

SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 21

The Gibeonites Avenged

During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, “It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death.”² The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.)³ David asked the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? How shall I make amends so that you will bless the LORD’s inheritance?”⁴ The Gibeonites answered him, “We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death.” “What do you want me to do for you?” David asked.⁵ They answered the king, “As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel,⁶ let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul—the Lord’s chosen one.” So the king said, “I will give them to you.”⁷ The king spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the oath before the LORD between David and Jonathan son of Saul.⁸ But the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Aiah’s daughter Rizpah, whom she had borne to Saul, together with the five sons of Saul’s daughter Merab, whom she had borne to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite.⁹ He handed them over to the Gibeonites, who killed and exposed them on a hill before the LORD. All seven of them fell together; they were put to death during the first days of the harvest, just as the barley harvest was beginning.¹⁰ Rizpah daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured down from the heavens on the bodies, she did not let the birds of the air touch them by day or the wild animals by night.¹¹ When David was told what Aiah’s daughter Rizpah, Saul’s concubine, had done,¹² he went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead. (They had taken them secretly from the public square at Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them after they struck Saul down on Gilboa.)¹³ David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there, and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up.¹⁴ They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul’s father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded. After that, God answered prayer in behalf of 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 (16:7–8; 18:28; see note on 16:8). (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)

tried to annihilate them. 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)

the LORD’s inheritance. See note on 1Sa 10:1. (CSB)

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

nor do we have the right 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 (see 4:2–3 and notes). (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)

hang them. Cf Nu 25:4; 35:31–33. (TLSB)

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

Home and capital of Saul. (TLSB)

21:7 *oath before the LORD between David and Jonathan.* See 4:4; 9:1–13; 1Sa 18:3; 20:15. (CSB)

21:8 *Rizpah.* See 3:7. (CSB)

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 *All seven of them fell 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)

barley harvest was beginning. About the middle of April (see note on Ru 1:22). (CSB)

21:10 *sackcloth*. See note on Ge 37:34. (CSB)

rain 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)

Wars Against the Philistines

15 Once again there was a battle between the Philistines and Israel. David went down with his men to fight against the Philistines, and he became exhausted. **16** And Ishbi-Benob, one of the descendants of Rapha, whose bronze spearhead weighed three hundred shekels and who was armed with a new sword, said he would kill David. **17** But Abishai son of Zeruah came to David's rescue; he struck the Philistine down and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished." **18** In the course of time, there was another battle with the Philistines, at Gob. At that time Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, one of the descendants of Rapha. **19** In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan son of Jaare-Oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod. **20** In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—twenty-four in all. He also was descended from Rapha. **21** When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimeah, David's brother, killed him. **22** These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men.

21:15–22 These four Philistine episodes (vv. 15–17, 18, 19, 20–21) cannot be chronologically located with any certainty (see note on 21:1–24:25). 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 *Rapha.* 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 *Abishai.* See note on 1Sa 26:6. (CSB)

Cf 2:24; 3:30; 16:9–10; 18:2; 19:21–22; 20:6; 23:18–19. (TLSB)

so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished. 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.* See NIV text note. 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)