
2SAMUEL 21: 1 There was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonites."

A famine taking place three successive years in Israel, David inquired of the Lord the cause; and was informed that it was on account of Saul and his bloody house, who had slain the Gibeonites, 2Sam 21:1. David inquires of the Gibeonites what atonement they require, and they answer, seven sons of Saul, that they may hang them up in Gibeah, 2Sam 21:2-6. Names of the seven sons thus given up, 2Sam 21:7-9. Affecting account of Rizpah, who watched the bodies through the whole of the time of harvest, to prevent them from being devoured by birds and beasts of prey, 2Sam 21:10. David is informed of Rizpah's conduct, and collects the bones of Saul, Jonathan, and the seven men that were hanged at Gibeah, and buries them; and God is entreated for the land, 2Sam 21:11-14. War between the Israelites and Philistines, in which David is in danger of being slain by Ishbi-benob, but is succoured by Abishai, 2Sam 21:15-17. He, and several gigantic Philistines, are slain by David and his servants, 2Sam 21:18-22.

Verse 1

Then there was a famine - Of this famine we know nothing; it is not mentioned in any part of the history of David.

Because he slew the Gibeonites - No such fact is mentioned in the life and transactions of Saul; nor is there any reference to it in any other part of Scripture.

2SAMUEL 21: 2 The king called the Gibeonites, and said to 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 to them: and Saul sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah);

Verse 2

The remnant of the Amorites - The Gibeonites were Hivites, not Amorites, as appears from Jos 11:19 : but Amorites is a name often given to the Canaanites in general, Gen 15:16; Amo 2:9, and elsewhere.

2SAMUEL 21: 3 and David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?"

Verse 3

Wherewith shall I make the atonement - It is very strange that a choice of this kind should be left to such a people. Why not ask this of God himself?

2SAMUEL 21: 4 The Gibeonites said to him, "It is no 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." He said, "Whatever you say, that will I do for you."

2SAMUEL 21: 5 They said to the king, "The man who consumed us, and who devised against us, that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the borders of Israel,

2SAMUEL 21: 6 let seven men of his sons be delivered to us, and we will hang them up to the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." The king said, "I will give them."

Verse 6

Seven men of his sons - Meaning sons, grandsons, or other near branches of his family. It is supposed that the persons chosen were principal in assisting Saul to exterminate the Gibeonites. But where is the proof of this?

2SAMUEL 21: 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.

2SAMUEL 21: 8 But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite.

Verse 8

Five sons of Michal - whom she brought up - Michal, Saul's daughter, was never married to Adriel, but to David, and afterwards to Phaltiel; though it is here said she bore ילדה yaledah, not brought up, as we falsely translate it: but we learn from 1Sam 18:19, that Merab, one of Saul's daughters, was married to Adriel.

Two of Dr. Kennicott's MSS. have Merab, not Michal; the Syriac and Arabic have Nadab; the Chaldee has properly Merab; but it renders the passage thus: - And the five sons of Merab which Michal the daughter of Saul brought up, which she brought forth to Adriel the son of Barzillai. This cuts the knot.

2SAMUEL 21: 9 He delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the mountain before the LORD, and all seven of them fell together. They were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, at the beginning of barley harvest.

Verse 9

In the beginning of barley harvest - This happened in Judea about the vernal equinox, or the 21st of March.

2SAMUEL 21: 10 Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water was poured on them from the sky. She allowed neither the birds of the sky to rest on them by day, nor the animals of the field by night.

Verse 10

Rizpah - took sackcloth - Who can read the account of Rizpah's maternal affection for her sons that were now hanged, without feeling his mind deeply impressed with sorrows?

Did God require this sacrifice of Saul's sons, probably all innocent of the alleged crime of their father? Was there no other method of averting the Divine displeasure? Was the requisition of the Gibeonites to have Saul's sons sacrificed to God, to be considered as an oracle of God? Certainly not; God will not have man's blood for sacrifice, no more than he will have swine's blood. The famine might have been removed, and the land properly purged, by offering the sacrifices prescribed by the law, and by a general humiliation of the people.

Until water dropped upon them - Until the time of the autumnal rains, which in that country commence about October. Is it possible that this poor broken-hearted woman could have endured the fatigue, (and probably in the open air), of watching these bodies for more than five months? Some think that the rain dropping on them out of heaven means the removal of the famine which was occasioned by drought, by now sending rain, which might have been shortly after these men were hanged; but this by no means agrees with the manner in which the account is introduced: "They were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest. And Rizpah - took sackcloth, and spread it for her on the rock, from the beginning of harvest, until water dropped upon them out of heaven." No casual or immediately providential rain can be here intended; the reference must be to the periodical rains above mentioned.

2SAMUEL 21: 11 It was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.

2SAMUEL 21: 12 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 street of Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, in the day that the Philistines killed Saul in Gilboa;

Verse 12

Took the bones of Saul - The reader will recollect that the men of Jabesh-gilead burned the bodies of Saul and his sons, and buried the remaining bones under a tree at Jabesh. See 1Sam 31:12, 1Sam 31:13. These David might have dug up again, in order to bury them in the family sepulcher.

2SAMUEL 21: 13 and he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son: and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged.

2SAMUEL 21: 14 They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. After that God was entreated for the land.

2SAMUEL 21: 15 The Philistines had war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines. David grew faint;

Verse 15

Moreover the Philistines had yet war - There is no mention of this war in the parallel place, 1Chr 20:4, etc.

David waxed faint - This circumstance is nowhere else mentioned.

2SAMUEL 21: 16 and Ishbibenob, who was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear was three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being armed with a new sword, thought to have slain David.

Verse 16

Being girded with a new sword - As the word sword is not in the original, we may apply the term new to his armor in general; he had got new arms, a new coat of mail, or something that defended him well, and rendered him very formidable: or it may mean a strong or sharp sword.

2SAMUEL 21: 17 But Abishai the son of Zeruah helped him, and struck the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall go no more out with us to battle, that you don't quench the lamp of Israel."

Verse 17

That thou quench not the light of Israel - David is here considered as the lamp by which all Israel was guided, and without whom all the nation must be involved in darkness. The lamp is the emblem of direction and support. Light is used in this sense by Homer: - Ουδε τι Πατροκλω γενομην φαιος, αυδ' εταροισι τοις αλλοις, οι δη πολεες δαμεν εκτορι διω.

Iliad, lib. xviii. ver. 102. "I have neither been a Light to Patroclus nor to his companions, who have been slain by the noble Hector."

2SAMUEL 21: 18 It came to pass after this, that there was again war with the Philistines at Gob: then Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, who was of the sons of the giant.

Verse 18

A battle - at Gob - Instead of Gob, several editions, and about forty of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., have Nob; but Gezer is the name in the parallel place, 1Chr 20:4.

2SAMUEL 21: 19 There was again war with the Philistines at Gob; and Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite's brother, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

Verse 19

Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim - slew - Goliath the Gittite - Here is a most manifest corruption of the text, or gross mistake of the transcriber; David, not Elhanan, slew Goliath. In 1Chr 20:5, the parallel place, it stands thus: "Elhanan, the son of Jair, slew Lahmi, the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear-staff was like a weaver's beam." This is plain; and our translators have borrowed some words from Chronicles to make both texts agree. The corruption may be easily accounted for by considering that ארגים oregim, which signifies weavers, has slipped out of one line into the other; and that בית הלחמי beith hallachmi, the Beth-lehemite, is corrupted from את לחמי eth Lachmi; then the reading will be the same as in Chronicles. Dr. Kennicott has made this appear very plain in his First Dissertation on the Hebrew Text, p. 78, etc.

2SAMUEL 21: 20 There was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who 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.

Verse 20

On every hand six fingers - This is not a solitary instance: Tavernier informs us that the eldest son of the emperor of Java, who reigned in 1648, had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot. And Maupertuis, in his seventeenth letter, says that he met with two families near Berlin, where sedigitism was equally transmitted on both sides of father and mother. I saw once a young girl, in the county of Londonderry, in Ireland, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, but her stature had nothing gigantic in it. The daughters of Caius Horatius, of patrician dignity, were called sedigitae, because they had six fingers on each hand. Volcatius, a poet, was called sedigitus for the same reason. See Pliny's Hist. Nat., lib. xi., cap. 43.

There are evidently many places in this chapter in which the text has suffered much from the ignorance or carelessness of transcribers; and indeed I suspect the whole has suffered so materially as to distort, if not misrepresent the principal facts. It seems as if a Gibeonite has had something to do with the copies that are come down to us, or that the first fourteen verses have been inserted from a less authentic document than the rest of the book. I shall notice some of the most unaccountable, and apparently exceptionable particulars: -

1. The famine, 2Sam 21:1, is not spoken of anywhere else, nor at all referred to in the books of Kings or Chronicles; and, being of three years' duration, it was too remarkable to be omitted in the history of David.
2. The circumstance of Saul's attempt to exterminate the Gibeonites is nowhere else mentioned; and, had it taken place, it is not likely it would have been passed over in the history of Saul's transgressions. Indeed, it would have been such a breach of the good faith by which the whole nation was bound to this people, that an attempt of the kind could scarcely have failed to raise an insurrection through all Israel.

3. The wish of David that the Gibeonites, little better than a heathenish people, should bless the inheritance of the Lord, is unconstitutional and unlikely.

4. That God should leave the choice of the atonement to such a people, or indeed to any people, seems contrary to his established laws and particular providence.

5. That he should require seven innocent men to be hung up in place of their offending father, in whose iniquity they most likely never had a share, seems inconsistent with justice and mercy.

6. In 2Sam 21:8, there is mention made of five sons of Michal, which she bore (יָלְדָהּ yaledah) unto Adriel. Now,

1. Michal was never the wife of Adriel, but of David and Phaltiel.

2. She never appears to have had any children, see 2Sam 6:23; this I have been obliged to correct in the preceding notes by putting Merab in the place of Michal.

7. The seven sons of Saul, mentioned here, are represented as a sacrifice required by God, to make an atonement for the sin of Saul. Does God in any case require human blood for sacrifice? And is it not such a sacrifice that is represented here? Dr. Delaney and others imagine that these seven sons were principal agents in the execution of their father's purpose; but of this there is no proof. Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, certainly had no hand in this projected massacre, he was ever lame, and could not be so employed; and yet he would have been one of the seven had it not been for the covenant made before with his father: But the king spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan - because of the Lord's oath that was between them, 2Sam 21:7.

8. The circumstance of Rizpah's watching the bodies of those victims, upon a rock, and probably in the open air, both day and night, from March to October, or even for a much less period, is, as it is here related, very extraordinary and improbable.

9. The hanging the bodies so long was against an express law of God, which ordained that those who were hanged on a tree should be taken down before sunset, and buried the same day, lest the land should be defiled, (Deu 21:22, Deu 21:23). Therefore,

1. God did not command a breach of his own law.

2. David was too exact an observer of that law to require it.

3. The people could not have endured it; for, in that sultry season, the land would indeed have been defiled by the putrefaction of the dead bodies; and this would, in all likelihood, have added pestilence to famine.

10. The story of collecting and burying the bones of Saul and Jonathan is not very likely, considering that the men of Jabesh-gilead had burned their bodies, and buried the remaining bones under a tree at Jabesh, 1Sam 31:12, 1Sam 31:13; yet still it is possible.

11. Josephus takes as much of this story as he thinks proper, but says not one word about Rizpah, and her long watching over her slaughtered sons.

12. Even the facts in this chapter, which are mentioned in other places, (see 1Chr 20:4, etc.), are greatly distorted and corrupted; for we have already seen that Elhanan is made here to kill Goliath the Gittite, whom it is well known David slew; and it is only by means of the parallel place above that we can restore this to historical truth.

That there have been attempts to remove some of these objections, I know; and I know also that these attempts have been in general without success.

Till I get farther light on the subject, I am led to conclude that the whole chapter is not now what it would be, coming from the pen of an inspired writer; and that this part of the Jewish records has suffered much from rabbinical glosses, alterations, and additions. The law, the prophets, and the hagiographa, including Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, etc., have been ever considered as possessing the highest title to Divine inspiration; and therefore have been most carefully preserved and transcribed; but the historical books, especially Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, have not ranked so high, have been less carefully preserved, and have been the subjects of frequent alteration and corruption. Yet still the great foundation of God standeth sure and is sufficiently attested by his own broad seal of consistency, truth, and holiness.

2SAMUEL 21: 21 When he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, killed him.

2SAMUEL 21: 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.
