

## A Study of 2 Samuel 21

### I. Outline.

1. Saul, the reason for a 3-year famine (2 Sam 21.1-4).
2. Seven sons of Saul Slain because of injustice (2 Sam 21.5-14).
3. David's victories over the Philistines (2 Sam 21.15-22).

### II. Summary.

As this chapter begins, (cf., note under Chronology below), we learn of a 3-year famine in the land. David inquires of the Lord about it and learns it is FOR SAUL AND FOR **HIS BLOODY HOUSE**, because he slew the Gibeonites. A study of Joshua 9 helps us to learn the reason God is punishing His people over the slaying of the Gibeonites. A covenant had been made to spare the Gibeonites by Joshua after having been deceived into thinking that the Gibeonites were from far away. Violating that oath by King Saul and his bloody family had to be punished and God chose this particular time to bring it to the attention of King David. David will seek to relieve the suffering of the nation by seeking information from the Gibeonites about how the damage done could be fixed. They demanded the death of SEVEN from Saul's family. David made arrangements for this to take place; at the same time he spared Mephibosheth because of the oath he had taken with Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan. Rizpah bore two of Saul's grandsons who were executed by the Gibeonites. She showed remarkable tenacity of love in protecting the remains of her sons and their cousins by keeping the birds and predators away from their remains for months. David was touched by her demonstration of love and he ordered the remains of Saul and Jonathan and the grandsons to be given a proper burial within the tribal allotment of Benjamin, in the sepulchre of Kish. Verses 15 through 22 give information about David's battles and his mighty men who fought under him.

### III. Chronology/Lists/Links.

**BIBLE PERIOD:** The Period of the United Kingdom.

If you are not familiar with the **15 Bible Periods**, please click here: <https://tinyurl.com/wl79hp7>

You can read an excellent article on Chronology from Wayne Jackson here:

<https://tinyurl.com/wylvljh>

**Epilogue. These last four chapters form an epilogue.** There are six sections arranged concentrically. The first section deals with a drought, the last with a plague. The second and fifth talk about David's heroes, and the middle two are psalms of David. They are not placed in chronological order with the rest of the book (note the vague expression "in the days of David" in 21:1). The last section is climactic, describing the events leading to the purchase of the land on which Solomon would build the temple.<sup>1</sup> ||||| No indication is given here about when during David's reign this famine occurred. It probably was after Mephibosheth had come under David's protection in Jerusalem (cf. 9:1-13) and before Absalom's rebellion (cf. 16:7-8).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 576.

<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 444.

**LINKS:** *These links are to the writings of men and not to inspired Scripture, thus care and caution in weighing the conclusions is always wise. Some might not be online links, but listing of material commonly available in books and publications.*

- Burton Coffman's Commentary: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/2-samuel-21.html>
- Matthew Poole Commentary: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mpc/2-samuel-21.html>

#### IV. Notes on the Text.

##### 1. Saul, the reason for a 3-year famine (2 Sam 21.1-4).

- **AND DAVID INQUIRED OF THE LORD (1)**... *“Because of Palestine’s almost total dependence on rainfall and dew for crop moisture, poor harvests were not uncommon and were not automatically considered a sign of divine displeasure. However, when crops failed for three successive years, David rightly concluded that Israel had offended the Lord and was experiencing a judgmental Torah curse (cf. Lev 26:20; Deut 28:18).”<sup>3</sup> |||||* Some fault David for waiting so long to inquire, but the time mentioned is how long the famine had gone on, not necessarily the time at which David made the inquiry. Perhaps it was at the end of the three years, but maybe there is room in the verse for earlier or multiple inquiries from David. When I read the Book of Psalms, I get the impression that David was frequently inquiring of the Lord throughout his life.
- **IT IS FOR SAUL AND HIS BLOODY HOUSE, BECAUSE HE SLEW THE GIBEONITES (1)**... To me, we must carefully note something important. The answer from the Lord to David’s inquiry involved NOT ONLY Saul, but also HIS BLOODY HOUSE. And it is likely that the grandsons came along too late to participate in the actual slaying of the Gibeonites. Additionally, we must consider Deuteronomy 24:16 KJV ***The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.*** Noting that our text specifically mentions Saul slaying the Gibeonites, yet perhaps the guilt of his “bloody family” was in some other ungodly activity and punishment was due for these grandsons selected but had never been carried out. Whatever the case may be, 2 Samuel 21.10, 14 seems to indicate that God was well pleased with the way David took care of this problem. That is not likely to be the case if justice had not been served. Rain began to fall (verse 10), God was intreated for the land (verse 14), and the famine would thus soon end.

The other possibility is that this slaying of the grandsons was wrong, excessive, and David should have asked God how to assuage His wrath which brought on this great famine.

- **IN HIS ZEAL FOR THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH (2)**... We have no record in Scripture for this action. However, it is quite possible that early on in Saul’s reign, he may have reflected upon the charge from the Lord to drive out all the Canaanites. It is true that the Gibeonites occupied territory in Benjamin. Some believe that this took place when Saul retaliated against the priests for giving assistance to David during the

<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 444.

time Saul was hunting him to kill him. That would have been at Nob. One of the duties assigned to the Gibeonites was to cut wood and draw water for the altar (Joshua 9.27). That would have required them to locate nearby the priests.

- **GIBEONITES WERE NOT OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, BUT OF THE REMNANT OF THE AMORITES (2)**... *“In the Bible the term “Amorites” can refer, in a general sense, to the inhabitants of Canaan (see Gen 15:16; Amos 2:9–10). Though the Gibeonites were specifically Hivites, they could also be called Amorites.”*<sup>4</sup>
- **...WHAT SHALL I DO FOR YOU (3)**... Some are critical of David allowing the Gibeonites to name their price, so to speak. As a nation, they are the ones who were damaged by the breaking of a covenant. According to the record, the Lord did not give any specifics for David to follow in seeking a remedy for this injustice. He did mention that Saul’s family was a bloody one. David’s position as king placed negotiation responsibilities on his shoulders (with due respect for the Law). If David has inquired of the Lord about why there was a famine, surely we would expect the Lord to know that he would want to do whatever the Lord required of him to relieve the suffering of the people he led. With no specific instructions, David’s next inquiry was directed to the offended party. Seems fitting to me.

## 2. Seven sons of Saul slain because of injustice (2 Sam 21.5-14).

- **LET SEVEN MEN OF HIS SONS BE DELIVERED UNTO US (6)**... *“Since Saul likely had been responsible for far more than seven Gibeonite deaths, blind justice might have required equal numbers of Saulides’ deaths. Mercifully, however, only a limited, symbolic retribution was requested. Saul had murdered most of the Gibeonites in their hometown, so now the house of Saul would be decimated in his hometown. Perhaps also in an attempt to create symmetry between Saul’s act and that of the Gibeonites, the request was also made that the corpses be left unburied ‘before the Lord.’”*<sup>5</sup> ||||| *“God, in His providence, suffered the Gibeonites to ask and inflict so barbarous a retaliation, in order that the oppressed Gibeonites might obtain justice and some reparation of their wrongs, especially that the scandal brought on the name of the true religion by the violation of a solemn national compact might be wiped away from Israel, and that a memorable lesson should be given to respect treaties and oaths.”*<sup>6</sup>
- **WHOM THE LORD DID CHOOSE (6)**... *“The exact title is nowhere else given to Saul but is implied by 1 Samuel 10.24. That it should be thus used by his enemies is strange. Was it from a feeling that the fact of his divine election aggravated his guilt?”* –A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*.
- **THE FIVE SONS OF MICHAL THE DAUGHTER OF SAUL (8)**... There are some differences in the ancient Hebrew sources and also the Septuagint at this verse. Some having Merab in the place of Michal. The wording of the KJV likely provides the true understanding since 2 Sam 6.23 tells us Michal had no children to the day of her death. It is assumed that at

<sup>4</sup> Ted Cabal et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), 485.

<sup>5</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 445.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 209.

the death of Merab, Michal took on the responsibility of raising her sister, Merab's five sons.

- **AND RIZPAH ... SUFFERED NEITHER THE BIRDS OF THE AIR TO REST ON THEM BY DAY, NOR THE BEASTS OF THE FIELD BY NIGHT (10)**... We are not told how Rizpah was able to accomplish such a remarkable feat, surely it is one of the great demonstrations of love in Scripture.
- **AND DAVID WENT AND TOOK THE BONES OF SAUL (12)**... David having learned of what Rizpah had done goes into action to preserve and honor the remains of Saul and his family. The burial place was Zelah in the territory allotted to Benjamin and in the sepulchre of Kish. ||||| 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. –*Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

### 3. **David's victories over the Philistines (2 Sam 21.15-22).**

- These four Philistine episodes (15-17, 18, 19, 20-21) cannot be fit into chronological order with any degree of certainty. "Each involves a heroic accomplishment by one of David's mighty men, resulting in the death of 'the sons of the giant' (cf., vv. 16, 18, 20, 22)." –*Zondervan's King James Commentary*.
- **THAT THOU QUENCH NOT THE LIGHT OF ISRAEL (17)**... "In the first battle, David was heroically spared by his nephew Abishai (v. 17; see 1 Chron. 2:16; discussion on 1 Sam. 26:6). His men determined then that David would no longer join them on the field, that thou quench not the light of Israel. Here is a striking metaphor depicting Israel's dependence on David for its security and continuing existence as a nation—its national hope (see 2 Sam 22:29; 23:3-4; 1 Kings 11:36)." –*Zondervan King James Commentary*.
- The second battle was at Gob, maybe near Gezer, where 1 Chronicles 20.4 speaks of this same battle. Saph or Sippai, another son of the giant was killed (2 Sam 21.18; 1 Chr 20.4).
- The third battle (2 Sam 21.19) contains some problems of harmony with 1 Samuel 17. First, please notice that the KJV has the word BROTHER italicized, which means it is not in the original, but was supplied by the translators. We learn in the 1 Samuel passage that David killed Goliath. I believe the KJV translators did the right thing in adding that word brother. The reason being that we can get some help from the Chronicles at 1 Chronicles 20.5 which informs us that Elhanan killed the BROTHER of Goliath. In another attempt to harmonize the two, some have suggested the idea that these large humans were all considered GOLIATH's (it became a type of person rather than a personal name). In fact, this Bible name is used in this way in our English language today.
- **AND THERE WAS YET A BATTLE IN GATH (21)**... 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. –*Bible Knowledge Commentary.*

#### V. **Lessons & Applications.**

- **AND DAVID INQUIRED OF THE LORD (1)...** How important is it to inquire of the Lord? In this instance it resulted in the end to a damaging three-year famine. Men and women, boys and girls who inquire of the Lord ought to be praised and appreciated. I appreciate David even more from the fact that he inquired of the Lord in this emergency. Unfortunately, we are not given detail about David's inquiry. To the degree that some ask the question, WHY did not David inquire sooner? Of course, we do not know that he inquired of the Lord for the first time at the end of a three-year period of famine. From what I have studied about David, I would assume that he inquired of the Lord as soon as he had the thought or understood that perhaps God was punishing His people. For you and me today, does it not make sense to inquire of the Lord at any time we are making decisions? Today we are so blessed to have a completed written revelation of the Lord's will to His people, the church. We can choose to be guided by that word, or we can refuse to be guided by it. There are principles within the Bible that must be used in our decision-making process. The only way to benefit from these principles is to be in the habit of seeking to know how God would want us to decide this issue in our lives. The Hebrews writer teaches us that the way to discern good and evil is BY REASON OF USE (Heb 5.14).
- **SAUL SOUGHT TO SLAY THEM IN HIS ZEAL TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH (2)...** God made clear through Moses to His people that they were completely to rid the land of its inhabitants when it came time for the conquest. The purpose was that they escape being polluted by those wicked idolaters. He provided a great leader in the person of Joshua to carry out this charge. For the most part, Joshua led valiantly submitting to the Lord's will. However, even Joshua was deceived by the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). They falsely claimed to be from far away and sought to make an alliance with Israel. They dramatically demonstrated that their claim was true, even though it was false. Joshua did make that alliance, but soon found out that they had deceived him and were neighbors. He had already agreed not to destroy them; he ruled that they would be cutters of wood and drawers of water for the people and the altar. Later, the first king, Saul decided to get rid of those Gibeonites in violation of the agreement made. It could be said that he had a zeal for the original charge God gave His people. It might also have been motivated to some degree by the fact that these Gibeonites were taking some space in the land allotted to his tribe, Benjamin. Whatever motivated Saul, his zeal for eliminating the Gibeonites was misplaced. It was a **zeal without knowledge**. A kind of zeal that Paul said the Jews in the first century had. We are wise to be zealous. We can be unwise by having zeal for the Lord's work without having God's authorization for the practices we use in carrying out that work!
- **WHAT SHALL I DO FOR YOU? (3)...** A key question to ask when we have harmed someone.
- **WHOM THE LORD DID CHOOSE (6)...** This statement seems to magnify the wrong that Saul did. He had the blessing of being chosen by the Lord to do the awesome work of leading the people of God. How sad it is when Christians go astray and cause reproach to come upon the very body for which Jesus shed His blood (Acts 20.28).
- **BUT THE KING SPARED MEPHIBOSHETH (7)...** A wonderful statement of David's integrity.
- **...AND SUFFERED NEITHER THE BIRDS OF THE AIR TO REST ON THEM BY DAY, NOR THE BEASTS OF THE FIELD BY NIGHT (10)...** An amazing portrait of a mother's sacrificial love!

- **AND DAVID WENT AND TOOK THE BONES OF SAUL... (12-14).** An example of NOT holding a grudge. David had been hunted by jealous Saul like a dog for two years, but he behaved himself honorably in his dealings with Saul’s family.
- **THOU SHALT GO NO MORE OUT WITH US TO BATTLE, THAT THOU QUENCH NOT THE LIGHT OF ISRAEL (17)...** Surely one of the highest compliments ever given to David. His mighty men, at least, and surely most of God’s people who were thinking clearly considered David to be essentially not expendable. The Cambridge Bible points out that: *“Extinguishing the lamp is a natural metaphor for changing the light of prosperity into the darkness of calamity; and in particular David’s sovereignty was the lamp which God’s favor had lighted for the well-being of His people.* Since it was God Almighty who chose David to be king, we would judge the will of the people in this instance to be wise.

**VI. Questions.**

**True or False**

01. \_\_\_\_ David was interested in having the Gibeonites to bless the inheritance of the Lord.
02. \_\_\_\_ Barley harvest is mentioned in this chapter.
03. \_\_\_\_ Saul and Jonathan were slain in this chapter.
04. \_\_\_\_ Ishbibenob’s spear was heavier than Goliath’s described in 1 Samuel 17.
05. \_\_\_\_ Saph was slain by David.

**I Found it in Verse(s)**

06. \_\_\_\_ David said he would do what the Gibeonites asked.
07. \_\_\_\_ We meet Aiah’s daughter.
08. \_\_\_\_ God was intreated for the land.
09. \_\_\_\_ The light of Israel.
10. \_\_\_\_ Six fingers.

**Short Answer**

11. Place Saul was slain.  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. It happened when David inquired of the Lord.  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Description of the parents of four giants.  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. David’s men told him this.  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. The Mephibosheth spared by David.

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*Each Question is worth 7 Points*

**My Score is: \_\_\_\_\_**

*Answers will be found on next week's handout*

**ANSWERS to 2 Samuel 20 Questions...** **01**—False, 5; **02**—True, 8; **03**—True, 15; **04**—True, 19; **05**—False, 22; **06**—3; **07**—8; **08**—16; **09**—21; **10**—25, SHEVA; **11**—cut off Sheba's head and tossed over wall (22); **12**—Sheba (21); **13**—stood still (12); **14**—art thou in health my brother? (9); **15**—fenced cities (6).

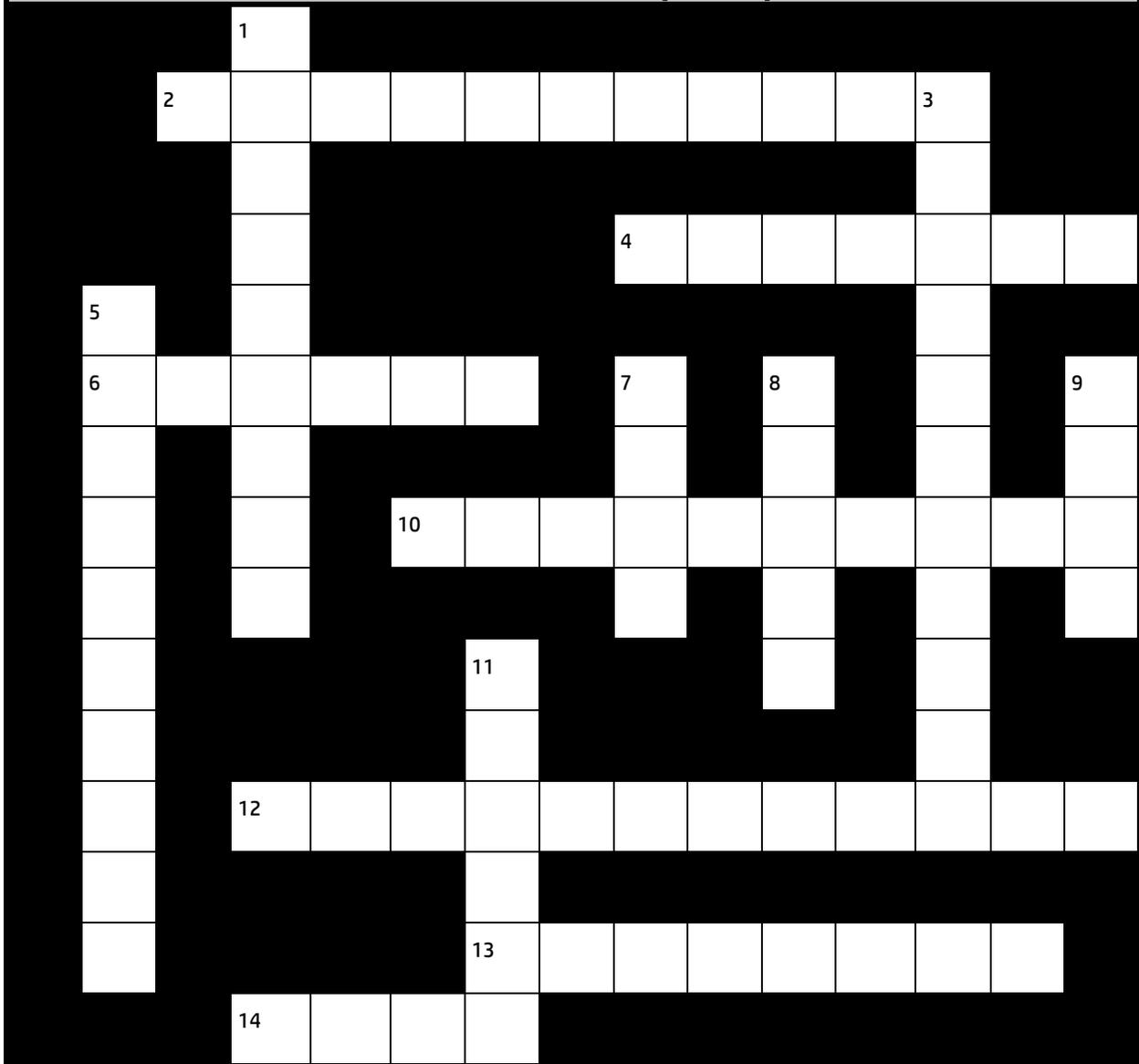
**VII. Seek-A-Word Puzzle.** The words may be backwards, diagonal, upside down, etc. See if you can find them all. The more you use the words of the Bible, the greater blessed you will be! You might be surprised at how much this little exercise will help you retain important truths. THANK YOU for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. –DRL 5.82Wx6.32H

J E Y G A I A H K I Z I R  
 T I E I I R B A T T L E T  
 V W A B S C E R I Z P A H  
 D G R E R D C V K I N G E  
 U G O O A H A E C V I A N  
 O B O N E S U S H A D I G  
 P P H I L I S T I N E N K  
 E T C T H R E E L S G T U  
 I S L E W L O R D W I O T  
 H O U S E T H E R E A O I  
 A K D A U G H T E R N K B  
 N J O N A T H A N E T I O  
 G C H A N D A V I D S L O  
 V S A I D S I S S A U L C

AGAIN	AIAH	ANSWERED	BATTLE	BECAUSE
BONES	CHILDREN	DAUGHTER	DAVID	GIANT
GIBEONITES	HAND	HANG	HARVEST	HOUSE
ISRAEL	JONATHAN	KILL	KING	LORD
PHILISTINE	RIZPAH	SAID	SAUL	SLEW
THEN	THERE	THREE	TOOK	YEAR

VIII. Crossword Puzzle.

**2 Samuel 21 (KJV)**



**ACROSS**

- 02) Elhanan's dad.
- 04) He succored David when he was in danger.
- 06) The Gibeonites would have none of this.
- 10) David called them.
- 12) Men from this place bravely removed Saul & Jonathan's remains.
- 13) Gibeonites used this verb to describe what Saul had done to them.
- 14) David spared Mephibosheth because of one.

**DOWN**

- 01) Rizpah spread it upon the rock.
- 03) 2 Samuel has two Barzillai's, the Gileadite and the \_\_\_\_.
- 05) Carried a heavy spear.
- 07) One giant had six time two of these.
- 08) This 5-letter word is found 6X in this chapter.
- 09) Saul's father.
- 11) David's men pressed him not to go to battle—that thou \_\_\_\_ not the light of Israel.