

2 Samuel 21
April 28, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: How important are covenants in the Bible? [Let people engage]

Transition: Covenants in Scripture are held in high regard. A covenant is a sacred agreement in which specific conditions are set out. Making and keeping covenants qualifies us to receive the blessings God has promised.

In today's text, we discovered that there has been a three-year famine that occurred in Israel. Here we learn that this famine happened on account of Saul's earlier murder of the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites were a group of Canaanites who dwell in Palestine prior to the Exodus event. When Israel entered the promised land, you may recall that the Gibeonites deceived them into making a covenant of protection, which resulted in these Canaanites becoming servants in the land. These events transpired, some 400 years prior to David's time, and are recorded in Joshua 9. While the covenant between Israel and the Gibeonites was made deceitfully and was contrary to God's command, it nevertheless was a covenant to be honored. Let's see what transpires as David rights the wrongs of a covenant that was broken by Saul. Let's begin.

BOOK:

The Gibeonites Avenged

21 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.

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 (7.5lbs) 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 (son of Jair the weaver) 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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- Themes of justice, atonement, covenants mattered, David sought the Lord

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

- Retribution meant 7 sons of Saul being crucified for their Dad's sins

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Anytime we are needing to make a decision that carries much weight and impacts many people, we should inquire of the Lord as to what he would have us do. David gives us a great example

when Israel was enduring a 3-yr famine. He sought the Lord to understand why it was happening. Once he learned the answer, he knew what he had to do.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). Commentary on the Old Testament (Vol. 2, pp. 677–681). Hendrickson.

Three Years' Famine. Heroic Acts Performed in the Wars with the Philistines—Ch. 21

2 Sam. 21:1–14. Three Years' Famine—A three years' famine in the land, the occasion of which, as Jehovah declared to the king, was Saul's crime with regard to the Gibeonites, was expiated by David's delivering up to the Gibeonites, at their own request, seven of Saul's descendants, who were then hung by them upon a mountain before Jehovah. This occurrence certainly did not take place in the closing years of David's reign; on the other hand, it is evident from the remark in v. 7, to the effect that Mephibosheth was spared, that it happened after David had received tidings of Mephibosheth, and had taken him to his own table (2 Sam. 9). This is mentioned here as a practical illustration, on the one hand of the manner in which Jehovah visited upon the house of Saul, even after the death of Saul himself, a crime which had been committed by him; and, on the other hand, of the way in which, even in such a case as this, when David had been obliged to sacrifice the descendants of Saul to expiate the guilt of their father, he showed his tenderness towards him by the honorable burial of their bones.

2 Sam. 21:1–6a. A famine, which lasted for three successive years, induced David to seek the face of Jehovah, i.e., to approach God in prayer and ask the cause of this judgment which had fallen upon the land. The Lord replied, "Because of Saul, and because of the house of blood-guiltiness, because he hath slain the Gibeonites." The expression "because of the house of blood-guiltiness" is in apposition to "Saul," and determines the meaning more precisely: "because of Saul, and indeed because of the blood-guiltiness which rests upon his house." **בֵּית הַדָּמִים** signifies the house upon which blood that had been shed still rested as guilt, like **עִיר הַדָּמִים** in Ezek. 22:2; 24:6, 9, and **אֵישׁ דָּמִים** in Ps. 5:7; 27:9, etc. Nothing further is known about the fact itself. It is simply evident from the words of the Gibeonites in v. 5, that Saul, in his pretended zeal for the

children of Israel, had smitten the Gibeonites, i.e., had put them to death. Probably some dissatisfaction with them had furnished Saul with a pretext for exterminating these Amoritish heathen from the midst of the people of God.

2 Sam. 21:2. In consequence of this answer from God, which merely indicated in a general manner the cause of the visitation that had come upon the land, David sent for the Gibeonites to ask them concerning the wrong that had been done them by Saul. But before the historian communicates their answer, he introduces an explanation respecting the Gibeonites, to the effect that they were not Israelites, but remnants of the Amorites, to whom Joshua had promised on oath that their lives should be preserved (vid., Josh. 9:3ff.). They are called *Hivites* in the book of Joshua (Josh. 9:7); whereas here they are designated *Amorites*, according to the more general name which is frequently used as comprehending all the tribes of Canaan (see at Gen. 10:16 and 15:16). David said to the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you, and wherewith shall I expiate” (sc., the wrong done you), “that ye may bless the inheritance (i.e., the nation) of Jehovah?” On the use of the imperative וַיִּכְרְטוּ to denote the certain consequences, see Ewald, § 347.

2 Sam. 21:4. The Gibeonites answered, “I have not to do with silver and gold concerning Saul and his house” (*lit.* it is not, does not stand, to me at silver and gold with Saul and his house), i.e., I have no money to demand of Saul, require no pecuniary payment as compensation for the blood which he shed among us (vid., Num. 35:31). The *Chethib* לִי is not to be touched, notwithstanding the לָנוּ which follows. The use of the singular may be explained on the simple ground that the speaker thought of the Gibeonites as a corporation. “And it does not pertain to us to put any one to death in Israel” (sc., of our own accord). When David inquired still further, “What do you mean, then, that I should do to you?” they replied, “(As for) the man who consumed us, and who thought against us, that we should be destroyed (כִּי נִשְׁמְדָנוּ without כִּי, subordinately to דָּמָה, like אֶעֱשֶׂה in the previous verse), so as not to continue in the whole of the territory of Israel, let seven men of his sons be given us, that we may crucify them to Jehovah at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of Jehovah.” אֵישׁ אֶשֶׁר וּגְוִי is placed at the head absolutely (cf. Gesenius, § 145, 2). On crucifixion as a capital punishment, see at Num. 25:4, where it has already been observed that criminals were not impaled or fastened to the cross alive, but were first of all put to death. Consequently the Gibeonites desired that the massacre, which had taken place among them by the command of Saul, should be expiated by the execution of a number of his sons—blood for blood, according to Num. 35:31. They asked for the crucifixion for Jehovah, i.e., that the persons executed might be impaled, as a public exhibition of the punishment inflicted, before the face of the Lord (vid., v. 9), as the satisfaction required to expiate His wrath. Seven was a sacred number, denoting the performance of a work of God. This was to take place in Gibeah, the home and capital of Saul, who had brought the wrath of God upon the land through his crime. There is a sacred irony in the epithet applied to Saul, “chosen of the Lord.” If Saul was the chosen of Jehovah, his actions ought to have been in accordance with his divine election.

2 Sam. 21:6–10. David granted the request, because, according to the law in Num. 35:33, blood-guiltiness when resting upon the land could only be expiated by the blood of the criminal; but in delivering up the members of Saul’s house for whom they asked, he spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul, for the sake of the bond of friendship which he had formed with Jonathan on oath (1 Sam. 18:3; 20:8, 16), and gave up to the Gibeonites two sons of Rizpah, a concubine of Saul (vid., v. 11 and 2 Sam. 3:7), and five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel of Meholah. The name of *Michal*, which stands in the text, is founded upon an error of memory or a copyist’s mistake; for it was not Michal, but *Merab*,

Saul's eldest daughter, who was given to Adriel the Meholathite as his wife (1 Sam. 18:19). The Gibeonites crucified those who were delivered up to them upon the mountain at Gibeah before Jehovah (see the remarks on v. 6). "Thus fell seven at once." The *Chethib* שֶׁבַע־עֵתִים, at which the Masoretes took such offence that they wanted to change it into שֶׁבַע־עָתָם, is defended by Böttcher very properly, on the ground that the dual of the numeral denotes what is uniformly repeated as if by pairing; so that here it expresses what was extraordinary in the event in a more pictorial manner than the *Keri*: "They fell sevenfold at once," i.e., seven in the same way. The further remark, "they were slain in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of the barley harvest," belongs to what follows, for which it prepares the way. The two *Keris*, וְהָיָה, and בְּתֵהֱלֵל for וְהָיָה, are needless emendations. וְהָיָה is an adverbial accusative (vid., Ges. § 118, 2). The harvest began with the barley harvest, about the middle of Nisan, our April.

2 Sam. 21:10. And Rizpah took sackcloth, i.e., the coarse hairy cloth that was worn as mourning, and spread it out for herself by the rock—not as a tent, as Clericus supposes, still less as a covering over the corpses of those who had been executed, according to the exegetical handbook, but for a bed—"from the beginning of the harvest till water was poured out upon them (the crucified) from heaven," i.e., till rain came as a sign that the plague of drought that had rested upon the land was appeased; after which the corpses could be openly taken down from the stakes and buried,—a fact which is passed over in the account before us, where only the principal points are given. This is the explanation which Josephus has correctly adopted; but his assumption that the rain fell at once, and before the ordinary early rain, has no foundation in the text of the Bible. "And suffered not the birds of heaven to settle upon the corpses by day, or the wild beasts by night." Leaving corpses without burial, to be consumed by birds of prey and wild beasts, was regarded as the greatest ignominy that could befall the dead (see at 1 Sam. 17:44). According to Deut. 21:22, 23, persons executed were not to remain hanging through the night upon the stake, but to be buried before evening. This law, however, had no application whatever to the case before us, where the expiation of guilt that rested upon the whole land was concerned. In this instance the expiatory sacrifices were to remain exposed before Jehovah, till the cessation of the plague showed that His wrath had been appeased.

2 Sam. 21:11–14. When this touching care of Rizpah for the dead was told to David, he took care that the bones of the whole of the fallen royal house should be buried in the burial-place of Saul's family. He therefore sent for the bones of Saul and Jonathan, which the men of Jabesh had taken away secretly from the wall of Beisan, where the Philistines had fastened the bodies, and which had been buried in Jabesh (1 Sam. 31:10ff.), and had the bones of the sons and grandsons of Saul who had been crucified at Gibeah collected together, and interred all these bones at Zela in the land of Benjamin, in the family grave of Kish the father of Saul. גָּנַב, to take away secretly. מִן־הַחֵבֶל בֵּית־שֵׁן, from the *market-place* of Bethshan, does not present any contradiction to the statement in 1 Sam. 31:10, that the Philistines fastened the body to the *wall* of Bethshan, as the *rechob* or market-place in eastern towns is not in the middle of the town, but is an open place against or in front of the gate (cf. 2 Chron. 32:6; Neh. 8:1, 3, 16). This place, as the common meeting-place of the citizens, was the most suitable spot that the Philistines could find for fastening the bodies to the wall. The *Chethib* תְּלָהִים is the true Hebrew form from תָּלָה, whereas the *Keri* תְּלָאוֹת is a formation resembling the Aramaean (cf. Ewald, § 252, a.). The *Keri* פְּלִשְׁתִּים is correct, however, as פְּלִשְׁתִּים, being a proper name, does not take any article. In בְּיָוֶם הַכּוֹת the literal meaning of יוֹם (day) must not be strictly pressed, but the expression is to be taken in the sense of "at the time of the smiting;" for the hanging up of the bodies did not take place till the day after the battle (1 Sam. 31:8ff.).—In v. 14 the account is abridged, and the bones of the

crucified persons are not mentioned again. The situation of *Zela* is unknown (see at Josh. 18:28). After this had been carried out in accordance with the king's command, God suffered himself to be entreated for the land, so that the famine ceased.

2 Sam. 21:15–22. Heroic Acts Performed in the Wars with the Philistines.—The brief accounts contained in these verses of different heroic feats were probably taken from a history of David's wars drawn up in the form of chronicles, and are introduced here as practical proofs of the gracious deliverance of David out of the hand of all his foes, for which he praises the Lord his God in the psalm of thanksgiving which follows, so that the enumeration of these feats is to be regarded as supplying a historical basis for the psalm.

2 Sam. 21:15–17. The Philistines had war with Israel again. עֹד (again) refers generally to earlier wars with the Philistines, and has probably been taken without alteration from the chronicles employed by our author, where the account which follows was attached to notices of other wars. This may be gathered from the books of the Chronicles, where three of the heroic feats mentioned here are attached to the general survey of David's wars (vid., 1 Chron. 20:4). David was exhausted in this fight, and a Philistian giant thought to slay him; but Abishai came to his help and slew the giant. He was called *Yishbo benob* (*Keri, Yishbi*), i.e., not *Yishbo at Nob*, but *Yishbobenob*, a proper name, the meaning of which is probably "his dwelling is on the height," and which may have been given to him because of his inaccessible castle. He was one of the descendants of Raphah, i.e., one of the gigantic race of Rephaim. *Raphah* was the tribe-father of the Rephaim, an ancient tribe of gigantic stature, of whom only a few families were left even in Moses' time (vid., Deut. 2:11; 3:11, 13, and the commentary on Gen. 14:5). The weight of his lance, i.e., of the metal point to his lance, was three hundred shekels, or eight pounds, of brass, half as much as the spear of Goliath (1 Sam. 17:7); "and he was girded with new armour." Böttcher has no doubt given the correct explanation of the word קְדָשָׁה; he supposes the feminine to be used in a collective sense, so that the noun ("armour," כְּלִי) could be dispensed with. (For parallels both to the words and facts, vid., Judg. 18:11 and Deut. 1:41.) וַיֹּאמֶר, he said (sc., to himself), i.e., he thought.

2 Sam. 21:17. The danger into which the king had been brought in this war, and out of which he had been rescued solely by Abishai's timely help, induced his attendants to make him swear that he would not go into battle any more in person. וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ, administered an oath to him, i.e., fixed him by a promise on oath. וְלֹא תִכְבֶּה, "and shalt not extinguish the light of Israel." David had become the light of Israel from the fact that Jehovah was his light (2 Sam. 22:29), or, according to the parallel passage in Ps. 18:29, that Jehovah had lighted his lamp and enlightened his darkness, i.e., had lifted him out of a state of humiliation and obscurity into one of honour and glory. The light (or lamp) is a figure used to represent the light of life as continually burning, i.e., life in prosperity and honour. David's regal life and actions were the light which the grace of God had kindled for the benefit of Israel. This light he was not to extinguish, namely by going into the midst of war and so exposing his valuable life to danger.

2 Sam. 21:18. (compare 1 Chron. 20:4). In a second war, *Sibbechai* and Hushathite slew *Saph* the Rephaite at *Gob*. According to 1 Chron. 27:11, *Sibbechai*, one of the *gibborim* of David (1 Chron. 11:29), was the leader of the eighth division of the army (see at 2 Sam. 23:27). הַחֲשָׁתִי is a patronymic from חֲשָׁה in 1 Chron. 4:4. The scene of conflict is called *Gob* in our text, and *Gezer* in the Chronicles. As *Gob* is entirely unknown. Thenius supposes it to be a slip of the pen for *Gezer*; but this is improbable, for the simple reason that *Gob* occurs again in v. 19. It may possibly have been a small place somewhere near to *Gezer*, which some suppose to have stood

on the site of *el Kubab*, on the road from *Ramleh* to *Yalo* (see at Josh. 10:33). The name *Saph* is written *Sippai* in the Chronicles.

2 Sam. 21:19. (vid., 1 Chron. 20:5). In another war with the Philistines at Gob, *Elhanan* the son of *Yaare-Orgim* of Bethlehem smote *Goliath* of Gath, whose spear was like a weaver's beam. In the Chronicles, however, we find it stated that "*Elhanan* the son of *Jair* smote *Lahmi* the brother of Goliath of Gath, whose spear," etc. The words of our text are so similar to those of the Chronicles, if we only leave out the word אַרְגִּים, which probably crept in from the next line through oversight on the part of a copyist, that they presuppose the same original text, so that the difference can only have arisen from an error in copying. The majority of the expositors (e.g., Piscator, Clericus, Michaelis, Movers, and Thenius) regard the text of the Chronicles as the true and original one, and the text before us as simply corrupt. But Bertheau and Böttcher maintain the opposite opinion, because it is impossible to see how the reading in 2 Sam. could grow out of that in the Chronicles; whereas the reading in the Chronicles might have arisen through conscious alteration originating in the offence taken by some reader, who recalled the account of the conflict between David and Goliath, at the statement that Elhanan smote a giant named Goliath, and who therefore altered אֶת הַלְחָמִי אֶת into אֶת לְחָמִי אֶת. But apart from the question whether there were two Goliaths, one of whom was slain by David and the other by Elhanan, the fact that the conjecture of Bertheau and Böttcher presupposes a deliberate alteration of the text, or rather, to speak more correctly, an intentional falsification of the historical account, is quite sufficient to overthrow it, as not a single example of anything of the kind can be adduced from the whole of the Chronicles. On the other hand, the recollection of David's celebrated officer *Elhanan* of Bethlehem (2 Sam. 23:24; 1 Chron. 11:26) might easily lead to an identification of the Elhanan mentioned here with that officer, and so occasion the alteration of אֶת לְחָמִי into בֵּית הַלְחָמִי. This alteration was then followed by that of אֶת לְחָמִי גִלְיָת into אֶת גִּלְיָת גִּלְיָת, and all the more easily from the fact that the description of Lahmi's spear corresponds word for word with that of Goliath's spear in 1 Sam. 17:7. Consequently we must regard the reading in the Chronicles as the correct one, and alter our text accordingly; since the assumption that there were two Goliaths is a very improbable one, and there is nothing at all strange in the reference to a brother of Goliath, who was also a powerful giant, and carried a spear like Goliath. Elhanan the son of *Jairi* is of course a different person from *Elhanan* the Bethlehemite, the son of Dodo (2 Sam. 23:24). The Chronicles have גַּעְיָר, instead of *Jairi* (the reading according to the *Chethib*), and the former is probably the correct way of writing the name.

2 Sam. 21:20, 21. (cf. 1 Chron. 20:6, 7). In another war at Gath, a Philistian warrior, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, defied Israel, and was slain by Jonathan the son of Shimeah, the brother of David (see at 2 Sam. 13:3). The *Chethib* מְדִיָן is probably to be read מְדִיָּן, an archaic plural ("a man of measures, or extensions:" de Dieu, etc.); in the Chronicles we find the singular מְדָה instead.

2 Sam. 21:22. (cf. 1 Chron. 20:8). This verse contains a postscript, in which the previous verses are summed up. The accusative אֶת־אֲרָרְבָּעָה may be explained from a species of attraction, i.e., from the fact that the historian had יָבֵהוּ (v. 21) still in his mind: "As for these four, they were born to *Rapha*," i.e., they were descendants of the Rephaite family at Gath, where remnants of the aboriginal Canaanitish tribes of gigantic stature were still to be found, as in other towns of the Philistines (vid., Josh. 11:22). "They fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants." "By the hand of David" refers to the fact that David had personally fought with *Yishbobenob* (v. 16).

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 2 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 476-477) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

G. Slaughter and burial of Saul's sons (chap. 21)

21:1–8. At some point in David's **reign**, probably toward the end, Israel was afflicted by a **three-year** drought. When he inquired of **the LORD** as to its cause, **the LORD** revealed that it came as punishment for Saul's violation of the covenant made with **the Gibeonites** back in the days of Joshua (Josh. 9:15–21). At that time Israel, under Joshua's leadership, had just destroyed Jericho and Ai and was 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). When David learned that the **famine** had come on Israel as punishment for that covenant violation, he asked the Gibeonite leaders **what** he should **do for** them. They responded by denying any interest in **silver or gold**. Nor, they said, 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).

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. 20:15–16). So David **spared Mephibosheth**, Jonathan's **son**, but singled out others of Saul's offspring for execution. These included **Armoni and another Mephibosheth**, sons of Saul's concubine **Rizpah** (cf. 2 Sam. 3:7). The other **five** were all **sons of Merab**, daughter of Saul, by her husband **Adriel** (cf. 1 Sam. 18:19). (As stated in NIV have "Michal," but that reading makes 2 Sam: 21:8 contradict the statement in 6:23 that Michal died childless.)

21:9–10. These **seven** sons and grandsons of Saul were publicly executed by **the Gibeonites** at the **beginning of barley harvest**, early in the spring (see the chart "Calendar in Israel," near Ex. 12:1). As their bodies hung suspended from their places of exposure, **Rizpah**, mother of the first two (v. 8), refused to take them down and bury them. In great grief she lamented for them on a rocky ledge until the coming of the drought-breaking rains. The reason for her action is not entirely clear unless she viewed the vengeance of the Gibeonites as being at the same time the vengeance of God against the land for Saul's sake. 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.

21:11–14. **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. David resolved to bring their **bones** back from Jabesh Gilead and bury them in the sepulcher of **Saul’s father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin**. After this was done **God** again **answered prayer** on behalf of the nation.

21:15–22. 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. A Philistine giant, **Ishbi-Benob**, advanced on **David** with a spear (with a **spearhead** weighing **300 shekels** or about seven and one-half pounds) and a **new sword** (the Heb. in v. 16 is lit., “armed with a new thing,” without specifying the weapon), threatening to **kill** him. Just in time **Abishai ... came to David’s aid and killed** the giant. **David’s** warriors advised him **never again** to take to the field of **battle**. His death would mean the end of his leadership, a tragedy synonymous with the snuffing out of Israel’s illumination (**the lamp of Israel**) for in and through David were God’s covenant blessings to be accomplished (1 Kings 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19).

Other Philistine encounters, **at Gob** and **Gath**, followed the one just recorded. At Gob (Gezer in 1 Chron. 20:4), **Sibbecai**, a heroic Israelite, slew **Saph** (Sippai in 1 Chron. 20:4), another Philistine giant (**Rapha** is from “Rephaim,” a race of giants; cf. 2 Sam. 21:16).

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 verses 18–22 and 1 Chronicles 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 Chron. 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.

A conflict **at Gath** involved a giant (**descended from Rapha**; cf. 2 Sam. 21:16, 18) **with six digits on each hand and foot**. The genetic strains which produced gigantism must also have caused this malformity. 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.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 130-131). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

God Avenges (21:1–22). A three-year famine caused David to inquire how Israel had offended the Lord. It was common in the Old Testament to attribute such catastrophes to the Lord’s intervention. King Saul had breached Israel’s long-standing covenant with the Gibeonites (see Josh. 9:25–27). Although 1 Samuel does not narrate Saul’s murder of these Amorites (who resided in his homeland of Benjamin), such an act was consistent with Saul’s policies (see 1 Sam. 22:16–19). David turned over seven descendants of Saul’s house (sparing Mephibosheth) to the Gibeonites for execution to avenge their loss. David buried Saul’s kin honorably with his and Jonathan’s bones. The execution of Saul’s kinsmen may have been the reason Shimei claimed David was guilty of bloodshed (see 16:7–8).

The catalog of wars against the Philistines is a commentary on the continued troubles in the reign of David but also a tribute to God’s abiding favor as Israel prevailed over their foes.

Tatum, S. L. (1972). 2 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 191-192). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The Gibeonites Execute Saul's Sons (2 Sam. 21:1–14)

The passage—There was a famine in Israel that lasted for three years. David asked God the reason for it. God replied it was because of the guilt of the house of Saul for putting some of the Gibeonites to death when Israel had sworn to spare them. David sought to make restitution to the Gibeonites. They demanded seven of the sons of Saul that they might hang them.

David spared Mephibosheth, but delivered seven other of Saul's sons. The Gibeonites hanged them as in public demonstration.

Rizpah, the mother of two of them, watched over their bodies for six months to protect them from the vultures and the beasts.

When David heard of her faithfulness and her mother love, he took their bones and those of Saul and Jonathan and gave them decent burial.

Special points—The seemingly unjust punishment of sons for the crimes of their father reminds us of the privilege we have of living in days when the influence of Jesus Christ has brought a larger degree of justice to the world.

Truth for today—The mother love of Rizpah is a pattern of loyalty and love to us. Though she was but a concubine to an evil king, she had the quality of love which has come down through the centuries in history as a memorial to her.

Another War with the Philistines (2 Sam. 21:15–22)

The passage—The Philistines continued to plague the Israelites. This is but another brief account of the continuing conflict. On one occasion David was about to be killed, but Abishai came to his rescue. David's men urged him not to continue to place himself in such danger. A number of giants of the Philistines were killed in those battles.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (2 Samuel 21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.