

It's a warm, dusty evening. The sun is about to say good night, as it lays its head on a pillow of clouds that are nestled in the hills of Israel. A kind, elderly gentleman is seated in a rocking chair on the front porch of a palatial cedar estate just outside Jerusalem. Gathered around him is a sea of little children. Their mouths are open. Their eyes are focused on the aged statesman, as he recounts for them tales of his war exploits, colorful stories of days gone by.

Finally, little Aaron holds up his hand. "Yes, my child," the old man kindly responds. "Tell us again, King David, about the time when you were a young man, and you killed the giant, Goliath. Tell us what it was like to be young and kill giants, King David, tell us again."

The king's eyes twinkled a bit, as he looked down at the lad and with a note of intensity he answered this way: "I'll tell you about Goliath if you like, my child, and what it was like to kill giants in days gone by. But you know what? My giant-slaying days aren't over!"

With that, a quiet ripple passed through the crowd, as the children looked at one another in puzzled amazement, not sure exactly what to think. They might have chuckled had they not been so filled with respect for the old warrior.

David spoke again: "I may be old," he said, "and I may be weak... but, ah, my child, when my God speaks...*the giants still fall!*" "You never get too old to slay a giant, my child," David went on, "no matter how old you get; WHEN GOD IS ON THE THRONE THE GIANTS STILL FALL!"

This study is proof of that, and it's that truth that serves as the basis for a study of some principles I believe all of the Christian community needs to remember, particularly those of us who may be tempted to fold up our tents, lay down our weapons, and take an early retirement from the battle.

As we concluded our last lesson, we saw the curtain descend on

David's most unnecessary conflict of all. It was a childish skirmish that developed just as he was returning for his long-anticipated homecoming. He was coming back to occupy once again the throne he had evacuated so hurriedly when his errant son, Absalom, had chased him from the palace.

Now Absalom was dead, and the king had returned. But his impending moment of triumph had turned into a nightmare of hostility, as the men of Judah and the men of Israel became so entrenched in an argument over who had the right to escort the king, that his moment of greatness degenerated into a horrendous fight.

At this point, a wild-eyed antagonist named Sheba became the self-appointed leader of the rebel army. It was only after Sheba's head had been separated from his shoulders that peace returned, and David truly returned as king.

Now as the house lights dim, and Act 21 of II Samuel opens, we see what appears to be a three-part epilogue of David's Days as king. Three major incidents are recorded, each with both shortterm significance and long-term application. It is to those three incidents that we address ourselves in this lesson.

And we may as well address ourselves at the outset to the issue of whether or not the events of Chapter 21 do in fact chronologically follow the events of Chapter 20. There are some Bible commentators who place these incidents earlier in David's life and see them only referred to here as a postscript, as added incidental tacked on to the colorful life of our Living Legend (almost as afterthoughts). They list numerous arguments to substantiate their claims, but in all honesty, the preponderance of evidence seems to point to the fact that this chapter is just where it belongs, indicating that these events did indeed take place chronologically at the end of David's days. So many of the Bible scholars who seem to be so consistently conservative in their thinking take that position, including in their arguments the use of the word "then" at the opening of verse one, indicating that these events in fact took place just after the events of chapter 20; that is, after the murder of Amasa, the murder of Sheba, and the reuniting of the warring factions under David's rule.

For the sake of our study, then, we will accept that interpretation and assume that these are, in effect, incidents etched in the scrolls of David's final days. We begin in II Samuel 21:

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years,

year after year; and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, " It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites."

So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; the children of Israel had sworn protection to them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.

Therefore David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the Lord?"

And the Gibeonites said to him, "We will have no silver or gold from Saul or from his house, nor shall you kill any man in Israel for us." So he said, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."

Then they answered the king, "As for the man who consumed us and plotted against us, that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the territories of Israel,

Let seven men of his descendants be delivered to us, and we will hang them before the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord chose." And the king said, "I will give *them*."

But the king spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite;

And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD. So they fell, all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first *days*, in the beginning of barley harvest.

(II Samuel 21:1-9 NKJV)

# I- THE PERIL OF UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The passage, as we stated earlier, begins with the word then, apparently tying in these unusual events in the time frame of David's life with the murder of Sheba, the subsequent return of Joab and the restoration of David's dynasty. What happened "then" is explained next. It is this: *There was a famine in the days of David*.

In other words, in the days when David was *again* on the throne, and yet in the days when David was *still* on the throne, tying it in

the latter chapter of David's reign, something happened.

What took place was one of thirteen famines mentioned in Scripture, one of thirteen times we read of God using the supply and demand system of economics to graphically capture the attention of His people, so He could, once they were hungry enough, teach them about heavenly food. Unfortunately, empty stomachs, thin pocketbooks, and bare cupboards are often God's most effective backdrops for communicating the concepts of repentance and dependence.

David knew this, and yet David, like us, allowed three successive years to grind slowly past before he did what God's man is supposed to do when the physical signs indicate spiritual problems.

Verse one tells us what he did. *He went to inquire of the LORD.* He prayed about it. He prayed intensely about it. He prayed specifically about it. That's important. And once he did, God answered him... specifically, as well. I say important, because God did nothing until David asked. He just let the heavens dry up and the crops burn up. He waited.

His principles have always been:

You begin the process of asking; only THEN do you receive.

You begin the process of seeking; only THEN do you find.

You begin the process of knocking; only THEN the door will be opened.

In other words, our initiating frees God to release His provision. Our silence, on the other hand, indicates to God a spirit of presumption. And though God desires to meet our needs, our failure to ask places a barrier between His power and us, and between His answers and us. Finally, David asked. Then God answered!

His answer posed a whole new set of problems for David. The Lord answered, "Here is why you are in the midst of a drought. It is because of what Saul did to the Gibeonites in absolute violation of My Word. (Exactly what Saul had done was not recorded in Scripture.) Therefore, we don't need to know exactly what Saul had done. *Everything we need to know is written in the Record... everything.* 

What we do know is that in the days of Joshua, according to Joshua 9, the children of Israel made a covenant to protect the Gibeonites, and trigger-happy Saul at some stage of his reign had violated that agreement, so an unsettled offense remained. It is now up to David, Saul's successor, to do something about that offense as he cleans up the loose ends and prepares to leave one kingdom for a far greater one.

Several principles immediately surface:

<u>1- David inherited the problems of his predecessor.</u> While he was not responsible for causing them, he was accountable for correcting them. You do not assume a position of leadership in the kingdom and take the accolades of the office without accepting the legacy of unfinished business that goes with it. Saul's offenses were still David's to deal with because they were, in essence, offenses against the reputation of God.

2- Though years had passed since this infraction occurred, God's timetable still demanded that the issue be settled. The books still had to be balanced. Time does not erase the effects of a transgression. If you have knowingly wronged someone, the fact that years may have passed without any apparent consequences does not mean that restitution is not still in order. Before David could pass the mantle of national authority over to his son, the issue of this offense had to be reconciled.

<u>3- David's task now was to meet the Gibeonites on their terms.</u> David was to trust in the sovereignty of His God, who holds the hearts of all men in His hands. He had to rest in the fact that God would see that their demands were commensurate with the crime. Two thoughts surface:

- a) Only the one wronged can really know the depth of the offense and what it will take to heal his hurts.
- b) The one seeking reconciliation must then become vulnerable, knowing that a sovereign God makes no mistakes.

<u>4- The Gibeonites were foreigners.</u> They were not Jews. How much more important it seems to be that no offense remain, for as we see in the passage, to them it was God who was responsible for in verse 6 they said, "We will hand them up to the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose." They wanted atonement before the God of Israel whom they considered accountable for putting Saul in office. That offense that is unattended to in YOUR life, therefore, is not only not excusable because it is an unbeliever you offended, it is even more vital that it be made right for the unbelieving world. Knowing you are God's, holds HIM accountable for YOUR offense.

<u>5- Notice that the payment was complete.</u> They wanted seven of Saul's sons. Seven is the perfect number in Scripture. Notice also, that once the issue was settled, the issue was settled. It could never again be resurrected, as far as God was concerned. David humbled himself, and though the offense was not his, he let those offended state the level of restitution required, and he met those requirements, protecting in the process the higher law of his vow to Mephibosheth. It was finished. The price had been paid. Never again could that issue be brought up again before the throne of God. Never.

No matter in the kingdom is of greater importance to God than the matter of unfinished business. Though years had passed, and the offender was dead, still those offended had a right to restitution at the hands of God's people. Who did it was not the issue. Someone was offended. That was the issue. God demanded that the books be balanced. We won't belabor the point; but the point is, that if there is someone that you know who is offended either because of you or because of one for whom you stand it is your responsibility to see that the wrong is righted. Not necessarily because they deserve it, but rather because the reputation of God is at stake. The peril of unfinished business. It was a memorandum that had staved on David's desk too long. Before he could write across the story of his life, "complete", this had to be settled. You and I know just as well as we know our own names, what God might be saying to us through this story. We are simply accountable to be not only hearers of the Word, but doers also. So be it.

# II- PUTTING THE PAST TO REST AT LAST

Having dealt with the unfinished business at hand, David now buries the issue of Saul and Jonathan once and for all. We continue reading,

> Now Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven. And she did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night.

> And David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.

Then David went and took the bones of Saul, and the bones

of Jonathan his son, from the men of Jabesh Gilead who had stolen them from the street of Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, after the Philistines had struck down Saul in Gilboa.

So he brought up the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from there; and they gathered the bones of those who had been hanged.

They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the tomb of Kish his father. So they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God heeded the prayer for the land.

(II Samuel 21:11-14 NKJV)

Don't ever forget, it is God who holds in His hands the channels of wind from which the storms flow. It is God who holds in His hand the measures by which the rains pour; He can water the lands in abundance and cause the crops to flourish. He can allow the thunder of His voice to announce from the heavens a deluge that the earth cannot tolerate, and floods prevail. Or He can quietly shut the valve altogether and the rains cease. Suddenly, when he does, He has the attention of man. It is not to see us suffer that He withholds the rain or any good thing. It is because there are more important things that man is overlooking. It is God who whispers, and it snows. It is God who touches His eyes, and it rains. It is God who adjusts the thermostat on the sun and the crops are scorched and parched and helpless. God it is. And it is God who, through His control of the elements, wants to speak to the hearts of men.

So God had caused the rain to cease. Now the issue was settled, and He was ready to pour out the mercy of the raindrops upon the fields of men once more. But one more thing had to happen. According to verse 14, only when the reburial of Saul and Jonathan was completed and the issue of Saul's reign was put to rest at last, were the heavens ready to pour out fresh blessings upon the children of God.

And what an act of love it was on Rizpah's part that called to David's attention what it was he needed to do. From the day of execution of the seven, two of whom belonged to Rizpah, she stood guard over the bodies with sackcloth, withstanding the intense heat by day and the cold by night. For *five months* she waited. So moved was David by her act of devotion, that he went to the place of Jabesh-Gilead where the bodies of Saul and Jonathan were, and he took their bones, and the bones of the seven, and he returned

them to the country of Benjamin, and placed them in the sepulcher of Kish, where they belonged. Now the issue was settled. Saul and those of his sons who died because of his infractions were laid to rest. Now the rains began to fall.

The truth is singular but vital. Once you have done what can be done to right a wrong, you bury the issue and you press on.

No one but you can determine when that has been done. But the problem we see so often in the lives of those whose lives are unnecessarily infested with false guilt, is that once the issue has been settled to the best of their ability, Satan sells them a guilt trip, and they live in the shadow of that transgression forever. Before you can finish what God has given you to do with your life, you must bury the dead once and for all. You must do immediately what you can to make wrongs right, and then you must immediately have a burial service and consider that issue finished. Then when Satan tries to resurrect that corpse, you can point to the cross and say, "No Satan, it is finished".

Some of you may need to have a funeral service this afternoon. You may need to go home and write out those things that Satan is still dragging out of his closet and parading before your subconscious and formally pronounce them dead and buried. God has forgotten. God has forgiven. So must you. You must forgive yourself, and by God's grace, you MUST NOT allow it to haunt you again. Make up a death certificate and put it somewhere where you can find it. Then when the enemy tries to rob the grave of what God has buried, wave that certificate in Satan's face and remind him it is a dead issue. A dead issue indeed.

# III- NO NEED TO RETIRE: THE GIANTS STILL FALL

One more incident, or shall I say series of incidents is left to be recorded in David's Book of Remembrance; and it is that part of the story that precipitated the opening remarks in today's lesson. The record is clearly found in the remainder of Chapter 21.

> When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint.

> Then Ishbi-Benob, who was one of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose bronze spear was three hundred shekels, who was bearing a new sword, thought he could kill David.

> But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him,

saying, "You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel."

Now it happened afterward that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbechai the Hushathite killed Saph, who was one of the sons of the giant.

Again there was war at Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-Oregim the Bethlehemite killed the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

Yet again there was war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty- four in number; and he also was born to the giant.

So when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him.

These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

(II Samuel 21:15-22 NKJV)

The rays of the sunset of David's life flitted across the horizon in every direction. He was on his way home. Beyond the stage where the physical battles could still be fought in the physical realm, he had to even retire from the battle, once actually thought to be dead. His body was old, and his stamina was gone. But still the giants were falling. Verse 22 reads:

These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants. (NKJV)

Surely, he did not physically demolish each one as he had Goliath. That was God's means and God's method for an earlier chapter in his life. But God still credited these victories to David's account. God had developed his life, and developed his ministry, and developed his servants; and now under David's direction, using nothing but God's marvelous power, the giants still fell.

In verse 17, after David waxed faint in the battle, David's men insisted that he keep his distance from the front lines, "that thou quench not the light of Israel." David was needed more now in the tower that overlooked the battle than he was on the battlefield itself. But it was still through David that God chose to slay these four incredible hulks.

These men were gross misfits in the drama of life. They were Satan's mistakes. They were a perfect example of what he will

produce with all of his emphasis on physical strength and physical power. The first giant, Ishbibenob, had a spear that weighed nearly 12 pounds. He was a mammoth man. Abishai took care of him. The legacy of David's God and Satan's Goliath had no doubt been engraved in Abishai's heart for years. He knew that if God could use David to kill a Goliath, that the same God could use one of David's own to take care of one of Goliath's offspring. So the example of one man who had been totally under God's control as a youth, still served as an example to an army of God's men faced with giants, the likes of which you and I cannot even fathom. The last one, killed by David's nephew, was a huge monster who had twelve fingers and twelve toes. That didn't bother God. He could have had fifty fingers and four hundred toes. When God is on the throne, the giants...still...fall.

Now I would like to address the remainder of this lesson primarily to those of us we like to call the "over the hill gang", though the principles involved apply to every one who has walked with the LORD for any time at all.

There is a danger in the Christian community today that has come as a result of the changes in society itself. Man once looked to those who had walked the walk and lived the life as sources of wisdom in government, in the classroom, and in the church. Age carried with it the essence of wisdom. The badge of maturity entitled a man or woman to serve with dignity in the latter years of their lives, not always in the same capacity, but with an even greater level of spiritual authority than ever before. So it was in the Scriptures, and so it was in the modern world for centuries.

But the recent technological age that has descended upon us with computer like speed has nullified to a large degree the knowledge of those who lived in days gone by. The successful businessman of forty years ago couldn't even recognize the cash register, let alone the inventory control in his store today. The successful teacher, or craftsman, or farmer of one or two generations ago would walk into a world inhabited by diodes and CRTs and bits and bytes and modems and robots he would have thought belonged in a Buck Rogers' comic strip. So today's youth has come to patronize their grandparents, and tolerate their experiences, but usually with a condescending chuckle or a sympathetic grin. Society is putting its choicest products on the shelf and marking them as unusable, and wondering why the technological advances are being accompanied by moral and spiritual degeneration unparalleled in history. The church is no different. In an effort to remain contemporary, the Body of Christ is, in many cases, putting out to pasture those who know the Book for what it is. Those who have walked the walk, lived the life, and survived the battles are given spiritual rocking chairs and an occasional pat on the head. This is in absolute violation of the principles of both the Old and New Testament, which demanded that the young learn from the old, from their parents and their grandparents as well. Grandpa may not know how to boot up software on that new IBM PC, but, oh, my child, can he tell you a thing or two about walking with Christ through the shadows. And when the shadows come, your new technology will have no answers. Only the man or woman, who has walked with God through the storms, knows that God is our refuge and strength, a tested help in times of trouble.

I want to have a word with my contemporaries and those who are even a generation older than I. (Believe it or not, there are some older than I and I need to learn from them.) That word is this: Dear saint of God who has walked the walk, don't fold up your tent and retire...*the giants still fall!* 

The danger David faced and the danger we face is that we believe the devil's lie, that because we are too tired or because we are too weak to face the enemy with the same youthful exuberance we once possessed, the giants no longer fall. In our season of selfpity, encouraged by an age that has relegated us to premature senility, we may have overlooked the truth behind the truth. It's this: *We never were giant slayers*. We simply know a God who only had to speak, and giants fell.

We had no might in those battles. Like David, we came in the name of the LORD, and down went the giants before us. Like Jehosophat we cried, "We have no might against this foe, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are on thee." If ever we saw giants fall, it was in our weakness, as we recognized HIS strength. Don't you see, then, that the weaker we get in the flesh, the greater our capacity to see the enemy fall? Yet Satan sells us a series of lies, and we forget. Our God is the giant-slayer. The older we get, the more aware we ought to be of our inadequacies, thus, the more valuable we ought to be in the kingdom.

Believers often DO face a spiritual "mid-life or late-life" crisis. Having taken off like a rocket and soared like an eagle, we sometimes reach a stage where the body tires and the emotions wane, and one of five enemies steal into our spirits unawares and rob us of our power.

Those five enemies are these:

<u>1- Spiritual pride is the first of those enemies.</u> Living off the aroma of past victories, we sit around and tell war stories of how God used us in days gone by, and worn-out testimonies replace up-to-the-minute news bulletins of the minute-by-minute workings of an eternal God. David didn't retire to the porch to embellish his stories and relish the glories of days gone by. He stayed on the battlefield till they sent him home.

2- Disillusionment is the second enemy that robs us of our later ministries. Perhaps we got too close to people, or too close to the inner workings of the church, and we looked at the weaknesses of men instead of the power of God and we lost our way. Or we got our feelings hurt, and so we threw down our swords and walked off the battlefield. Bad decision.

<u>3- The lure of worldly success is the third enemy.</u> Scripture says that when the pressures of the world, the deceitful promises riches make, the lust of other things crowd in, the overwhelming fire that burned in our spirit for God is extinguished drop by drop until we have, like poor soldiers, become entangled in the affairs of this life, in spite of the Commander's warning.

<u>4- Late-life laziness is the fourth foe.</u> David succumbed to this momentarily in his career, and it almost wrecked him. He took an early retirement, and it nearly cost him his crown. It DID cost him some eternal crowns, to be sure. The Scripture says, "even the young men faint and are weary, and the young men will utterly fall," but they that wait upon the Lord have no need to take an early retirement. They still can soar on eagle's wings...because the strength of their life never faints, neither is HE weary.

<u>5-Battle fatigue is the last enemy and one of the slyest.</u> It creeps into the lives of those who have fought the good fight and kept the faith, and are tired. But they forget one thing. They haven't finished the course. They become weary in well-doing. God said that's not your prerogative.

The strength of the army of God today rests largely, I believe, in the Corps of Commanders that the church has quietly moved into early retirement. And in closing, I want to speak both to those who are in charge of ministries who may have relegated the senior

saints to the back porch, and to those of us who might be tempted to cooperate by packing up our Bibles and our spiritual gifts and stealing away to a late-life resort out of the range of the bullets, beyond the sound of the cannon fire of spiritual warfare.

<u>God doesn't issue early retirements.</u> You don't ever retire in the Christian life; you graduate! You are intended to graduate with honors into Glory. In fact, the greatest giant you will ever face, the towering monster called death, will be slain before your very eyes on the day that all your strength is gone.

So don't you listen to the enemy's lies. You still have a ministry out there waiting to be completed. You still have the quiet arm of discipleship to wrap around the shoulders of those who follow in your footsteps. You still have the gentle voice of counsel to light the path ahead of those who, without your guiding hand, would suffer countless falls they need not take before they learn to walk the walk alone. Yours is still the consistent voice of experience that knows what principles must be applied. Yours is still the steadying hand when the church in an emotional upheaval needs the leveling love of one who knows how to weather the storms. You may not still charge onto the battlefield with sword in hand, crowds cheering in the background, but, ah, dear saint, in the background yours is still the heartbeat of the church.

<u>The giants still fall, Beloved.</u> The giants still fall. And so if you have taken an early retirement from the battle, and either out of spiritual pride, or disillusionment, or worldliness, or laziness, or battle fatigue, you have laid aside your armor, it's time you took a look at the Living Legend of David. Even as the faint rumblings of death lingered in the background and cast their shadows on the horizon of David's life, he refused to live on the memories of days gone by. Goliath was history. There were still giants to slay, in a different way, perhaps, but they were still his to slay so long as he had breath to breathe.

So David didn't give up. He learned, much to his delight that God never intended him to. For no matter the season of life in which he lived, still the giants would fall.

Oh, God, may we, like David, never, ever forget that incredible truth. From this moment forward, may it be forever engraved on our hearts, that until the very hour He calls us home, we are called to stay in the battle, praising Him without ceasing, that to the very end of life,

#### THE GIANTS STILL FALL!

The giants still fall, Beloved, The giants will always fall My God has not retired me Nor nullified my call.

The body may be weaker The strength may well have waned But as the flesh has lost its power Praise God, His power remained.

And so the weaker I may be, The less that I can do, The more the LORD seems prone to shout, "Now I can work through you."

And so, as sunsets dominate The songs life sings to me, May I not yet succumb to those Who have not eyes to see.

That God has not retired me Nor from the conflict freed, But rather He has given me New orders yet to heed.

And He has through His precious Word Yet issued forth this call... My son, the battle has not ceased, There are still giants to fall.

I'll tell you when it's over Till then, pick up your sword, There are still countless giants to slay Just stand before the Lord.

And let Him slay them one by one Till every battle's past, And till that final giant of death Is swallowed at last.

Then with a song of triumph That shakes the gates of hell, He'll shout, "My soldier stood his ground Until the last giant fell."

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