

## STUDIES IN SAMUEL

### A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 21

- Vv. 1- 9 *The Gibeonites avenged.* Saul had slain many of the Gibeonites although Joshua had made a covenant to live in peace with them. As a result of this injustice God had sent a famine on Israel. The Gibeonites did not ask for any restitution from David, but they felt that the family of Saul should be punished. They asked that seven of his sons be slain to avenge the treatment they had received at Saul's hand. David executed the penalty on their behalf, and the famine was stayed.
- Vv. 10-14 *Rizpah's sad vigil.* Rizpah was Saul's concubine. Two of her sons whom she had borne to Saul were among those slain. She sat by their bodies and drove off the birds of the air and the beasts of the field until David came and took up the bones of the slain men and buried them in Saul's old home.
- Vv. 15-22 *Battles with the Philistines.* The Philistines were perennial enemies of Israel. Even in the later days of David's reign they were engaged in war against him.

### LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Mother love is deep.* Kipling has said in his poem, "Mother O' Mine," that if he were hanged on the highest hill, his mother's love would reach him still. He mused that if he were drowned in the deepest sea, his mother's love would come down to him. Men and women who have memory of tender mother love should give God thanks for this invaluable gift.
2. *Vengeance belongs to the Lord* (Deuteronomy 32:35). It was not for David to say what penalty should be exacted against the house of Saul for their infamous

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treatment of the Gibeonites, neither was it for the Gibeonites to make an unfair request of David. That vengeance should be taken on the house of Saul was evident from the fact that God had brought a famine on Israel. Those involved were wise to inquire of the Lord in this manner. Men and women today should be willing for God's justice to be worked in their lives.

### 2. The Three Years of Famine, 21:1-22.

#### *The Gibeonites Avenged.* 21:1-9

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

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.)

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?

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 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 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*.

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.

8 But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare 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:

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.

1. *Who were the Gibeonites? 21:1*

The Gibeonites were inhabitants of a republic which included not only Gibeon, the capital, but the towns of Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath-Jearim. Gibeon was larger than Ai, the city which Israel attacked when she first came up out of the Jordan valley in the days of Joshua (Joshua 10:2). Gibeon was one of the royal cities and was inhabited by Hivites, who were a brave people (Joshua 10:7; 11:19). When the land was settled by the Israelites, the city was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin and set aside as a Levitical city (Joshua 18:25; 21:17). After the destruction of the priestly family at Nob by Saul, the tabernacle was moved to Gibeon; and it remained there until the building of Solomon's temple (I Chronicles 16:39; 21:29; I Kings 3:4, 5; II Chronicles 1:3). A team of archaeologists from the University of Pennsylvania excavated the site of El-Jib in 1956. The walls and part of the city's water supply system were uncovered. More recent diggings reveal that the city had an elaborate system of civil defense which was designed to enable Gibeon to withstand indefinite siege. They also found a cemetery dating to 2000 years before Christ and containing thirty-six rock-cut tombs which illustrated burial customs and

documented the details of the Gibeonite daily life several hundred years before the Israelites came to Palestine. These people had lived at peace with the Israelites from the days of Joshua when they deceived the Israelites by their camouflage and Joshua made a treaty of peace with them.

2. *Why had Saul sought to slay them? 21:1 b*

The Gibeonites were not members of any of the tribes of Israel, but were known as Amorites, a name given to the Canaanites in general on occasion and probably signifying those who dwelt in the hills (Joshua 24:8). They were descended from Canaan (Genesis 10:16). Joshua's covenant with them was an unending one and should have been honored by all leaders of Israel who followed Joshua (Joshua 9:15). No historical reference is made to Saul's effort to exterminate them, but he probably did this in a burst of senseless zeal after he had failed to exterminate the Amalekites, as if wiping out a Canaanite tribe would atone for his failure to get rid of the Amalekites.

3. *Why was the nation punished for Saul's sin? 21:2*

Israel had sworn to the men of Gibeon that they would be at peace throughout their days. This was promised at the time Israel conquered the land, and an account of this promise is found in Joshua 9:1-27. Saul had slain a number of the men of Gibeon. No number is given, but the number was probably larger than the seven lives sought in revenge. Saul had sinned, it is true; and all Israel paid the penalty by a famine because of Saul's zeal for Israel and the fact that the nation would be held responsible for the acts of her leaders. Why the Gibeonites should desire the penalty to be paid in "Gibeah of Saul" is not known; but it was, of course, Saul's home.

4. *Why did the Gibeonites want seven men to be killed? 21:6*

The Gibeonites told David that they did not want retribution in the form of the payment of money, neither did they want to punish all Israel for the sins of her king.

They asked for specific revenge in the form of the killing of seven descendants of Saul. By hanging them up in Gibeah they would keep the shame upon Saul's home and any other of his descendants who might live there. Seven sons were chosen to signify a complete number. The number seven is generally taken to be a full number, God having ordained seven days in a week and often providing that a payment be made seven times for injuries sustained (Genesis 4:15; Proverbs 6:31).

5. *Why did David spare Mephibosheth? 21:7*

Mephibosheth was the grandson of Saul, and his death would certainly have satisfied the demands of the Gibeonites. David spared him because he had sworn with an oath to Jonathan, the son of Saul, that he would not harm his heirs. This oath was made immediately after David had killed Goliath and was repeated a number of times as David was in exile from Saul's court (I Samuel 18:3; 20:8; 8:15, 42; 23:18). It is called the Lord's oath because the men swore to each other as unto the Lord. It was a sacred covenant, and David would not do anything to break it. It is significant that he spared Mephibosheth even though Ziba had said that Mephibosheth entertained notions of succeeding David to the throne (II Samuel 16:3).

6. *Which of Saul's descendants were slain? 21:8*

David took two sons of Rizpah—Armoni and Mephibosheth. Rizpah was Saul's concubine, and she had borne these children to Saul. David took five sons of Merab, Saul's oldest daughter. She was the daughter who should have been given to David as his wife as a reward for his killing Goliath (I Samuel 18:19), but when it came time for the marriage, Saul gave her to Adriel, the Meholathite, to be his wife and to embarrass David. Michal had no children of her own (II Samuel 6:23), and these sons were evidently taken into Michal's care for rearing after Merab had died. Barzillai is noted as the father of Adriel, but this is quite evidently a different Barzillai from the

one who aided David while he was in Gilead (II Samuel 17:27). These seven descendants of Saul were hung by the Gibeonites in Gibeah, the home of Saul.

7. *How were the sons hanged?* 21:9

The Gibeonites asked that the persons executed might be impaled as a public exhibition of the punishment. The bodies were gibbeted and exposed after death. These sons were slain at the beginning of the harvest (near the first of June) and Rizpah kept watch over them until the time of the autumnal rains (sometime in November). This was a long period of five months. Rizpah, Saul's concubine, posed a tragic, dramatic figure in the heart of the scripture account. Although the place of woman in those days was not what we know it to be now, women still were capable of that faithful deep devotion which is well expressed in mother love. The attachment of Rizpah to her sons caused David to again show his respect for Saul.

*Rizpah's Sad Vigil.* 21:10-14

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.

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

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

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.

14 And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulcher

of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was entreated for the land.

8. *Why did Rizpah guard the bodies? 21:10*

Rizpah took the coarse, hairy cloth which was worn as a sign of mourning and spread it out as a pallet for herself on the rock at the summit of the high place where Saul's heirs were crucified. She was, indeed, mourning over this tragic end of Saul's house, two of whom were her own children. The sackcloth was not used as a tent to keep the sun off herself nor as a covering for the corpses of those who had been executed; it was to soften the surface on which she sat by day, and lay by night, and to express her deep grief. Leaving bodies to be consumed by birds of prey and wild beasts was regarded to be the greatest ignominy that could be heaped on the dead (I Samuel 17:44). The Law had stipulated that when people were executed, they were not to remain hanging overnight but to be buried before nightfall (Deuteronomy 21:22, 23). The law was not applicable in this case because the slaying of Saul's sons was to expiate a sin which Saul had committed, and the bodies were to be left spread out before the Lord until the rains fell as a sign of the end of the famine. Mention is made of the fact that Rizpah sat there from the beginning of the harvest which would come in late spring, until the rains came in the fall at the beginning of Palestine's wet season. Josephus assumes that the rain fell at once and before the ordinary early rain (*Antiquities* VII; xii; 1). News of this lonely vigil of this tragic figure was brought to David by those who had seen what she was doing.

9. *How was David able to move the bones of Saul? 21:12*

Although the corpses of Jonathan and Saul had been stolen from the walls of Beth-shan by the men of Jabesh-gilead, the bodies may have been only partially burned (I

Samuel 31:12). Some charred remains of the body must have been left. The bones of these men were then buried with the bones of those seven sons who had been hanged. Such concern for the human body was typical of the Jewish people and is another indication of the fact that Godfearing people through the years have practiced only the burial of the corpse. The earthly remains of Saul's heirs were buried in the homeland of Israel's first king.

*Battles With the Philistines.* 21:15-22

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.

16 And Ishbi-benob, 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.

17 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured 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.

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.

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

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.

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

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

10. *Why did the Philistines attack again? 21:15*

Israel had been weakened by the famine which had followed year after year for three years. The Philistines seized the opportunity to rise and revolt against their neighbors to the east. Although some students of Scripture believe that this account is not in its correct location, chronologically speaking, the statement is made that the Philistines had *yet war* again with Israel. Such an emphasis on the time of the war, and its repetition point to an effort of the Philistines to defeat Israel after the famine which had come on them because of Saul's sin against the Gibeonites.

11. *Who were the sons of the giant? 21:16*

One of the sons of Goliath is named Ishbi-benob. He is described in language similar to that used to describe his father. He made an effort to avenge the death of his father by slaying David, but Abishai helped David, and Ishbi-benob was killed. A second son was Saph (verse 18). Saph was slain by Sibbechai the Hushathite. The location of Hushath is unknown, and Josephus calls Sibbechai a Hittite (*Antiquities* VII; xii; 2). A third son was also named Goliath, after the name of his father (verse 19). Elhanan, the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite, slew this Goliath. The King James version adds unnecessarily the words found in italics in verse 19, making the man slain to be the brother of Goliath the Gittite. The text in Chronicles reads, "Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite" (I Chronicles 20:5). If this giant slain by Elhanan is not a son of Goliath, we cannot determine who were the four sons of the giant mentioned later (verse 22). A fourth son is mentioned as one who had a physical imperfection. He had six fingers on every hand and six toes on every foot. The total is given as twenty-four, verifying the facts of his deformity. He was also born to the giant (verse 20); and when he fought against Israel, Jonathan, the son of

Shimei, David's brother, killed him. These four—Ishbi-benob, Saph, the son slain by Elhanan, and the one with twelve fingers and twelve toes—were born to the Goliath in Gath (verse 22). All of these were killed by David or his men in their various campaigns against the Philistines.

12. *Who was this Goliath? 21:19*

This Goliath was probably a descendant of the Goliath slain by David. They were both from the same country. All of this must have transpired at the time of the war with Gath. Chronicles (see I Chronicles 20:1-8) calls Gob "Geyer." This place is located on the border of the Philistine plain and is probably the correct location. Radical critics attempt to discredit the Scriptures by saying that Elhanan slew Goliath and tradition attributed the feat to David. They emend the text by dropping the phrase "the brother of" from verse 19 and defend their action by showing that there was no Hebrew word for brother at that point. A better emendation of the text would be to put the "son of" in the text for the italicized words found there in the usual printing. It is essential that it be understood the giant had four sons, and the one slain by Elhanan must have been a son of Goliath, who was killed by David (I Samuel 17:50).

## CHAPTER 21 IN REVIEW

1. How long did the famine last? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What people had Saul slain? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many sons of Saul were slain in revenge? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Did David spare Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many of Rizpah's sons were slain? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Where did David go to get Saul's bones? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Where were they finally interred? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How many sons did Goliath have? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Who saved David from Goliath's son? \_\_\_\_\_
10. How many toes did the deformed son have? \_\_\_\_\_