

# **The Life of David**

## **David's War with the Philistines**

*2 Samuel 21:15-22*

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## David's War with the Philistines

### Scripture

We are in a section that some call the epilogue to “The Life of David.” This section gives us information about a few themes in David’s life. Upon first reading, it may appear unimportant, but the epilogue teaches us a lot about David and his kingdom.

The section that we are going to examine today is David’s war with the Philistines. It involves battles with four different giants. Scholars debate whether this narrative is from early in David’s life or later in his life. It certainly took place *after* David killed Goliath of Gath, which is recounted in 1 Samuel 17. I lean toward thinking that these battles took place later in David’s life.

Let’s read about David’s war with the Philistines in 2 Samuel 21:15-22:

**<sup>15</sup> There was war again between the Philistines and Israel, and David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines. And David grew weary. <sup>16</sup> And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David. <sup>17</sup> But Abishai the son of Zeruah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David’s men swore to him, “You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel.”**

**<sup>18</sup> After this there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants. <sup>19</sup> And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam. <sup>20</sup> And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six**

toes on each foot, twenty-four in number, and he also was descended from the giants. <sup>21</sup>And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck him down. <sup>22</sup>These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants. (2 Samuel 21:15-22)

## Introduction

Earlier this week, I spent a large portion of the day at the auto dealership waiting for my wife's car to be serviced. I got a lot of work done there, probably because I am less distracted and can focus on my work. At one point, I had to use the restroom. I passed by a number of offices and noticed one of the employees looking at a computer screen. It appeared to me that he was examining the fine print of a purchase agreement, or something like that. I thought to myself, "Boy! That has got to be bo-o-o-oring!"

As I read our text for today, 2 Samuel 21:15-22, some of you may have had a similar thought run through your mind. *Boy! This is going to be bo-o-o-oring!* After all, what can we possibly learn from David and his men killing a number of giants?

But this is where digging into God's word pays such rich dividends. We remember that God called David to be his anointed king on earth. David was to replace Saul, whom God set aside because of his disobedience. While Saul was still king, however, David came to national prominence by fighting and killing Goliath of Gath. God promised to build David a kingdom that would last through all eternity, and that a descendant of David would rule as the eternal king. David eventually succeeded Saul as king. The early years of David's reign as king were extremely successful as he followed closely after God. But enemies constantly threatened David and his kingdom. By opposing David, these enemies were also opposing God.

## Lesson

Second Samuel 21:15-22 shows us the power of God in destroying enemies.

Let's use the following outline:

1. God Destroys Enemies by Preserving His Anointed (21:15-17)
2. God Destroys Enemies by Honoring His Servants (21:17, 18, 19, 21, 22)
3. God Destroys Enemies by Fulfilling His Promise (21:16, 18, 20, 22)
4. God Destroys Enemies by Silencing His Enemies (21:20-22)

### I. **God Destroys Enemies by Preserving His Anointed (21:15-17)**

First, God destroys enemies by preserving his anointed.

Verse 15 begins by saying, **“There was war again between the Philistines and Israel.”** The Philistines constantly attacked Israel. I have mentioned previously that David never lost a battle, and he was in many battles. The Hebrew implies that the Philistines were the aggressors in this war against Israel.

So, once again, as verse 15 continues, **“David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines.”** The phrase **“went down”** suggests that David descended from his capital city, Jerusalem, which was at an elevation of almost 2,500 feet above sea level, to the border of Israel and Philistia, which was much lower.

Then the text says, at the end of verse 15, **“And David grew weary.”** David is unlikely to have become weary as a young man. It is more likely that he was much older now and prone to weariness. I think that is the main reason why some believe that David

was much older when these battles took place.

Verse 16 tells us, **“And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David.”** Apparently, while the battle was underway, one of the giant Philistines, a soldier named **Ishbi-benob**, saw David looking tired and decided to move in for an easy kill.

**“But,”** verse 17a tells us, **“Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him.”** We have heard of **Abishai** before. He was David's nephew, and his brothers were Joab and Asahel (see 2 Samuel 2:18). **Abishai** was also a commander in King David's army. We are not given any details about **Abishai's** victory over **Ishbi-benob**. All we know is that **Abishai attacked the Philistine and killed him. Abishai** did to **Ishbi-benob** what David did to Goliath many years earlier.

David's men did not like what they saw. David's brush with death was too close for comfort. So, his men got together and made a pact. Verse 17 goes on to say, **“Then David's men swore to him, ‘You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel.’ ”** As far as David's men were concerned, David was **the lamp of Israel**. If he were to die, Israel would be plunged into darkness. If **Ishbi-benob** had been successful, God's people would be without God's anointed on earth.

God always has a way of preserving his anointed. Think of Noah. God spared him and his family from a world-wide flood (Genesis 6:9-9:17). Or think of Isaac. God spared him from Abraham's knife cutting off his life by providing a substitutionary ram (Genesis 22:1-14). Or think of Moses. God spared him by providing an Egyptian adoptive mother (Exodus 2:1-10). In the same way, God spared David by enabling **Abishai** to slay **Ishbi-benob**.

Dale Ralph Davis gives the following illustration:

So much can seem to hinge on one person. Recently, a couple of our seminary families were involved—through no fault of

their own—in what could have been a fatal auto collision. All were spared. While giving thanks for this I thought of one of the students involved—an international student whose gifts, learning and leadership have been and will be so vital for the evangelical church in his country. What if his life had been snuffed out on our highways? A certain light would have gone out for the church in his native land.<sup>1</sup>

So, first, God destroys enemies by preserving his anointed.

## II. God Destroys Enemies by Honoring His Servants (21: 17, 18, 19, 21, 22)

Second, God destroys enemies by honoring his servants.

Second Samuel 21:15-22 gives an account of four battles. A different servant battled and defeated each one of the four giants. Verse 22 says, **“These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.”** David is given the credit for these victories because he was God’s anointed king on earth. But credit must also be given to each of the four servants.

In the first battle, Abishai defeated and killed Ishbi-benob, as we read in verse 17a, **“But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him.”**

In the second battle, Sibbecai defeated and killed Saph, as we read in verse 18, **“After this there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants.”**

In the third battle, Elhanon defeated and killed Goliath, as we read in verse 19, **“And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose**

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 276–277.

**spear was like a weaver's beam."** This verse has caused scholars to doubt that David killed Goliath, which was recorded back in 1 Samuel 17. Most likely, however, 2 Samuel 21:19 contains a scribal error. The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 20:5 tells us that Elhanan struck down Lahmi, who was the *brother* of Goliath, "And there was again war with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of Jair struck down Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam."

In the fourth battle, Jonathan defeated and killed a giant whose name is not given, as we read in verse 21, "**And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck him down.**" So, another one of David's nephews, Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimei, killed this giant.

Four of David's servants defeated and killed four giants. They are honored because we are not only told their names, but their names are given in full: **Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Sibbecai the Hushathite, Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, and Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother.** Even though all praise belongs to God, it is nevertheless right to honor these servants because they risked their lives to preserve God's anointed one.

We see an illustration of honor being given to God's servants in the New Testament. For example, when Paul concluded his letter to the Roman church, he greeted many people in the church by name. In Romans 16:3-4, he wrote, "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well." We don't know the details of what they did to risk their necks for Paul's life, but it is surely similar to David's servants who risked their necks for his life as they faced the giants.

It is right to honor God's servants for faithful service. Last month, we honored two of God's servants, one for almost four decades and the other for more than three decades of faithful service. Whether it was attending children in the nursery, teaching the

Bible in Sunday school, making refreshments, washing linens, or encouraging fellow saints, all these acts of service combine to advance God's kingdom on earth and defeat God's enemies.

So, God destroys enemies by preserving his anointed and by honoring his servants.

### III. God Destroys Enemies by Fulfilling His Promise (21:16, 18, 20, 22)

Third, God destroys enemies by fulfilling his promise.

The text states that the four Philistines were giants.

In verse 16, Ishbi-benob is **“one of the descendants of the giants.”**

In verse 18, Saph was **“one of the descendants of the giants.”**

In verse 20, the giant's name is not given but he is described as **“a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number, and he also was descended from the giants.”**

Goliath the Gittite is not specifically mentioned as being a giant, except in the summarizing statement in verse 22, **“These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.”**

The Hebrew word for **“giant”** is *raphah*. It is possible that Raphah may be a proper name so that these giants had an ancestor named Raphah. We remember that Goliath was nine feet tall (1 Samuel 17:4). We are not given the height of these four giants but we can assume that they, like Goliath, were monstrously tall.

The point of author in telling us about the demise of these four giants is that God is always faithful in fulfilling his promise.

Think of the people of God after they left Egypt. When they came close to the land which God had promised to give them, Moses sent twelve men, one from each tribe of Israel, to spy out



the land of Canaan and said to them, “Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land” (Numbers 13:17-20). Ten of the spies reported that they could not conquer the Promised Land because, as they said, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and *all the people that we saw in it are of great height*” (Numbers 13:32). But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, “The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey” (Numbers 14:6-8). God did bring the people of God into the Promised Land, although they wandered in the wilderness for forty years so that those who doubted the Lord died before they entered the Promised Land.

God always fulfills his promise to his people. If you have put your trust in Jesus Christ, God will bring you safely to your promised eternal home. Do not doubt God’s ability to preserve you safely until you reach glory.

So, God destroys enemies by preserving his anointed, by honoring his servants, and by fulfilling his promise.

#### **IV. God Destroys Enemies by Silencing His Enemies (21:20-22)**

And fourth, God destroys enemies by silencing his enemies. In the fourth battle, we read about the giant “**who had six**

**fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number” (21:20).** We read in verse 21 that **“he taunted Israel.”** That reminds us of Goliath who also defied Israel. By doing so, he also taunted and defied the God of Israel. But then we read in verse 22, **“These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.”**

Dale Ralph Davis summarizes the point by saying, “It doesn’t matter if it’s the celebrated David who knocks off Goliath or the relatively obscure Jonathan who cuts down Mr. Six-Digits; the point is the same: those who trash talk Yahweh and his people will be silenced.”<sup>2</sup>

The story is told of a farmer in a Midwestern state who had a strong disdain for “religious” things. As he plowed his field on Sunday morning, he would shake his fist at the church people who passed by on their way to worship.

October came and the farmer had his finest crop ever—the best in the entire county. When the harvest was complete, he placed an advertisement in the local paper which belittled the Christians for their faith in God. Near the end of his diatribe he wrote, “Faith in God must not mean much if someone like me can prosper.”

The response from the Christians in the community was quiet and polite. In the next edition of the town paper, a small ad appeared. It read simply, “God doesn’t always settle his accounts in October.”<sup>3</sup>

That reminds us of Proverbs 6:12-15, which states, “A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord; therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he

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<sup>2</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, 280.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1999/september/5963.html>.

will be broken beyond healing.”

So, God destroys enemies by preserving his anointed, by honoring his servants, by fulfilling his promise, and by silencing his enemies.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the account of David's war with the Philistines in 2 Samuel 21:15-22, let us look to Christ who has destroyed our enemy.

In his commentary on this chapter, Rick Phillips mentions that “the metaphor of ‘slaying giants’ is often used by Christians with respect to overcoming opposition or personal problems.” These giants may include fear, worry, anger, and procrastination. Or the giants may be difficult people or troubling circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

The problem with this approach is that it misses the point of the text. The text is about what God was doing in redemptive history. The text shows us how God destroyed enemies who were opposed to him and his redemptive work in the person of David.

The application to us is found in how the text points us to David's Greater Son, Jesus Christ. You see it is Christ who has defeated his—and our—enemy, Satan. By his death on the cross, Christ won the victory over Satan. Yes, it is true that Satan is now prowling around “like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). But, if you are in Christ, then for you, Satan is already defeated.

If you are not in Christ, that is, if you are not a Christian, the only way to avoid being devoured by Satan is to turn to Christ in faith and repentance. I invite you to do so today. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *2 Samuel*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 373.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
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