

# Dr. Robert Chisholm, 1 & 2 Samuel, Session 26, 2 Samuel 21

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This is Dr. Bob Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 26, Bludgeon Vengeance for the Gibeonites chapter 21 verses 1 to 14, and David's Mighty Men, chapter 21 verses 15 and following, and chapter 23 verses 8 and following.

In our studies of 1 and 2 Samuel, we have come to the epilogue, which is 2 Samuel chapters 21 through 24.

This section is not in chronological order. The story of David is suspended at the end of 2 Samuel chapter 20. The epilogue consists of material from different points in David's career and then the story is going to pick up again in 1 Kings chapters 1 and 2 where we read about the fact that Solomon will succeed David and then David passes away.

As you read through the epilogue, 2 Samuel 21 through 24, it may seem initially that material is just sort of thrown in there at random. There doesn't seem to be a clear-cut structure, but actually there is and it's what we call a chiasmic or concentric or mirror structure. I'll walk you through the outline and I think you'll see how this works.

The section begins in chapter 21 verses 1 through 14 with an account of Saul's sin and its atonement. This initial account recalls a time when Saul committed sin against the Gibeonites with whom the Israelites had made a treaty and the Lord punished Israel for Saul's sins. By this time, David is the king and David has to clean up the mess that Saul left, so I entitle this section, Saul's sin and its atonement, David as a royal judge.

David is going to be functioning as a royal judge here. He's going to be mediating between the Gibeonites and Israel so that the Lord will restore his favor to Israel, but we will talk about that passage here in a moment. So, we could designate that initial story as A in the outline.

Then in chapter 21 verses 15 through 22, we have a section that records the mighty deeds of David's men. David won great victories for Israel during his career, but the epilogue to the book makes it clear that he had a lot of help and this is always the case for the Lord's chosen servants. They need the support of others.

It takes a team to accomplish God's purposes and so there's a brief account of the mighty deeds of David's men and we could call this B in the outline. So, we've got the initial story where David is going to function as the royal judge and then the mighty deeds of David's men. When we come to 2 Samuel 22, which is a long poem that also appears in the Psalms.

In Psalm 18, we have two versions of this one poem that David wrote. It's David's song of thanksgiving, thanking the Lord for sustaining him, delivering him, giving him victory in battle. 2 Samuel 22, it's verses 1 through 51.

As I said, it's a long, long song. That could be C.

So, A, we've got David as a royal judge.

B, the mighty deeds of David's men.

And C, David's song of thanksgiving.

What's going to happen at this point in the epilogue in chapters 23 and 24 is we're going to go back in reverse. We're going to go, we've gone A, B, C. Now we're going to reverse that and go C, B, A. And so, at the beginning of chapter 23, verses 1 through 7, we have David's final words.

It's called, it's a short poem, but it corresponds to the long poem that's in chapter 22. So, we could refer to it as C as well. Then we come to another section that deals with the mighty deeds of David's men in chapter 23, verses 8 through 39.

David actually had a group of elite warriors that were called the Thirty, and they're all named there. And at first, you think, well, we talked about the mighty men earlier. How come this material isn't with that earlier material? That's because the author wants to arrange his material in a concentric fashion.

This is a very common structuring device that we see in the Old Testament in different places. And so, we could call this second section on the mighty deeds of David's men, B, corresponding to the first. And then the epilogue ends with another story.

This time it's a story of David's sin and its atonement, David's sin in numbering the people. And in this case, David mediates between Israel and the Lord and David functions as a royal priest. And that's what we see in chapter 24.

So, to quickly review the structure of the epilogue, it begins with Saul's sin and its atonement, David as royal judge, that's A. The mighty deeds of David's men, B. David's song of thanksgiving, C. Then another poem, David's final words, C in the second section of the epilogue. The mighty deeds of David's men again, B. And then David's sin and its atonement, David as a royal priest, and that would be our final A

section. So hopefully you were able to follow that and there is a clear-cut arrangement in this section and as you can see it is kind of a microcosm of David's career.

David had to clean up a mess left by Saul. David had a lot of help from his mighty men in winning great victories and he talks about his relationship with God in those poems. David also had times when he failed and the final story in chapter 24 is an example of that.

So, with that introduction to the epilogue, let's move into the material itself, 2 Samuel chapter 21 verses 1 through 14, where we're going to read about Saul's sin and its atonement, where David is going to be functioning as the royal judge. But we could entitle this section Blood Vengeance in Gibeah. And what we're going to see is that sin, in this case Saul's sin, sometimes has devastating consequences and it did for his family because God is a just God and his justice must be satisfied.

So, let's begin with this story. It's not a happy one. Like so many passages in the books of Samuel, it has its disturbing dimension to it and it's not a happy story to read.

During the reign of David, we're not told when, but sometime after David had become king, there was a famine for three successive years. This is not good. This would be understood by the Israelites as something's wrong in our relationship with God.

Why is there a famine? Why is God not blessing us? Because they know from the way the covenant is set up that if Israel is obedient, the Lord will provide what they need. If they are disobedient, then the Lord will bring famine. And so, something has happened here to upset the Lord, it would seem.

So, David sought the face of the Lord. David went before the Lord and sought his mercy and tried to get some information about what had happened. You would have thought he would have done this sooner before the famine got to three years, but nevertheless, he finally goes before the Lord and the Lord answers very clearly.

It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house, interestingly enough. Saul has stained his own house, as it were, his own family. It is because he put the Gibeonites to death.

We did not read about this earlier in the books of Samuel. So, this is an indication that lots of things happened that we were not told about earlier in the story. And this is one of those.

He put the Gibeonites to death. And so, we have to do a little background work here. Why would that be wrong? The Gibeonites were part of the Canaanite group.

Why would it be wrong for Saul to try to kill them? Well, you will recall if you go all the way back into the book of Joshua, chapter 9, the Israelites were invading the land and the people of Gibeon were afraid. They realized they were going to be wiped out and so they came up with a plan. They put on old clothes and took old moldy bread and went to the Israelites and said, we have come from a far country.

We have heard about how great you are. We want to make a treaty with you. The Israelites believed this and made a treaty with the Gibeonites.

Treaties in this context are going to be solidified by swearing oaths. And so, the Israelites vowed, they made an oath that they would not harm the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites in turn would serve as servants for the Israelites.

These treaties would have curses. Typically in a treaty, you would say, if I break this treaty, may I be punished by the God or the gods. These are called curses.

They have threatened judgments for violation of the treaty. So, Israel made this treaty with the Gibeonites. Then they discovered that the Gibeonites had tricked them.

But the treaty was made and so the Israelites realized we have to keep this treaty. And so, the Israelites and the Gibeonites had a working relationship for a long, long time. Saul came along and decided, I am going to wipe out the Gibeonites.

We have already seen Saul failed to wipe out the Amalekites as he should have, but he is quick to try to wipe out the Gibeonites even though they have a treaty with Israel. Well, the Lord is on the Gibeonites' side because that treaty was made on oath and the Lord is the protector of the treaty. And so, there is a sense in which when Israel makes this treaty and they appeal to the Lord as the guarantor or the protector, the Lord is going to be responsible for protecting the Gibeonites' interests.

So, we read in 2 Samuel 21:2, that the king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites. This is the background material that we talked about.

The Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them. So, Saul apparently with some kind of nationalistic, pro-Israel, pro-Judah zeal, decided we don't want Gibeonites living among us. And so, he decided to wipe them out and he tried to do that and he killed many of them apparently.

So, David asked the Gibeonites, what shall I do for you? How shall I make atonement so that you will bless the Lord's inheritance? We're being punished for what Saul did. We don't want that to continue. We need to eat.

So, what can we do to appease you, to make atonement for Saul's sin so that you will ask the Lord to bless us? Because you in many ways hold our destiny in your hands here. We violated the treaty and we want to know what we can do to get back into a proper relationship with you and with the Lord. And the Gibeonites answered, we have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death.

Well, what do you want me to do for you? David asked. So, they begin by saying what they don't think is fair. David wants to know what they think is fair.

So, they answered the king, as for the man who destroyed us, Saul, and plotted against us so that we have been decimated, Saul must have wiped out a lot of these Gibeonites and have no place anywhere in Israel. We are so weak now, we really have no place among Israel. Before we were a strong people and now we've been decimated.

Let seven of his male descendants, now I'm sure Saul killed more than seven Gibeonites, but in the Old Testament world and in the Old Testament, seven is often a number that is used to indicate symbolically, it indicates fullness and completion, and perfection. So, they choose this highly symbolic number and they say, let seven of his male descendants, sort of representing Saul's blood-stained house, be given to us to be killed and their bodies exposed before the Lord. That's very important.

They see this as something that is going to be done before the Lord. So, they see this as something that's just. The Lord will see the penalty paid and then will restore his blessing to Israel.

So, before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul, they're going to do this in Saul's hometown, which seems appropriate, the Lord's chosen one. So, the king said, I will give them to you. So, understand what's happening here.

Seven of Saul's descendants are going to be executed for his sins. Whether they were involved in it or not, they are going to be executed to pay the price. And so, David is in a very difficult situation.

He has to choose which seven descendants are going to die. The king spared Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the oath before the Lord between David and Jonathan, son of Saul. David himself had made a covenant with Jonathan and had promised to protect Jonathan's descendants.

So, he can't touch anyone that's descended from Jonathan. And so Mephibosheth, we've read about him before, the fellow who was dropped when he was a child and was lame, David spares his life. David has been taking care of him and he spares his life.

But the king took Armoni and another Mephibosheth, the two sons of Aiah's daughter Rizpah, whom she had borne to Saul. So, Saul had two sons through this concubine Rizpah. And so, David takes those two sons together with the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab.

Remember Saul had tried to marry Merab off to David. David didn't go for that. He eventually married Michael.

So, five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, whom she had borne to Adriel, son of Barzillai, the Meholathite. So, five of Saul's grandsons through Merab. Just imagine the pain that this must have caused their parents.

He handed them over to the Gibeonites. But by the way, don't get mad at David, and don't get mad at the Lord. This is a matter of justice.

Think of the victims, in this case, the Gibeonites. And justice has to be served. And unfortunately, these sons and grandsons are going to have to pay the price for Saul's sins.

He handed them over to the Gibeonites who killed them and exposed their bodies on a hill before the Lord. All seven of them fell together. They were put to death during the first days of the harvest, just as the barley harvest was beginning.

March, April, around there. Rizpah, daughter of Aiah, who has lost two sons in this, took sackcloth, which is often associated with mourning, and spread it out for herself on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest, till the rain poured down from the heavens on the bodies, she did not let the birds touch them by day or the wild animals by night.

Rizpah's attitude is, I am not going to allow my sons to be devoured by wild animals. They're going to have a proper burial. And I am going to stay out there night and day and keep these scavengers from devouring the corpses of my boys.

Now, the execution took place in maybe in April, May, March, April, May, barley harvest. And she protected the corpses until the rains came, signaling that the famine, the drought was over. We're not certain how long this vigil lasted.

The fall rains don't come until October and November, so she may have been out there for months. On the other hand, because there's been a famine, the Lord may

have caused it to rain prior to that, which means she wouldn't have been out there for quite as long. But still, she is out there for a lengthy period of time.

When David was told what Aiah's daughter Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had done, he got to thinking, you know, maybe we need to give Saul and Jonathan a proper burial. And so, this is a catalyst for his own thinking about them. And he went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Yahveh's Gilead.

They had stolen their bodies from the public square at Beit Shan where the Philistines had hung them after they struck Saul down on Gilboa, you will recall. The citizens of Yahveh's Gilead who liked Saul because he had delivered them one time from Nahash the Ammonite, went and took the bodies and brought them back to their town. David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there, and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up.

And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul's father Kish at Zillah in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded. So, David feels that Saul and Jonathan need to be buried in their ancestral tomb, and so he goes and gets those bones and brings them back. Rizpah's actions were the catalyst for this.

And then we read at the end of verse 14, and this is how we know that the Lord endorses what happened here as justice, and he's on the side of the Gibeonites. After that, God answered prayer on behalf of the land. And I would assume that means that the seasonal cycle began again with its regularity and all was well.

This is a disturbing account because what happens in this story is sons and grandsons pay the penalty for a father's or a grandfather's sins. According to the Old Testament law, you are not supposed to punish a child for a parent's sin. The law does not allow Israelite courts to do that.

But God is in a different category. God is the author of life, the creator of life, and he can punish individuals by taking away his blessing of children. Human beings can't do this, but God is the one who gives the blessing in the first place, and he can punish sinners by taking their children away.

And we see examples of this in the Old Testament. In the Pentateuch, in the law, the Lord warns that sinners, those who hate him, who rebel against him, will see the consequences of their sin in their family to the third or fourth generation. People sometimes think that that's a transgenerational kind of thing beyond the person's lifetime, but actually, in this culture where men would get married very, very young and begin to have children, you could be a father at 15 or thereabouts, grandfather at 30, you could live to see the third and fourth generation.

In fact, there's an Aramaic inscription that we have where an individual is dying, a priest, and he says, I saw my offspring all around me to the, I think, fourth generation. So, it means throughout your lifetime. So, we have that policy that's stated in the law.

We have examples of this in Numbers when Dathan, Abiram, and Korah rebel against Moses and the Lord punishes them for their sin, the children are executed along with their sinful parents. The ground opens up and swallows up the children, even the little ones of Dan and Abiram. Korah's sons, we discover, were spared.

I don't know, they were maybe playing over at somebody's house that day, but they were spared. If you recall, Achan, when Achan sinned against the Lord and stole some of the loot, his children were executed along with him. Some people will say, well, they must have been in on it.

Well, why were his animals executed? Were they in on it? No, Achan and his property were taken away, and it's the Lord's prerogative to do that. We're even seeing that unfold in David's story here. David sinned.

He said that the sinner would pay fourfold. Of course, he's the sinner, and he, one by one, is losing sons. Now, they're sort of self-destructing here, but nevertheless, this is God's discipline upon David.

And so, as much as it disturbs us, there are times when God deems it appropriate to take away his blessing of children from individuals who have blatantly rebelled against him. Saul had done that by violating this treaty with the Gibeonites. Saul had murdered a lot of Gibeonites, and the Gibeonites asked for restitution, and the Lord provided that.

And so, don't get mad at David. Don't get mad at the Lord. Realize this is what happens when individuals sin against the Lord.

There's always collateral damage. There are repercussions, and I think some innocent people died in this case because of their ancestor Saul's sins. We're now going to make a transition to the next part of chapter 21, which is the section on David's mighty men, verses 15 through 22.

And in the concentric structure of the epilogue that we talked about, we're also going to slide over and look at the second section on David's mighty men in chapter 23. We're not going to spend a whole lot of time on this. It's very interesting, and you can read about it on your own, but in verse 15 of chapter 21, we see once again there was a battle between the Philistines and Israel.

We're not told exactly when. David goes down with his men to fight against the Philistines, and he becomes exhausted. And then we discover that there is a Philistine warrior, Ishbi-benov, who's one of the descendants of the Rephaim.

It sounds kind of scary, and he's got a bronze spearhead that is very, very large, and he has targeted David. His bronze spearhead probably weighs about seven and a half pounds, and he's targeted David. He's announced, I'm going to kill David.

So, Abishai, whom we have met on and off during the story, is the one who wanted to kill Saul. David wouldn't let him. He wanted to kill Shimei twice.

David wouldn't let him, but he is a good guy to have around. He is an accomplished warrior, and he comes to David's rescue, and he strikes the Philistine down and kills him. But David's men on this occasion tell David, you're not going to go out to battle anymore with us because we don't want the lamp of Israel to be extinguished.

They refer to David in that way. A lamp is what provides light and gives you direction, so you won't stumble or fall. And so, they see David as the leader of the nation, as their lamp, as it were, the one who guides them and directs them safely, and they don't want to lose him.

And so, they tell David, you're not going to go out into these hand-to-hand combat situations anymore. So, this must have been toward the end of his career. There's another battle with the Philistines, and one of David's mighty men, Sibbecai, the Hushathite, kills a fellow by the name of Soph, who's one of the descendants of the Rapha as well.

Then in verse 19, in another battle with the Philistines at Gove, there is a warrior by the name of Ehanan, who is the son of Jair the Bethlehemite, and he kills another large individual who is probably the brother of Goliath. The Hebrew text of 2 Samuel 21:19 actually says Ehanan killed Goliath. And so, scholars have puzzled over this, whoa, whoa, I thought David killed Goliath, but here Ehanan kills Goliath.

And so, the problem has been solved in different ways. Some will argue that Ehanan is just an alternative name for David. I don't think that's the case.

David is being called David all the way through here. Why would we all of a sudden call him Ehanan with no indication that we're using an alternative name? Others have argued, well, Goliath may have been a title the Philistines used, and so this is a different Goliath. I don't know, that seems to me like we're cutting the knot at that point, not untying it.

Others have argued, well, it may have been Ehanan who killed Goliath. David may have killed a giant, but he wasn't called Goliath, and over the course of time the

name Goliath crept into the story back in 1 Samuel 17, and some other texts where he's named Goliath. I think the simplest solution is to use the Chronicles parallel passage.

In the Chronicles parallel passage, it says in 1 Chronicles 20 verse 5 that Ehanan killed Lahmi, the brother of Goliath. Now, I think that Lahmi is a corruption in the Chronicles passage of Bethlehemite, so I don't think that either of these texts preserves the original reading. I think textual corruption has occurred.

That shouldn't disturb you, by the way, and make you think that the Bible's unreliable. When we affirm inerrancy and inspiration for Scripture, it's usually in conjunction with some kind of a statement about the original manuscripts, the original text. But the fact of the matter is that in the course of time as human beings are transmitting these texts, errors can come in.

And so, inerrancy doesn't apply to the later manuscript tradition, it applies to the original text, and so that's important to remember. What we're doing when we're doing textual criticism like this is we're trying to determine what is the original text. Once we determine that, we can then affirm that it's inspired and inerrant.

And so that's what we're doing here. We've got a problem. The two texts don't seem to line up, and is there some way that we can figure out what the original text said? I think the original text said that Ehanan killed, and then I think there was a proper name.

I don't think it was Lahmi. There was a proper name, and then it said the brother of Goliath. And if you know Hebrew, you realize that Hebrew will sometimes use a little particle to introduce the object of a verb.

That particle is et. The Hebrew word for brother is ach, or when it's followed by a name it would be achi. In Hebrew script, and remember in early on there would be no vowel pointing, it would just be the consonants, and the accusative sign looks like the word for brother.

And so, I think that contributed to the problem here. I think what happened, a scribe wrote down that the text before him was Ehanan killed whatever proper name, et, accusative sign, proper name, the brother of Goliath. And I think what happened, was the scribe probably wrote the et, then his eye skipped down to brother, which looks like et, and so he thought that he had written the et, and he just skipped over the name and the word brother, and then ends up with him killing Goliath.

I think that's what happened in the 2 Samuel 21:19 tradition. 1 Chronicles 20, they're trying to smooth it out. Bottom line, I know this is kind of technical, but I think that

what happened, Ehanan is a distinct individual, and he killed an individual who was the brother of Goliath.

There was another battle, according to 2 Samuel 21-20, that took place at Gath, and there was a huge man. So, there is a family of giants down here in the Gath area. Goliath was one of them.

He's a huge man, and there's an oddity about him. He has six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot. And just in case you're mathematically challenged, the Hebrew Bible will often do things like this.

24 in all! And he was also a descendant of the Rapha, and he taunts Israel. And Jonathan, son of Shemiah, David's brother. So, this is an individual who is David's nephew.

He killed him. So, these four were the descendants of the Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men. So, David had a lot of mighty warriors.

David brought down Goliath, but as you can see, he had other warriors around him who were very adept, and they also won great victories on David's behalf and killed giants as well. We're going to skip at this point over to the second section in the concentric outline on David's mighty men. 2 Samuel 23, verse 8 begins this next section, and we read about some individuals who were great warriors, and you can read about their exploits.

On one occasion, they actually went and got water for David at Bethlehem. They risked their lives. David said, you know, I would love to have a drink of water from the well or the cistern near the gate of Bethlehem back home.

Wouldn't that be refreshing right now? Well, he wasn't suggesting that anyone go and try to get that water, but three of his mighty warriors break through the Philistine lines, and they brought back water for David from that well or cistern, and David is so overcome by their bravery and their commitment to him that he pours it out before the Lord as a drink offering. He says I can't drink this. When I look at this water, I see your blood.

You risked your lives to do this, and so I'm going to consecrate this water, and I'm going to pour it out before the Lord as a drink offering. So, these are the kind of fellows that surround David, and there's even one guy I particularly like Benaiah. You can read about him in 2 Samuel 23:20.

He's a valiant fighter, and performed great exploits. He struck down Moab's two mightiest warriors. He also went down into a pit or a cistern, an empty cistern on a snowy day, and killed the lion.

So, can you imagine that? Going down into a cistern, it's you and the lion, and it's snowing, and you know when it's snowing, you can slip, and these cisterns were plastered over, and so they could be slippery, but yet he killed, he was able to kill the lion, and he struck down a huge Egyptian. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand, and Benaiah went against him with a club, and what he does, he snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand, and he killed him with his own spear, and so David had this group of warriors who were called the Three, and they were a particularly elite group. There were others that were associated with them, including Abishai whom we've read about before.

He's spoken of in here, the brother of Joab. He was the chief over the Three, but he was not a member of the Three, but he was a chief over them, and he raised his spear against 300 men whom he killed, and he became as famous as the Three. So Abishai, on occasion, is overzealous.

He actually collaborated with his brother Joab to murder Abner, but nevertheless, he's a great warrior. He's a good guy to have around, and that may explain why David just kind of overlooked his sins at times, and refused to bring justice against him because he was a great warrior to have covering your back. So, there is this elite group of the Three, and Abishai is associated with them, but then we also get a long list of names that are called the Thirty, and if you add up the names, it's a little tricky, because at one point it just talks about the sons of Yashen, how many sons, and so it seems as if we have more than 30 names.

So, is that a problem? No, I don't think so. It's a very superficial problem. It may be that these individuals were not among the Thirty at the same time.

In other words, these are all individuals who at one time or another were part of that group. It wouldn't necessarily imply that they were part of the group all at one time, and it may be that the Thirty grew. If you're a football fan from the upper Midwest, you probably root for one of the teams in the Big Ten conference.

Well, how many teams are in the Big Ten conference? More than ten, now that they've brought in some other teams. And so sometimes labels just continue, because it's the traditional way to refer to a unit or institution, even when the number exceeds that original number. So that may be a modern parallel to what we have going on here, but you can read all of their names, and then it says there were 37 in all.

So, they're called the Thirty, but there's 37 in all, and so there is some discussion, well, is that talking about the list? And you've got a little bit of flex, because you can make the sons of Jashen however many you want them to be to fill out the amount. But also, if you go back into the section before the list, you can actually come up with

seven names there. So maybe when it says 37 in all, it's talking about the Thirty, who were more than 30, the Three, and Abishai, and other individuals who are associated with them.

So, at first, it looks like there's some confusion on the numbers, but if you look at the text carefully, you'll see that there are some fairly simple ways to resolve the tensions. So, what we see here is David had great support from a lot of great warriors that the Lord raised up. And so, it wasn't just David winning victories, it was David and his warriors who led the armies of Israel, and the Lord allowed them to accomplish some great things in defending the nation.

We'll move on in our next lesson to David's long poem of thanksgiving in 2 Samuel 22. And we'll also look at the short poem at the beginning of chapter 23 called his final words.

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