
Day 106 – April 16

Israel as a Monarchy (1100 – 930 BCE)

Two Major Calamities

Preparations for Building the Temple

Readings: *2 Samuel 21:1-14; 2 Samuel 24:1-9; 1 Chronicles 21:1-22:19; Psalm 30. Also see: 2 Samuel 24:10-25*

Reflections:

- This first passage must be included in the list of “very hard to understand” category. The story of apparently innocent descendents of Saul being executed to atone for the sin of the family is horrific for us to consider. The clear notion in this passage is that the land had been defiled by all the innocent blood that had been spilt by Saul. To cleanse the land of this defilement, judgment needed to be completed. A famine begins the process of judgment but then David initiates making atonement for this sin by offering to the Gibeonites, the sufferers of Saul, these seven innocent people whom they kill. We assume from the text that this is what God wants from start to finish. To give God the benefit of the doubt on this one, nowhere does it suggest that this is something David should do. God only states why there is the judgment of famine. He does not tell David to do this and nor does God comment on David’s decision. All we know at the end was that “God answered the prayer of the land.” In other words, the famine stopped. Does this mean that this was God’s first choice? Could God have simply stopped it if he didn’t want any more of this happening? We have to remember to see the message of Jesus as ultimately defining God’s intention and will and heart. As we look at the Old Testament as the account of “what doesn’t work” and we are in a section about “why kings are not going to help change the human heart because they have issues of their own” I think we are freed up to look at these texts as not being equal to or helpful to us understanding God’s heart but as some of the awful things that happen in a broken world when Jesus isn’t leading.
- What does it mean that the land prayed? We should try to answer that. Creation although impersonal is described in such personal terms when it comes to its relationship with sin. Paul writes in Romans 8:19-22, “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” We see clearly today the impact and effect of sin on the world and the created order. In Scripture God describes his creation as suffering as a person would suffer. And so here, the image is that of the land praying to capture God’s awareness of the suffering of his creation under the impact of human sin. This still doesn’t explain why more humans needed to die.

- We should also mention that the bones being properly buried fit into the image of peace finally being given to this situation. A proper burial was significant in the Jewish culture in understanding peace. They believed (as Christians do) in a physical resurrection. To properly bury the bones was symbolic of being ready for that future day.
- A second sad and troubling story unfolds. David is tempted by Satan to proudly count how many men he has in his army. This pride and self sufficiency shows he is completely disregarding God as his provider and protector. Even Joab sees this very clearly and refuses to include Benjamin and Levi tribes in the count. Note: The tribe of Levi should never be counted anyway because as Priests they were not to fight in any battle. Again judgment falls and the response of God seems harsh. In this case we know exactly what God’s options are and he offers them to David. Here we see both God’s judgment and mercy. We see both David’s sin and repentance. We also see that the sin of a leader and a willing participation of his people bring judgment on the whole community. Praise God that with Jesus as our ultimate King and Leader all we experience is mercy and grace. What a powerful illustration of why you don’t want a human king leading rather than God!
- In this story we also see the veil between the spiritual realm and the natural realm pulled back. It provides a rare window into the spiritual realm. I am not sure what else to make of it other than I am quite sure this was very frightening for David to see the spiritual reality of God’s judgment.
- Here on a simply threshing floor (again an image of simplicity and humility) David selects the location for the future temple. As he makes the preparation for his son, in light of Solomon’s inexperience and young age, we see the beginning of a new transition. Just as the Torah and a King can’t change the human heart, so we will soon discover having a magnificent temple with all the rituals and traditions can not change the human heart. As wonderful a building it certainly will be, one day it will be completely destroyed because of the dead spirituality and sinful rebellion found within the hearts of the people who give leadership to the temple.
- It is important to note that although the Old Testament has a lot of judgment and war, this is never God’s ultimate heart. David is not allowed to build the temple because he is

a warrior. Solomon who is to be a man of peace and rest is entrusted with this task. Again, peace is viewed as the higher and more complete expression of God's heart.

- Notice in the commands David gives to Solomon regarding the temple, he commands, "Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the Lord your God." There is the physical work in building the temple but at the heart level, the focus should simply be on relationship with God. A good reminder that God ultimately doesn't need to own properties or be a religious landlord. He wants intimate relationship with his kids.
- David's dedication song seems to echo the story of when he tried counting his army and everything went wrong. Here he declares that when he was in right relationship with God, "[God] made my mountain stand firm." True security comes from God's grace alone. The end result is dancing, joy, singing and thanksgiving! Even in this context where so much is wrong, still David and Israel get to experience moments of God's blessing and grace that brings them great joy.