



Finer Grounds Bible Study

2 Samuel

Lesson 12: 2 Samuel 21-23

We are almost to the end of 2 Samuel. I hope so far that you have grown in your love and understanding of King Jesus as we have studied his human ancestor, David. Chapters 21-24 of 2 Samuel are usually considered an appendix to the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. This material is not chronologically ordered and so may seem like a set of random accounts that were stuck at the end of the book. However, we know there is nothing random about God's inspired word, including its ordering.

If we zoom out from the individual accounts included in this section, we see that these chapters are composed in chiasmic structure. Chiasmic structure is basically a crisscross of the ordering of passages or ideas. Similar sections, themes, or wording are symmetrically arranged, usually to highlight the turning point of a narrative, or in this case, the main theological purpose of the section.

A: 2 Samuel 21:1-14: God's judgement for Saul's Sin.

B: 2 Samuel 21:15-22: David's Mighty Men

C: 2 Samuel 22: David's Psalm of Praise for Deliverance

C': 2 Samuel 23:1-7: David's Last Words of Praise for God's Covenant

B': 2 Samuel 23:8-39: David's Mighty Men

A': 2 Samuel 24: God's judgement for David's Sin

Think about it: See if you can find the chiasmic structure in other passages of the Bible.

- Joshua 1:5-9

- Genesis 6-9

- Genesis 11:1-9

Read 2 Samuel 21-24. As you work through this section, think of why God inspired the writer to group these narratives in this way. Considering that the main purpose of the books of Samuel is to understand the nature of human kingship in Israel, why would these topics be chosen?



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Since this passage is in chiastic structure, I think it is best if we work through the mirrored passages to highlight the parallels.

Read 2 Samuel 21:1-14 and 2 Samuel 24. As you do, write down parallel events, wordings, and themes below. You may also want to underline them in your Bible. Write down any questions you have.

Both passages are connected by the theme of God's justice in response to the sin of Israel's king. How does God respond when the king sins? Let's begin by comparing the inciting event for each story.

Read Joshua 9. Who were the Gibeonites?

Describe the agreement made between the Gibeonites and Israel. Why could the Israelites not break their vow to the Gibeonites (see Numbers 30:1-2)?

How did Saul break that oath according to 2 Samuel 21:2?

What was God's punishment for this betrayal (21:1)?

Why would God's wrath be against the whole of Israel for Saul's decision? Use 1 Samuel 12:14-15 to inform your answer.

The slaughter of the Gibeonites is not recorded anywhere else in the Bible, but it may have taken place when Saul killed the priests at Nob in pursuit of David, as the Gibeonites supplied wood and water for the altar of the Lord (Joshua 9:27). Whatever the circumstance, Saul sought to purify Israel of these outsiders because of his "zeal" for Israel and Judah. Likely, the people-pleasing Saul decided that killing these Canaanites might make him popular with his own people. In this way, the nation of Israel, who sought the death of the people they promised to protect, were complicit with the sin. Saul was the figurehead who sanctioned the awful action in keeping with his peoples' desire.

Compare this event to the event in 2 Samuel 24:1-14 and the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 21:1-13.



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Who committed the sin in 2 Samuel 24:1-14? Who helped this man commit the sin?

Who discovered the sin in 2 Samuel 21?

Who discovered the sin in 2 Samuel 24?

Who determined the punishment for the sin?

While we know that David's sin was to count the people, we don't know why that was considered a sin. It may be that it violated Exodus 30:12 where God required every man of fighting age to contribute a half shekel to the Lord. Some wonder too whether David hoped to know his military strength by counting the men. In so doing, David signaled that he trusted the numbers in his army rather than the God who gave him the army to begin with. Either way, we know that even Joab, whose moral character is called into question several times in 2 Samuel, thought the action so abhorrent that he refused to report the true number of men according to 1 Chronicles 21:6.

In both cases, David is involved in bringing the sin to justice. In the case of the Gibeonites, he goes to God and identifies the offense. In the case of the census, he is convicted of his own wrong-doing and seeks the Lord's forgiveness by way of the prophet Gad.

Think about it: Compare 2 Samuel 24:1 to 1 Chronicles 21:1. What is the noticeable difference between these verses? How can both be true? Consider Job 1:6-12 and James 1:13 for context.

Now compare the result of these two events (2 Samuel 21:7-14 and 24:11-25). In each case, who suffered the consequences of the kings' actions?

In both narratives, the people suffer for the sin of their king. In Saul's case, his sons and grandsons receive an especially terrible punishment and are given to the Gibeonites in response to their request.

Many debate whether fulfilling the Gibeonites request was righteous. Honestly, I have repeatedly wrestled with this passage trying to discern who is at fault and how. This passage is an excellent reminder that Biblical authors rarely lay bare the thoughts and feelings of the characters involved. Instead, we are left to discern motives from each character's actions and words. We can weigh those against the



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rest of God's word to fully understand what God is trying to tell us about himself and ourselves.

Think About It: Look at each character in the Gibeonite narrative and evaluate their motives and involvement based on what you know about God and about them.

- **Saul:** What motivated Saul's decision to kill the Gibeonites. See 2 Samuel 21:2 and 1 Samuel 15:13-31 for context.

- **David:** Who did David go to find the cause of the famine? Who did he consult for the solution? Did he accept the initial response of the Gibeonites in 21:4? Did he benefit from their request in 21:5-6? How did David respond to Rizpah's actions?

- **Gibeonites:** Were they Israelites? What was their motive for the restitution they requested (21:4-6)? Was their punishment in keeping with God's law? (Read Deuteronomy 24:16 and Exodus 34:7)

- **Rizpah:** Why did Rizpah do what she did? Read Deuteronomy 21:22-23 for help.

- **God:** What did he say was the cause of the famine? Was he consulted on the solution? After which action did God become receptive to prayer?

Notice that while David inquired of God for the cause of the famine, he did not ask for the solution. When the Gibeonites at first refused to kill anyone to forgive the wrong, David pressed them and they then asked for the death of seven of Saul's offspring. Seven was often a number that signified completeness in ancient times. According to the Gibeonites, complete retribution for their loss would be achieved through the death of Saul's offspring. The Gibeonites punishment is bloody, public, and humiliating. The seven men are hung or impaled for all to see. Their bodies are left out for days almost as a warning to the rest of Israel.

However, Rizpah, the mother of two of the men, watched and protected the bodies of her sons from animals. David realized that her actions are righteous and removed the bodies from the trees on which they were hung. He buried the bodies with the remains of Saul and his other sons. It is only then that God answered the prayers concerning the famine.



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While Saul did not witness the consequences his sin brought on his family, David had a front row seat to the pain that his sin caused. He watched as his “sheep” suffered for his actions (2 Samuel 24:17). He even called for the sin to be only on him and his house. However, his people still die, 70,000 in all (notice that number 7 again!) Even though the punishment was carried out, David remained obedient to God and built an altar to the Lord on the spot where the angel stopped inflicting the plague. This spot would later become the site of the first temple.

Think about it: Leaders can only lead those willing to follow. How should Godly leaders hold their followers accountable to God? How should Godly followers hold their leaders accountable to God? Use scriptures to support your answer.

Compare the wording of 2 Samuel 21:14 and 24:25. What do we learn about the judgment for sin in these two passages.

How does sin affect the relationship between God and his people?

How did both kings’ sins affect their people?

We know that the wages of sin are death. In both accounts, the earthly kings led their people into sin and could not atone for it themselves. They watched as the land and people suffered the consequences of the curse of sin. Only after the payment for sin was given could the people renew their communication and right relationship with God.

How great it is for us who live under the reign of King Jesus, who lived a perfect life to become death for all people. He redeemed us in order to make us his sons and heirs (Galatians 4:3-7). Unlike these earthly kings who brought suffering on their people, Jesus suffered for his people. He alone is the king who could provide the perfect payment for the sins of his people.

Think about it: In what other ways is Jesus the reversal of the earthly kings described in these two stories?

If nothing else, these passages serve as drastic reminders that without a perfect king, God’s people are susceptible to the consequences of sin. The nation of Israel hoped that an earthly king would save them from their enemies. However, these passages reveal that a king could not save them from themselves.



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Let's move on to the next group of parallel passages.

Read 2 Samuel 21:15-22 and 23:8-39. Write down any questions or observations you have about these verses.

My personal titles for these two sections are "Israel's Great Enemies" and "Israel's Great Soldiers." In 21:15-22, we read of how David's loyal men struck down four giant Philistines. These passages remind us of the greatness of the foes that David faced with God's strength. They also remind us that David did not do it alone. He was aided by fighters who bravely followed God's lead to defend Israel from these formidable enemies.

The one event that often gets noticed in this section is the killing of Goliath by Elhanan. People like to look at this as a "mistake," since 1 Samuel 17 clearly states that David killed Goliath. However, there are two explanations. 1 Chronicles 20:5 states that it was a relative of Goliath that was killed by Elhanan, so the early manuscripts of 2 Samuel may have a copying error. Most likely, Goliath could be a title for a giant fighter rather than a proper name.

In 2 Samuel 23:8-39, we read of the brave acts of Israel's heroes in service to their king. What an honor it is to have your name to be preserved by God's word. These men faithfully served their king, at great risk to their own lives. We too must undertake to

follow our king, Jesus, with the same courage and tenacity.

What is the last name on the list of mighty men in 23:39? Why would this name be so prominently placed?

Even though David was a great king, God reminds us of David's unfaithfulness to one of his faithful fighters, Uriah. A greater king is needed, one who will never be unfaithful to his followers (2 Timothy 2:13).

Now we come to the centerpiece of this chiasm, two psalms of David. The first psalm was composed early in his reign, just after Saul's death while the second psalm is referred to as David's last words. While the true meaning of "Last Words" is debated, these psalms bookend David's reign, begging us to compare and contrast their content and purpose.

Read 2 Samuel 22 (Psalm 18 is identical)

Pick one or two keywords in each of the following sections. Then, in one sentence, summarize the subject of each of these sections.

22:2-4:



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22:5-6:

22:7:

22:8-16:

22:17-20:

22:21-25:

22:26-31:

22:32-43:

22:44-46:

22:47-50:

Who does David credit with his victories?

2 Samuel 22:21-25 provides the reason why David found favor with God. Why did God help David?

This beautiful Psalm reminds us that despite all earthly oppression and fear, God remains omnipotent over all things. David recognized that he had to rely on God's unwavering strength, calling Him his rock, stronghold, fortress. If we were ever tempted in reading 1 and 2 Samuel to glorify David for the mighty deeds recorded in these books, 2 Samuel 22 makes clear that God was responsible for delivering David from his enemies and establishing him as king in the first place. David's words here sound similar to another passage found in the books of Samuel.

Compare this passage to 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Look for similar words, phrases, and sentiments.

These passages stand as bookends to the entire story of the books of Samuel. This



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reminds us that as the earthly kings fail to meet expectations and fall plague to their own sins, God remains the rock who uplifts the humble and makes the proud weak.

David confirms God's role in his appointment as king in his last words.

Read 2 Samuel 23:1-7. List any parallel phrases or similar word usage between this passage and 2 Samuel 22.

While this passage is much shorter than 2 Samuel 22, it succinctly makes a similar point. These last words of David are called a revelation of God, spoken to him through his Spirit. Verses 3 and 4 highlight the need for a king who rules in righteousness.

Did David always rule in righteousness? If so, how can his house be "right" with God (v. 5)?

This is where the Psalm becomes truly interesting. David posed the question, if he were not righteous before God, how could God make an everlasting covenant with him and his household? This is where the most crucial theological point of the whole book rests.

We know that David was not righteous. We have discussed that over and over again as we examined his relationship with his sons and even the sinful census described in 2 Samuel

24. However, God made him righteous because of his faith in God and his willingness to repent to the only one capable of forgiving his sin. In that way and that way alone, he became righteous in God's eyes.

David seems to have asked this question in awe of God's grace and mercy towards a life of faithfulness and failures. We as the reader then wonder, will the king from David who reigns forever be of this same ilk? Will the promised king's reign be characterized by good but tainted by sin? Is there something better coming?

We live in a time when this question has been answered with a resounding "yes!" Jesus, David's descendent and God's son, sits on his throne as the perfect king whose reign is everlasting. Not only does he rule in sinless perfection, but he also removes the sin that separates us from an eternity with God, allowing us to live in holiness under the rule of a just and righteous king.

Think about it: Look at the chiastic unit that ends the books of Samuel. Why did the inspired writer group these sections together? Why did the writer end a book about kingship with these poems and stories?

The Books of Samuel answer the question of whether having a king is a good thing for Israel. Some passages seem to support the idea while other sections vehemently oppose it. The appendix in 2 Samuel 21-24 lays bare



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the inadequacies of earthly kings ruling over God's people. Even David, who would come to be seen as the greatest king of Israel, could not rule his people perfectly. He and Saul led their people into sin and harmed the relationship between God and his people.

More importantly, the king cannot succeed apart from God. The words of David himself remind us that it was God and God alone who established the king and provided victory over the unrighteous. As readers, we then must arrive at this conclusion: As rulers rise and fall, God remains the supreme ruler over all peoples and powers. While only he could be the perfect ruler for his people, God would use the imperfect kings he appointed to bring about the arrival of a man who was also God who would become king forever. We now live under the rule of King Jesus and look forward to the day when he makes all things new and

free from sin. He will restore his people to fellowship with him and will reign forever as our perfect king in the place he is preparing for us. Praise God for his indescribable gift!