

## Rizpah

one of Saul's concubines

### *2 Sam. 21:1-14*

**21:1** Then there was a famine in the days of **David** three years, year after year; and **David** enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites. . .

**21:5** And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, **21:6** Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose. And the king said, I will give them. **21:7** But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD'S oath that was between them, between **David** and Jonathan the son of Saul. **21:8** But the king took the two sons of **Rizpah** the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five [adopted] sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite: **21:9** And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites . . .

**21:10** And **Rizpah** the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. **21:11** And it was told **David** what **Rizpah** the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.

#### lowly concubine - loyal mother

Other than David and Moses, King Saul is named more than anyone else in the Old Testament. Yet, Rizpah, one of Saul's concubines is little known. This is not surprising, of course, since she was only a concubine. Even so, she impacted David by her devotion to her sons who were killed to atone for her master's sins.

**21:12** And **David** went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: **21:13** And he brought up from thence the bones of

Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. **21:14** And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land.

## negatives

This is a sad story! Rizpah's two sons were hanged and all she could do about it was to try to prevent their exposed bodies from being eaten by vultures. Sadder still perhaps is the background of it all. She had been Saul's concubine, with a status not much better than that of a slave, at least until her two sons were born. After that she may have enjoyed some minor prestige for a time, but after Saul died and David came to power (2:4), Abner may have forced her into a scandalous relationship (3:7). *(Caution: this is unclear.)*

Rizpah was undoubtedly a beautiful woman and somewhat younger than Saul's two daughters, Merab and Michal. (The fact that her two sons were killed with their five sons implies this.) She must have been very attractive as a young woman and still attractive to Abner decades later (3:7). Her beauty did not make her life an easy one, however.

As for King David killing her two sons and five of Saul's grandsons to atone for Saul's sins, this does not seem right. The bloodshed did not start with David, however.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

<b>A</b>	( ) Rizpah had an unhappy life.
A-1	( ) Her two sons were killed.
A-2	( ) Nothing is said about her faith.
A-3	( ) She was the concubine of an evil king.
A-4	( ) She probably did not have much freedom.
A-5	( ) She committed fornication with Abner (3:7-11).
A-6	( ) 21:10 shows that she hated David for what he did.
A-7	( ) There is nothing good to be learned from her (3:7, 21:10).
<b>B</b>	( ) David had an unpleasant task.
B-1	( ) He had to kill innocent people.
B-2	( ) He had to kill Jews to please Gentiles.
B-3	( ) It is difficult to deal with sin and still be kind.
B-4	( ) He was unable to spare Mephibosheth (21:7-8).
B-5	( ) David was probably glad to kill some of Saul's family.

## positives

Was David as bad as he seems? No! It was the sin of Saul against the Gibeonites that was especially wicked. He broke the covenant with Gibeon and tried to exterminate them (21:5). So God allowed the Gibeonites to demand that a substantial part of Saul's family be cut off as well. Thus the chapter is not about David killing seven innocent relatives of Saul, his former rival, though it appears that way to some at first. According to 21:1, the seven may have taken part in the slaughter of the Gibeonites.

As for Rizpah, did her actions involve more than the natural care of a mother for her children? We do not know for sure, but many ancient Israelites believed in the physical resurrection of the body. (*This is clearly seen in Job 19:25-27, Daniel 12:2, John 11:23-25, and many other passages.*) So the belief in resurrection may be behind what Rizpah did in 21:10. Likewise, the same was probably true regarding David's efforts to properly bury Saul and Jonathan in response to what she had done.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

<b>C</b>	( ) Rizpah was not an evil woman.
C-1	( ) She showed loyalty and love toward her sons.
C-2	( ) She may have been forced to become Saul's concubine.
C-3	( ) It would have been difficult for her to reject Abner (3:7-8).
C-4	( ) She may have understood the need to atone for Saul's sin.
C-5	( ) David respected her for what she did for her sons (21:10-13).
C-6	( ) 21:10-11 proves that she believed in physical resurrection.
C-7	( ) She probably publicly opposed Saul's sinful behavior.
<b>D</b>	( ) David was not an evil man.
D-1	( ) He sought the Lord (21:1).
D-2	( ) Saul's sin had to be atoned for (21:3).
D-3	( ) Saul caused the famine; David did not (21:1).
D-4	( ) David gave Saul and the others proper burials.
D-5	( ) God answered those who prayed for the land (21:14).

## worksheet answers

There are more obviously incorrect lines on the worksheets of this study than in most others. First, regarding Rizpah, there are no verses which show that she hated David (A-6), and there are good things to be learned from her (A-7). Though we do not know if she believed in the resurrection of the body or not (C-6), she was loyal to her family, and that is usually a good thing. She may have been overly submissive to Saul, however, by not opposing his sin (C-7).

As for Rizpah and Abner in 3:7-12, we do not know what really happened. They may have committed fornication (A-5), since she had not been formally given to him as a wife. Perhaps they even committed adultery, if she had previously been taken as Ishbosheth's concubine. On the other hand, Ishbosheth's accusation may have been totally false. Regardless, it would have been difficult for her to oppose Saul (C-2, C-7) or Abner (A-4, C-3).

Finally, regarding David, there is no reason to say that he enjoyed killing members of Saul's family (B-5). Moreover, the seven that he killed were probably not innocent (B-1). So he did not kill them just to please the Gibeonites (B-2). David saved Mephibosheth, one of Jonathan's son (B-4). *(There were two men named Mephibosheth.)*

## So what?

The biggest negative in the passage was not the death of Rizpah's sons. Nor was it the death of the five sons of Saul's daughters, which was equally as sad. The cause of it all was the sin of Saul and his bloodthirsty house against the Gibeonites. So the executions were a matter of justice before the Lord (21:6). And even Rizpah and those who were killed would have had some understanding of this (C-4). Perhaps there was repentance as well, though we do not know for sure.

It is vital to realize that this was not like human sacrifice practiced by the ancient Maya peoples of Central America for centuries. Rather, it was a special one-time incident in the history of Israel because of Saul's great sin. Moreover, despite the death and gloom of this tragic scene, the justice and goodness of David still shines through. He kept his covenant with Jonathan and protected his son (21:7).

Above all, respect was shown for the human body, even dead bodies. And this is where Rizpah's actions in 21:10-11 shine through as well as David's in 21:12-14. The body should be treated with dignity, because it will be resurrected someday. Rizpah may have known this (C-6), but even if she did not, we do. *(See First Corinthians chapter 15.)*

## applications

*Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.*

---

---

---

---

---