



39: The Curse & the Conquering King (2 Samuel 21)

In 2 Samuel 21, we will see the serious cost of sin, the faithfulness of God, and the victory He gives through His King. Most importantly, this difficult chapter points us to Jesus—the innocent One who bore our curse and the conquering King who will defeat every enemy.

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teachingnotes

* All Scripture is from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) unless otherwise noted.

These chapters do not simply tell us **what happened next**. They step back and help us understand **what David's entire reign meant**. Over the next couple of weeks we will see:

- Famine resulting from Saul's sin and resolved by David's obedience to bring justice.
- David's warriors & victories by the hand of Yahweh.
- David's song of praise
- David's final words
- A complete listing of David's warriors
- and...the plague resulting from David's arrogance.

This is not a random collection of leftover stories. ***It is an intentionally arranged theological conclusion***: Saul's sin brought consequences, David's sin brought consequences, and David's greatest victories came through the power and provision of God. The final chapters are widely recognized as this kind of carefully arranged conclusion. The message is unmistakable:

God takes sin seriously, keeps His promises faithfully, and gives the ultimate victory through His chosen king.

2 Samuel 21:1

During David's reign there was a **famine for three successive years**, so **David inquired of the Lord**.

The Lord answered, "It is due to Saul and to his bloody family, because he killed the Gibeonites."

For three successive years, the land suffered from famine. Finally, David "inquired of the LORD"—or, more literally, David sought the face of Yahweh. The text does not tell us why David waited three years. But when David sought God, God revealed that this was not merely a weather problem. It was a spiritual and covenant problem.

- Years earlier, ***Saul had attempted to annihilate the Gibeonites***. This slaughter is not recorded elsewhere in Scripture, but God had not forgotten it.
- ***Gibeon was actually in Benjamin's tribal territory*** - the homeland of Saul, and although the Scriptures don't mention details about Saul killing the Gibeonites, it does mention that Yahweh reveals this injustice in the breaking of the OATH and killing the Gibeonites was the reason for the **famine**.
- Further, Yahweh mentions not only **Saul**, but also **his "bloody" family**. So it seems likely that Saul's descendants could have participated in this killing of **the Gibeonites**, but were never punished for it.

2 Samuel 21:2-3

The Gibeonites were not Israelites but rather a remnant of the Amorites. The Israelites had taken an oath concerning them, but Saul had tried to kill them in his zeal for the Israelites and Judah. So David summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. He asked the Gibeonites, "What should I do for you? **How can I make atonement** so that you will bring a blessing on the Lord's inheritance?"

Centuries earlier, during the days of Joshua (about 350 years earlier - see Joshua 9), Israel had sworn an oath to protect the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites had obtained that promise through deception, but once Israel gave its word in the name of Yahweh, that promise had to be honored.

Saul treated an ancient promise as though it no longer mattered. But *God took Israel's word seriously—even generations later*.

- 🔍 Examine the promises we have made. God cares about the marriage covenant. He cares about our business agreements. He cares whether our word can be trusted.

Just as Saul had murdered all the priests of Nob in [1 Samuel 22](#), Saul attempted to slaughter the neighboring Gibeonites.

2 Samuel 21:4-6

The Gibeonites said to him, "We are not asking for silver and gold from Saul or his family, and we cannot put anyone to death in Israel." "Whatever you say, I will do for you," he said. They replied to the king, "As for **the man who annihilated us and plotted to destroy us** so we would not exist within the whole territory of Israel, let seven of his male descendants be handed over to us so we may hang them in the presence of the Lord at Gibeah of Saul, the Lord's chosen." The king answered, "I will hand them over."

This is one of the most difficult passages in 2 Samuel. God identified the bloodguilt resting upon Saul's house, but the text does not say that God personally selected these seven men or dictated the exact method of execution. David asked the injured Gibeonites what restitution would require, and they requested seven male descendants from Saul's family.

Within that ancient covenantal setting, this was presented as a public judicial reckoning—not simply a private act of revenge.

To hang them **in the presence of Yahweh** is likely referring to impalement, where their bodies would be lifted up on a stake, an image of being cursed by God. *Rather than a random act of revenge, **this would be seen as a judicial act with Yahweh as the ultimate judge handing down the sentence***. David agrees, the arrests are made, and the judgment is handed down.

2 Samuel 21:7-9a

David spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord that was between David and Jonathan, Saul's son. But the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, who were the **two sons** whom **Rizpah** daughter of Aiah had borne to Saul, and the **five sons** whom **Merab** daughter of Saul had borne to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholahtite and handed them over to the Gibeonites.

Notice the contrast: Saul had broken Israel's oath to the Gibeonites, but David honored his oath to Jonathan. He spared Jonathan's son Mephibosheth.

There are two different men named **Mephibosheth** in this account. Jonathan's son was spared; another Mephibosheth, a son of Saul and Rizpah, was handed over. (**Rizpah** was Saul's concubine and her 2 sons were Saul's sons. The 5 sons of **Merab** were Saul's grandsons.)

Their death sentence was swift. David did not put them to death, but **handed them over to the Gibeonites** to kill them and hang their bodies on display.

2 Samuel 21:9-10

They hanged them on the hill in the presence of the Lord; the seven of them died together. They were executed in the first days of the harvest at the beginning of the barley harvest. Rizpah, Aiah's daughter, took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on the rock from the beginning of the harvest **until the rain poured down** from heaven on the bodies. She kept the birds of the sky from them by day and the wild animals by night.

These men are impaled - hung on a tree - under God's CURSE according to the Scriptures (Deut 21:23). Some scholars believe Rizpah's vigil may have lasted for months. Imagine the grief, determination and physical exhaustion of this mother.

[Deuteronomy 21](#) commanded that the body of an executed person be buried on the day of death rather than left exposed overnight. Why, then, were these bodies left exposed? The text does not explain it. We should not try to make the difficulty disappear. Instead, the narrator turns our attention to Rizpah. Her courageous and costly devotion exposed something that remained unfinished—and when David heard about her actions, he responded.

Finally, **rain poured down from heaven** (a term pointing to God causing the rain to fall) and the famine was finished.

2 Samuel 21:11-14

When it was reported to David what Saul's concubine Rizpah daughter of Aiah had done, he went and got the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh-gilead. They had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan where **the Philistines had hung the bodies** the day the Philistines killed Saul at Gilboa. David had the bones brought from there. They gathered up the bones of Saul's family who had been hanged and buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan at Zela in the land of Benjamin in the tomb of Saul's father Kish. They did everything the king commanded. After this, **God was receptive to prayer for the land**.

Years earlier, the Philistines had publicly displayed the bodies of Saul and his sons on the wall of Beth-shan. The brave men of Jabesh-gilead recovered the bodies, burned the remains and buried their bones ([1 Sam 31:11-13](#)) David now had the bones of Saul and Jonathan brought home. He also gathered the remains of the seven men and gave Saul's family a proper burial in the tomb of Kish.

✓ Atonement had been made. And **God was receptive to prayer for the land** - the famine was OVER and rain continued to fall!

2 Samuel 21:15-17

The Philistines again waged war against Israel. David went down with his soldiers, and they fought the Philistines, but **David became exhausted**. Then **Ishbi-benob**, one of the descendants of the giant, whose bronze spear weighed about eight pounds and who wore new armor, intended to kill David. But **Abishai** son of Zeruiah came to his aid, **struck the Philistine, and killed him**. Then David's men swore to him, "You must never again go out with us to battle. You must not extinguish the lamp of Israel."

The chapter now moves from the unresolved guilt of Saul's house to **the growing vulnerability of David**.

We are not told exactly why David became **exhausted**. The warrior who once rescued Israel now needed someone to rescue him. Thankfully, David had fierce warriors who fought to defend him - some of whom we are about to be introduced to.

Ishbi-benob was one of the descendants of Rapha (the literal Hebrew term here translated as "**giant**")—a line of enormous Philistine warriors associated with Gath. His bronze spearhead weighed approximately **8 pounds**. This was a powerful and terrifying opponent, and he intended to kill David. But **Abishai** came to David's aid and killed the Philistine. **Remember Abishai?** He's the brother of Joab & the nephew of David.

- **Do you see how David's situation had reversed?** As a young man, David rescued Israel from a giant. Now David was exhausted and had to be rescued from another giant.

You must never again go out with us to battle. David's life represented more than one soldier. God's covenant promise and the stability of the nation were connected to this king. His men understood that protecting David meant protecting the lamp God had lit for Israel.

2 Samuel 21:18-19

After this, there was **another battle with the Philistines** at Gob. At that time **Sibbecai** the Hushathite **killed Saph**, who was one of the descendants of the giant. Once again there was a battle with the Philistines at Gob, and **Elhanan** son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath of Gath. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam.

According to this verse, **Elhanan killed Goliath of Gath**. But 1 Samuel 17 clearly and repeatedly tells us that **David killed Goliath**. So how do we understand this? The parallel account in 1 Chronicles gives us an important clarification.

1 Chronicles 20:5

Once again there was a battle with the Philistines, and **Elhanan** son of Jair **killed Lahmi** the brother of Goliath of Gath. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam.

The most likely explanation is that the Hebrew text of 2 Samuel suffered an early copying corruption, while Chronicles preserves the clearer reading: Elhanan killed **Lahmi, the brother of Goliath**.

2 Samuel 21:20-22

At Gath there was still another battle. A huge man was there with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—twenty-four in all. He, too, was descended from the giant. When he taunted Israel, Jonathan, son of David's brother Shimei, killed him. These four were descended from the giant in Gath and **were killed by David and his soldiers**.

The verse says these four warriors were killed **"by David and his soldiers,"** even though David did not personally strike the fatal blow in these accounts.

- Their victories were credited to David because he was their king and they fought under his leadership. But David could not win these battles alone. **God surrounded him with faithful men who fought beside him, defended him and carried on the mission when David no longer could.**

BRIDGE TO JESUS

1,000 years later, another descendant of Israel was hung upon a tree. But Jesus was not bearing His own guilt. He was completely innocent. He willingly bore **our guilt and our curse**.

THE CURSE

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by **becoming a curse for us**, because it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.

Jesus did not merely tell us how to escape the curse. **He became a curse for us**. The judgment our sin deserved fell upon Him. The innocent King took the place of the guilty so that everyone who trusts Him could be forgiven, cleansed and given eternal life!

THE CONQUERING KING

Revelation 19:11-16

Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. The armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses, wearing pure white linen. A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty. And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

David and his men defeated the giant warriors who threatened Israel. But their victories were temporary. David's lamp could have been extinguished. David became weary and needed to be rescued.

But ***Jesus will one day defeat all his enemies - for all time!***



TRUST JESUS. LIVE FOR JESUS and point others to Him!

heretoserveyou

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- * Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), **Gary** (850-673-2507), **Betty** (850-973-3266), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- * Or call our **deacons & wives: Alan & Christy Androski** (850-464-1428), **Noel & Patricia Barnes** (813-767-2881), **Derek & Emily Beaty** (813-763-4421), or **Chris & Caitlin Day** (850-673-7920), **Glen & Margie Peacock** (850-464-1484).

Discussionquestions

These questions are designed to help you LIVE what you LEARN with your family, friends, or small group.

1. Read Joshua 9:15-20 and 2 Samuel 21:1-2. Why did Israel's oath to the Gibeonites still matter centuries later? What does this teach us about the seriousness of our promises?
2. Read 2 Samuel 21:1. What is significant about David "seeking the face of the LORD"? What situations tend to drive you toward God—or distract you from seeking Him?
3. Saul acted "in his zeal for Israel and Judah." How can sincere zeal become sinful when it is disconnected from obedience to Scripture?
4. Read 2 Samuel 21:10-14. What does Rizpah's vigil teach us about grief, devotion and the dignity of human life? How did her actions affect David?
5. Read 2 Samuel 21:15-17. How had David's situation changed since his victory over Goliath? Why is it sometimes difficult to admit that we need the help of others?
6. What do the victories of Abishai, Sibbecai, Elhanan and Jonathan teach us about serving together rather than trying to accomplish God's work alone?
7. Read Galatians 3:10-14. What does it mean that Jesus "became a curse for us"? How should that truth affect the way we deal with guilt and shame?
8. Read Revelation 19:11-16. What names and descriptions of Jesus stand out to you? How does the promised return of Jesus bring both comfort and urgency?
9. Which Feet2Faith response do you most need this week: seeking God's face, keeping your word or trusting the true King? What specific action will you take?