

Bible Study October 2, 2024

2 SAMUEL 21 (AMPLIFIED VERSION)

Gibeonite Revenge

1 There was famine in the days of David for three consecutive years; and David sought the presence (face) of the Lord [asking the reason]. The Lord replied, "It is because of Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death."

Farmers relied heavily on spring and fall rains for their crops. If the rains stopped or came at the wrong time, or if the plants became insect infested, there would be drastic food shortages in the coming year. Agriculture at that time was completely dependent upon natural conditions. Irrigation sprinklers, fertilizers, and pesticides did not exist. Even moderate variations in rainfall or insect activity could destroy an entire harvest.

2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them (now the Gibeonites were not of the sons (descendants) of Israel but of the remnant (survivors) of the Amorites. The Israelites had sworn [an oath] to [spare] them, but Saul in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah had sought to strike down the Gibeonites). 3 So David said to the Gibeonites, "What should I do for you? How can I make it good so that you will bless the Lord's inheritance (Israel)?"

4 The Gibeonites said to him, "We will not accept silver or gold belonging to Saul or his household (descendants); nor is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." David said, "I will do for you whatever you say." 5 So they said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to exterminate us from remaining in any territory of Israel, 6 let seven men [chosen] from his sons (descendants) be given to us and we will hang them before the Lord [that is, put them on display, impaled with broken legs and arms] in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen one of the Lord." And the king said, "I will give them."

7 But the king spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between David and Saul's son Jonathan. 8 So 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 Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite. 9 He handed them over to the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill before the Lord, and the seven died together. They were put to death in the first days of the grain harvest, the beginning of the barley harvest [in the spring].

The barley harvest was in late April and early May. Barley was similar to wheat but less suitable for breadmaking. Rizpah guarded the men's bodies during the entire harvest season, which lasted from April to October.

10 Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest [in the spring] until [the autumn] rain fell on them; and she allowed neither the birds of the sky to rest on their bodies by day, nor the beasts of the field [to feed on them] by night. 11 David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. 12 Then David went and took the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the open square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them on the day when the Philistines had killed Saul in Gilboa. 13 He brought up the bones of Saul and of Jonathan his son from there, and they

gathered the bones of those who had been hanged [with their arms and legs broken].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 did all that the king commanded. After that, God was moved by prayer for the land.

Although the Bible does not record Saul's act of vengeance against the Gibeonites, it was apparently a serious crime, making him guilty of their blood. Still, why were Saul's sons killed for the murders their father committed? In many ancient Middle Eastern cultures, including Israel's, an entire family was held guilty for the crime of the father because the family was considered an indissoluble unit. Saul broke the vow that the Israelites had made to the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:16-20). This was a serious offense against God's law (Numbers 30:1-2). Either David was following the custom of treating the family as a unit or Saul's sons were guilty of helping Saul kill the Gibeonites.

¹⁵ Now the Philistines were at war again with Israel. David went down with his servants, and as they fought against the Philistines, David became weary. ¹⁶ Then Ishbi-benob, who was among the descendants of the giant, the weight of whose spear was three hundred shekels (six pounds) of bronze, was armed with a new sword, and he intended to kill David. ¹⁷ But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to David's aid, and struck and killed the Philistine. Then David's men swore to him, "You shall not go out again with us to battle, so that you do not extinguish the lamp of Israel."

¹⁸ After this, there was war again with the Philistines at Gob (Gezer). At that time Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph (Sippai), who was among the descendants of the giant. ¹⁹ There was war with the Philistines again at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite, killed Goliath the Gittite, whose spear shaft was like a weaver's beam. ²⁰ There was war at Gath again, 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; he also was a descendant of the giants. ²¹ And when he taunted and defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, killed him. ²² These four [warriors] were descended from the giant in Gath, and they fell by the hands of David and his servants.