought. When he inquired of the Lord as to its cause, the Lord revealed that it came as punishment for Saul's violation of the covenant made with the Gibeonites back in the days of Joshua (Josh. 9:15–21). At that time Israel, under Joshua's leadership, had just destroyed Jericho and Ai and was about to attack the Amorite federation of the Canaanite hill country. The people of Gibeon, who were in the direct line of Joshua's conquest, pretended to be faraway aliens and so escaped annihilation. Moreover, they tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them whereby they would forever serve Israel in menial tasks but could never be harmed. Though the covenant was made deceitfully, its binding nature was recognized by both the Israelites and the Gibeonites."<sup>4</sup>
- E. "This was the covenant which Saul had violated by attempting to annihilate the Gibeonites (21:2). The sin was compounded by the fact that whereas God had commanded Saul to extirpate the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:3), he had given no such orders with respect to the Gibeonites. Years had passed since the crime, but God had not forgotten it and the famine was the initial impact of his retributive justice."<sup>5</sup>

**In the second part of the story,**

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<sup>3</sup> Payne, D. F. (1994). [1 and 2 Samuel](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 331). Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>4</sup> Merrill, E. H. (1985). [2 Samuel](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 476). Victor Books.

<sup>5</sup> Keddie, G. J. (1990). [Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel](#) (p. 193). Evangelical Press.

**(2) God led David to give the Gibeonites seven descendants of Saul to suffer the death penalty as atonement for the death Israel had inflicted on the Gibeonites under Saul. (21:3-9)**

**A.** Now, some believe the Lord wasn't leading David in this matter, but I think the text implies that he was, and the proof comes in the removal of the curse God had inflicted on Israel. When God told David the famine was His judgment on Israel because they had unjustly betrayed a covenant they had made before Him with the Gibeonites, He was necessarily directing David to go to the Gibeonites to find a way to atone and reconcile.

**B. 3 And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?"**

1. "cover over (fig.), pacify, make propitiation"<sup>6</sup>
2. In allowing David to atone for the wrong, that is, do something to justly pay for what had been done, they would make a way for the blessings of God to return to Israel. He was asking what needed to happen for them to be able to pour out their wrath on Israel in a way that they felt provided some sort of justice for the unjust wrath that was poured out on them. The ball was in the court of the Gibeonites!

**C. 4 The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "What do you say that I shall do for you?"**

1. They refused to let some sort of financial repayment cover up the death that was inflicted on them! "The death penalty was—and remains to this day—the proper punishment for murder (Numbers 35:31–33). 'Those over-value money and under-value life,' remarks Matthew Henry, 'that sell the blood of their relations for corruptible things, such as silver and gold.'"<sup>7</sup>
2. In addition, despite Saul's injustice towards them, they continued to serve Israel as they had always done, remaining subservient to Saul and then David, without ever seeking revenge or even bringing up the matter. In this way, the Gibeonites were acting more like God's people than God's people actually were. They were willing to keep their word even when Israel had violated theirs! But now David is saying, "God sent me to make atonement, so I need you to tell me what we need to do to make that happen. Your integrity is totally intact; ours is the problem."

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<sup>6</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). In *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 497). Clarendon Press.

<sup>7</sup> Keddie, G. J. (1990). *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel* (p. 195). Evangelical Press.

**D. 5 They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, 6 let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give them."**

1. At this point, we don't know if any of the living sons or grandsons of Saul were directly involved with this injustice or not. Therefore, "by modern laws, to punish Saul's family for Saul's sins would be equally wrong, but in the ancient world the principle of a family's common responsibility was strongly held."<sup>8</sup>
2. "... they asked that **seven ... male descendants of Saul be given over to them** so that they could practice the age-old tradition of *lex talionis*—eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and life for life (Ex. 21:23–25)."<sup>9</sup>
3. "The number seven had symbolic value, so this action allows for the Gibeonites to symbolically carry out the one-to-one retaliation against their attackers."<sup>10</sup>
4. "This request is often regarded today as 'strange and repellent' because it involved the execution of seven supposedly 'innocent men'. It therefore is the current fashion to explain this 'in terms of the culture and attitudes of the age'. This approach, however, casts an aspersion on the Lord, who led David to dispense this justice for the Gibeonites. It suggests that God was himself boxed in by the culture and attitudes of the age and felt compelled to allow this essentially reprehensible deed to be done to accommodate contemporary primitive notions of justice. Meanwhile we can feel good that we are more enlightened! An assessment of this kind, however, ignores the most simple and basic fact of all—a fact that has to be a basic interpretive principle for understanding what was going on in these events—namely that *God* approved of this as a just retribution for the original genocide by Saul. Charles Simeon rightly observes: 'such a kind of retribution would not be justifiable among *us*; because the children are not to suffer for the parents' crimes [cf., Deuteronomy 24:16]: but, as ordered of God, it was right: and, if the whole truth were known, we would probably find that the sons of Saul had aided and abetted the wicked devices of their father; and that they therefore justly suffered as partners in his crime.' It is significant that 'seven' only of the descendants of Saul were to be killed. This number represented the action of God and the completeness of his action. The Gibeonites asked

<sup>8</sup> Payne, D. F. (1994). [1 and 2 Samuel](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 331). Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>9</sup> Merrill, E. H. (1985). [2 Samuel](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 476). Victor Books.

<sup>10</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (2 Sa 21:6). Lexham Press.



for the *minimum* number by which the justice so done could be seen to be the work of God rather than the revenge of men. Even in this, the Gibeonites showed a restraint which evidences a profound understanding of and submission to the canons of divine justice. David's response was to grant the request."<sup>11</sup>

**E. 7 But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. 8 The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; 9 and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.**

1. "The traditional Hebrew text references Michal here—Saul's youngest daughter and David's first wife (1 Sam 14:49; 18:27)—however other Hebrew manuscripts refer to Merab, Saul's oldest daughter. Merab seems to be correct, since Michal did not have children (2 Sam 6:23) and Merab is elsewhere recorded as marrying Adriel the Meholathite (1 Sam 18:19)."<sup>12</sup>
2. "David recognized the propriety of their demand, but he also had to balance against it the pledge he had made to Jonathan that he would forever preserve his seed (1 Sam. 20:15–16). So David spared Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, but singled out others of Saul's offspring for execution. These included Armoni and another Mephibosheth, sons of Saul's concubine Rizpah (cf. 2 Sam. 3:7). The other five were all sons of Merab, daughter of Saul, by her husband Adriel (cf. 1 Sam. 18:19)."<sup>13</sup>
3. "The writer's chief reason for telling this story is to show that David was not responsible for the deaths of the seven men now executed. No doubt there were some Israelites like Shimei (16:5–8) who accused David of hatred of Saul's family. This passage, therefore, reminds the reader about David's treatment of *Mephibosheth*, and shows his scrupulous care for the remains of Saul and his descendants."<sup>14</sup>
4. "The passage records that 'During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years.' It is not clear at what point in David's reign the three-

<sup>11</sup> Keddie, G. J. (1990). [\*Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel\*](#) (pp. 195–196). Evangelical Press.

<sup>12</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [\*Faithlife Study Bible\*](#) (2 Sa 21:8). Lexham Press.

<sup>13</sup> Merrill, E. H. (1985). [2 Samuel](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 476). Victor Books.

<sup>14</sup> Payne, D. F. (1994). [1 and 2 Samuel](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 332). Inter-Varsity Press.



year famine took place. Current scholarship regards 2 Samuel 21–24 as an appendix to the historical narrative—the so-called ‘Samuel Appendix’—and therefore probably not in strict chronological order. Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that the inspired historian recorded the circumstances of the calamity at this point in his narrative in order to focus attention on the same topic as chapters 19 and 20, namely, David’s dealings with the supporters and descendants of the house of Saul. You will recall that as David fled from Absalom, Shimei had called him ‘a man of blood’ on account of his alleged treatment of the house of Saul (16:7–8). The likelihood is that this accusation arose from matters covered by 21:2–14—the executions of Saul’s grandsons ... The record of that incident is, accordingly, inserted in the text at this point in order to set the record straight. From the historian’s viewpoint, this is an essential component in the account of David’s restoration, for it proves him to be the Lord’s king over against any residual commitment to the house of Saul, as represented by Shimei, Sheba and the Benjamites. David is held up as the righteous king who is vindicated by the Lord.”<sup>15</sup>

**In the third part of the story, we see the resolution.**

**(3) As a sign that the matter had been fully atoned for, not only did God end the famine, but David also honored Saul and his family. (21:7-14)**

**A. 10 Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night.**

1. Rizpah was one of Saul’s concubines. That means she was potentially brought in without her input to serve Saul’s wife through sexually gratifying Saul and giving him more children without ever receiving the privileges of being his wife. Perhaps her sons had gone with Saul to try to kill the Gibeonites; we don’t know, but what can be safely assumed is that she was totally innocent in the matter. She now had to not only watch her sons get executed but also feel the grief of their naked bodies remaining suspended in the air for all to see until the rains returned to Israel!
2. So, she laid sackcloth on the ground and slept there to demonstrate her grief and refused to leave her sons until their bodies were taken down. She even kept the birds and animals from devouring their bodies. We don’t know that this meant she was out there from April (the harvest) until the normal rainy season began in October, but what we do know is that she wouldn’t leave them until God sent rain to make it clear He had accepted their death as a full atonement for Israel’s unjust actions. She wouldn’t leave until the rain returned!

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<sup>15</sup> Keddie, G. J. (1990). [\*Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel\*](#) (p. 192). Evangelical Press.

3. "The fact that the bodies remained where they were until it rained suggests that God's curse had been on the land and now rested on the executed sons of Saul for "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deut. 21:23). The coming of the rain meant that the curse was ended and the corpses could be taken down and buried. Though the Law stated that a body hung from a tree must be removed by sundown (Deut. 21:23), it implied punishment of an individual for his personal crime. This case had nothing to do with any personal act of murder but rather with violation of a covenant, the results of which brought God's displeasure on the whole nation and required vengeance of a public and extended nature."<sup>16</sup>
- B.** Now, David knew he had to do what he did, but that doesn't mean he liked it. It deeply grieved him, and we see it in how he responded to the knowledge of Rizpah's grief and the coming of the rain, which signified that God had accepted the men's execution as a proper atonement for what was done to the Gibeonites. Look what happens when David presumably hears it had rained, but specifically when he hears about Rizpah's grief.
- C.** **11 When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, 12 David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. 13 And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. 14 And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land.**
1. "To honor Rizpah's motherly vigilance (2 Sam 21:10), David exhumes the bones of Jonathan and Saul and gives them a proper burial in the tomb of Saul's father, Kish. He likewise ensures that the seven slain descendants of Saul receive a proper burial."<sup>17</sup>
  2. Notice that God didn't completely lift the curse until the atonement was complete, and that the atonement wasn't completed when Saul's sons and grandsons were executed. It wasn't until David took down the bodies of the executed men, gathered the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan, and honored Saul's memory by burying them all together in the land of Saul's tribe (Benjamin) that God fully lifted the curse and the land began to produce

<sup>16</sup> Merrill, E. H. (1985). [2 Samuel](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 476). Victor Books.

<sup>17</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (2 Sa 21:13). Lexham Press.

again (vs. 14)! The rain coming was a sign that God had lifted the curse, but it wasn't complete until the land once again produced enough food for Israel to not only survive but do so with such surplus that they could trade with other nations to get all the different things they needed to prosper and dominate the region. The death of Christ atoned for our sins, but it wasn't complete until He rose from the grave!

3. Again, this is key in understanding Biblical atonement. Atonement isn't atonement if there is any vengeance or unforgiveness left. If something has been atoned for, then forgiveness is complete, and reconciliation is in order. Therefore, for David, Israel, or even the Gibeonites, to in any way dishonor Saul or his family from that moment forward would have been a statement that atonement had not been accomplished. The deaths of Saul's two sons and his five grandsons would have therefore been just as unjust as when Saul led Israel to try to eradicate the Gibeonites. If, after saying the death of the seven men would atone for the evil done to them, they continued to hold a grudge against Saul or Israel, then they would be going against their word that the death of the seven men would, in fact, atone for the evil. To atone for something means it is fully forgiven, that is, the offense is totally removed, and there is no longer any right or desire to act in a way that they were ever unjustly treated. Atonement means that the wrong has been fully righted, to the extent that the response is now one of favor instead of a curse. Nowhere is this seen any clearer than in the cross of Christ! Look at what Paul wrote in the book of Romans.

**6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die--8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. 12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-- 13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. 17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. 18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all**

**men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:6-21)**

**New Testament Application: 2 Samuel 21 points us to the ultimate atonement of Christ. Christ's death, and His death alone, fully satisfied God's just wrath on our sin, so much so that there is not only no wrath of God left for those who are in Christ, but there is no hindrance to God's favor on all who are in Christ!**

**Challenge: If God's wrath on sin is fully satisfied for all who repent and believe in Jesus, so much so that He restores all who repent and believe in Him to be fully favored sons and daughters, then who is it that you believe needs to do more to earn your forgiveness and favor?**

What we have sinfully done to one another is sin to the Lord, and Christ paid for that sin! Therefore, when Jesus commands us to forgive one another, He's not telling us to do something that He hasn't already done. He suffered the hell their sin was owed, whether that sin was directly pointed at God or at God through us, either way, Jesus has declared their debt is paid, so how can I require more?

I've said this many times in the past. You cannot be restored with somebody who refuses to repent, just as God is not restored to those who refuse to repent and believe in Him. Christ died for the sins of the world, but it's only effective for those who repent and believe in Him (the elect). However, Christ commanded us to forgive all who offend us! He didn't say forgive them when they repent, but forgive them—period! I'm supposed to let go of my right to hold something against somebody, not because they earned the right to be forgiven, but because Christ did. If God has forgiven them for all their sin, that means God has forgiven them for what they did to us, as well as what we have done to others, and therefore, for me to hold something against somebody or even against myself is of itself an injustice. Their debt is clear, yet I continue to treat them as if it isn't. It would be the same as if the Gibeonites refused to accept the death of Saul's sons and grandsons as atonement after saying it was, or if God had not received it after sending David to the Gibeonites to humbly ask what would!

So, who is it in your life or in your world that you believe needs to be punished in some way, to suffer loss in some way, for you to forgive them, that is for you to no longer feel they owe you something? Who are you demanding something from, other than repentance? Who is that you believe Christ's death, that God Himself said was enough, isn't enough for you?