

2 Samuel 1 & 4 – The Relationship Litmus Test

Introduction

One of the most well-known Scriptures is Hebrews 10:30, "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' Within the Mosaic Law was provided the guiding principle that even through we are unjustly wronged, justice resides not with us but with God.

Deuteronomy 32:35, "*Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them.*"

But the Mosaic Law took it one step further in the case of injustice at the hands of a fellow countryman. The obligation was to try and reprove them -- in other words to provide instruction and correction that they may have an opportunity to change their life before experiencing final judgment at the hands of God.

Leviticus 19:17-18, "*You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.*"

David -- who incessantly meditated on the Law -- was guided by this principle. And although he had unquestionably suffered wrong at the hands of Saul, never took vengeance into his own hands. David personally had two opportunities to take Saul's life in the cave (1 Samuel 24) and at the camp (1 Samuel 26), yet chose to obey the full Word of God.

¹Now it came about after the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, that David remained two days in Ziklag. ²On the third day, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul, with his clothes torn and dust on his head. And it came about when he came to David that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself.

³Then David said to him, "From where do you come?"

And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel."

⁴David said to him, "How did things go? Please tell me."

And he said, "The people have fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also."

⁵So David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

⁶The young man who told him said, "By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and behold, Saul was leaning on his spear. And behold, the chariots and the horsemen pursued him closely. ⁷When he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I said, 'Here I am.' ⁸He said to me, 'Who are you?' And I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' ⁹Then he said to me, 'Please stand beside me and kill me, for agony has seized me because my life still lingers in me.' ¹⁰So I

[Read v.1-2]

Q: We know this messenger will eventually be revealed to have false intentions. What is indicated in v.2 that begins to give him away?

A: He came "with his clothes torn and dust on his head" which are the traditional, outward signs of mourning. In other words, he had the outward **APPEARANCE** of sincerity.

[Read v.3-5]

Q: Why do you suppose David doesn't simply accept the report as given in v.3-4? Why does he ask for proof?

A: This is only one witness or messenger. In those days communication was much slower and came in waves, one messenger after another. It was not uncommon for a messenger to report a battle going badly or even lost, only to have the next messenger report victory. Both may have been correct at the time they left the situation, but the information is often incomplete or only temporarily interpreted correctly until the next messenger.

Point: How often do we take a course of action based on the first report, only to learn that the situation changed in the mean time, or the report was erroneous to begin with?

[Read v.6-10]

Q: So how does the messenger know that Saul and Jonathan are dead?

A: Actually, he only knows for sure that Saul is dead because the messenger killed him.; no proof is offered for Jonathan.

Q: Why would the messenger include Jonathan?

A: It's another indication of the messenger's true motives as this is a subtle way of communicating that an heir to Saul's throne has been killed, clearing the way for David to be king. It's supposed to be a "win-win" situation.

stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown which was on his head and the bracelet which was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord.”

Q: Carefully review the messenger's testimony regarding Saul's condition. Based on his report, what might be concluded about Saul's personal situation at the time of his death based solely on this information?

A: Saul was being pursued by enemies, probably wounded, in emotional anguish over the situation, but it was not hopeless -- Saul still had the opportunity to escape alive. Although wounded, Saul's own testimony in v.9 is "...my life still lingers in me." The literal translation of this statement is, "My whole life is in me."

Q: Why might this be significant to David?

A: David had bypassed two previous opportunities to dispose of Saul himself; opportunities which, to everyone around him, **appeared** to be the right time and place supplied by God but which David knew otherwise. (Hint: David's past behavior puts him in the position to judge the messenger according to what David himself would be measured against.)

Q: What reveals the messenger's true intentions? How might this contradict the very first report he provided David?

A: He has raced to David with Saul's bracelet and crown, the things that will belong to the next King of Israel. In v.3 the messenger testified, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel", "escape" implying a lucky series of events that brought the messenger to David. But we now see his actions purposefully brought him to David' and that he is no mere "survivor" that happened across David's path.

Q: What might now be divined as to the messenger's true motives?

A: He was looking for favor with what he supposed would be the new King of Israel. In reality, this man took the actions that the vast majority of men in his position took and was handsomely rewarded by most earthly rulers throughout history.

Point: Just because someone appears to have your interests at heart, they may **NOT** be sent from God nor contributing for reasons other than meeting their own agenda. It's as much about understanding motives as discerning gaps in the information.

[Read v.11-12]

Q: David has discerned the truth of both the situation and the motives of the messenger. What is significant about his first actions?

A: He sets the public example that this is not news of celebration focused on his taking the throne. It's ultimately bad news that Saul and Jonathan have been killed and therefore the proper response is respect and mourning, not celebration.

Point: From a spiritual point of view, as long as Saul lived there was still hope that he would turn back to the Lord. Our desire for our enemies to repent and return to the Lord should overwhelm our personal relief coming from their final destruction.

[Read v.13]

Q: Why do you suppose that this man volunteered to BOTH Saul (v.8) and David that he is an Amalekite?

A: The implication is that although he is on "their" side, he's not really subject to the same rules as everyone else because he's not an Israelite. He represents the type of person that is only along for the ride for personal gain and will change or break the rules any time it fits in with his

¹¹Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did all the men who were with him. ¹²They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

¹³David said to the young man who told him, "Where are you from?"

And he answered, "I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite."

own plans.

Q: Re-read v.1. What had David just accomplished prior to hearing the news about Saul?

A: David had just defeated the Amalekites.

Point: *The enemy of your enemy may **NOT** be your friend and may simply be another enemy.*

[Read v.14-18]

Q: Is David taking out his own vengeance on the messenger?

A: No. He is carrying out the penalty of the law for the unlawful killing of Saul.

Point: *David clearly demonstrates the difference between himself and the messenger, that although from a certain point of view they were united by a common enemy, their spiritual point of view was so incompatible that David needed to clearly send the message, "He and I do **NOT** believe in the same things."*

Q: Other than for the sake of "doing the right thing", why might it be very important that David has Judah learn and invoke the song of the bow specifically mourning Saul and Jonathan?

A: Judah was David's tribe, the people that consistently backed David against Saul. This is his way of leading them towards reconciliation with all the other tribes of Israel so that everyone will be united spiritually rather than militarily.

Point: *The messenger sought to bring about change simply by transferring a crown -- he had little regard for the spiritual welfare of the nation; David sought to bring about spiritual reconciliation regardless of what side any person had taken during the conflict.*

Read and review 2 Samuel 4 before continuing the study.

[Read 4:1-6]

Let's get all the players straight so we know who we're talking about.

Q: Who are the people mentioned here that are directly related to Saul?

- Abner is Saul's chief military leader and recognized as a very great leader by the entire nation. His death is nearly as devastating as King Saul's.
- Saul's healthy son Ish-bosheth. He loses courage and therefore does not appear to be a threat to David or whomever next assumes the throne.
- Saul's crippled grandson Mephibosheth, who was injured at the time of the news of his father's (Jonathan) and grandfather's death. (Note: The nurse's reaction might not be so crazy as it was not uncommon of surrounding nations of the day to kill all of the outgoing king's family to pave the way for the new.)

Point: *There is no serious threat to David either from top military officials previously loyal to Saul or in his few remaining offspring. The path to succession is free of any potential problems without the need for further intervention.*

Q: Who are the people mentioned here that are related to Saul's sons?

A: Baanah and Rechab. They also happen to be members of the tribe of Benjamin, the same as Saul and his family. Many would have seen them

2 Samuel 1 & 4 – The Relationship Litmus Test, Page 3 of 5

¹⁴Then David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?"

¹⁵And David called one of the young men and said, "Go, cut him down." So he struck him and he died.

¹⁶David said to him, "Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.'"

¹⁷Then David chanted with this lament over Saul and Jonathan his son, ¹⁸and he told them to teach the sons of Judah the song of the bow; behold, it is written in the book of Jashar.

¹Now when Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel was disturbed. ²Saul's son had two men who were commanders of bands: the name of the one was Baanah and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, of the sons of Benjamin (for Beeroth is also considered part of Benjamin, ³and the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been aliens there until this day).

⁴Now Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the report of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened that in her hurry to flee, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

⁵So the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, departed and came to the house of Ish-bosheth in the heat of the day while he was taking his midday rest. ⁶They came to the middle of the

house as if to get wheat, and they struck him in the belly; and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped.

⁷Now when they came into the house, as he was lying on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and killed him and beheaded him. And they took his head and traveled by way of the Arabah all night. ⁸Then they brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Behold, the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; thus the Lord has given my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and his descendants."

⁹David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said to them, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress, ¹⁰when one told me, saying, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him in Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. ¹¹How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood from your hand and destroy you from the earth?"

¹²Then David commanded the young

as being loyal to Saul and his family to the exclusion of David.

Q: Why is it significant that Baanah and Rechab killed Saul's 5-year-old grandson Mephibosheth and NOT Saul's older son Ish-bosheth? Wasn't Saul's son higher in line to make a claim on the throne than his grandson?

A: It betrays the true condition of their hearts to accomplish something that would elevate themselves over others. It's perhaps an indication that they were seeking to re-establish their place in David's kingdom as it was in Saul's.

[Read v.7-8]

Q: As with the messenger who killed Saul in 2 Samuel 1, these men take actions they "think" will both please David AND further their personal positions. What is the application here for people like this that we may encounter in the course of our life and ministry?

A: One of God's oft-repeated principles of living a righteous, Spirit-controlled life is that **HOW** you get "there" is more important than simply getting "there." In other words, the ends **DO NOT** justify the means.

People who purport to be working for our benefit or on our behalf but are actually self-serving or agents of Satan will betray the true condition of their faith and heart in the methods they employ, thinking that not having to actually live a righteous life is not an issue if they obtain the results desired. They don't see that their sin has tainted the results and actually **EXPECT** that you're on board with how they've accomplished something while breaking all the rules in the process.

In other words, they don't respect the integrity of your walk in Christ either. It's the ultimate proof that they believe you're as much a hypocrite as they are and are working not towards heavenly treasure but earthly.

As with the messenger, they're also often betrayed in the way that their story changes over time and, in the case of Baanah and Rechab, the use of God's name to justify obviously sinful actions.

Q: How did these men try to legitimize their methods?

A: They claim that since the results fulfill God's will, their methods are justified.

Point: Using God's name is not the same as being obedient to His name. David's example is greater concern for everyone's obedience to God's name rather than his own.

[Read v.9-11]

Q: What is the difference between the man that killed Saul and the men that killed Mephibosheth?

A: The former was deceived or in error; the latter premeditatedly evil.

Q: What is the common denominator between both parties?

A: Self over all else; abandonment of obedience to God's law in order to achieve a desired result.

[Read v.12]

2 Samuel 1 & 4 – The Relationship Litmus Test, Page 4 of 5

men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hung them up beside the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the grave of Abner in Hebron.

Q: What might be significant about the difference in the way David treated Baanah and Rechab vs. Saul's killer?

A: The public display of their mutilated bodies communicated intolerance of sin. Some men in David's position might have rewarded such behavior; David makes the statement here that the ends don't justify the means.

For Consideration:

- Do we think everything's "OK" as long as we're all focused on the same goal? Why is that not biblically correct?
- How well do we scrutinize **ALL** of our relationships?
- Are we only wary of becoming unequally yoked with non-believers? What about people and organizations that also claim to follow Christ?
- Are there individuals or even organizations you've allowed into your life whose methods you sometimes question as to whether or not they're biblically grounded? Are you accepting that the ends justify the means?
- If we follow David's example, what is the application for how to handle such relationships? (Sever all contact; completely remove the "relationship".)

In Conclusion, Jesus' own words:

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." -- Matthew 5:17-19

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" -- Matthew 5:43-46

"Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." -- Matthew 23:10-12

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." -- Matthew 20:25-28