
2 Samuel 21

Related Topics: David; Saul; Famine; Gibeonites; Covenant; Philistines; War

We are coming to the FINAL FOUR chapters of 2 Samuel. They are not placed in chronological order with the rest of the book. In Chapter 21:1 we find the vague expression “in the days of David” – there is no specific time stamp.



CHAPTER 21

- Record of a 3 year Famine and the death of Saul's sons (21:1-14)
- Philistine wars (21:15-22)

CHAPTER 22

- Song of David (22:1-51)

CHAPTER 23

Last words of David (23:1-7)
David's heroes (23:8-39)

CHAPTER 24

The census and the threshing floor (24:1-25)

CHAPTER 21

*1Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the Lord.
And the Lord said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death."*

The first observation is that it took three years for David to seek the Lord. You would think that David would have sought the Lord in the first year. Or at the least into the second year of draught David would have said, “Something is wrong here... We are having some serious problems here... I better seek the Lord.” But It wasn't until the third year that David decided to seek the face of the Lord.

Note that David was not seeking merely pragmatic information. He knew that the answer was to be found in seeking the face of the Lord; in Personal Communion with the Living God. How different from modern church culture where everyone is running to the next conference or seminar for answers.

But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, 17 until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.

Here is the picture: It is tragic that people wait for things to get real desperate before they seek the Lord; seek to meet with him. I wonder how many of our problems would have been avoided if we had only sought the Lord, enjoyed fellowship with Him, sensed His heart and His desires, asked His mind in matters at the beginning.

As the words of an old hymn tell us:

*O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bare
All because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer*

A lot of needless problems and suffering because we don't seek the face of the Lord. It is so sad that it takes some tragedy to move us to seek the face of the Lord. But the reality of it all is that we have so pushed God out of the center of the Christian life and supplanted Him with a church subculture that seeking the face of the Lord is lost on the average professing Christian.

Sadly, it does take a tragedy to move us to seek His face!

God would be so pleased if we would seek Him without some disaster hanging over our heads. He would be so pleased if He were not our last resort, but rather our first and best time would be spent seeking His face.

Think of the great condescension of God in seeking to meet us face to face. For God to be Immanuel— God with us — meant that He had to leave His throne of glory. All of that being said, when things are going wrong, it is a wise thing to seek the Lord. Don't let your adversary the devil rip you off by saying, "You really don't think God will hear you NOW!"

The reality - because as it was with David, the Lord will show you what is wrong. Maybe there is something spiritually wrong that even you are not aware. Something has crept in and God is trying to get your attention. We remember that David ruled as king over Israel for 40 years. If this chapter is in chronological order — the nation of Israel has been unaware of this sin for some 40 years.

Now, 40 years after the deed of Saul, God is dealing with that sin and these 3 years of famine are his way of getting their attention. The question that is often asked is "Why did God wait FORTY YEARS to deal with this problem?"

QUOTE: Matthew Henry

some troubles especially show that they are sent to bring sin to remembrance. God's judgments often look a great way back, which requires us to do, when we are under his rebukes.

These closing chapters are considered by many scholars to be an EPILOGUE. An epilogue is a section or speech at the end of a book or play that serves as a comment on or a conclusion to what has happened.

In his Harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, William Day Crockett places this shortly after David is settled in Jerusalem, after ruling over Judah from Hebron for 7 ½ years, he is recognized by all 12 tribes.

Some place the famine after David's kindness to Mephiboshet (2 Sam.9) and before the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam.15-18)

Others refer to the opening of CHAPTER 22 as pointing to the famine being an event early on in David's reign, at the beginning of his rule in Hebron

And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.

KEY POINT #1 – The passage of time does not lessen the ramifications of sin. If this is indeed at the end of David's reign. We must remember that the delay of Divine justice is not a token of innocence. Sin must be dealt with. If this is indeed at the end of David's reign, God in His patience allowed 40 years to pass before dealing with it. Upon revealing the sin, the Famine came and remained until the sin was dealt with.

KEY POINT #2 – Even though it took 3 years of a desperate situation to move David to seek the face of the Lord, The Lord answered David. Here is a wonderful illustration of a New Testament truth

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

The reason for the drought and famine was sin committed by Israel's first king – king Saul. When the children of Israel first came into the promised land under the leadership of Joshua – it was obvious that the hand of God was with them. The people of the city of Gibeon understood that their only hope to escape extermination was to make a treaty with Israel. The Gibeonites also knew that there was to be no treaties between Israel and the Canaanites.

They knew that they would have to resort to deception to gain a peace treaty with Israel. So they pretended to come from afar.

They brought moldy bread and wore torn garments and worn sandals as evidence of their long journey. (Judges 9) Joshua and his men made a fatal mistake.

Josh 9:14-15

So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the Lord. 15And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.

The Gibeonites got the treaty they wanted because Joshua did not seek the face of the Lord. The terms of this treaty prohibited Israel from wiping out the Gibeonites. They could only relegate the Gibeonites to performing manual labor in Israel.

After 400 years under the rule of the Judges, Saul broke this treaty. His actions are not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture but here. It was for this that God was judging the Israelites by means of this drought and famine during the time of David.

God is a covenant keeping God. He expects that His people will be a covenant keeping people.

Saul was zealous to defeat the enemies of God, but it was misguided zeal. He attacked a people Israel was not to harm. Being zealous does not make an action right.

We remember that Paul the apostle said that he persecuted Christians with great zeal; believing that he was doing the work of God. (Acts 22:3-4) Zealousness is bad if it isn't after the truth.

2 Samuel 21:3-6

3And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the Lord?" 4The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "What do you say that I shall do for you?" 5They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, 6let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the Lord." And the king said, "I will give them."

The request of the Gibeonites was reasonable in the context of that culture. They didn't want any monetary compensation. They didn't want vengeance against Israel at large. They only wanted vengeance against the family of the man who committed the atrocities against their people.

2 Samuel 21:7

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

In sparing Mephibosheth, David carries out the deal.

2 Samuel 21:8-9

8The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholahite; 9and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites,

This would nearly extinguish the house of Saul

1 Sam 13:13-14

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14But now your kingdom shall not continue.

In 1 Chron. 8:29-39; 9:35-44 there are no descendants of Saul listed other than from the line of Jonathan and they hanged them on the mountain before the Lord (implies that the execution of these men was sanctioned by God), and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.

2 Samuel 21:10-14

10Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night. 11When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, 12David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-

gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. 13And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. 14And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land.

What is going on here?

Numbers 35:31; 33-34

31Moreover, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death..... 33You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. 34You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the people of Israel."

Saul is dead and it is his sons who will have their blood shed.

It is not unreasonable to think that his sons helped in, or benefited directly from that massacre, thus David's action would be in keeping with the perfect justice of God.

This is not easy stuff. Sadly, the common practice of professing Christians when confronted with hard passages like this is to throw out those portions of the Bible as irrelevant or un-inspired. They reject it as valid because they don't like the way they feel about it.

When in doubt retreat to the light. When trying to understand a hard passage start from the light that you do have.

Don't attempt to come to a conclusion from the starting point of your own darkened and limited understanding. Concerning this passage, we retreat to the certain light of [Genesis 18:25](#).

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? It is a rhetorical question. Of course He will! In essence, retreat to the cross. How just will God be? So just that He would not save us without satisfying His divine justice in judging our sin! [Romans 3:26](#)

so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

2 Samuel 21:15-16

15There was war again between the Philistines and Israel, and David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines. And David grew weary. 16And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, (This was about 30 pounds)

The shot put in High School is 12 pounds... In college it is 16 pounds. It is hard to imagine throwing a 30 pound spear. What a powerful man.

2 Samuel 21:16-17

and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David. 17But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him.

Even though David grew faint, David held his ground and the Lord provided him a timely rescue. Remember, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus held His ground sweating great drops of blood. When Jesus grew faint, the Father sent Angels to minister to Jesus.

Here is the picture for us. In spiritual warfare, even strong saints grow faint. Satan attacks even more fiercely, but those who stand their ground will be refreshed and relieved and become more than conquerors.

2 Samuel 21:18-19

18After this there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants. 19And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

Here is an apparent contradiction in the Scriptures, but it is one that is easily remedied.

FIRST – 1 Chronicles 20:5 makes it clear that Elhanan killed Goliath's brother, not Goliath himself – thus agreeing with the account of David slaying Goliath recorded in 1 Samuel 17

SECOND – It is not IMPOSSIBLE that there were two different men named Goliath. Because there are so many duplicate names in the OT, this is also a possibility.

THIRD – It is easily plausible that "Goliath" was a common noun for a giant just as "Achish" (1 Sam. 21:10; 27:2) may have been a title or common noun for a Philistine ruler. Just as "Pharaoh" is a title of the king of Egypt, not a name.

That being the case – There would be no conflict in saying that both David and Elhanan killed a "Goliath." Then David's men swore to him, "You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel."

FIRST - I don't think David took their advice.

2 Samuel 21:22

22These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

QUOTE: Blaikie – The Second Book of Samuel p. 342 (paragraphs 1 and 2)

SECOND - They said this to David out of concern for the safety and preservation of their king whom they loved.

QUOTE: Blaikie – The Second Book of Samuel p. 342 (paragraph 3 "The north wind....")

2 Samuel 21:20-22

20And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number, and he also was descended from the giants. 21And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck him down. 22These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

