



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Ignoring sin . . . no basis for blessing!

A plea to Free Presbyterians

“Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, *It is* for Saul, and for *his* bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites,” 2 Samuel 21:1.

It has been felt by some, I fear, that the divisive events of recent years are best dealt with by ignoring them and simply acting as if the tragic series of events that began in 2006 and which saw men turn their former views and commitments on their heads, never took place. Such are the foolish notions of those who wish for peace and unity and feel that it may be obtained at the expense of truth. Furthermore, such folly, it is believed, will lead on to revival and blessing. Whatever God in His sovereign mercy may bestow upon His beloved people in Ulster, it will not be because of such actions. Rather it will be despite such stupidity. God does not ignore sin even though we may do so. The events in 2 Samuel 21:1-14 are recorded to teach us this lesson.

1. THE SIN OF SAUL, WHICH WAS THE CAUSE OF THE JUDGMENT OF GOD FALLING UPON ALL ISRAEL, WOULD HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO ALL ISRAEL.

The whole land was affected by the famine sent of God and I believe this was because guilt lay upon the whole land stemming from the sin of Saul. In slaying the Gibeonites, Saul had sought to impress the people with his zeal for “the children of Israel and Judah”, verse 2. Such an action must therefore have been known to the people. Saul had his eyes upon impressing them with his zeal rather than the Lord. He wished to show he was a king that had their interests at heart. He would have been under pressure to act so, since it had been prophesied that his reign would be such that the people would soon complain of the burdens he would lay upon them.

“And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint *them* for himself, for his chariots, and *to be* his horsemen; and *some* shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and *will set them* to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters *to be* confectionaries, and *to be* cooks, and *to be* bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, *even* the best *of them*, and give *them* to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put *them* to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles,” 1 Samuel 8:11-20.



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The action of Saul when he “slew the Gibeonites” was wrong and the people would have known it. They would have been aware of the solemn oath that Joshua had sworn to the Gibeonites before the Lord and the violation of it that Saul’s action entailed. They would have known that God would thus be offended. However, the people chose to ignore Saul’s sin and the offence caused to the Lord. Herein lies the reason for the famine in David’s day, perhaps some forty years later. Many commentators link the slaying of the Gibeonites to the time of Saul’s attack upon the Amalekites, 1 Samuel 15. This was just before David was first anointed as king by Samuel the prophet. If this is indeed the time of the incident, then Samuel the prophet would have known of the wrong Saul did and so also would David, yet neither made any comment or took any action regarding it. Little wonder then that the whole land was being punished in connection with Saul’s wrongdoing. All had ignored the event and acted as if it had never happened. But God does not ignore sin and sooner or later, according to His sovereign purpose, He will deal with the matter. “*It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.*” God keeps long accounts and will in no wise pass over iniquity.

2. GOD WAS GRIEVED WITH SAUL’S ACTIONS EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE, IT APPEARS, MOTIVATED BY A ZEAL FOR GOD’S PEOPLE.

Good motivation does not justify actions that are intrinsically wrong. The Bible is filled with records which illustrate this fact. Was not Peter highly motivated when he rebuked the Lord for speaking of His death, Mark 8:33, or James and John when they desired fire to fall upon the Samaritans who did not welcome Christ, Luke 9:55? Of course they would have been but they were very wrong indeed and spoke wickedly. Many all too often judge what they should do or say on the basis of what they *feel* or what they perceive will be *popular*. In this they are deceived by that great deceiver, their own heart. “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9. How many have been advised to act in a sinful fashion on the basis of that which springs from their own hearts. We must ever act according to God’s Word. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them,” Isaiah 8:20. This was Saul’s mistake and I am afraid that it is a mistake that many made in recent times in Ulster, no matter how highly motivated they may have been. Consequently, offence has been caused in heaven and ignoring it will not remove or dissipate that offence.

3. HOW SLOW DAVID WAS TO SEEK THE LORD IN THE FACE OF THE FAMINE

Three years of famine afflicted the land before David sought the Lord to ask why. “Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD.” I believe that David was slow to act because he was aware, deep down, that there was sin in the camp. Perhaps there was an element of “sticking his head in the sand” on David’s part. He did not wish to face the truth that sin within the nation was the cause of the judgment. Three years of famine, its weariness and distress emphasised by the



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phrase “year after year”, is a long time of suffering for a man of David’s spirituality to endure without enquiring of the Lord why it was so. I have little doubt that David was slow to ask for he had some idea of the cause and the remedial action that must be taken. Is there not a similar spirit at work today in Ulster? Is there not a desire to stick one’s head in the sand and ignore the offence caused to God by events that have taken place within the last three years? Sin may be ignored and whitewashed until its appearance has been somewhat concealed from public gaze but it cannot thus be removed from God’s sight. Only repentance and confession, pardon and cleansing by the blood of Christ can remove sin from God’s sight. We may say like Samson, “I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself” (Judges 16:20), but that will not restore the grace and power of which sin has robbed us.

4. THE RESPONSE REQUIRED OF GOD WAS OBEDIENCE TO HIS WORD.

The sin that brought the judgment of God on Israel could be dealt with and the sentence lifted and wrath put away. The wrong done by Saul had to be acknowledged and the requirements of God’s Word complied with before that would happen.

A great wrong had been done and it had to be acknowledged and the appropriate action taken. What was necessary in the day of David is still necessary today when wrong has been done.

Sin had to be put away by an act of atonement as the required means of appeasing God’s wrath. Innocent blood had been shed and according to God’s law, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed,” Genesis 9:6. The seven descendants of Saul were hung up before the Lord to pacify Him. The action of Saul had brought guilt upon his offspring. Here is an instance of the Lord “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children,” Exodus 34:7. Sin is not to be trifled with or swept under the carpet. When the appropriate action was taken, and only then, “God was intreated for the land”.

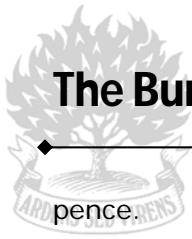
It should be noted that this act of appeasement took place “in the days of harvest, in the first *days*, in the beginning of barley harvest,” verse 9. It was just after the Passover had taken place.

It reminds us of Calvary and the Saviour being hung upon the cross and made a curse for us in order that God’s wrath which abode upon us would be put away.

His blood is still the only means by which the sins of God’s people can be put away. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” 1 John 1:9.

Bringing sin into the open and confessing it, rather than pretending it has never taken place, remains the only means of putting away God’s anger.

The Gibeonites had for many years remained silent regarding this outrage against them. They had not cried out for revenge nor had the Lord stirred them up to agitate for recom-



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pence.

In this they present an example for believers in Ulster, grieved and vexed by the sins of recent years. Like the Gibeonites, we may leave the matter with the Lord for He will pursue the issue and will not permit it to be ignored.

However, the silence and patient bearing with the evil by the Gibeonites does not diminish the wrongdoing. If anything, it magnifies it.

Today, a lack of a loud crying out for recompence for the wrongdoing over the last few years may well be taken as an indication that little or no offence has been caused or that few really care about the setting aside of solemn oaths and undertakings and the overthrowing of publicly declared beliefs and truths. Such a perception would be to mistake silent sorrow for indifference.

Whether or not those offended by the sins of recent times make themselves heard and loudly clamour for action, let it be known that the Lord will, sooner or later, demand an account.

Better it would be for all if the matter were addressed now and the folly of the activities of the whitewash crew be abandoned.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy,” Proverbs 28: 13.

Ivan Foster

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(Subsequently enlarged)