

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## Giants vs. Saints II Samuel 21:15-22

**Intro:** At 1<sup>st</sup> glance, it may seem that our text today is a real yawner. It looks like a small sampling of snips taken from various military reports. There are names, locations, armaments & a even a casualty list but no flowing narrative or riveting plot twists – or even a plot. There are brief flashes of suspense so the text does draw some interest but what does it mean? What sort of theological truth or spiritual principles can we hope to draw from this passage?

This composite of battle scenes fits quite nicely in the format of this last section of **II Sam**. I've mentioned that many see these last 4 chapters as not just a collection of fragments but as a carefully organized collection of fragments. We know this by the deliberate structure in which these "fragments" have been arranged by the writer. It begins with a story of judgment in Israel due to a previous sin of Saul against Gibeon. Then it gives a report on battles with the Philistines that highlight the exploits of some of David's heroic warriors. In **ch22**, we're given a song of David that is a **retrospective** look at **YAHWEH**'s dealings with Israel. **Ch23** offers the last words of David: **looking ahead** at **YAHWEH**'s work on behalf of David & Israel. We're then treated to further reports of Philistine battles & given a list of all David's hero warriors. Finally, ch24 tells of judgment in Israel yet again, but this time because of David's sin in taking a census. The apparent hodgepodge of these last 4 chapters actually constitutes a careful piece of literary work.

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**15-17-** Again, the opening phrase is very ambiguous if you're trying to nail down a time frame. Many commentators assume this happened towards the end of David's reign because of 15b; but, you don't have to be old to grow faint. This could well have occurred shortly after David conquered Jerusalem & made it his capitol. But, what's going on here?

David's in the thick of it, going toe-to-toe with the best Philistia had to offer but sadly, he failed to eat his Wheaties that day. He ran out of steam. There was a Philistine galoot with a bird's eye view that thought he could take him out.

Ishbi-benob cuts quite a figure: declared to be 1 of the sons of the giant (Goliath); he was a big dude & he packed a big wallop! Not only was his **spear** (or **spearhead**) quite hefty (**7#s**), but he also strapped on some new equipment for this battle (**sword, helmet, armor**). He's a formidable opponent & he's formidably armed & he **sees** David exhausted. We can guess his intention. He cinches up his belt, grips his spear & utters the Philistine equivalent of "I got dis!"

It looks like all hope is lost but then Abishai rushes in to help David, he takes on the big man with the fancy new weapons & then he takes him out. This must be why David kept Abishai around. 3Xs we've seen David have to put Abishai in his place because he's always so ready to take someone's head off but his special talent came in handy here. Ishbi-benob is assuming room temperature. But this was a close call & it really sobered up David's men (**17b**). They took it upon themselves to enact a new war policy & imposed it on David with a solemn oath. How could these men, subjects of David, presume to exert authority over David their king in this matter? Precisely because David was their king!

David was always a scrapper. He could make things happen on the battle field, he could win! But now, David was **YAHWEH's** appointed & anointed king over a united Israel – the stakes were now too high, the risk too great. He was now considered the **lamp of Israel** – a term that symbolizes both life & prosperity. If David's life were to be taken in battle, Israel would flounder in darkness & confusion. These men recognized that King David's life meant light for Israel & his death would be an incalculable disaster. To his men, David **is** Israel in a certain sense. What they now recognize as being their 1<sup>st</sup> **essential** duty: **preserving YAHWEH's king**! Clearly, **YAHWEH** could take care of His own king but they recognized that they had a responsibility to honor & protect **YAHWEH's** blessing to them. They weren't **doubting** **YAHWEH's** ability to protect David, they were acknowledging the value his life & reign meant to all of Israel.

How often in Scripture do we see God's great cosmic plan hinges on 1 person? If Isaac had died on that altar, there never would've been a covenant seed. If Moses' basket had floated down the river, Israel would've never been delivered from Egypt. If David had been run thru by Ishbi-benob, Israel would have plunged into disaster & ruin. Not 1 of us would have salvation had not the infant Jesus been delivered from the murderous hands

of Herod. Of course, the God of heaven was always in control & still is today. He's always up to the challenge of preserving His people & executing His plan. But why does it often seem to hang on 1 person? Faith! If there's no real possibility of failure, then how can you honestly say you are walking by faith?

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**18-22-** Our text deals with 4 specific battles between large Philistines & plucky Israelites: **Giants** vs. **Saints**. Just because I call them saints doesn't mean I know their true spiritual condition. But, since they're fighting for **YAHWEH**'s covenant people under **YAHWEH**'s covenant king, they are **YAHWEH**'s servants, at least in this area. Now, we're not given much of a player roster for the giants (**2 names**) but the roster for the saints is extensive. This military brief mentions each by his full name & it is only proper that they should because their heroic deeds were accomplished at great risk against these genetic mutation of the larger order (**Rephaim**). These men gambled their lives to accomplish these amazing feats. True, all the glory goes to **YAHWEH**; but, His instruments should still at least receive some honorable mention.

Paul does this quite often in the NT. He's always mentioning some person or persons who have assisted him greatly during a time of need: **Priscilla & Aquila**, Epaphras, Onesiphorus, Titus, Timothy; even Demus at 1 time. The Lord Himself even honored His disciples at times, commending them for sticking with Him thru all His trials (**Lk 22:28**). The point is: it's only **proper to honor** the Lord's servants. That's not the goal of service but it is still right.

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There's another point that needs to be addressed: what was **accomplished** in all these battles? Nothing less than the **fulfillment of YAHWEH's promise**! All 4 of these enemy combatants are said to be descendents of **the giant (raphah)** which means a lot more than being Goliath's kid – they were offspring of the Rephaim: a clan that was notorious for their humongous size. Og, king of Bashan was 1 & his bed was 14' X 6' – that's a big dude! But it wasn't just their size; there was something down right sinister about the Rephaim. Are these 4 the last of their kind? If so, their deaths at the hands of David's men merely reinforces the reliability **YAHWEH's** old promise (**Gen 15:18-21**).

Whether these 4 were Rephaim or not, their deaths mean victory over the Philistines. Again, we don't know exactly when this all occurred in David's

but it was clearly **after** David took down Goliath. Now, the rest of the Philistine champions have bit the dust & **YAHWEH** has done what He promised in **II Sam 3:18**. What Saul's reign failed to do, David's did (by **YAHWEH's** power). Thus, a brief battle report declares to us that what God promises at the 1<sup>st</sup>, He **will** bring about at the last. This shows us that **YAHWEH** was with David here as He was when David faced Goliath. All the years & all the Philistines have not changed the word of **YAHWEH's** mouth or the strength of His hand! We've seen this many times before. Why are we often reminded of this truth? Because we're so often in **doubt** of this clear, plain truth!

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**20-21**- This last giant was unusually impressive: he was so big, he had room for extra fingers & toes! A physical trait like that is something people tend to notice – at least those that can count. Ironically, tho this bruiser's extremities are interesting, they really don't count. What I mean is: it's not his **anatomy** that matters, it's his **attitude**. The problems not with his hands or his feet – it's with his **mouth**; not with **6 of 1 & a half dozen of another** but with his **1 tongue**. He should have known better. For being such a large fellow, he surely wasn't very smart because **he defied Israel** (21a).

Where have we heard this before? The Hebrew verb **harap** = **to reproach, taunt, blaspheme, defy**. This verb appears multiple times in I Sam 17 in reference to Goliath's verbal contempt of Israel & her God. We all know what happened to Goliath – he lost his head. This big lummoX did the same thing (**defied Israel; thus, defied Israel's God**) & met the same fate – we don't know if he lost his head but we do know he lost his voice! The point is clear: those who insist on defying God & His people will eventually be **silenced**. You don't really expect a military report to teach eschatology but this 1 does. You don't expect a battle report to teach about last things but that's what this guy's 24 cold, dead appendages actually do. His death is just another reminder of what is to come, another installment of what it will be like at the end of all things. This unnamed giant's lifeless tongue actually testifies to God's people that in the end, **all our enemies will be silenced**. (**Isa 54:17**). Let this giant encourage you. You can believe his witness. Hey, Rephaim never lie – at least not the dead ones.

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**22**- There are 2 final points I want to draw out of this last verse & both deal with investment. **1<sup>st</sup>**) we should recognize that David is conquering enemies now so it will be better for Solomon in the future. David spent a lot of time

fighting during his reign. Sure, it was necessary for Israel's survival but it was also an investment in Israel's future. Solomon will spend almost no time fighting battles – he'll spend all his time building up his kingdom & his nation. David's investment of skill, risk & blood paid off in his day but it paid even greater dividends in Solomon's day.

In our own spiritual walks, we must never allow failure to be an option. If we are going thru difficult times or even horrible times, we must realize it is a spiritual battle that we must see thru to the end. We cannot give up or give in. Victory thru the power & presence of God's Holy Spirit must be our only option & goal. Yes, it will be difficult but it will also be of great benefit. Not only will it be good for us now but it will pass on something important to the next generation of believers. Tho the fight is hard, the benefits of victory are incalculable, as is the cost of failure.

**2<sup>nd</sup>**) Note that it says the giants fell *by the hand of David*... Where? I didn't see David cleaving any heads here. But there is a real sense in which David played a role in these victories by his example, his guidance & his influence. When Goliath defied Israel as the Philistine's champion, there was no Israelite warrior who was willing to take him up on his challenge. They were all as scared as their king, Saul. Then this little punk kid showed up with his sling & taught them all how to take out a giant. Now, his cousin does it, his nephew... Apparently they had the capacity to take the fight to the enemy; it seems all they needed was a good example to follow & an opportunity to serve.

In the Christian life, we have this same blessing of a good example in the life of Jesus Christ. It was in the wilderness that He taught us that we can successfully resist even the greatest temptations Satan has to offer with only the Word of God. Jesus shot down every 1 of Satan's temptations simply by referencing truths from **Deut 6 & 8**! He **knew** the Word & He **used** the Word. Jesus also showed us what it looks like to walk in the power of the Spirit. He didn't do all those miracles & wondrous works just because He was God but because He was filled, empowered & guided by the Holy Spirit. Why don't we experience something similar today? It is probably because we're still stumbling over the 1<sup>st</sup> example. Jesus is our good example of faith, trust, sacrifice & unconditional love. Do we **see** the value of His exemplary life? Do we desire to follow in His footsteps? Are we willing to place our lives, reputations at risk in order to see His will accomplished in

our lives, our church, our community & our world?

He's given us the perfect example – are we willing to receive it; trust it; live it? We can but we must know His Word & we must be filled with His Spirit. There is no other way...😊