

CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION TO SECOND SAMUEL 21

A famine being in the land three years, the Lord was inquired of, to know the reason of it; and it being answered, that it was on account of Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites, they were summoned by David to know what satisfaction they required for the cruel usage of them, (^{<1020>}2 Samuel 21:1-3); to which they replied, that they only desired seven of Saul's sons to be delivered up to them, to be hanged by them, which was granted, (^{<1020>}2 Samuel 21:4-9); whose bones, with those of Saul and Jonathan, David buried in the sepulchre of their fathers, (^{<1020>}2 Samuel 21:10-14); and the chapter is closed with an account of the various battles fought with the Philistines, in which four of their generals were slain, (^{<1021>}2 Samuel 21:15-22).

Ver. 1. *Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year*, etc.] That is, three years running, one after another; some think this, though here related, was before the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba, and not after, and there are several things which may incline to it, as that the sin of Saul should otherwise be so long unpunished, and that the bones of Saul and Jonathan were not sooner removed, here related; and that there should be so many battles the Philistines after they were subdued, as recorded in this chapter; and in one of the Jewish ^{f348} writings it is said, that this was the year after Saul was slain; though, in other copies of the same book, it is said to be thirty years after; and so in that Abarbinel used, and who is of the mind that what is here related stands in the order in which it was, and of the same opinion are some of our best chronologers ^{f349}:

and David inquired of the Lord; before the high priest by Urim and Thummim, what should be the cause of the famine perhaps suspecting it was some sins of his; the first year he might take no notice of it, hoping for a more fruitful season the next year, it arising, as he might suppose, from some natural cause; the second year he might begin to think it was for some national sins, but might be remiss in his inquiry into them; but the third year he was alarmed, and concluded there was something

extraordinary and special, and feared it was on his account, and this put him on making inquiry:

and the Lord answered, [it is] for Saul, and for [his] bloody house; on account of the blood shed by him and his family; which answer must in a good measure relieve the mind of David, if he was fearful it was for his sins:

because he slew the Gibeonites: which was contrary to the oath that Joshua and all Israel had given them not to slay them, but save them alive, (^{<4095>}Joshua 9:15). When this was done is not certain; the Jews commonly say ^{f350} that he slew them when he slew the priests at Nob, they being hewers of wood and drawers of water to them, and were slain with them; or because their maintenance depended on the priests, they being slain, it was in effect slaying them; but rather this refers to another time, and to other action or actions of Saul, who sought by various means to destroy these people, and root them out of the land. The Heathens had a notion that barrenness, unfruitfulness, and famine, were inflicted by God for murder. Philostratus ^{f351} reports of the Ethiopian Indians, that for the murder of their king, Ganges, their ground was unfruitful, their cattle starved, their wives abortive, and their cities and houses fell to ruin, until the murderers were destroyed.

Ver. 2. *And the king called the Gibeonites,* etc.] Sent messengers unto them, and summoned them to come to him,

and said unto them; what is expressed in (^{<4008>}2 Samuel 21:3); for what follows is in a parenthesis:

(now the Gibeonites [were] not of the children of Israel; originally, though they were proselyted to the Jewish religion, and were employed in the menial services of the sanctuary:

but of the remnant of the Amorites; they were the remains of the old Canaanites, who sometimes in general were called Amorites, otherwise the Gibeonites were called Hivites; (see ^{<4007>}Joshua 9:7 11:19);

and the children of Israel had sworn unto them; by their princes, as Joshua; yet,

and Saul, contrary to this oath, sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah); pretending a great concern for them, for

their honour and profit; that these men ought not to live in their cities, and take the bread out of their mouths, and be employed in the service of the sanctuary; but that they ought to be expelled, and even cut off, being the old inhabitants of the land, the Lord ordered to be destroyed; and that though the Israelites had given an oath to the contrary, they were drawn into it by guile and deceit, and therefore not binding upon them; hence he sought by all means to harass and oppress them, and slew many of them, and destroyed them out of their cities, that they might be possessed by Judah and Benjamin; (see ^{<104E>}2 Samuel 4:2), compared with (^{<1097>}Joshua 9:17).

Ver. 3. *Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, what shall I do for you,* etc.] By way of satisfaction for the injuries done them:

and wherewith shall I make the atonement; for the offences committed, that so the wrath that was gone forth against the land in a famine might be appeased:

that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord? pray for a blessing upon the land which the Lord had chosen for his inheritance, and given as such to the people of Israel, that rain might descend upon it, and make it fruitful.

Ver. 4. *And, the Gibeonites said unto him,* etc.] In reply to his motion:

we will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; this shall not be the ransom or atonement; it was not silver and gold Saul took from them, but the lives of their brethren, and therefore they insist upon life for life:

neither for us shall thou kill any man in Israel; who were not of the house of Saul; they did not desire any man should die, but who were of that family by whom they had suffered:

and he said, what you shall say, [that] will I do for you; whether by inflicting pecuniary fines, or punishing with death, which latter seems to be what they suggested, and afterwards insisted on; whatever, according to law and justice, was required, he was ready to do it for them.

Ver. 5. *And they answered the king,* etc.] Declaring expressly what they would have done: the man that consumed us; meaning Saul, who lessened their number by cruel oppressions of some, and by taking away the lives of others:

and that devised against us, [that] we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel; who had formed schemes, and published edicts, for banishing them out of the land; perhaps at the same time that he put away wizards and those that had familiar spirits out of the land, under the same pretence for zeal for the glory of God, and the good of the people of the land, (~~OMB~~ 1 Samuel 28:3-9).

Ver. 6. *Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us*, etc.] They settled upon this number, either because they were seven, and no more of the Gibeonites, whom Saul slew, as the Jew say ^{f352}; two hewers of wood, two drawers of water, a keeper (of a synagogue), a scribe, and a servant; but perhaps the true reason was, they knew there were no more besides Mephibosheth, for whom David had a great respect, and therefore required no more:

and we will hang them up unto the Lord; not to gratify a revengeful spirit of theirs, but in honour to the justice of God, and to appease his wrath:

in Gibeah of Saul, [whom] the Lord did choose; which was Saul's native place, and where he always lived; so that to hang them there was to the greater disgrace of him and his family; and he being chosen of the Lord to be a king of Israel, was an aggravation of his crime in violating the oath made to the Gibeonites

and the king said, I will give [them]; for though he had sworn to Saul that he would not cut off his seed, yet as he had a divine direction in this case, as appears by the Lord's being pleased with it, and was entreated for the land by it, this oath of his was dispensed with; nor did he cut them off himself but delivered them to others, according to the will of God.

Ver. 7. *But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul*, etc.] As they did not name particular persons, only required seven sons, it was at the option of the king what sons to deliver to them, and therefore kept back Mephibosheth, who is thus described, to distinguish him from a son of Saul's of the same name, after mentioned:

because of the Lord's oath that [was] between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul; not merely or only out of affection to Mephibosheth, but because of the oath, that he might not be guilty of the same crime Saul was in slaying the Gibeonites.

Ver. 8. *But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah,* etc.] Saul's concubine, (^{<1018>}2 Samuel 3:7);

whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; of whom we read nowhere else; after the name of the latter, it is probable, Jonathan's son was called, before mentioned:

and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; Michal had no children to the day of her death, nor was she the wife of Adriel, but Merab her sister, (^{<1019>}1 Samuel 18:19); wherefore these sons were not whom she "bare", as the word used signifies, but, as we rightly render it, whom she "brought up" or educated, so the Targum, her sister being dead; and so the Jews say ^{f353}, Merab brought them forth, and Michal brought them up, therefore they were called by her name; or the words may be supplied thus, "and the five sons [of the sister of Michal]", and, as in (^{<1019>}2 Samuel 21:19), is supplied, "[the brother of] Goliath". Barzillai is here called the Meholathite, to distinguish him from Barzillai the Gileadite, spoken of in a former chapter, (see ^{<1027>}2 Samuel 17:27 19:31).

Ver. 9. *And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites,* etc.] The two sons of Rizpah and the five sons of Merab, two sons of Saul and five grandsons:

and they hanged them in the hill before the Lord; in the hill at Gibeah, that they might be seen by all that passed by, and serve to deter from such evils, which brought on them that punishment; gibbetings or crucifixions were commonly made on hills and mountains ^{f354}: the phrase, "before the Lord", is either the same as "unto the Lord", (^{<1026>}2 Samuel 21:6); to make atonement to the Lord, and in his sight; or it denotes that it was done publicly before the sun, and in the sight of it; for it cannot mean before the ark, the symbol of the divine Presence, for that was not there:

and they fell [all] seven together; they were hanged together, and died at one and the same time:

and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first [days], in the beginning of barley harvest; which began at the passover, the morrow after the first day of the feast, (^{<1029>}Leviticus 23:10,11); which was the sixteenth of Nisan, on which day, the Jews say ^{f355}, these men were hanged, and which must be about the beginning of our April.

Ver. 10. *And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, etc.*] Both as a token of mourning for her sons, and as fittest to defend from the weather, the heat by day of cold by night:

and spread it for her upon the rock; the hill on which her sons were hanged; this she spread as a canopy or tent to sit under, and be covered with it; not to cover the bodies with it, but herself, and where she sat to mourn the loss of her sons, and to watch their bodies, that they might not be devoured by birds and beasts of prey, as after observed: and here she sat

from the beginning of harvest until water dropped on them out of heaven; that is, as the Jews say ^{f356}, from the sixteenth of Nisan, when barley harvest began, to the seventeenth of Marchesvan, when the former rain fell; that is, from the beginning of April to the beginning of October: but it is not likely that she continued so long watching the bodies, nor would there be any need of it to keep the birds and beasts from them; for after they had hung so many months, there would be nothing left for them; but rather the meaning is, that she continued there until it pleased God to send rain from heaven, which had been restrained, and a famine came upon it, because of the ill usage of the Gibeonites: and very probably the order from the king was, that the bodies should hang till rain came, that it might be observed what was the reason of their suffering; and no doubt Rizpah sat there praying that rain might come, and which, as Abarbinel thinks, came in a few days after, though not usual in summertime; but this was an extraordinary case, as in (^{<0927>}1 Samuel 12:17,18); and was done to show the Lord was entreated for the land; and so Josephus says ^{f357}, that upon the hanging up of these men, God caused it to rain immediately, and restored the earth to its former fruitfulness. According to the law in (^{<0922>}Deuteronomy 21:22,23), the bodies should have been taken down and buried the same day: but these men suffered not for their own personal, sins, but for the sins of others, and to avert a public calamity, and therefore must hang till that was removed; nor were they executed by men bound by that law; and besides their continuing on the tree was according to the will of God, till he was entreated, who could dispense with this law; to which may be added, the ceremonial and judicial laws, of which this was one, gave place to those of a moral nature ^{f358}, as this did to that of sanctifying the name of God in a public manner; hence the saying of one of the Rabbins upon this ^{f359}, which is by many wrongly expressed,

“it is better that one letter should be rooted out of the law, than that the name of God should not be sanctified openly;”

that is, a lesser precept give way to a greater, or a ceremonial precept to a moral one, such as the sanctification of the name of God is:

and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day; as it is usual for crows ^{f360} and ravens, and such sort of birds, to light on bodies thus hung up, and pick their flesh:

nor the beasts of the field by night; for it seems it was usual to make the gibbets, and so in some other nations the crosses, so low, that wild beasts could easily come at the bodies and devour them; so Blandina was hung upon a tree so low, that she might be exposed to the wild beasts to feed upon her, but not one of them would touch her body ^{f361}; now Rizpah, by her servants, had ways and means to frighten away the birds, and beasts from doing any injury to the carcasses.

Ver. 11. *And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.*] Whether this was told out of good will or ill will is not certain; however, it was not disagreeable to David, but served to move pity and compassion in him to the woman, and to stir him up to give an honourable interment to Saul and his sons; and which would show that this fact was not done out of personal pique and revenge to his family, but in obedience to the will of God, and the honour of his name.

Ver. 12. *And David went and took the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, from the men of Jabeshgilead,* etc.] Which, according to Bunting ^{f362}, was fifty two miles from Jerusalem; though perhaps David did not go thither in person to fetch them, but by his messengers, (see ^{<1014>}2 Samuel 21:14);

which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa; the history of all which see in (^{<0808>}1 Samuel 31:8-13).

Ver. 13. *And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son,* etc.] Which had been buried there under an oak, (^{<1302>}1 Chronicles 10:12);

and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged; the seven sons of Saul, who had been lately hanged; who either had hung so long that their

flesh was consumed, and the bones dropped upon the ground, from whence they gathered them; or they took them down and burnt the flesh off of them, and took the bones to bury them, which was not usually done ^{f363}.

Ver. 14. *And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son*, etc.] Together with those who had been hanged:

buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah; a city in the tribe of Benjamin, (^{<06183>}Joshua 18:28);

in the sepulchre of Kish his father; the father of Saul, (^{<0900>}1 Samuel 9:1,2); and which, according to Fuller ^{f364}, and the position of it in his map, was not far from the hill on which the seven sons of Saul were hanged:

and they performed all that the king commanded; that is, David's messengers and servants did; they fetched the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabeshgilead, and buried them with those of his seven sons hanged, in the burying place of his father Kish, and made a general mourning for them; for the Jews say ^{f365}, that by David's order Saul's coffin was carried through every tribe, and men, women, and children, came out and expressed concern:

and after that God was entreated for the land; not after the burial of the said persons, but after the seven men were hanged up; by this the wrath of God was appeased, which was seen by his sending rain and fruitful seasons, so that the famine ceased.

Ver. 15. *Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel*, etc.] Besides what is before recorded in this and the preceding book; being animated to it partly by the number of giants among them, and partly by the decline of David's life, and it may be chiefly by the insurrections and rebellions in Israel; though some think that these battles were not after the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba, and the affair of the Gibeonites, though here recorded; but before, and quickly after the war with the Ammonites, next to which they are placed in (^{<1300>}1 Chronicles 20:1-8); but they seem to be placed here in their proper order:

and David went down, and his servants with him; to the borders of the Philistines, perceiving they were preparing to make war against him:

and fought against the Philistines; engaged in a battle with them:

and David waxed faint; in the battle, not able to bear the fatigues of war, and wield his armour as he had used, being in the decline of life; after he had been engaged a while, his spirits began to fail, not through fear, but through feebleness; but, according to Josephus, it was through weariness in pursuing the enemy put to flight, which the following person perceived, and turned upon him ^{f366}.

Ver. 16. *And Ishbibenob, which [was] of the sons of the giant*, etc.] Of Goliath, or of a giant, of the race of them:

the weight of whose spear [weighed] three hundred [shekels] of brass in weight; which must be understood either of the wood of it, or of the head of it, the flaming point of it, as many interpret it; and if so, it was but half the weight of Goliath's spear, unless there was any difference of the weight of iron and of brass, (see ~~1~~ Samuel 17:7);

he being girded with a new [sword]; or rather with a new girdle, as the Targum; and so Jarchi, which might be given him as a mark of honour, or as a token of his having a commission in the army:

thought to have slain David; his aim was at him, and perceiving him faint and feeble, thought to take the advantage of it, and dispatch him.

Ver. 17. *But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him*, etc.] Observing him in danger, made haste to his relief:

and smote the Philistine, and killed him; it seems as if Abishai engaged with the Philistine, and killed him; but inasmuch as it will bear to be interpreted of David, and since the four giants here and hereafter mentioned are said to fall by the hand of David and his servants, (~~1~~ Samuel 21:22), it may be thought that this man fell by his hand; seeing it is clear that all the rest fell by the hands of his servants:

then the men of David sware unto him; after they had observed the danger he was exposed unto, and how narrowly he escaped with his life:

saying, thou shalt go no more with us to battle; they had persuaded him not to go to the battle with Absalom; they had suffered him to go with them now, he being, no doubt, forward and pressing to it; but now they were resolute, and determined he should never go more:

that thou quench not the light of Israel; signifying that their glory and prosperity depended on his life, and that, should he be taken away, they

should be in affliction and adversity, their honour and their happiness would be at an end; the Targum is,

“thou mayest not extinguish the kingdom of Israel,”

the light and glory of it.

Ver. 18. *And it came to pass after this*, etc.] After the former battle:

that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob; in (^{<1310>}1 Chronicles 20:4) it is called Gezer; either the place had two names, or these two places were near each other; so that the battle may be said to be fought both at the one and at the other, being fought equally near to both:

then Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Saph, which [was] of the sons of the giant; who is called Sippai, (^{<1310>}1 Chronicles 20:4); he had his name from the lintel of a door, being as high as one, so tall that he could scarce go under one. Sibbechai was one of David’s worthies, (^{<1312>}1 Chronicles 11:29); perhaps a descendant of Hushah, who sprung from Judah, (^{<1304>}1 Chronicles 4:4).

Ver. 19. *And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines*, etc.] Another battle with them in the same place:

where Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim, a Bethlehemite, slew [the brother of] Goliath the Gittite; the word “brother” is rightly supplied from (^{<1315>}1 Chronicles 20:5); where his name is said to be Lahmi, for not Goliath himself was slain, though some so interpret it, and take Elhanan to be David; so Jarchi, and with which agrees the Targum; but he was slain not at Gob, but in the valley of Elah, nor had David any such name as Elhanan; he was one of David’s worthies, (^{<1234>}2 Samuel 23:24); where he is called the son of Dodo, and in (^{<1315>}1 Chronicles 20:5), the son of Jair; and Lahmi there may not be the name of Goliath’s brother, but, as here, the country name of Elhanan; for the words ^{f367} there may be rendered,

“and Elhanan the son of Jair, the Lehemite (i.e. the Bethlehemite), slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite,”

and so perfectly agrees, with this:

the staff of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam; not of Goliath’s brother, but of Goliath himself, (^{<0177>}1 Samuel 17:7).

Ver. 20. *And there was yet a battle in Gath*, etc.] Besides the battles in the above place or places; for this does not necessarily suppose that one of the said battles had been there, only that this, which was another battle, had been there:

where was a man of [great] stature; for so the sense of the word appears to be from (¹³⁰⁶1 Chronicles 20:6); though here it signifies a man of strife and contention, a man of war, and both were true of him:

that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; twelve fingers on his two hands, and twelve toes on his two feet. Pliny ^{f368} speaks of one M. Curiatius, a patrician, who had two daughters that had six fingers on an hand, and were called “Sedigitae”, six-fingered; and of Volcatius, a famous poet, called “Sedigitus”, or six-fingered, for the same reason; and elsewhere, from other writers ^{f369} he makes mention of a people that had eight toes each foot; so Ctesias ^{f370} speaks of a people in the mountains of India, which have eight fingers on each hand, and eight toes on each foot, both men and women:

and he also was born to the giant; a son of a giant.

Ver. 21. *And when he defied Israel*, etc.] The armies of Israel, as Goliath had done some years ago, (⁹⁷⁰1 Samuel 17:10);

Jonathan the son of Shimea the brother of David slew him; this brother of David is called Shammah, (⁹⁶⁹1 Samuel 16:9); and Shimma, (¹³²³1 Chronicles 2:13); this son of his is another man from Jonadab his son, who was famous for his subtlety as this was for his valour, (¹⁰³³2 Samuel 13:3). The Jews say ^{f371} this was Nathan the prophet, a son of Shammah.

Ver. 22. *These four were born to the giant in Gath*, etc.] Not to Goliath, for one of them was his brother, but to some giant or another of that place, for which it was famous; they were all of them of the race of the giants; and so the Septuagint version, they were

“the offspring of the giants in Gath, whose family was Repha;”

and this Repha, or Arepha, as the Vulgate Latin version, according to Abarbinel, was a woman of the daughters of the giants; the Talmudists ^{f372} make her to be the same with Orpah, (⁸⁰⁰Ruth 1:4). These giants, it is highly probable, were the descendants of the Anakim which remained in Gath after they were cut off by Joshua in other places, (⁶¹²Joshua 11:22);

and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants; the first, Ishbibenob, fell by the hand of David assisted by Abishai, and the other three by the persons mentioned.