

# (2 Samuel) Settling an Old Debt

by David Guzik

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*David inquires of the Lord and discovers that the famine is a result of Saul's sin and the breaking of the covenant with the Gibeonites, leading to a wise decision to deliver seven men of Saul's descendants to fulfill the promise to the Gibeonites and bring an end to the famine.*

**Duration:** 34:06

**Scripture:** Numbers 35:33, 2 Samuel 21:1-2, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Keeping Promises", "Biblical Justice"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of keeping promises and being people of our word. They highlight how the entertainment industry often operates on dishonesty, but as believers in Jesus Christ, we are called to be different. The sermon also emphasizes that God holds us accountable for the promises we make, even if they were made a long time ago. The speaker also mentions the need for justice in our society, particularly in cases of unpunished murders, and how it grieves God when justice is not served. Throughout the sermon, the speaker points to Jesus as the ultimate example and emphasizes the importance of keeping our promises and following His teachings.

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## Transcript

When you go through books of the Bible verse by verse, you're faced with some real challenges. And that's just exactly what we face here in 2 Samuel chapter 21. This is a passage of scripture that makes people not want to teach through the Bible verse by verse, because it's very challenging.

This is the kind of passage where if you're reading a commentary, oftentimes they would skip right over it and not deal with the passage, and to your great frustration, it's just the passage that you wanted some illumination on, they don't speak to you about it. But let's jump right into it and get a sense of what the Lord would have to say to us this morning. Second Samuel chapter 21, beginning at verse one.

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. You have the picture in your mind here.

Here's David King over Israel and a year of famine comes. Now, you should know that in the ancient world famine, you could almost make it just equal drought. Most famines were caused by drought.

They didn't have artificial irrigation. And when the rains didn't fall, you didn't have crops. Oh, it's true that sometimes that the famines were caused by some kind of plague or locusts or blight.

But typically it was drought. And so you can just picture David presiding over Israel during a dry year. And the crops that come in are very scanty, very small.

But the nation suffers through it for a year and nobody thinks much of it. Right. I mean, bad years happen when it comes to the weather.

You don't want to make a great big spiritual deal over every little trial. And so David is then, well, that was a bad year. We just trust God for a better one next year.

Then the second year comes along and it's not so good either. And now they're getting a bit concerned. It's like, well, who knows what's happening with this? We just barely scraped by now this second year.

But when the third year came and the rains weren't there and it looked like great famine was going to come upon the land, David wisely said there must be a spiritual reason behind this. This isn't all just about weather patterns and where the jet stream is and high and low pressure systems. The hand of God must be in this somewhere.

We need to seek the Lord and inquire of him, Lord, what's going on? What great wisdom King David had. David knew that there wasn't a spiritual reason or might I say a great spiritual reason behind every problem. Sometimes people get off on that misconception, right? Oh, Lord, why did I catch three red lights in a row? Lord, what are you trying to tell me through this? And, you know, God may just be telling you slow down.

I don't know, but you don't have to make a great big deal about it. But then again, other people are blind. The circumstances of their life are impressing them.

God is trying to get their attention. He has the whooping stick out on them in a fatherly, chastising way, and they're not listening. Well, David was listening and quiet of the Lord.

Lord, what's going on? And the Lord told him, did you see that in verse one, David inquired of the Lord and the Lord answered, it is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites. David said, Lord, Saul hasn't been king for 40 years, but yet you say it's because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house that the whole nation suffered for Saul's sin. Maybe they approved of it.

Maybe they didn't mourn it. Maybe they didn't do what they could to hinder it. But we don't know all the reasons why.

But Saul sinned and the nation suffered some 40 years later. And it was the sin of him and his household killing the Gibeonites. When David heard that it was because Saul killed the Gibeonites, a chill ran up his back because David knew his Bible.

He knew from the book of Joshua who the Gibeonites were and why the people of Israel had a special obligation to treat the Gibeonites well. You see, some 400 years before this, 400 years before David's time in the days of Joshua, God commanded Israel to go and take possession of the entire land of Canaan. And as an act of judgment against the depraved people of that land, God commanded them to wipe out all the inhabitants of Canaan.

You might think that it was a horribly severe judgment, but it was justified. An archaeologist will tell you of the great depravity morally and culturally, how the Canaanite cultures practiced human sacrifice on an almost unheard of level and how it was essential that that land be cleansed as an act of judgment. And God sent the army of Israel in a unique way into that land to judge the people of Canaan and to cast them out of the land.

And God said, don't spare anybody, any of the native peoples of this land. You are to cast them out. Well, the Gibeonites were clever.

The Gibeonites came unto the people of Israel to strike a peace treaty. But they came very cleverly. They came.

Acting as if they had come from a long distance, that they didn't even live in the land of Canaan, and so they got guys and they they didn't have them shower or bathe for a month, and then they got the oldest, most worn out sandals they could find and they got bags full of the moldiest, crustiest bread that you could find. And then they had those guys walk into the camp of Israel and meet with Joshua and the leaders of Israel. And they said, oh, Joshua, we're the Gibeonites and we've come from a far, far distance.

We want to make a peace treaty with you. And Joshua says, well, you know, look, we're not supposed to make a peace treaty with any of the people of the land. Oh, no.

But we come from a far, far distance. Why look at our sandals. Look how far we've been walking and look at the bread in our bag.

It's all moldy. And look at us. We haven't showered in weeks.

We've come from a far, far distance. And Joshua and his men bought into it, and they made a peace treaty with the Gibeonites. Well, God revealed it to them that they didn't come from a far, far distance, that they lived right there in the land of Canaan.

But God told them, you made this promise. You've got to keep it. You swore that you would not destroy the Gibeonites, and so you can't.

You have to treat the Gibeonites peaceably all the time that they are in the land of Canaan. Well, this was the law. This was the promise, the covenant, the oath that King Saul broke when he brought this massacre against the Gibeonites.

So David has the picture here right after the end of verse one. By the way, may I say before we go on to verse two, this this emphasizes some important principles to us already just from verse one. Here's the principle.

God expects us to keep our promises. That sounds elementary, doesn't it? But oh, we need to hear it in our own day. You know, we've come to the place where in a lot of arenas in our life, we don't even expect people to keep their promises.

You listen to the politician make the campaign promise. You don't even expect him to keep it. It's like everybody, you know, you wink at him and he winks at you.

I'm just saying this. You'll vote for me. And you wink back.

I don't expect you to fulfill any of this because I know you're just saying it. So I'll vote for it. You know, the commercial makes the promise either right out front or just subtly, they make the promise.

You buy our product and look how great life will be for you. And you don't believe it for a minute. You might buy the product, but you don't believe the promise.

Interesting here in our community, we have a lot of people who work in the entertainment industry. And the entertainment industry is one where oftentimes dishonesty is just a pattern of doing business and deal making. Two men will sit across each other to negotiate a deal, and each one of them knows that the other is lying through their teeth and they'll just all have to sort it out with lawyers later.

But they work it out. But, you know, it just shouldn't be like that for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. God expects us to keep our promises, to be people of our word.

We don't walk around talking with our fingers crossed behind our back. We keep our promises. We could also say that we learn from this, that God expects nations to keep their promises.

I mean, he expected Israel to keep the promises they made as a nation. We can also say that time does not diminish our obligation to our promises. This promise was 400 years old, yet God still required it from Saul and the nation of Israel.

Some of us have a way of thinking that that somehow promises that we make are sort of freshness dated, you know, like the milk you get in the dairy case. And well, you know, this is a stale promise, so I can throw it out. No, no, no.

Isn't that how a lot of people treat their marriage promises? Well, boy, that was a long time ago. I guess things change not in God's eyes. God holds you to the promise and you're required to keep it.

The fourth principle that we see from this, just before we move on to verse two, is we see the principle that God's correction may come a long time after the offense. Don't you find it interesting that this famine that came because of the slaughter of the Gibeonites came some 40 years after Saul performed this? I think it's fascinating, but it's a principle. It doesn't necessarily mean that that God will bring the correction immediately after the offense.

Sometimes it is delayed. So let's look here at verse two, how it works out. So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them.

And 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. So we're just told what we knew before, how God had a special responsibility upon Israel to treat the Gibeonites good because they had sworn this covenant to them.

But Saul forsook that covenant. And did you see why at the end of verse two, it says Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah. And let me ask you a question.

Zeal for the children of Israel and Judah. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Is it good for the king to be zealous for the people? Well, it's a good thing. Then what went wrong? I think what we have to see is that normally that kind of zeal is a good thing, but Saul's misguided zeal was a sin and brought calamity on Israel.

I think there's an important lesson for us here, folks. The lesson is this good intentions do not excuse bad actions. We might say, based on verse two, that Saul had a good intention.

He was zealous for the people of Israel. Maybe he said Israel for the Israelites and we got to drive out all the Canaanites and here's the Gibeonites, their descendants of ancient Canaanite tribes, drive them out. And he might have been very zealous to do it.

But friends, good intentions don't excuse bad actions. We oftentimes want to excuse our bad actions when it comes to when they come to light. We want to excuse them by saying we had good intentions.

Let me give you an example of how this commonly works out. I see a sin oftentimes excused by good intentions, and it's the sin of gossip. Well, you know, I just wanted to share that prayer request with that brother or sister.

I just wanted to unburden my heart. I just wanted to whatever, whatever. And it might be great intentions.

But if the action is bad, the action is bad. You see, sometimes we get mixed up in this. God is concerned about both our intentions and our actions.

Now, surely it is better to have a bad action with a good intention. I mean, that's better than having the bad action with a bad intention. But we're not going to satisfy ourselves with bad on either one.

We want good actions with good intentions. So, friends, we see that even though Saul might have had good intentions, the action was bad and God was displeased. And so what does David do? Look at verse three.

And as you look at verse three, I want you to picture David in a Bedouin tent, because that's the kind of people that the Gibeonites were. They were these nomadic tribesmen, you know, going around the wilderness there of Judah, Judea and beyond. And they're with the flocks and their herds.

And so here's David with a tent with Bedouin chieftains of the Gibeonites around them. And they're just going through the ceremonies. And David's discussing this with them, initiating the resolution of these things.

And he says in verse three, 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? David says, I want you guys to bless Israel. I don't want you to be still bitter or sore about the massacre that we committed against you. I know that if you will bless us, the heavens will open, the rains will fall, the famine will be over.

What do we have to do so that you will bless the inheritance of Israel? And look at the answer there in verse four. 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. Now, David heard that and he goes, man, this is great.

They're not using this as an extortion plot. They're not filing a class action suit against Israel and the government of Israel and saying, well, now you have to give us billions and billions of dollars to compensate for the massacre of the Gibeonites. We're not interested in your silver or gold.

The Gibeonites chieftains tell David. Then they say, we don't want you to kill any man in Israel for us. In other words, we're not asking for an eye for an eye.

Now, we're not told how many Gibeonites were killed. It must have been several hundred or maybe several thousand, but they're not saying, OK, you killed five hundred Gibeonites. We want five hundred Israelites killed in exchange.

They're not asking for an eye. They're not asking for tooth for tooth. David hears this and he goes, wow, man, this is great.

Look at verse four. And he said, whatever you say, that will I do for you. David says, well, you guys have a good heart in this.

Just tell me what you want. So look at verse five. So 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 and give you of Saul, whom the Lord chose. And the king said, I will give them. Wow.

David, we don't want money. We don't want an eye for an eye payment. You just pick out seven descendants of the household of Saul, bring them to us, we'll execute them, and then it's even.

And David says, great, let's do it. This is a place that stumbles many people. They say, how could this be? How could these innocent men be punished for the guilty Saul? Well, let me address this.

First of all, we don't know that these were innocent men. Did you see what it said in verse one when the Lord explained the problem to David? Look again at verse one. David inquired of the Lord and the Lord answered it is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house.

It wasn't that Saul committed this atrocity on his own, and he very well may have had the assistance of these very men who are going to be delivered up for execution. That's possible. It's possible that they approved of this crime or benefited from it, perhaps in the spoil or the booty that was taken from these massacred Gibeonites.

That's one way of looking at it. Another way to look at it is that this may be the hand of God doing something for David that David would not do for himself. You see, David would not massacre people from the family of Saul.

Now, that was the custom in that day. When one dynasty replaced another dynasty, the new dynasty wiped out everybody from the old house because he didn't want any competition for the throne. And isn't it interesting that some of the trouble that David endured in his kingdom came from people from the household of Saul, like Shimei, like Sheba, who was probably from the household of Saul because it says he was a Benjaminite.

Now, David wouldn't deal with these people because he said, I don't want to dishonor the household of Saul. This may be God's way of saying, look, I know that there's troublemakers among the household of Saul. I'm going to take this out of your hands, David.

And so I'm orchestrating this in part to deliver these men up for execution. That may be another reason. Let me say thirdly that we should know as well that this just was not strange in the ancient world.

Now, I know we can't explain everything by saying, well, it's just how they did it in those days. But you should know that this wasn't a surprise to David because this is how they did it in those days. It was not

unusual to punish a household or the descendants of a man in the place of a man.

Saul was gone, but his descendants lived on and Saul's heritage, Saul's inheritance could be punished through the descendants. And so for those three reasons, we don't know that they were innocent. Number two, this may have been God's way of taking care of something for David that he wouldn't take care of for himself.

And number three, it was the custom of the day. We can say, well, we can understand how this happened, why they would take these perhaps innocent men and make them die for the guilty so that blessing could come upon the people of God. So David said, well, I will give them.

And this is how it happens in verse seven. So 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 Rizvah, the daughter of Ahiah, whom she bore to Saul and the five sons of Machal, the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel, the son of Barzilla, the Matholite.

And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites and they hanged them on the hill before the Lord. So they fell all seven together and were put to death in the days of the harvest in the first days in the beginning of the barley harvest. David delivered these seven men up.

They hanged them pretty picturesque, hung them all at the same time. It's like you can see seven nooses dropping all at the same time. Men sadly, tragically twisting on the ropes and seven lives extinguished.

By the way, the method of execution was important. You might say, well, why didn't they behead them? Why didn't they stone them? No, because they did this to fulfill a promise connected with Deuteronomy 21, 23, where it says he who is hanged is accursed of God. They deliberately put these, well, supposedly innocent men in the place of being accursed so that the curse that was upon Israel in the famine would come upon these men and that these supposedly innocent men, seven, the number of fullness, the number of completeness that they would fulfill the bearing of the curse on behalf of Israel and that the drought would be over, the famine would be stopped and blessing would once again come upon Israel.

Now, there's something very dramatic in verse 10. Now, Rizpah, the daughter of Ahia, 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 Ahia, 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 and 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. And they buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan, his son in the country of Benjamin and Zelah in the tomb of Kish, of Kish's father. So David sees, well, first of all, he sees the dramatic actions of this woman named Rizpah.

Do you see this? Here's Rizpah, the mother of two of the men who were killed, who were hanged before the Lord. This mother said, these men have been disgraced. They've been treated as if they were guilty,

though.

Well, again, supposedly they were innocent, but I will not allow them to be disgraced in their death. You see, again, in the thinking of that ancient age, there was a fate worse than death. And you know what the fate worse than death was not only to be executed, but after execution to have your body disgraced.

And she said, I'm not going to allow these bodies, though the Gibeonites will not bury them. They want them to be disgraced. They want the curse to come upon these bodies in full force.

I'm going to stand as a vigil over these bodies. And when the birds of the air come, I'm going to shoo them away. When the wild predators come at night to scavenge these bodies, I'm going to shoo them away and I'm going to stand vigil over these bodies until when? Did you notice that in verse 10? From the beginning of the harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven, I'm going to do it until the drought ends, I'm going to do it until we know that their sacrifice was not in vain.

I'm going to do it until we know that there's an answer from heaven saying, I will now pour down rain upon you and the drought is over. And this godly. Very motherly mother with the heart of a mother, as I will not allow these boys to be disgraced in death, I will not allow their lives to be ended in vain, I'll stand vigil over their bodies until the rain comes.

And she did. David heard about the great heroism of this woman, and he said, I'm going to give these men a special burial. And so he got the bones of Saul and Jonathan and collected them with all the remains of these men and gave them a special burial in Saul's ancestral home.

So what's the result of it? Look at the end of verse 14. So they performed all that the king commanded, and after that, God heeded the prayer for the land. I think it's fascinating that there's an interesting principle at work here.

It's a principle drawn from chapter thirty five, verse thirty three. Let me read that to you. God says there, you shall not pollute the land where you are for blood defiles the land and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.

The idea there in numbers chapter thirty five is that unpunished murders defile a land and God will one day require the blood from unpunished murders. He will require it in his justice from that land. And that's why David commanded all this to be done, because he knew that the blood of the unpunished murders of the Gibeonites and the broken oath that it cried out to God from earth to heaven and that had to be answered by blood.

How relevant is this to our own day? You've been reading the newspapers lately. You see how they say that Los Angeles is the murder capital of the nation, that almost 600 people have been murdered in the city of Los Angeles this year, that there was just 16 or 17 within the last week, people murdered on the streets of Los Angeles. They say that the new police chief of Los Angeles gave a directive to his commanders that he wanted to be called anytime, day or night, whenever a homicide happened in his city.

The police chief hasn't been getting much sleep then. And when you look at the newspaper and when you look at the Bible, your heart becomes very heavy for our land. You say, Lord God, if the blood of unpunished murders cries out from the earth to heaven for justice, then oh, what a cry must arise from our blood-soaked land.

It pains me to say that murderers often go unpunished in our country. You know, there's so many hoops that have to be jumped through before a murderer can be punished. You know, first the murderer has to be caught.

Then he has to be properly arrested and processed. And then they have to be convicted in a trial, which we know sometimes just doesn't happen. And then they have to be sentenced justly.

I've heard it said that a person has a greater chance of winning the lottery than a murderer has of actually being executed for their crime. That's how rare proportionately the death penalty is actually applied for murders in our land. It grieves us when we think of the unpunished murders in our nation.

Friends, when we look at that, we cry out to God for mercy. Can anybody say that just on that basis alone that the United States does not deserve the judgment of God, that there's so much unpunished violence in our land? And might I say as well, and friends, I want you to know that this is not an editorial or a political comment at all. This is a biblical comment.

That the Bible teaches us in Romans chapter 13 that the fundamental duty of government is to keep order and to punish evildoers. And might I say by implication to leave the innocent alone, that's the fundamental duty of government. I might say that if we look at the murder rate and the violent crime rate and the unpunished murders that go on in our land, we would have to say that our government isn't fulfilling the fundamental duty in God's eyes of what government should do to punish evildoers.

There's a lot of evildoers who are never brought to justice. Well, it should stir up a spirit of prayer within you for our land, that God would withhold his hand of judgment because we deserve it and that God would pour out his grace and pour out his mercy on our land for a great spiritual awakening and revival. That is what is needed in those areas of Los Angeles that are ravaged by such terrible crime.

They need a great awakening of the spirit of God to turn people away from violence and gangs and drugs and crime and to turn them to Jesus Christ. Now, I know many of you say, well, I don't know if that could ever happen. What a big prayer that is to pray.

Well, just think of what a remarkable thing it is that God got a hold of you. What do you think, you're some prize for the kingdom? He grabbed us, didn't he? And though God can change us, we trust he can change others, and we need to plead with him to pour out his spirit upon our land for that. So we're left with a challenging passage in front of us.

We can't leave it without considering this thought, two thoughts perhaps to conclude with. First of all, doesn't this show us how seriously God takes covenant, how seriously God takes oaths? Now, if God expects man to keep oaths and covenants that seriously, how do you think God regards the covenant he makes with us? Oh, he will never fail the covenant he has made with you. Never, ever.

I love reading in the book of Revelation about the throne of God, and it tells us in the book of Revelation that surrounding the throne of God, overarching it, if you will, is a green hued, an emerald rainbow that covers over the throne of God. And the rainbow we know from the book of Genesis is a great picture of God's covenant and the remembrance of his covenant before man, because the rainbow was what God put in the sky to say, I will always remember the covenant to not destroy the earth again by flood. And God has set a rainbow around his throne to tell you and I that though he's reigning and resplendent majesty in heaven.

Then nevertheless, God says, I am a covenant keeping God, and I will not forget the covenant I've made with you. Have you received God's covenant of salvation? Have you had your life changed by his life changing work? Have you had that covenant work in your life? God will not forsake his covenant to you. If he expects man to keep it this seriously, how could God ever do less? Secondly, you see the great shining picture of Jesus in this chapter.

You know, the Bible says that the story of the Bible is written of him in the book. The testimony of the scriptures is of Jesus Christ. Well, do you see it here? Here you have a group of seven men, the number of fullness, the number of perfection, perfect man, if you will.

Seemingly innocent. Judged by hanging and public exposure, the innocent in the place of the guilty so that God's hand of judgment would be lessened from his people and that blessing would rain down from heaven and bring fruitfulness to God's people once again. If that's not a description of the work of Jesus on our behalf, then I don't know what is.

God's perfect man, the sinless son of God, the innocent punished in the place of the guilty. Who is the innocent? Jesus. Who is the guilty? Me.

You also. The innocent punished in place of the guilty. Publicly hanged, publicly exposed so that the curse of God would rest on him instead of us so that God's hand of judgment would be released from his people.

And that blessing would come down from heaven and bring fruitfulness to God's people. Where do you fit into that? Have you accepted God's covenant towards you in light of that? Have you embraced it? Have you put your trust in Jesus's atoning sacrifice? Maybe you're here this morning trying to save yourself. You're thinking that God will put another star on your church attendance chart in heaven.

And if you get enough of those, then well, then you're in for sure. No, you can't put on enough stars. You can't do enough good works.

No, it's the work of Jesus Christ on your behalf. The innocent in place of the guilty, deflecting, absorbing the curse of God that you and I deserve so that we can be blessed with showers of blessing from heaven and that fruitfulness can be restored. No reason for spiritual famine in this room.

No reason for dryness because of the work of Jesus. It's been made abundantly provided for us. No reason, might I say as well.

Verse 14 for unanswered prayer. It says after that, God heeded the prayer for the land. Do you notice unanswered prayer in your life? Does it grieve you? If it does, then you go before the Lord.

Say, God, what are you trying to show me? I want to look to the spiritual causes here. Teach me, guide me. Let your blessing come upon me because of what Jesus did in my place.

Let's stand together. I'm going to pray to conclude this morning's message. Tim and the men of the worship team will come up and let's conclude this morning with prayer.

Lord God, I pray that if there's anyone here this morning who has not received that great covenant of yours, that you would touch them. Let them, Lord, put their hope in you, their trust in you, the innocent atoning for the guilty. And Lord, we pray as well that you would give us a dissatisfaction with unanswered prayer.

That you would compel us to look for the spiritual causes behind any such lack. And that we would trust in you and devote ourselves to you. Bring down blessing from heaven, Lord.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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