

Exegetical Notes – 2 Samuel 23:8-39

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2 Samuel 23:8-39

(2 Samuel 21:1-24:25 forms an appendix to the book of 2 Samuel. It records episodes which happened during the years about which the book speaks but which were not put in chronological order in the book of Samuel. However, this section has always been part of the Biblical book of Samuel and we have no idea why they were not included in the chronological telling of the story.)

Verse 8a

⁸ These are the names of David's mighty warriors:

- In Hebrew the sentence begins, “These are the names of David’s mighty men.” There are no women’s names mentioned in the list of 37 names which follow. The word was changed by the translators of the new NIV because it was thought to be unfair to women by the enlightened members of our culture. This change to be “inclusive” is wrong. The fact is that there are 37 men listed here and they were known as David’s Mighty MEN. We should not change the word of God to suit us.
- Following is the list of the names of 37 men who assisted David to become king and were part of God’s plan to do so. A similar list is found in 1 Chronicles 11:11-41.

Verses 8b-12

Josheb-Basshebeth, a Takhemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.

9 Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty warriors, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the Israelites retreated,¹⁰ but Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword.

The Lord brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.

¹¹ Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. ¹² But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory.

- This division of David's army was structured. It consisted of 30 active members (see verse 13). And it was divided into three groups. Each of these sub-groups had its own commander. These three are in addition to the 30. So now, the total number in the group is 33. The active number of the group was officially kept at 30. But as some left the group others were added. Thus a total of 37 names are mentioned here (see verse 39). 1 Chronicles 11:11-41 contains a similar list but it is expanded by 16 additional names.
- Josheb-Basshebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah, were each a leader of one group of 10. The Hebrew of this passage is somewhat confusing. It could mean that these three formed a separate group of three men. So there would have been only two divisions of the group. The first consisted of three men and the second of 30 men. However, 1 Chronicles seems to imply that these three were the chief leaders of the entire group and that each commanded a group of ten others.
- Of the three, Josheb-Basshebeth was the first in command. Under him was Eleazar. Under him was Shammah. Each of these men had single-handedly defeated a large number of Israel's enemies. These accounts are additional to the story. We cannot relate them to events already told in 1 and 2 Samuel.

Verses 13-17

¹³ During harvest time, three of the thirty chief warriors came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴ At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. ¹⁵ David longed for water and said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" ¹⁶ So the three mighty warriors broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. ¹⁷ "Far be it from me, LORD, to

*do this!" he said. "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?"
And David would not drink it.*

Such were the exploits of the three mighty warriors.

- At harvest time in some particular year, three of the 30, as the 3 mentioned above (Josheb-Basshebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah) are not counted as part of the 30, went to where David was held up. The description of the place where David was suggests that this was early in his rise to power when he was fleeing from King Saul.
- David mentioned to them that he longed for a drink of water from the well at the gate of Bethlehem, but the Philistines held the city of Bethlehem.
- The three men risked their lives to bring David a drink of water from the well at Bethlehem. This shows how devoted they were to David.
- But when they returned with the water, David would not drink it. He poured it out on the ground. He said that he could not drink it because it was the "blood" of those who risked their lives to get it. He did not want the men who followed him to take such chances for him. David thinks this shows his devotion to them.
- The final line, "Such were the exploits of the three..." suggests that it may have been the 3 mentioned in verses 8-12 (Josheb-Basshebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah) who did this but we cannot be sure.

Verses 18-19

¹⁸ Abishai the brother of Joab son of Zeruiah was chief of the Three. He raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed, and so he became as famous as the Three. ¹⁹ Was he not held in greater honor than the Three? He became their commander, even though he was not included among them.

- Abishai, the brother of Joab, was over the 3. He was not one of the 3 and he was not greater than the 3. But he was the general over them. The army was structured. There was a chain of command.

Verses 20-23

²⁰ Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, performed great exploits. He struck down Moab's two mightiest warriors. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. ²¹ And he struck down a huge Egyptian. Although the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, Benaiah went against him with a club. He snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. ²² Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he too was as

famous as the three mighty warriors. ²³ *He was held in greater honor than any of the Thirty, but he was not included among the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.*

- Benaiah was not one of the 3 but his exploits were as well-known as were those of the 3. He was put in charge of David's bodyguard.

Verses 24-39

²⁴ *Among the Thirty were:*

Asahel the brother of Joab,

Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem,

²⁵ *Shammah the Harodite,*

Elika the Harodite,

²⁶ *Helez the Paltite,*

Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa,

²⁷ *Abiezer from Anathoth,*

Sibbekai the Hushathite,

²⁸ *Zalmon the Aohite,*

Maharai the Netophathite,

²⁹ *Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite,*

Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin,

³⁰ *Benaiah the Pirathonite,*

Hiddai from the ravines of Gaash,

³¹ *Abi-Albon the Arbathite,*

Azmaveth the Barhumite,

³² *Elijah the Shaalbonite,*

the sons of Jashen,

Jonathan ³³ son of Shammah the Hararite,

Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite,

³⁴ *Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Maakathite,*

Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite,

³⁵ *Hezro the Carmelite,*

Paarai the Arbite,

³⁶ *Igal son of Nathan from Zobah,*

the son of Hagri,

³⁷ *Zelek the Ammonite,*

Naharai the Beerothite, the armor-bearer of Joab son of Zeruiah,

³⁸ *Ira the Ithrite,*

Gareb the Ithrite

³⁹ and Uriah the Hittite.

There were thirty-seven in all.

- Here is a list of the names of the men who were, from time to time, among the 30.
- There are 37 names given here because, from time to time, the composition of the group changed.

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