

THE LAST DAYS OF DAVID

2 Samuel 21, 23, 24 and 1 Kings 1 and 2

Act 1:

Narrator
David
Joshua
Gibeonite 1
A prophet
Gibeonite 2
Rizpah

Act 2:

Narrator
David
Joab
Gad, the prophet
Josheb, a mighty man
Eleazar, a mighty man
Shammah, a mighty man
Araunah, a Jebusite

Act 3:

Narrator
David
Joab
Adonijah
Nathan, the prophet
Bathsheba
Solomon
Benaiah, an army general
Jonathan, Abiathar the priest's son

ACT 1: The Gibeonites are avenged

NARRATOR: The Bible records several rather odd stories that occurred towards the end of David's life. The first one involves a people group called the Gibeonites. Back in the time of Joshua, just after Jericho had been destroyed, the Canaanites living in the city of Gibeon decided that they would try to avoid being exterminated. They had heard the rumor that the God of the Israelites had told his people to totally wipe out everyone living in the land of Canaan. They believed this would come true and they were very afraid. They decided to try to trick Joshua into making a peace treaty with them. The messengers they sent to Joshua were wearing old clothes and carrying dry and moldy food.

JOSHUA: Who are you and where do you come from?

GIBEONITE 1: We have come from a distant land. When we started our journey our clothes were new and our food was fresh. You can see how worn out and old they are now. That is because we have been traveling so long to get here. However, we have heard stories about all the things your God has done for you. We've heard what he did to Pharaoh in Egypt and also to the kings of the Amorites. We fear your God. Since we are from a distant place, we are probably not on your list of people you must kill. So make a peace treaty with us and promise us you will not wipe us out.

NARRATOR: The men of Israel looked at their provisions and saw that they did, indeed, look old and worn out. The men decided to believe the Gibeonites and did not bother to ask God about it.

JOSHUA: Since you are from faraway, we will agree to make a treaty with you. Our nations will not go to war against each other, but will have peace between us. We promise not to kill you.

NARRATOR: All the elders of Israel joined with Joshua and agreed to this treaty. Then, three days after they made this treaty, the Israelites found out that the Gibeonites were not from far away, but were practically their nextdoor neighbors! Joshua and the army marched for three days and came to the land of the Gibeonites. He summoned the men who had come to him.

JOSHUA: Why did you deceive us? You said, "We came from a distant land," when, in truth, you were living right next to us. Why did you do this?

GIBEONITE 1: We were told how your God told you that He would give you the whole land of Canaan and wipe out all of your enemies. We feared for our lives. That is why we did this. We are in your hands now. Do to us whatever seems right to you.

JOSHUA: We swore an oath to you, before the Lord our God, not to destroy you. God has told us never to break our promises, so we can't break the treaty we made with you. We will not kill you. However, you will now be our slaves. You will chop wood and carry water for us.

GIBEONITE 1: We will do as you say. We serve you by chopping wood and carrying water.

NARRATOR: So Joshua allowed the Gibeonites to live among the Israelites as their slaves. They even chopped wood and carried water for the temple. Sacrificing animals required a lot of wood for the fires and a lot of water for washing up. The Gibeonites preferred working hard to being put to death so they were okay with this arrangement. They were still living among the Israelites centuries later, during the time of Saul. As we know, Saul did not do a good job of obeying God. One of the evils he committed during his reign was to try to get rid of the Gibeonites. He knew the story of how Joshua had made a treaty with them, but perhaps because that was so long ago, maybe he thought it was okay by now to get rid of them. After all, that was what was supposed to happen, had they not tricked Joshua. Perhaps Saul thought he could right this wrong after all these years. Apparently, he began killing the Gibeonites until almost none of them were left. The Gibeonites living at time of Saul had not done anything wrong, they simply were not Israelites and Saul wanted to “cleanse” Israel of foreigners. A Several decades had gone by since Saul did this, and nothing had been done to right this wrong.

DAVID: We have had three straight years of famine. One or two years are to be expected every now and then, but three years in a row makes me think God is trying to tell us something. I will inquire of God to find out what is going on.

NARRATOR: God spoke to David and said:

A PROPHET, SPEAKING GOD’S MESSAGE: It is because of Saul and his blood-stained house that his famine has come upon the land of Israel. It is because Saul put the Gibeonites to death.

NARRATOR: David summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them.

DAVID: Our forefathers swore and oath to you not to destroy you, and Saul broke that promise. What can I do for you to right this wrong? How shall I make amends so that your people will bless the people of the God of Israel?

GIBEONITE 2: We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone to death.

DAVID: But what I can I do for you? There must be justice.

GIBEONITE 2: Let seven of Saul’s male descendants be killed and exposed before the Lord at Gibeah, Saul’s home town.

DAVID: I will give them to you and you may put them to death.

NARRATOR: This is the place where modern readers get very upset. This sounds downright cruel and unfair. How can a second act of unfair cruelty make up for a first one? Is the Bible saying that two wrongs DO make a right? The answer is that we have a very limited ability to judge this situation. We were not there. This is a story from thousands of years ago. The people and societies in the story cannot be judged by modern standards. What we do know is that God is concerned about both justice and compassion. He is God and we have no right to challenge his decisions. In this case, God’s will was to carry out further judgement on the family of Saul.

Seven of Saul’s grandsons were chosen. David spared Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth, because he has sworn an oath to protect him for the sake of Jonathan.

Did these seven other grandsons participate in the slaughter of the Gibeonites or had they been completely innocent of this crime? We don’t know. All we know is that this solution made sense to the people of that day, and that it was another fulfillment of God’s prophecy that He would bring the reign of Saul’s family to a permanent end. It had not been that long ago that a member of Saul’s tribe had tried again to revolt against David. This would put a final end to the “house” of Saul.

GIBEONITE 2: Take these seven descendants of Saul and execute them over on that hill. Execute them all at the same time, not one at a time. Make sure they fall all at once. Then leave their bodies on the hill. Don't bury them. Leave them there so that God can see that justice has been carried out. God will then forgive Israel and end this drought.

NARRATOR: So the bodies of these seven men lay there in public view. That seems gruesome to you and I, but it made sense in that society. This was the ancient world. (And remember, if those men loved God, their personal stories had a happy ending because they are now heaven, alive and happy!)

The end of this story involves a woman named Rizpah. She had been one of Saul's lesser wives. She must have been a notable person at the palace because during the time that Saul's son, Ishbosheth, was trying to reign as king during the two years after Saul's death, he accused his army general, Abner, of having a relationship with Rizpah. We don't know for sure what actually happened, only that Abner was so angry about this accusation that he decided to switch sides and go over to David. So here is that same woman, Rizpah, guarding the bodies of her two sons, making sure birds of prey don't land on them. Poor Rizpah!

RIZPAH: Shoo! Shoo! Go away, birds! Leave us alone! Shoo! I will not let you touch my precious sons and nephews! And that goes for you wild animals, too! I will not let you come close! I will stay here day and night and will not leave!

NARRATOR: Rizpah stayed there for weeks. She stayed there even when it began to rain. (God saw that justice had been done, so he sent rain upon the land.) When David heard about what Rizpah was doing, he knew it was time to end this story.

DAVID: I now proclaim that the bones of those seven men are to be gathered up respectfully and buried along with the bones of Saul and his sons. None of these men had a proper burial. So gather up all their remains and give them a proper burial in tomb of Saul's father in the land of Benjamin.

NARRATOR: The king's command was carried out, and that was, finally, the end of the story of Saul.

ACT 2: The census and the plague

NARRATOR: David had some amazing warriors in this army. There was an official list of "Thirty Mighty Men," though the actual number may have grown a bit beyond thirty, possibly to thirty-seven. Uriah had been among these Thirty Mighty Men. Another of the Thirty, named Benaiah, was famous for having killed an Egyptian soldier who had a spear, even though Benaiah only had a club. He somehow managed to get the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and then killed him with it. He also killed some of Moab's best soldiers.

There was an even more exclusive group called "The Three." It seems that they had been with David from the very start, back when David was still running from Saul. Their names were Josheb, Eleazar, and Shammah.

JOSHEB: I killed 800 men all by myself!

ELEAZAR: I refused to retreat from the Philistine army even when all the Israelite soldiers turned and fled. I stood my ground and would not retreat. I fought alone! I kept fighting even when my hand grew so tired that it felt like it was frozen to my sword. The Lord helped me to defeat the Philistine soldiers, and when my fellow soldiers finally returned, they found that I had killed all the Philistines and all they had to do was strip the bodies of their weapons.

SHAMMAH: I also fought a battle by myself. I single-handedly won a great victory, with the Lord's help.

NARRATOR: Joab's brother, Abishai, was as famous as The Three, so he was considered to be chief of The

Three. Abishai once killed three hundred Philistines by himself. Only Joab was higher in rank than Abishai. In modern terminology, both Joab and Abishai were 5-star generals.

Yes, David had some of the bravest men in the world in his army. But most importantly, David had the Lord. It was God who ultimately gave them their victories, even though they were indeed very brave. God wanted David to trust in Him, not in the abilities of his men. David was never to worry about the strength of his army. After all, Gideon had defeated the Midianites with only 300 men!

In the ancient world, if someone counted something, this was like a statement of ownership. For example, only the owner could count the number of sheep in the flock. If someone else came along and counted them, this would have been considered rude. This was the custom in the ancient world. So when David decided to count his soldiers, Joab became alarmed. Joab knew the commandment from the law of Moses that talked about taking a census.

EXODUS 30:12: "When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a payment for himself to the Lord, that there may be no plague among them when you number them."

NARRATOR: The payment required by the law was to be paid to the temple, as payment to God. It was a way of demonstrating God's ownership over his people. The king did not own Israel, God did.

But God was angry at the Israelites for some reason. We are not told why. Perhaps they were already starting to make idols. Whatever they were doing was apparently bad enough for God to determine that they needed to be punished. But God used a foolish act of David to accomplish this. In Chronicles, we are told that Satan actually inspired David to take the census.

DAVID: Joab, I want you to go throughout all of Israel and take a census. Find out how many men we have available to fight in the army.

JOAB: May the Lord multiply our troops a hundred times over and may the king be blessed to see this, but please reconsider this decision. My Lord the king, why would you want to do this? This might make God angry.

DAVID: I've already decided, Joab! There is no use arguing with me. Now go and do it!

NARRATOR: Joab had to obey whatever David decided, because David was the king. So, against his will, Joab set out to take a census.

JOAB: But I will not count the Levites, or the tribe of Benjamin. I have to draw the line somewhere!

NARRATOR: It took Joab nine months to go throughout the entire land of Israel. When he got back, he gave his report to the king.

JOAB: My Lord the King, in Israel there are 800,000 men who can fight. In Judah there are 500,000.

DAVID: Joab, this was wrong, and I know it. While you were gone I did some thinking, and I know now that I did a very foolish thing.

NARRATOR: Before David got up the next morning, God had spoken to the prophet, Gad. The Lord told Gad to go and confront David.

GAD: Thus says the Lord: "You will be punished for this sin, but I am giving you three options. You must choose one of these punishments: Three years of famine in the land, three months of running from your enemies, or three days of plague. Which shall it be?"

DAVID: I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of God, rather into the hands of men. I choose the three days of plague.

NARRATOR: Providentially, plague is exactly what the law of Moses had said would happen. The Lord

immediately sent a plague out over the land of Israel. 70,000 people died during those three days. An angel had been instructed to carry out this horrible task, but as the angel approached Jerusalem, the Lord was saddened by the thought of afflicting the holy city, and he said to the angel, "Enough! Withdraw your hand!" The angel was standing on the threshing floor of a man who lived just outside of Jerusalem. (A threshing floor is a flat place used to process wheat.) The man's name was Araunah, and he was a Jebusite. The Jebusites were the original inhabitants of Jerusalem, before David came and conquered it. Many of them were still alive and living in the area.

Apparently the angel was visible, at least to David. David went out to that area and saw the angel standing there on the threshing floor.

DAVID: I am the one who sinned and did this great wrong. These people are like sheep that are being slaughtered. What have they done? They did not ask for the census. Please, let your hand fall on me and my family, instead of them.

NARRATOR: The angel did stop, and there were no further deaths by plague. God told the prophet Gad to go and speak to David again.

GAD: Go and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor where the angel stopped.

NARRATOR: Of course, David was very eager to obey. He immediately went to see Araunah, who owned the threshing floor. Araunah saw the king coming. He went out to meet him and bowed with his face to the ground.

ARAUNAH: Why has my Lord the king come to visit his humble servant?

DAVID: I want to buy your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the Lord in order to stop this plague.

ARAUNAH: My Lord the king can take whatever he wants. The threshing floor is yours. And also take my oxen and my wooden tools and burn them on the altar. I gladly give all of this to you so that the plague may be stopped.

DAVID: No, I insist on paying you for everything. I can't offer to God as a sacrifice that did not cost me something. I must pay you.

NARRATOR: So David bought the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and built an altar there. The Lord accepted David's sacrifice and forgave him. The plague stopped. This location would become very important in the near future. David's son, Solomon, would build the temple on this site.

ACT 3: David makes Solomon king

NARRATOR: When David became very old and it was obvious that he didn't have long to live, his third oldest son, Adonijah, decided that it was time for him to become king. The first-born and second-born sons, Amnon and Absalom, were dead, so Adonijah was now the eldest son. In general, kings traditionally were succeeded by their eldest sons. However, the king was not under any obligation to follow this tradition if they had a good reason not to. The king could pass the kingship on to any of his sons. The king's word was law. Apparently, it was widely known, at least inside the palace, that David intended to pass the kingship to Solomon. Adonijah knew this. Yet instead of respecting his father's wishes, he decided to stage a revolt. He did exactly what Absalom had done. He convinced key people to help him.

ADONIJAH: It is time for me to be king. My father is too old now. Servants, prepare chariots and horses for me. And get 50 men to run ahead of them. I must look royal from now on!

NARRATOR: Two of Adonijah's co-conspirators were Joab and Abiathar the priest. Both men should have known better. Adonijah found other men, also, who would support him and invited them all to a special

gathering. He also invited the rest of the royal princes (all of David's sons), except Solomon. Adonijah's invite list was remarkably accurate—he had done his research and knew exactly who would support him. Why did Joab decide to support Adonijah, after a lifetime of loyalty to David? We aren't told. Perhaps Joab did not like the idea of serving a king who was only a teenager. Or perhaps he saw this as a way of finally getting back at David for taking from him the status of being commander of the army. The Bible does not tell us his motives, but Joab surely knew he was taking a huge risk in supporting Adonijah. If Adonijah succeeded, Joab would be a hero. If not, Joab would be a traitor deserving death.

When Nathan the prophet heard about Adonijah's gathering down at En Rogel, he was alarmed. If would not be long until Adonijah and his troops would headed their way to take over the palace and execute both David and his intended heir, Solomon.

Nathan went to talk to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother.

NATHAN: Bathsheba, have you heard what Adonijah is doing? He is declaring himself as the next king. He knows very well that David wants Solomon to be king, but he is going to try to take and get rid of Solomon. You must go and speak to the king right away.

BATHSHEBA: I will do as you say. I will go to the king right away.

NARRATOR: So Bathsheba went to talk to David.

BATHSHEBA: My lord, the king, did you not promise me that our son, Solomon, would sit on your throne after you? Yet your son Adonijah seems to have declared himself as king. There is news of a huge gathering down in En Rogel. He has invited all the rest of your sons, and also Joab and Abiathar the priest. They are sacrificing many sheep and cattle and having a huge party right now, but you know that soon they will head back to Jerusalem and I am afraid of what they will do to us.

DAVID: Here comes Nathan. I will ask him what is going on.

NATHAN: My lord, the king. Have you declared that Adonijah is king now? He has gone down to En Rogel to hold a huge gathering. They are offering sacrifices to give the impression that God approves of this. Adonijah invited all the other princes, too, except for Solomon. They are eating and drinking and making merry and everyone is yelling, "Long live king Adonijah!"

DAVID: As surely as the Lord lives, I swore to Bathsheba that our son, Solomon, would sit on my throne after me. It looks like today is the day he will become king. Nathan, get Zadok the priest and Benaiah, my faithful general, and have them sit Solomon on my royal mule and parade down to Gihon. In the presence of everyone gathered there at Gihon, have Zadok anoint Solomon and declare him king. Then come back and have Solomon sit on my throne.

BENAIAH: As the Lord was with you, so may he be with your son, Solomon. May Solomon's reign be even greater than David's!

NARRATOR: So Zadok and Nathan and Benaiah did as David commanded, and had a coronation ceremony for Solomon. People came from all over to join in the celebration. They made a great noise as the celebrated. The noise could be heard far and wide. Even Adonijah and his friends heard it.

JOAB: What is the meaning of all the noise coming from the city?

NARRATOR: Just then, Jonathan, son of Abiathar the priest, came in. He had been in Jerusalem and knew what was going on.

ADONIJAH: Come in, Jonathan. You must be bringing good news!

JONATHAN: I'm afraid not. It seems that King David had declared that Solomon is now king. He's been

anointed and crowned and everything, and is sitting on the royal throne. The noise you hear is the whole city shouting in celebration.

NARRATOR: This ended the party. Adonijah's guest got up and ran away. Adonijah realized he was in big trouble. Solomon could order his execution as a traitor. His only chance of survival was to beg for mercy. He ran to the altar and clung to its horns. (The altar had decorative horns on the four corners.)

ADONIJAH: I will not leave the altar until Solomon swears to me that he will have mercy and not kill me.

NARRATOR: Solomon was told that Adonijah was clinging to the altar and would not leave it until Solomon promised him mercy.

SOLOMON: Go and tell Adonijah that if he proves himself to be a worthy man, not a hair on his head will perish. But if he proves to be a trouble-maker, he will be put to death.

NARRATOR: So Adonijah left the altar and came and bowed down before Solomon.

SOLOMON: You may go home. But be careful how you behave from now on!

NARRATOR: Then David called Solomon to come to him. He wanted to give Solomon some important advice.

DAVID: Solomon, my son, I know I will die soon. Before I do, I want to give you these last instructions. Be strong and manly, but most of all, be sure to walk in the ways of the Lord. Keep His commands and be careful to do everything written in His law. If you obey the Lord, you will prosper. This is my most important advice. However, I also have some favors to ask of you. After I am gone, be sure to give certain men what they deserved. Joab is a man of blood. He killed innocent men, like Abner and Amasa. He proved to be a traitor in the end, too, so make sure you execute him. Also, punish Shimei, the man who threw stones at me. Also, remember to show kindness to the men who met me on the other side of the Jordan River, when I had to flee the city. They helped me when I was in need. Make sure they are rewarded.

NARRATOR: After David gave this advice to Solomon, he died. He had reigned over Israel for forty years.