

# SECOND SAMUEL

## Chapter 21

### *David Avenges the Gibeonites*

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." 2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah. 3 And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" 4 The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "What do you say that I shall do for you?" 5 They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, 6 let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give them." 7 But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. 8 The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; 9 and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest. 10 Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night. 11 When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, 12 David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. 13 And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. 14 And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land.

**21:1–24:25** This concluding section forms an appendix to 1,2 Samuel and contains additional materials (without concern for chronology) relating to David's reign. While its topical arrangement is striking, it also employs a literary pattern, *a-b-c-c-b-a*, frequently found elsewhere in OT literature. The first and last units (21:1–14; 24:1–25) are narratives of two events in which David had to deal with God's wrath against Israel (the first occasioned by an act of Saul, the second by his own). The second and fifth units (21:15–22; 23:8–39) are accounts of David's warriors (the second much longer than the first). At the center (22:1–23:7) are two songs of David (the first much longer than the second), one of which celebrates David's victories as warrior-king while the other recalls his role as psalmist (see note on 1Sa 16:14–17:58). It is unknown if motivation for this arrangement went beyond aesthetic considerations. The triumph song of ch. 22 and the song of Hannah in 1Sa 2:1–10 clearly form a literary frame enclosing the main composition (see note on 1Sa 2:1). (CSB)

**21:1–14** This event appears to have occurred after David's kindness was extended to Mephibosheth (ch. 9) and before Absalom's rebellion. (CSB)

**21:1** *sought the face of the LORD.* Asked questions of the Lord, probably with the Urim and Thummim. (TLSB)

*he put the Gibeonites to death.* Saul's action against the Gibeonites is not related elsewhere but appears to have been instituted early in his reign, motivated by an excessive nationalism (if not tribalism—the Gibeonites occupied territory partly assigned to Benjamin, and Saul's great-grandfather was known as the "father of Gibeon," 1Ch 8:29; 9:35). (CSB)

Nothing more is known of Saul's crime. See note, 1Ki 2:31. Joshua had sworn to let the Gibeonites live (Jsh 9). Perhaps the drought was due to Saul's rejection of this covenant. (TLSB)

**21:2** *Amorites.* A comprehensive name sometimes used to designate all the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan (Ge 15:16; Jos 24:18; Jdg 6:10; Am 2:10). More precisely, the Gibeonites were called Hivites (Jos 9:7; 11:19). (CSB)

*the Israelites had sworn to (spare) them.* A pledge sworn in the name of the Lord (Jos 9:15, 18–26). (CSB)

*to strike them down.* The reason Saul was unsuccessful is not known. (CSB)

**21:3** *bless.* Since the oath sworn to them had been violated, they could rightly call down God's curse on the land. (CSB)

Or, "that you may bless the land of Israel, which the Lord gave them as an inheritance." There could be no blessing from the offended party without atonement first being made. Cf Mt 5:23–24. (TLSB)

**21:4** *not a matter of silver or gold.* They did not seek monetary payment for their loss. (TLSB)

*neither is it for us to put anyone in Israel to death.* Bloodguilt could only be redressed by the shedding of blood, but as subject aliens the Gibeonites had no right to legal redress against an Israelite. This restriction must have been Saul's since it is contrary to the Mosaic law (see Ex 22:21; Lev 19:34; 24:22; Dt 1:16–17; 24:17; 27:19). (CSB)

They did not need to put just anyone to death, only the guilty. (TLSB)

**21:5** *the man.* Saul. (TLSB)

*no place anywhere in Israel.* Those who escaped Saul's attack had been driven from their towns and lands. (CSB)

**21:6** *seven.* Because it would represent a full number (seven symbolized completeness)—though many more Gibeonites had been slain. (CSB)

Perhaps to signify the number of people Saul killed, or because these seven participated in the slaughter of the Gibeonites, or to symbolize complete satisfaction (the number seven symbolized completeness). (TLSB)

*Gibeah.* The place of Saul's residence (see 1Sa 10:26). (CSB)

Home and capital of Saul. (TLSB)

**21:8** *Mephibosheth*. Son of Saul, not of Jonathan. (TLSB)

*Merab*. See 1Sa 18:19. (CSB)

*Barzillai the Meholathite*. Not to be confused with Barzillai the Gileadite (17:27; 19:31). (CSB)

**21:9** *seven of them perished together*. This nearly extinguished the house of Saul, which God had rejected (see 1Sa 13:13–14; 15:23–26). In 1Ch 8:29–39; 9:35–44 no descendants of Saul are listed other than from the line of Jonathan. (CSB)

Not just a public hanging, but an act of expiation. Gibeonites may have hung them by impaling. (TLSB)

*beginning of barley harvest*. About the middle of April. (CSB)

**21:10** *faith poured down*. An indication that the famine was caused by drought and evidence that the judgment on Israel for breaking the oath sworn to the Gibeonites (see v. 1) was now over. (CSB)

Showing that God's wrath had been stilled and the drought had ended. (TLSB)

*did not allow ... to come upon them*. After the shameful death of her two sons, Rizpah sought to prevent further disgrace to their bodies. (TLSB)

**21:11–13** David accorded the remains an honorable burial and showed that the execution of Saul's sons was not due to personal animosity. (TLSB)

**21:12** *bones of Saul and his son Jonathan*. See 1Sa 31:11–13. David's final act toward Saul and Jonathan was a deed of deep respect for the king he had honored and the friend he had loved. (CSB)

**21:14** *God responded to the plea*. God accepted the death of the seven men from Saul's house and ended the famine. (TLSB)

**21:1–14** Saul's sons, whether innocent or guilty with their father, now pay the penalty for Saul's crime. God will not allow sin to go unpunished, though His justice sometimes does not make sense to us. The apparent innocence of the seven from Saul's house, who were hanged on a mount before the Lord as an act of atonement for Saul's sin, brings into sharp focus the all-atoning sacrifice of Christ, the Son of God, who was crucified on Mount Calvary for all the sins of the world. Not just any man's death would propitiate God; only the death of God's Son could bring salvation. • Father, thank You for sending Your holy Son to atone for our sins and win salvation for us. Amen. (TLSB)

*Was With Philistines*

**15** There was war again between the Philistines and Israel, and David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines. And David grew weary. **16** And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David. **17** But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, "You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel." **18** After this there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants. **19** And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. **20** And there was again 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 descended from the giants. **21** And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei,

**David's brother, struck him down. 22 These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.**

**21:15–22** These four Philistine episodes (vv. 15–17, 18, 19, 20–21) cannot be chronologically located with any certainty. Each involves a heroic accomplishment by one of David's mighty men, resulting in the death of a "descendant of Rapha" (see vv. 16, 18, 20, 22). (CSB)

**21:15** *David grew weary.* From old age. (TLSB)

**21:16** *Ishbi-benob.* In calling the four formidable enemy warriors referred to in this series "descendants of Rapha" (v. 22), the writer most likely identifies them as giants, as suggested by Dt 2:10–11, 20–21. In that case, they may have been related to the Anakites (see Jos 11:21–22). Cf. Ge 15:19–20, which in its list of ten peoples of Canaan mentions Rephaites but not Anakites, though the Anakites (but not Rephaites) figure significantly in the accounts of the conquest (Nu 13:22, 28, 33; Dt 1:28; 9:2; Jos 14:12, 15; Jdg 1:20). (CSB)

**21:17** *lest you quench the lamp of Israel.* A striking metaphor depicting Israel's dependence on David for its security and continuing existence as a nation—its national hope (see 22:29; 23:3–4; 1Ki 11:36). (CSB)

After the king's death, everyone, as though sitting in darkness, would not know what to do. (TLSB)

**21:18** *Gob.* Probably in the near vicinity of Gezer, where 1Ch 20:4 locates this same battle. (CSB)

*Sibbecai.* One of David's mighty men. (TLSB)

*Saph.* Called Sippai in 1Ch 20:4. (CSB)

**21:19** *Elhanan ... killed Goliath.* Since it is clear from 1Sa 17 that David killed Goliath, it is possible that an early copyist misread the Hebrew for "Lahmi the brother of" (see 1Ch 20:5) as "the Bethlehemite" (in Hebrew the word for "killed" stands first in the clause). (CSB)

One of David's mighty men. (TLSB)

*Goliath.* A scribe may have left out a portion of this verse since Lahmi is the Philistine defeated in this incident (cf 1Ch 20:5). David defeated Goliath earlier (cf 1Sm 17:4, 50). (TLSB)

**21:21** *taunted Israel.* As Goliath had done (see 1Sa 17:10, 25). (CSB)

*Shimeah.* Also called Shammah (1Sa 16:9; 17:13). (CSB)

**21:15–22** Despite the attack of Philistine giants and armies, David and the armies of Israel are victorious. Due to his old age, David will no longer go out to battle with his troops. Baptized believers in this world will always face warfare with the devil, the world, and the evil desires of the flesh. But God supplies His Holy Spirit for the battle, and He has already won the war through the cross of Christ. • "Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done." Amen. (LSB 655:1). (TLSB)