

2nd Samuel Chapters 20-21 – John Karmelich

1. In this lesson, I come back to one of my favorite topics: Christianity and “maturity”. In order to grow and mature as a Christian, we constantly have to struggle with our old human nature. Maturity as a believer is about putting more and more trust in God for every aspect of our lives.
 - a) With that said, our Christian life can be described as an internal struggle for control.
 - b) The Christian life has a starting point when we first commit our lives to serving God. We want Jesus to pay the price for our sins. At that point, God establishes a “home base within our hearts”. The rest of our lives becomes an internal struggle between doing our own will for our lives and “God’s will”, which is for us to live in obedience to Him.
 - c) It is as if our lives are a military battle of “God versus us”. We struggle as our old human nature wants to do things our way and not God’s way. Being “born-again” is only the first step in the Christian life. That is the moment we decide that “God’s way” is the best way for our lives and we mentally decide to turn our lives over to Him. The remainder of our lives is an internal struggle for control of our lives.
2. I mention all of this, as that “pattern” is prevalent here in 2nd Samuel:
 - a) This chapter opens with David, once again, becoming King over Israel.
 - b) These two chapters focus on “internal and external” issues that need to be resolved.
 - c) Yes, you can read the story as historical literature. It is about David resuming power and the issues that need to be resolved. The underlying message for us is the pattern of: “God takes over control of lives; God then works on fixing different aspects of our lives.”
 - d) My point is the last chapter of 2nd Samuel would have been a very good “and they lived happily ever after” type of moment. David lost his power due to rebellion by his son. David wins, and resumes power. You would think that is the end of 2nd Samuel.
 - e) Instead, we read of the “clean up” operation. The remainder of 2nd Samuel primarily focuses on problems that have to be dealt with now that David is in charge again.
 - f) That is the pattern God uses for our lives: We let God be in charge. God then says, “Here are some areas of your life that need to be cleaned up.” We clean them up. God then says, “Good, you’re ready for some other areas that need cleaning.” That pattern is our “maturity” as we learn to trust God over and over.
 - g) When we turn away from God, He says in effect, “OK, you want to walk away from me for awhile? Fine, I’ll just let you make a mess of things, and when you’re ready, you can call me back.” ☺ When we eventually get in trouble again, we then call to God and the pattern of “internal struggle” starts all over again. That pattern will be stated in the remainder of this book.
3. With all of that in mind, let me summarize the events of these two chapters:
 - a) The civil war between King David and his son Absalom is over. Absalom is dead.
 - b) David is now returning home, but the spirit of rebellion still exists among the people.
 - c) A man named Sheba then starts another revolt. By the end of Chapter 20, he’s dead too.
 - d) When David returned to power, he put a man named Amasa in charge of the army.
 - i) Amasa was his rebel son’s top general. David did this to appease the “rebels” that all is forgiven. He also did this to punish David’s usual top-general Joab.
 - ii) In this chapter Joab kills Amasa, whether David likes it or not, Joab resumes command of the Israelite army.
 - e) In Chapter 21 King David has a whole new set of problems to deal with:
 - i) There is a 3-year famine. David discovers the reason for the famine has to do with a bad mistake caused by his predecessor, King Saul. David has to deal with it.
 - ii) After this, David has to go fight his old enemy the Philistines again.
 - iii) David has to personally lay off as he’s getting old. There are lessons there on Christian maturity and letting others fight your battle for you.

4. One of the things to consider is the possibility that Chapters 21-24, which are the remainder of the book, may not be in chronological order. Most of the commentators debate when the events listed in these chapters happened “now” or earlier in David’s reign.
- a) These are actual events. The debate is whether or not everything that happens from Chapter 21 to Chapter 24 happened “after” Chapter 20 or sometime earlier.
 - b) The issue to me is irrelevant. Whether or not these events happen in chronological order is irrelevant compared to the pattern of the bible stories. What I mean is that these stories were placed at this particular location in 2nd Samuel “for a reason”. These stories follow the “patterns” set in Chapter 20:
 - i) In Chapter 20, we see David’s struggle to be obedient and rule Israel again. It is a pattern of how God rules in our lives. That “pattern” of David’s obedience and David’s success then continues with new examples in Chapter 21.
 - ii) Even if Chapter 21 did not occur right after the event so Chapter 20, the “pattern” continues very well.
 - c) With all of that said, it is time for David to regain power again (and God, hint-hint ☺).
5. Chapter 20, Verse 1: Now a troublemaker named Sheba son of Bicri, a Benjamite, happened to be there. He sounded the trumpet and shouted, "We have no share in David, no part in Jesse's son! Every man to his tent, O Israel!" ² So all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba son of Bicri. But the men of Judah stayed by their king all the way from the Jordan to Jerusalem.
- a) Let me set the scene and recall what happened at the end of Chapter 19:
 - i) A relatively short time ago, the civil war between David and his son Absalom had ended. David waited outside of Israel until he was “invited” to be king again.
 - ii) Israel is divided into 12 separate tribes. Apparently, representatives of two of the tribes, Judah and Benjamin went out to the border of Israel to go escort him home.
 - iii) Chapter 19 ended with a squabble between the leaders of the 12 tribes. The leaders of the other 10 tribes were complaining they were not invited to the escort.
 - iv) In summary, David was back as the king, but the leaders of the 12 tribes were busy arguing amongst themselves.
 - b) With all of that understood, we now have this new “troublemaker” named Sheba.
 - i) Sheba blew a horn (translated a trumpet in verse 1) to call attention to himself and for everyone to stop arguing for a moment.
 - ii) To paraphrase Sheba, “Since all of us leaders are arguing amongst ourselves, “we” have decided that we don’t need David being king over us. In fact, we don’t need any king at all. Let’s all go home and govern ourselves”.
 - iii) I don’t believe Sheba wanted to be in charge. He just didn’t want a central government. Sheba was calling for all the tribes to go home and let every tribe be self-governed as opposed to David being their king.
 - c) Let’s get back to my theme of an “internal struggle” for our faith in God.
 - i) When God first “takes over” our lives, our old self-nature does not say, “Oh goodie, God is in charge, I’ll drop my old ways now and forever.” ☺
 - ii) Many people “claiming” to be Christians rebel against God in their outwardly actions. They make a commitment to Jesus at some point in their lives and go to church on occasion. They think, “OK, I’ve got salvation, now I can go back to living how I want.” Other than that, they don’t think about God very much. If you actually asked them to change their lifestyle, they say, “What, you mean I actually have to change my behavior to follow Christ? No thank you, I’ll just attend the church down the street that doesn’t convict me as much.” ☺
 - iii) I state that as “David is in charge again, and the people rebel”. This guy Sheba is just the excuse for what is in their heart.
 - d) Getting back to Verse 2, the tribe of Judah (and probably Benjamin) were loyal to David and do make David their king. At this point, David is king over the tribe of Judah.

6. Verse 3: When David returned to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to take care of the palace and put them in a house under guard. He provided for them, but did not lie with them. They were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows.
- a) Notice David's first order of business as king is not to go after this Sheba-rebel.
 - i) David does deal with Sheba. There are other issues he makes a priority.
 - ii) David's first (recorded) order of business is to deal with his ten concubines.
 - b) To explain, we need to go back to some events of earlier chapters:
 - i) Besides David's wives, he also had at least ten concubines. Concubines had all the duties of a wife, including sexual "duties", without any of the privileges. The concubines' children were second-class citizens compared to the children of wives.
 - ii) The problem is the bible explicitly teaches that Kings of Israel are not to multiply wives for themselves. (Ref.: Deuteronomy 17:17). You cannot get around this law by having concubines. It is an unacceptable loophole. ☺
 - iii) When David was fleeing from his son, Absalom, David left these 10 concubines at home to take care of the palace. (Reference: 2nd Samuel 15:16).
 - iv) Absalom publicly had sex (probably raped) all 10 women to show Israel how he "assumed power" by taking over David's harem. (Reference: 2nd Samuel 16:22).
 - c) This leads us to Verse 3. David is back in power. David now has to face the 10 women who were raped by Absalom and who David never should have "had" in the first place.
 - d) What did David do with them? He placed them under "house arrest". In other words, they lived comfortably in the palace. They were financially provided for, but they were not allowed to marry and lived a celibate lifestyle for the rest of their lives.
 - i) Why? For starters, in Israel, a "used bride" holds little value. It was David's way of trying to make up for what Absalom (and David) did to them.
 - e) What's the point of these verses? The point is David is in charge and the first thing David does is "clean up his house". It is implied that David realized it was wrong to have these concubines in the first place. These girls had to suffer because of what Absalom did. David is now making it up to them the best way possible.
 - f) That is what God expects of us when we sin. Are we forgiven? Yes. Does God expect us to change our behavior? Yes. God also asks us to "remedy the past as best as possible". Sometimes that can be done, and sometimes it cannot. When it can, like in David's situation here, David helps to remedy for past mistakes.
 - g) Notice David's first order of business is not to deal with the rebel-Sheba.
 - i) Instead, David's first order of business is an "internal cleanup" of his own house.
 - ii) My theory that the only reason God allowed David to eventually become King over all of Israel again is because David started by getting his own house in order.
 - iii) That is what God expects of us. Do we want greater financial success? We start by "cleaning up" our own house and then God will give us greater responsibility.
 - iv) I stated in the introduction that these chapters in 2nd Samuel show a pattern of how God works in our lives. God begins by cleaning up the areas He does have control over and then gets us to move on to bigger and better projects.
 - v) David did have control over the territory over Judah. David was a king again. With God ruling in our lives, God starts with the "clean-up-operation" over the territory God "does" control before moving on to bigger and better things.
7. Verse 4: Then the king said to Amasa, "Summon the men of Judah to come to me within three days, and be here yourself." ⁵ But when Amasa went to summon Judah, he took longer than the time the king had set for him. ⁶ David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba son of Bicri will do us more harm than Absalom did. Take your master's men and pursue him, or he will find fortified cities and escape from us." ⁷ So Joab's men and the Kerethites and Pelethites and all the mighty warriors went out under the command of Abishai. They marched out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba son of Bicri.

- a) Let's summarize these verses:
 - i) David is king over the tribe of Judah (and again, possibly the tribe of Benjamin).
 - ii) David now wants to deal with the rebel-Sheba and end this rebellion.
 - iii) David appointed Amasa to be the head general prior to being king again.
 - iv) David gives the order to Amasa to assemble an army within Judah.
 - v) David specifically gives Amasa three days to organize the army. This is important because in a few verses, Amasa fails to comply with this order.
 - vi) Verse 7 gives the impression that the "rank of order" is 1) General Amasa and under him is 2) General Abishai, Joab's brother. Joab himself is demoted and is now "just" part of the army. The verse mentions "Joab's men" as they are part of this army. The Kerethites and Pelethites are mercenary soldiers loyal to David.
 - b) Now that the "concubine business" is all resolved, David can now deal with this rebel-Sheba. David announces a plan to go capture Sheba.
 - c) When David's son Absalom started a mutiny, David ran for his life. When this guy Sheba organizes a mutiny, David goes after him. In fact, David even says, "Sheba... will do us more harm than Absalom". The question becomes, why did David organize a fight against Sheba as opposed to running away like he did from Absalom?
 - i) Part of the answer is that with Absalom, "nobody" wanted David as king and David was forced to run away. With the Sheba-rebellion, one (or two) tribes wanted David as king. Therefore, David now has a "home base" to operate his defense and his attacks.
 - ii) On a practical note, David did need to strike down this Sheba-rebellion because if he didn't, this would allow any "hot-head" in Israel to start a rebellion. That is why David calls this rebellion "more dangerous" than that of Absalom's.
 - iii) Going back to my opening theme of "internal warfare", the "pattern" of Absalom is like the times in our lives when we don't want God in any aspect of our lives. As I stated earlier, God "walks away" until we make a mess of things and then ask God to come back in our lives. Remember that all of Israel asked David to come back after Absalom's death. It was only then that another rebellion occurred.
 - iv) The rebellion with Sheba represents a different type of pattern. "Part" of Israel did want David in charge. David used that as a home base to establish himself as King over Israel by the end of the chapter. The same applies to God in our lives. Once we give "part" of our lives over to God, He then wants to "take over every aspect of our lives". Thus, the "Sheba rebellion" needed to be put down.
8. Verse 8: While they were at the great rock in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. As he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath. ⁹ Joab said to Amasa, "How are you, my brother?" Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. ¹⁰ Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab's hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died. Then Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba son of Bicri.
- a) The main story is David's army is in pursuit of this rebel named "Sheba, son of Bicri".
 - i) This main story is interrupted here for three verses. In these verses, we read of former-general Joab murdering Amasa, the head general of David's army.
 - b) Let me summarize the verses:
 - i) There was a squadron of soldiers being "led" by Joab. He was not technically the leader, but the army respected Joab as the leader. Joab met the actual head-general Amasa at a spot called "the great rock in Gibeon" in Verse 8.
 - ii) General Amasa would naturally be suspicious of Joab. Years earlier, Joab murdered another rival for power after Saul's death (Chapters 2-3 of 2nd Samuel).

- iii) Now Joab has “another rival for power” named Amasa. I’m sure Amasa was nervous about meeting Joab. Joab was demoted for Amasa to assume power.
 - iv) Therefore, right as former-general Joab was about greet general Amasa, Joab’s sword “accidentally” fell on the ground. Joab did this so Amasa would not be suspicious that Joab was about to kill him. In Joab’s left hand (or say, hidden in his vest) was a dagger that Joab used to kill Amasa.
 - v) Verse 10 said Amasa’s guts spilled out. To share a really bad joke, “Amasa became “A-mess-a”. ☺ Yes, that’s a bad joke, but it will help you to remember who Amasa was and keep your names straight.
 - vi) Verse 10 then stated that Joab and his brother Abishai went on follow David’s orders to go after this rebel named Sheba.
- c) Let’s stop and talk a little about Joab:
- i) Joab is a complex character in the bible. On the positive side, he was fiercely loyal to King David despite all the circumstances. There were times where he advised David what to do what is best for the nation of Israel.
 - ii) Coming up in Chapter 24, David takes a census of all of Israel. The bible teaches that a king is not to do such a thing. (Reference Exodus 30:12). The interesting thing is that Joab knew it was biblically wrong and tried to talk David out of the census. It implies that Joab knew his bible or at least parts of it.
 - iii) Joab was also a great military leader. Joab won all of the battles he led.
 - iv) At the same time, Joab was a ruthless killer. He murdered any rival for power.
 - v) You get the impression that “Joab usually does what is best for Joab”.
 - vi) Now let’s look ahead to Verse 23 of this chapter. In Verse 23, David is giving the “ending credits” over his top staff. The first person listed is Joab as the head general. Naturally, you would say, “Of course Joab was the general, he killed everyone else in his way”.
 - vii) In a sense, God “allowed and ordained” Joab to be the general despite his murders and David’s orders to relieve him of command. Joab will still suffer for what he did and King Solomon has Joab put to death (Reference: 1st Kings 2:34).
 - viii) The question is, “Was it a mistake for David to place Amasa as top general? We don’t know. All we can do is read the results and see Joab is in charge again.
 - a) Amasa did fail to organize the army in three-days as David commanded. The bible “hints” that David then asked Joab’s brother (who is also a general) Abishai to lead the army.
 - b) Now, Joab is in charge again by default. It is as if Joab is saying, “I was the #2 man. I just killed the number #1 man. I’m in charge. I have a knife in my hand and I’m not afraid to use it again. Anyone else have a problem with me being the general?” ☺
9. Verse 11: One of Joab's men stood beside Amasa and said, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab!
- a) You have to see the irony of this sentence. One of Joab’s loyal soldiers links Joab and David together implying that you have to support both.
 - b) It would be like me saying, “All of those in favor of Jesus and me for president, raise your hand!” I’m falsely implying that if you really love Jesus, you would vote for me as your next president. The point of this verse is to watch out for false-associations.
 - c) Unfortunately, this rallying cry worked and the army now accepted Joab as general again.
10. Verse 12: Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the road, and the man saw that all the troops came to a halt there. When he realized that everyone who came up to Amasa stopped, he dragged him from the road into a field and threw a garment over him. ¹³ After Amasa had been removed from the road, all the men went on with Joab to pursue Sheba son of Bicri.

- a) Let me use an illustration to describe what is happening in this verse: When an accident happens on the highway, the cars are moved to the side of a road. Automobile traffic then comes to slow halt as everyone slows down to gawk at the wreckage. In order to get traffic moving again, the police need to remove the wrecked cars from the scene.
 - b) That is what is happening in these verses. The soldiers are stopping to gawk at the dismembered body of "A-mess-a". The late, ex-general was lying on the ground.
 - c) Joab drags the body into a pit and covers it with a garment. The idea is to stop all the soldiers from "gawking" and they could get on to the business of finding Sheba the rebel.
 - d) Now let's get back to a discussion of Joab:
 - i) For whatever reason, God "allows" Joab to be in charge again.
 - ii) Maybe it was because Amasa failed to rally the troupes in 3 days as David asked.
 - iii) We can speculate all day as to "why". The text just says it happens.
 - iv) One thing you have to give Joab credit is that he takes charge. The soldiers were busy gawking. Joab deals with the issue and gets the soldiers focused on their mission of finding the rebel.
 - e) This gets back to the issue of God "taking over our lives". The main point of this section is Joab is successful in catching and killing this rebel. That is coming up in a few verses. The question is, "Why does God use this murderer Joab to accomplish "God's will" of David being king again?" The answer is that God uses "imperfect" people who are loyal to him to get God's will done. Yes, Joab will suffer for his sins. The point here is that David did "clean up his own house" by taking care of the concubines. God then arranges (or allows) situations so that the "best" general then leads David's army to victory.
11. Verse 14: Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel Beth Maacah and through the entire region of the Berites, who gathered together and followed him.
- a) Now we are back to this rebel named Sheba. The last we read of him was in Verse 1 when he announced that everyone in Israel should avoid David as a king.
 - b) Now we read that this guy went through all of the Israel, presumably to organize a rebellion, or just be on the run. He ended up in a city named "Abel Beth Maacah". Apparently, there were people who followed Sheba who lived in the "Berite" region.
12. Verse 15: All the troops with Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maacah. They built a siege ramp up to the city, and it stood against the outer fortifications. While they were battering the wall to bring it down,¹⁶ a wise woman called from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here so I can speak to him."¹⁷ He went toward her, and she asked, "Are you Joab?" "I am," he answered. She said, "Listen to what your servant has to say." "I'm listening," he said.
- a) Let's set the scene: Joab and his troops found out that Sheba was camped in this city.
 - b) Joab's troops surrounded the city so no one could get in or out. Joab then organized a battering ram to bring the gate down. From the top of the wall, a "wise woman" (Verse 16) then called to Joab and offered a peace settlement.
 - c) Joab understood that he could save a lot of time and trouble if he simply captured Sheba. Therefore, he listened to what this woman had to say.
13. Verse 18: She ("the wise woman") continued, "Long ago they used to say, 'Get your answer at Abel,' and that settled it."¹⁹ We are the peaceful and faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why do you want to swallow up the LORD's inheritance?"
- a) Remember that the town that Joab has surrounded is called "Abel Beth Maacah".
 - b) Now let me paraphrase this "wise woman". There used to be a saying in Israel that if you have a problem, you go talk to the wise people who lived in Abel and that would settle your issue". Well, I (the wise woman) am here to tell you this "legend" is still true. I can solve your dilemma for you. We the residents of "Abel" are a peaceful city and faithful to the God of Israel. Our city has spawned residents of other cities (thus the reference in Verse 19 to "mother in Israel)". Why would you Joab, want to destroy a city that has such a good and peaceful long term reputation?"

14. Verse 20: "Far be it from me!" Joab replied, "Far be it from me to swallow up or destroy!"²¹ That is not the case. A man named Sheba son of Bicri, from the hill country of Ephraim, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Hand over this one man, and I'll withdraw from the city." The woman said to Joab, "His head will be thrown to you from the wall."²² Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bicri and threw it to Joab. So he sounded the trumpet, and his men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home. And Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem.
- Here is the story where Joab explains that his intention is not to destroy the entire city, but just to capture the rebel named Sheba.
 - The "wise woman" was worried because all of Israel had rebelled against David. She may have thought that David wanted to declare war on all of Israel. This is where Joab had to explain to her, (and thus get word to all the residents) that David was only interested in Sheba.
 - The "wise woman", then probably told the residents of the town, "Look folks, we have two choices: We can allow Joab and his men to destroy the city and kill a lot of people or we can personally kill Sheba-the-rebel and spare our lives. All in favor of option #2, raise your hands!" ☺
 - Verse 22 said that the head of Sheba was thrown over the wall, proving he was killed.
 - I'll spare you all my Joab "got-a-head" jokes and move on. ☺
 - In Verse 22, we read of Joab and his men returning to David in Jerusalem.
15. Verse 23: Joab was over Israel's entire army; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites;²⁴ Adoniram was in charge of forced labor; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder;²⁵ Sheva was secretary; Zadok and Abiathar were priests;²⁶ and Ira the Jairite was David's priest.
- The last three verses of this chapter are the "ending credits" of David being king again.
 - What is implied between Verses 22 and Verses 23 is David is now the king over all of Israel again. It is not stated, but based on the events of future chapters, it is implied.
 - The point here is David won, and David stops to give gratitude.
 - Verse 23 says Joab was in charge. I've already beaten that issue to death in this lesson, so I'll move on. ☺
 - The second guy to get credit was "Benaiah". He was in charge of the mercenary soldiers. These non-Jews were loyal to David. David is not only recording Benaiah with some credit for all of history, but also these men as well. The third person is Adoniram, who was in charge of all the "forced labor" (i.e., slaves). Next, we have the secretary, who probably recorded much of David's writings that became part of 2nd Samuel.
 - Next, we have the high priest and his right-hand man Zadok and Abiathar. If you remember from Chapter 15, they helped David regain power and influence the tribe of Judah to accept David as their king again.
 - Finally, David mentions Ira the Jairite who was David's personal priest. David, in his life-long zeal for God and who wrote most of the Psalms, still wanted a personal priest for spiritual guidance. Leader's need extra ministry. I don't mind if the government spends money for a private godly counselor for the President. Being in charge is demanding and having a godly personal spiritual is "well worth it".
 - Going back to my discussion of "God battling for control of our lives", don't forget to stop every now and then and thank God for allowing others to help us. Give thanks to God for those He put in our lives to help us be "who we are for God".
16. Chapter 21, Verse 1: During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."² The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.)

- a) In Chapter 21, we now change stories. Some question whether or not Chapter 21 chronologically fit after Chapter 20, or if it occurred sometime earlier in David's reign. The main point is that this is a true story and it is placed "here" for a reason.
- b) Onto the next story itself. Let me summarize:
- i) There is a famine in Israel. That probably meant there was no (or very little) rain for three years and the crops didn't grow.
 - ii) David as king sought God during this time. David probably prayed, "OK, Lord, one year of famine is possible, two is an incredible coincide, but three years must be your doing. What's going on and what can I do to change this situation?"
 - iii) God did answer David after three years. The answer is that when Saul was king, he killed a majority of a people called the Gibeonites. Saul put most of them to death and there was no reason to do so.
- c) The history of the Gibeonites goes way back to Joshua Chapter 9. That was roughly 400 years prior to the events of this chapter.
- i) To summarize, when the Israelite people first came to the Promised Land, God told them to conquer all the local residents due to His judgment on them. The Gibeonites were among those living in the Promised Land. The Gibeonites pretended to be foreigners and asked for mercy from the Israelites. Joshua believed the lie that they were foreigners and spared their lives. When Joshua discovered he was deceived, God said to the Israelites in effect, "Look, like it or not, you made a vow to spare the Gibeonites. You've given your word and I (God) expect you (Israelites) to keep your vow."
 - ii) Now, here we are, centuries later. The verse states that former-King Saul was putting Gibeonites to death. We don't know the reason. It is not in the text.
 - iii) Some commentators suspect that Saul wanted their land and goods. Because they were part of the people God wanted them to conquer, Saul justified it in his mind.
- d) The interesting thing to consider is "why this sin?" Of all the things the Israelites have done over the past 500 years, why would this one be so bad that God allowed a famine?
- i) OK, let's start with the fact that killing spree happened in David's lifetime. David was alive when Saul was king and this happened in a recent time past.
 - ii) Still, David had his own sins. I suspect David first thought, "God allowed this famine because of my sins with Bathsheba". We tend to personalize blame when events like this happen.
 - iii) One "big" answer is God cares His reputation. Because He cares about His reputation, God cares a lot about His people keeping their promises. God wants us to keep whatever vows we make and be men and women "of our word".
 - a) Why? Because if other people think we're not trustable in keeping our word, how are they ever going to believe us when we talk about God?
 - b) In other words, if a person is flaky at keeping his word, how is anyone going to trust that person when they talk about God?
- e) These verses bring up another question: Does God allow famines to occur? What about other natural disasters? Are these God-ordained?
- i) The answer, based on this verse, is yes. I believe God allows "all" things to happen for a reason. Not all disasters are judgment related, but I suspect some are, based on the patterns of the bible. Sometimes God judges a nation, or a group or a city based on their actions. The bible is full of examples on that issue.
 - ii) Our problem is we don't know if a famine (or whatever else) is or is not God's judgment. It is always a possibility, but we don't know.
 - iii) We can't use that possibility as an excuse to not be helpful. For example, we can't say to a person, "Well, the reason you're suffering is because God is judging you and your people. Too bad for you, better repent before it is too late." ☺

- iv) Jesus only used the word “learn” three times in the Gospel. One of those three times is when Jesus said, “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’” (Matthew 9:13, with Jesus quoting Hosea 6:6).
- v) My point is God calls to be helpful. If God wants to “judge” someone or some group, trust me, the point will get across. ☺
- f) Now let’s get back to my opening theme of Christian maturity and “internal battles”:
 - i) When God “takes over” our lives, He wants to spend the rest of our lives getting us to grow in maturity for Him.
 - ii) In a sense, God was done (for the moment) with David’s “internal” issues and now needs to work on “external” issues.
 - iii) David repented of his sins with Bathsheba. In the past chapter, David “put away” the concubines so that they were no longer an issue. I believe it is because of that action, God allowed David to be king of all of Israel again and Sheba to be killed.
 - iv) Now in Chapter 21, it is as if God is saying to David, “I’m not done cleaning you up yet. Yes, we’re done for the moment with internal issues, but I still made you king over Israel, and there are other issues as the king that must be dealt with.”
 - v) What does this mean for us? There may be external issues that God wants to clean up in our lives. “External” can mean issues at your job, your family, or some responsibility God has given you.
 - vi) The trick is to recognize and deal with sinful issues before God has to bring in a “famine” into our lives in order to call the issue to our attention! It is something to pray about occasionally and ask God for a personal inventory check.
- g) Meanwhile, after two pages of commentary, I can move on to Verse 3. ☺
- 17. Verse 3: David asked the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? How shall I make amends so that you will bless the LORD's inheritance?"
 - a) Notice David’s first step is to make amends to the Gibeonites. God “got David’s attention” with the famine and David acts upon God’s response. It took three years of a famine in order to get David’s attention to deal with the issue as fast as possible.
 - b) Notice David’s humility. David didn’t give orders on how to fix it, but went to the survivors of Saul’s massacre and asked in effect what he could do for them.
- 18. Verse 4: The Gibeonites answered him, "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." "What do you want me to do for you?" David asked. ⁵ They answered the king, "As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel, ⁶ let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul--the Lord's chosen one." So the king said, "I will give them to you."
 - a) Let me summarize the verses:
 - i) David asks the Gibeonites what he can do to make up for Saul’s crimes.
 - ii) The Gibeonites respond with, “We don’t want money or things. We don’t want any revenge killings. However, we do want you to kill seven descendants of Saul as a symbolic gesture what Saul did to our entire nation.”
 - iii) David agreed to the terms and agreed to have seven descendants of Saul killed.
 - b) Give David a little credit. David, as king, could have said, “no deal”. Instead, in his interest to end the famine and please God, he agrees to these terms.
 - c) This brings up a new question: Are innocent people being hurt for the sins committed by the late-king Saul? Were Saul’s sons innocently paying for the crime of Saul?
 - i) Deuteronomy 24:16 (NIV) says, “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.”
 - ii) This verse implies God only holds accountable those who sin, not their children.
 - iii) Here David is going to execute the descendants of Saul for the sins of Saul.

- d) Commentators give possible explanations: It is probable that children and grandchildren of Saul benefited from the death of the Gibeonites. We suspect Saul might have taken their land and possessions from this slaughter. Further, the whole nation of Israel directly or indirectly benefited if the Gibeonites “stuff” was taken. That is why God punished the whole nation and not just Saul or his children. That theory would “make sense” as the punishment for talking the land and possessions of the Gibeonites was to suffer famine.
- i) The slaughter itself by former King Saul is not stated in the bible, other than this brief mention here in Verse 2 of Chapter 21. We don’t know the details.
- ii) One has to remember that God is sovereign and God judges perfectly. If we accept the premise that God is perfect, than we must also accept the premise that God judges perfectly. The descendants of Saul will live forever in heaven or hell based on how they lived, not on how Saul lived. Eternity is a lot longer than their time on earth. We as people often have to suffer due to the actions of our parents or grandparents. That is what is happening here.
- e) Part of the punishment requested by the Gibeonites is that not only are they to be killed, but it is to be done publicly and openly. It would be a “pubic hanging in the Old West”.
19. Verse 7: 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.
- a) If you recall, Mephibosheth is the crippled son that David took care of. He was the son of David’s late-best-friend Jonathan. David vowed to Jonathan to show kindness to his family and David kept that vow by sparing Mephibosheth.
- b) The point of this verse is that we can’t wipe out one vow to keep another. David made a vow to Mephibosheth and David cannot negate that vow in order to keep another.
20. Verse 8: But the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth (a different Mephibosheth), the two sons of Aiah's daughter Rizpah, whom she had borne to Saul, together with the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, whom she had borne to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite. ⁹ He handed them over to the Gibeonites, who killed and exposed them 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. (The text in the parenthesis was added for clarity.)
- a) Now we have the death of seven of Saul’s grandchildren. These were all the children of Saul’s daughters. All seven of Saul’s children were publicly hanged.
- b) It is important to understand that hanging was considered a curse if they hung on a tree.
- i) “Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse”. (Deut. 21:23b, NIV.)
- ii) Getting off topic, that is also important to understand why the Pharisee’s wanted Jesus crucified. They understood that crucifixion “counts” under the curse of being hung by a tree as the cross is a tree-based product. Was Jesus cursed? Yes, because Jesus took our sins from us. (See Galatians 3:13 on this topic.)
- c) Now comes the interesting part: This action did not end the famine. There are four more verses of “events” that occurred prior to the famine ending.
- i) As you read the next paragraph, notice that it is not until after the events of these four verses that then God “answered the prayer on behalf of the land” (Verse 14).
21. Verse 10: Rizpah daughter of Aiah took sackcloth 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 of the air touch them by day or the wild animals by night. ¹¹ When David was told what Aiah's daughter Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had done, ¹² he went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead. (They had taken them secretly from the public square at Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them after they struck Saul down on Gilboa.) ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul's father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded. After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land.

- a) Let me summarize these verses:
 - i) The mother of two of the seven slain (grand)sons-of-Saul was named Rizpah.
 - ii) The bodies of the seven dead Saul's-descendants were left "in the street".
 - iii) Rizpah guarded the bodies. She wouldn't let birds of prey pick at the bodies.
 - iv) When David heard what she did, David arranged for a "proper Jewish burial" of these seven bodies. At the same time, David had the bones of Saul and Jonathan dug up and buried in Saul's family tomb.
 - v) After all of this, Verse 14 says that then God answered the prayers. What that meant is rain occurred, and the famine would end.
 - b) I picture David during this time-period praying to God, "Lord, I killed seven descendants of Saul like the Gibeonites asked. Yet, Lord, there still is no rain. What do I have to do?"
 - i) We don't read of any answer by God until the "proper burial".
 - c) If you go through the Old Testament, there are no set rules on a proper Jewish burial. One can imply how they should be buried based on text like this, but there are no direct commands on this subject other than one is temporarily "unclean" when touching a dead body. (References: Leviticus 5:2, 11:27, et.al.)
 - d) The question becomes, "Why is this burial ritual so important? God told David that the reason for the famine was because of Saul's killing the Gibeonites. After David did what the surviving Gibeonites asked David to do, the plague is not ended until the seven dead descendants of Saul get a proper burial.
 - e) We can only speculate the reason for this action because the bible does not say why.
 - f) My personal theory is it has to do with "judgment and mercy". God wanted David and the Israelites to be punished for the past-sins of King Saul. The mistake was they dealt with it at the expense of having compassion for the loved ones of those who died. It is only after David shows love and mercy to the family members that the famine is over.
 - i) The application for us is about "judgment and mercy". We as a society are called upon to show justice and mercy. The challenge is to have balance in our actions.
 - g) Back to the opening topic of maturity and internal struggles. As we grow, we need to understand God's laws and God's requirements for us both as individuals and collectively as believers. There are times when God "judges" us individually and times when God judges us corporately. The challenge for us is to recognize whatever issue is causing the problem and do our best to resolve it.
 - h) These verses are also good support for the National Day of Prayer. Every May in the United States there is a day officially designated for prayer for this country. It is a good idea to collectively pray as a nation and try to hold off famines for a few more years. ☺
22. Verse 15: Once again there was a battle between the Philistines and Israel. David went down with his men to fight against the Philistines, and he became exhausted. ¹⁶ And Ishbi-Benob, one of the descendants of Rapha, whose bronze spearhead weighed three hundred shekels and who was armed with a new sword, said he would kill David. ¹⁷ But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to David's rescue; he struck the Philistine down and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished."
- a) We now move on to a new story. We're back to King David fighting the Philistines.
 - b) The Philistines were a neighboring nation. The Israelites had been at war with these guys on and off for centuries.
 - c) If you recall, one of David's generals was Abishai, the brother of General Joab.
 - i) Here we read of Abishai killing a man who is about to kill David.
 - d) Verse 17 ends with David's soldiers telling David in effect, "David, we love you man, but you're getting too old for this. We'll never let you come in battle with us again!"
 - e) The key point to this little story is that David almost died. Notice in Verse 15 that David became exhausted. This is David's "retirement" from personally fighting battles.

- f) Verse 15 to the end of the chapter is four separate battles with the Philistines.
 - i) Each battle deals with the killing someone related to Goliath. Yes, that Goliath. This will become clear in a few more verses.
 - ii) Now in Verse 15, we read of another great “giant” of a man that attacked the Israelites. The verse mentions that the bronze spearhead weighed 300 shekels. I’ve read this can be anywhere from 12-20 pounds. The point is the spearhead weighed more than say, a shot put used in the Olympic games.
 - g) You can just hear David thinking, “When I was a kid, I faced a giant just like this guy. Who knows, maybe they’re related. The point is God protected me then, and God will protect me now.” I then picture David huffing and puffing in exhaustion. Finally, one of David’s top generals kills the guy as opposed to David killing the guy himself.
 - h) OK John, and your point is? ☺ Now we get back to “internal battles” as a Christian.
 - i) We’ve already dealt with internal clean-up issues like David’s concubines.
 - ii) Next, we dealt with external clean up issues like the Gibeonites.
 - iii) Now, we reach a point of maturity where we realize, “it’s not just about me”. We have to depend upon others. Christianity has always been designed to be a team effort. God wants us to work with each other to help mature as believers.
 - iv) A “new command” given by Jesus was to love one another” (John 13:34). That command is about putting the needs of other Christians above our own needs. That command is about helping others to grow as Christians and not just ourselves. David, now near the end of his life, now has to depend on others to get his victories. I’m positive this was a humbling and learning experience. Part of “loving one another” is not just for us to love others, but to let others love us!”
23. Verse 18: In the course of time, there was another battle with the Philistines, at Gob. At that time Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, one of the descendants of Rapha.
- a) Now we read of a second battle in Verse 18. In this battle, another “descendant of Rapha” was killed. We’ll find out in a few more verses these guys are somehow related to “that” Goliath. In “battle #1” the guy who almost killed David was also a decedent of Rapha (Verse 15). The point is both guys were related and probably brothers.
 - b) The point of this verse is David wasn’t there. We read of David letting others have the victories over God’s enemies.
24. Verse 19: In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan son of Jaare-Oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod.
- a) Now we have “battle #3”. Here we have a mention of Goliath.
 - b) There is a parallel passage to this one in 1st Chronicles 20:13. The only difference between these two sentences is that Chronicles says Elhanan killed “the brother of Goliath”. This verse says Elhanan killed Goliath himself. A reader of the text would assume there is only “one” Goliath. The “mistake” is here in 1st Samuel. Elhanan killed Goliath’s brother.
 - c) This probably means there was a scribal error. It’s pretty trivial, but it shows there are some copyist errors in the bible. These are minimal and don’t have any significant affect upon the story. I take the view that the original text is God inspired, but through the centuries, there is less than 1% that has become corrupt due to copyist errors. These errors are insignificant to both Christian and Jewish theology.
 - d) Let’s go on to “battle #4” and I’ll tie them together.
25. Verse 20: In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot--twenty-four in all. He also was descended from Rapha. ²¹ When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimeah, David's brother, killed him. ²² These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men.
- a) Now we read of “battle #4” In Verse 20. Another relative of Goliath is killed here.
 - b) There is a great bit of bible trivia to share here. When David and his slingshot was used to attack Goliath, the text back then said David picked five stones (Ref. 1 Sam 17:40).

- i) The fact that David picked five stones can read like a lack-of-faith: Did David think he couldn't kill Goliath with the first stone? Here we read of four other relatives (sons, brothers, whatever ☺) of Goliath all being killed in this battle.
 - ii) Now we can speculate that the five stones were because David was ready to take on Goliath's whole family! Grant it, it's speculation, but it does tie the five stones with the five deaths in Goliath's family.
 - c) Verse 24 mentions the "Goliath relative #4" had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. Why this is mentioned is beyond me. ☺ I do take this text as literal. The guy was born with a "deformity" that allowed these extra toes and fingers. My guess is that he was teased about this all of his life and it made him a better fighter.
 - i) People tend to be nervous about "big freaks". Maybe just the size of this big guy with the extra fingers and toes was an intimidation factor to overcome.
 - d) Notice in Verse 22 David gets the credit as the leader of the army. Many years ago, the Philistines, led by Goliath attacked the Israelites, now, that David is an old man, God allows "the job to be finished" by letting the Israelite army defeat all of Goliath's family.
 - e) This leads us back to the issues of maturity as a Christian. When we're obedient to God, God will fight the battles for us that we can't. Remember, sometimes God works through us, and sometimes God works through others for our benefit. David personally no longer had the strength to fight Goliath. God waited until David was at this age so "God gets the glory" for the ultimate victory over Goliath.
 - f) The lesson for us gets back to "loving one another". We all have our "Goliath's" to fight. These are the issues in life that without God, would be too big for us to handle. There are times when God wants us to step out in faith and lead for others. There are times when God wants us to "pass the reigns" onto others. Wound through all of this is the necessity of obedience. David "cleaned up" internal and external issues that God commanded of him, and then God rewarded him for that obedience. That's the lesson of these two chapters in a few sentences.
26. Let's pray: Lord, there are issues in our life that scare us. We have our own "Goliath's" that overwhelm us and cause us to have fear. Work through us and through others around us to overcome these issues. Help us to overcome our fears and realize that You are in charge of our lives, and not us. Further, help us to "clean out" those areas of our lives where we are not obedient to you. Give us the discernment to know what those areas are, and the boldness to deal with them as you see fit. May you be glorified as you mature us for your benefit. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.