

2 Samuel 21 - Slaughter and Burial of Saul's Sons

IV. Six appendices testifying to the greatness of the Davidic covenant (21:1—24:25)

(1) David averts a famine by avenging the Gibeonites as he killed the seven sons of Saul (21:1-14)

(2) David was more powerful than the Philistine giants (21:15-23)

2 Samuel 21

(1) David averts a famine by avenging the Gibeonites as he killed the seven sons of Saul (21:1-14)

1 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of the LORD. And the LORD said, *"It is because of Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death."*

1 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of the LORD. And the LORD said, *"It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death."*

1 One time there was a famine during David's reign that went on for three straight years. David sought the LORD, who said, *"Saul and his household are guilty because he executed the Gibeonites."*

1 Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, *It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.*

- The famine occurred early in David's reign, between the arrival of Mephibosheth and the beginning of the Ammonite wars (996-993 BC). The famine drew David to pray urgently.

— God answered that the famine was not on account of his recent sin, but because of Saul's execution of the Gibeonites

— God called David to right the wrong done by his predecessor

- While there is no mention in 1 or 2 Samuel that Saul had broken the Israelites' treaty with the Gibeonites (Cf. Joshua 9:1-27), he had evidently put some of them to death

— It's possible that when Saul killed many of the priests at Nob, he also executed many Gibeonites (1 Sam 22:6-19)

— Saul had once refused to kill an enemy king whom God commanded him to kill, an error that cost him his kingdom (Agag, 1 Sam 15). Saul continued to think he was free to choose when and how he would obey.

- Ezek 14:21 lists the sword (war), famine, the noisome beast, and pestilence as the four sore judgments of God for the sins of Jerusalem
- In 1 Kings 8:35-37, Solomon refers to the cloudless heaven that could bring famine as the result of the sins of his people
- Sometimes natural catastrophes resulted from Israel's sins, but sin was not always the cause

At the time Israel made a covenant with the Gibeonites, they, under Joshua's leadership, had just destroyed Jericho and Ai and were about to attack the Amorite federation of the Canaanite hill country. The people of Gibeon, who were in the direct line of Joshua's conquest, pretended to be faraway aliens and so escaped annihilation. Moreover, they tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them whereby they would forever serve Israel in menial tasks but could never be harmed. Though the covenant was made deceitfully, its binding nature was recognized by both the Israelites and the Gibeonites. Saul, in an action not recorded in the biblical account, had slain some Gibeonites during his tenure (2 Sam 21:1). This constituted the breaking of a covenant and was to be reckoned as unexpiated murder, which, according to Deut 21:7-9, defiled the land.

2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them (now the Gibeonites were not of the sons of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites, and the sons of Israel had made a covenant with them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah).

2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them (now the Gibeonites were not of the sons of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites, and the sons of Israel made a covenant with them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah).

2 So the king called together the Gibeonites and conferred with them. Now the Gibeonites weren't part of the nation of Israel, but were the survivors from the Amorites. Although the Israelis had promised to spare them, Saul had started to execute them in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.

2 And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.)

- Here it states the Gibeonites were descendants of the Amorites, but elsewhere they are called Hivites (Joshua 9:7; 11:19)

— Amorite is often used generally to describe the original occupants of the Promised Land (Cf. Gen 15:16; Deut 1:27)

3 David said to the Gibeonites, "What should I do for you? And how can I make **amends**, so that you will bless the **inheritance** of the LORD?"

3 Thus David said to the Gibeonites, "What should I do for you? And how can I make atonement that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?"

3 So David asked the Gibeonites, "What am I to do for you? How am I to make atonement so that you will bless the LORD's heritage?"

3 Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD?

- When David learned that the famine had come on Israel as punishment for that covenant violation, he asked the Gibeonite leaders what he could do for them

- "...amends" - *kipper*, can mean either to propitiate (satisfy) or to expiate (remove); from the context, it means both—David is seeking both to satisfy the Gibeonites and to "make up for" the wrong done to them

- "...inheritance" - God's people are His "inheritance"

— God deals with sin that stands between His people and the blessing He intends for them

To "make up for" the wrong, David could have given the Gibeonites the same number of men Saul had executed. These could have been men in disfavor at the court of David or men chosen by lot. However, the Gibeonites would not be satisfied with anything less than revenge on the family of Saul. They accused Saul of trying to exterminate them (an ancient policy used to invalidate the law of revenge). They wanted to see his descendants dealt with exactly as he had sought to deal with them (Cf. v5).

This demand for exact justice was in keeping with the legislation of Num 35:31-32, which insists upon a strict regard for human life. The payment of money by the murderer to the family of the murdered was a dangerous precedent, which could be abused by the rich. Men with money could "beat the rap."

4 Then the Gibeonites said to him, "For us it is not a *matter* of silver or gold with Saul or his house, nor is it for us to put anyone to death in Israel." Nevertheless *David* said, "I will do for you whatever you say."

4 Then the Gibeonites said to him, "We have no *concern* of silver or gold with Saul or his house, nor is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "I will do for you whatever you say."

4 "We're not looking for mere silver or gold to be paid by Saul or his household to us," the Gibeonites responded to him. "And it's not for us to execute anyone in Israel."

In reply, David asked, "So what are you asking me to do for you?"

4 And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that

will I do for you.

5 So they said to the king, "The man who destroyed us and who planned to eliminate us so that we would not exist within any border of Israel—

5 So they said to the king, "The man who consumed us and who planned to exterminate us from remaining within any border of Israel,

5 They told the king, "The man who consumed us, who planned our destruction—intending to leave us with nothing in the territory of Israel—

5 And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel,

6 let seven men from his sons be given to us, and we will hang them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give *them*."

6 let seven men from his sons be given to us, and we will hang them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give *them*."

6 is to have seven of his sons turned over to us. We will hang them in the presence of the LORD at Gibeah, which belonged to Saul, whom the LORD chose."

So the king answered, "I will give them."

6 Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose. And the king said, I will give them.

- They responded by denying any interest in silver or gold. Nor could they, as Israel's vassals, take vengeance into their own hands.

— Instead they asked that seven male descendants of Saul be given over to them so that they could practice the age-old tradition of *lex talionis* —eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and life for life (Ex 21:23-25; Num 35:31)

— Saul's descendants may have been involved in the attack on the Gibeonites, since it was illegal to put children to death for their fathers' sins under Mosaic Law (Deut 24:16)

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

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

7 The king exempted Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the promise to the LORD that existed between David and Saul's son Jonathan.

7 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.

- David recognized the propriety of their demand, but he also had to balance against it the pledge he had made to Jonathan that he would forever preserve his seed (1 Sam 18:3; 20:8,15-16)

— David's faithfulness to his covenant with Jonathan shows he was a covenant-keeping king like Yahweh; Saul, on the other hand, broke Israel's covenant with the Gibeonites
— So David spared Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, but singled out others of Saul's offspring for execution

8 So the king took the two sons of **Rizpah** the daughter of Aiah, Armoni and **Mephibosheth** whom she had borne to Saul, and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel the son of Barzillai the **Meholathite**.

8 So the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, Armoni and Mephibosheth whom she had borne to Saul, and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite.

8 Instead, the king arrested Aiah's daughter Rizpah's two sons Armoni and Mephibosheth, whom she had borne to Saul, and the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, whom she had borne to Barzillai the Meholathite's son Adriel.

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

- "...Rizpah" - a concubine of Saul, who Ish-bosheth once accused Abner of having illicit relations with Rizpah in an attempt to assume the throne of Saul in his (Ish-bosheth's) place. This accusation led to Abner's transferring his loyalty to the house of David (Cf. 2 Sam 3:7).

- "...Mephibosheth" - another person by that name, not Jonathan's son who David had taken in

- "...Meholathite" - that is, of Abel-meholah, a town in the Jordan Valley, near Beth-Shan, famous as the birthplace of Elisha (1 Kings 19:16)

9 Then he handed them over to the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, so that the seven of them fell together; and they were put to death in the first days of harvest at the beginning of barley harvest.

9 Then he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the mountain before the LORD, so that the seven of them fell together; and they were put to death in the first days of harvest at the beginning of barley harvest.

9 Then he turned them over to the custody of the Gibeonites, who hanged them on the mountain in the presence of the LORD. All seven of them died at the same time. They were executed during the first days of harvest, just as the barley began to be gathered in.

9 And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and 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.

- These seven sons and grandsons of Saul were publicly executed by the Gibeonites at the beginning of barley harvest, early in the spring
- The execution took place in Gibeah, Saul's former home and capital
- By making things right with the Gibeonites, David brought Israel out from under God's oppression that Saul's sin had caused

10 And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until it rained on them from the sky; and she allowed neither the birds of the sky to rest on them by day nor the wild animals by night.

10 And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until it rained on them from the sky; and she allowed neither the birds of the sky to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night.

10 Then Aiah's daughter Rizpah grabbed some sackcloth and spread it out for herself on the rock where her children had been hanged from the beginning of harvest until the first rain fell from the sky. She would not allow any scavenger birds to land on them during the day nor the beasts of the field to approach them at night.

10 And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.

- As their bodies hung suspended from their places of exposure, Rizpah, mother of the first two (v8), refused to take them down and bury them

- Instead, she took cloth, made a tent, and stood watch from April to October, till the fall rains came and she knew that the sin of Saul's household had been expiated and that no further claim would be made on the lives of her family

- The fact that the bodies remained where they were until it rained suggests that God's curse had been on the land and now rested on the executed sons of Saul for "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deut 21:23)

- The coming of the rain meant that the curse was ended and the corpses could be taken down and buried. Though the Law stated that a body hung from a tree must be removed by sundown (Deut 21:23), it implied punishment of an individual for his personal crime.

- This case had nothing to do with any personal act of murder, but rather with violation of a covenant, the results of which brought God's displeasure on the whole nation and required vengeance of a public and extended nature.

- God reduced Saul's line from one of the most powerful-looking men in Israel, Saul, to one of the weakest-looking, Mephibosheth

11 When it was reported to David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done,

11 When it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done,

11 When David was informed what Rizpah, the daughter of Saul's mistress had done,

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

12 then David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the citizens 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 struck and killed Saul in Gilboa.

12 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 open square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them on the day the Philistines struck down Saul in Gilboa.

12 David had Saul's bones and the bones of his son Jonathan removed from the custody of certain men from Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square in Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them—that is, back on the day when the Philistines had killed Saul on Mount Gilboa.

12 And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabeshgilead, which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa:

- When David saw the devotion of Rizpah in protecting the bodies of her sons from the carnivorous birds and beasts, he was reminded of the shameful exposure of the bodies of Saul and his son Jonathan on the walls of Beth Shan where the Philistines had displayed them after the battle of Gilboa (1 Sam 31:11-13)

— Though the people of Jabesh-Gilead had brought the bodies away for burial, the remains were interred far from Gibeah, Saul's family home

— To show that he had no personal hostility toward the house of Saul, David resolved to bring their bones back from Jabesh-Gilead and bury them in the sepulcher of Saul's father Kish, at Zelah in Benjamin

13 He brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan, and they gathered the bones of those who had been hanged.

13 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.

13 He brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there along with the bones of those who had been hanged,

13 And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged.

- This place is enumerated among the towns of Benjamin (Joshua 18:28), but it has not yet been identified

— Beih Jala near Bethlehem has been suggested, but this is in Judah, not Benjamin. It is strange that Saul's burial was not at Gibeah, his birthplace.

14 Then they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the country of Benjamin in Zela, in the grave of his father Kish; So they did everything that the king commanded, and after that God responded to prayer for the land.

14 They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zela, in the grave of Kish his father; thus they did all that the king commanded, and after that God was moved by prayer for the land.

14 and they buried Saul's bones and his son Jonathan's bones in the territory of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Saul's father Kish. After they had done everything that the king commanded, God responded to prayers for the land.

14 And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land.

- After this was done, God again answered prayer on behalf of the nation

This tragic story demonstrates how sin can continue to disrupt and destroy long after we forget the sin. Through costly atonement, God's grace powerfully restores what sin ruins. Through His death on the cross, David's perfect Son Jesus has atoned fully and finally for sin (Rom 5:20).

(2) David was more powerful than the Philistine giants (21:15-23) (Cf. 1 Chr 20:4-8)

15 Now when the Philistines were at war with Israel again, David went down, and his servants with him; and when they fought against the Philistines, David became weary.

15 Now when the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David went down and his servants with him; and as they fought against the Philistines, David became weary.

15 Afterwards, war broke out between the Philistines and Israel, so David went down to fight the Philistines. David became weary,

15 Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint.

- The chapter concludes with a final word about David's hostility toward the Philistines. No longer the robust young warrior of former days, David now was old and weak.

16 Then Ishbi-benob, who was among the descendants of the giant, the weight of whose spear was three hundred *shekels* of bronze in weight, had strapped on a new *sword*, and

he intended to kill David.

16 Then Ishbi-benob, who was among the descendants of the giant, the weight of whose spear was three hundred *shekels* of bronze in weight, was girded with a new *sword*, and he intended to kill David.

16 and Ishbi-benob, who had been fathered by giants, said he intended to kill David. (His bronze spearhead weighed 300 shekels, and he carried state-of-the-art weaponry.)

16 And Ishbibenob, which was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David.

- A Philistine giant, Ishbi-Benob, advanced on David with a spear (with a spearhead weighing 300 shekels or about seven and one-half pounds)

- "...new sword" - the Hebrew is literally, "armed with a new thing" without specifying the weapon

17 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah helped him, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, saying, "You shall not go out again with us to battle, so that you do not extinguish the **lamp of Israel.**"

17 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah helped him, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall not go out again with us to battle, so that you do not extinguish the lamp of Israel."

17 But Zeruiah's son Abishai came to David's aid, attacked the Philistine, and killed him. After this, David's army told him, "You're not going out anymore with us to battle, so Israel's beacon won't be extinguished!"

17 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succored him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David swore unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel.

- Just in time, Abishai came to David's aid and killed the giant

- "...lamp of Israel" - David's death would mean the end of his leadership, a tragedy synonymous with the snuffing out of Israel's illumination (the lamp of Israel)

— It was in and through David that God's covenant blessings were to be accomplished (1 Kings 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19)

18 Now it came about after this that there was war again with the Philistines at Gob; then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck and killed Saph, who was among the descendants of the giant.

18 Now it came about after this that there was war again with the Philistines at Gob; then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was among the descendants of the giant.

18 Sometime later after this incident, there was another battle with the Philistines at Gob. Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, who had been fathered by giants.

18 And it came to pass after this, that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob: then Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Saph, which was of the sons of the giant.

- Other Philistine encounters, at Gob and Gath, followed the one just recorded:

— At Gob (Gezer in 1 Chr 20:4), Sibbecai, a heroic Israelite, slew Saph (Sippai in 1 Chr 20:4), another Philistine giant (Rapha is from "Rephaim," a race of giants; Cf. 2 Sam 21:16).

19 And there was war with the Philistines again at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

19 There was war with the Philistines again at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

19 In yet another battle at Gob, Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite's son Elhanan killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear resembled that of a weaver's beam.

19 And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim, a Bethlehemite, slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

- The reference [ISV] to Elhanan killing Goliath is incorrect

— The KJV translation, along with 1 Chr 20:5, says that Elhanan killed Lahmi, the brother of Goliath

Again at Gob, Elhanan felled a giant, Goliath. Because Elhanan was from Bethlehem, some scholars believe that he was David and that the present passage recapitulates David's former exploit. Against this is the lack of evidence to equate Elhanan with David and the fact that the accounts in both v18-22 and 1 Chr 20:4-8 follow that of David's conquest of Goliath by many years. The Chronicler in fact stated that the giant killed by Elhanan was Goliath's brother Lahmi (1 Chr 20:5). The resolution of the problem might well be that two Philistines were named Goliath, one killed by David and the other by Elhanan. Perhaps the Chronicles version is an attempt to clear up the confusion of two giants with the same name.

20 And there was war at Gath again, 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 had been born to the giant.

20 There was war at Gath again, 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 had

been born to the giant.

20 Later on, there was another battle at Gath, where there was a very tall man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—24 in number—who had also been fathered by giants.

20 And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant.

- "...man of *great* stature" - some use this verse (and others: Num 13:33; Deut 3:11; 1 Chr 11:22, et al) to argue that post-Flood Nephilim existed. However, the word Nephilim is never used to describe these large creatures/people anywhere outside of Gen 6:1-4 and Num 13:33.

— So how do you explain a guy with six fingers and six toes, a guy who slept on a bed that was 12'-13' feet long, or a guy who killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day? Natural abnormalities. Take a look at the Guinness Book of World Records and you'll see all sorts of this same type of thing.

21 When he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck and killed him.

21 When he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck him down.

21 When he defied Israel, David's brother Shimeah's son Jonathan killed him.

21 And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea the brother of David slew him.

- A conflict at Gath involved a giant (descended from Rapha; Cf. 2 Sam 21:16,18) with six digits on each hand and foot. He was slain by David's nephew Jonathan, named, of course, for David's dear friend. With this giant's death the terror caused by the Philistine giants came to an end.

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

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

22 These four giants, who had been fathered by a giant in Gath, were killed at the hands of David and his servants.

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

- The four giants were:

- Ishbibenob (v16)
- Saph (v19)
- Goliath (probably Lahmi) (v19)

- “a man of great stature” (v20)
- Evidently, Goliath had four brothers