

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

WHO WAS RIZPAH?

2 SAMUEL 3:6-11 • 21:1-14



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

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REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

WHO WAS RIZPAH?

Sermon

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www.ReasonTogether.Church

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Our invitation is simple: Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

Whether this is your first time with us or you have been here from the beginning, we are grateful that God has brought us together today.

Before we open the Scriptures, let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for the privilege of gathering around Your Word. Give comfort to those who grieve. Give courage to those who feel powerless. Give humility to those who possess authority. Help us see the people whom others overlook. Above all, lead every heart to Jesus Christ, who entered death and rose in victory. We ask for wisdom and compassion, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Our primary passage is 2 Samuel 21:1-14.

We will begin by reading verses 10 and 11:

“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. And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.”

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Guests are not expected to give. Members of another church should normally give through their home church. If God leads you to support this ministry, a giving box is available in the back.

If you are visiting, we invite you to complete a guest card with only your first name and email address. After the service, please join us in the Reason Together Café, where COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere. Conversations have free refills.

Parents may also ask about the Keiki Kids Center, and anyone who wants to talk or pray after the service is welcome to meet with us in the Pastor’s Study on the second floor.

Now let us open our Bibles and reason together about Rizpah.

There are people in the Bible whose names almost everyone knows.

Abraham.

Moses.

David.

Peter.

Paul.

Then there are people whose names appear only briefly.

They do not command armies.

They do not occupy thrones.

They do not write books of the Bible.

They do not deliver recorded sermons.

Sometimes Scripture gives us only a few verses about them.

But occasionally one of those nearly forgotten people does something so faithful that even a king must respond.

Her name was Rizpah.

The Bible never records a single word that she spoke.

Yet the Bible tells us that David heard what she had done.

Who was Rizpah?

Before she became the woman upon the rock, she was a woman caught between powerful men.

Her first appearance is in 2 Samuel 3.

Saul was dead.

David ruled in Judah, while Saul's son Ishbosheth held a weakening kingdom in the north.

Abner commanded Saul's former army and possessed more practical power than Ishbosheth did.

Second Samuel 3:7 says, "And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and Ishbosheth said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine?"

The accusation was explosive.

In the ancient royal world, taking a dead king's concubine could be interpreted as claiming the dead king's authority.

Ishbosheth was not asking only about private immorality.

He was questioning Abner's loyalty and perhaps accusing him of reaching for the throne.

The Bible never tells us whether the accusation was true.

It tells us that Abner became furious.

He announced that he would transfer his support to David.

Men argued.

Kingdoms shifted.

Power changed hands.

And Rizpah's name stood in the middle of their struggle.

We hear Ishbosheth.

We hear Abner.

We never hear Rizpah.

Before Rizpah was the woman on the rock, she was the woman powerful men argued over.

She had belonged to Saul's royal household, but she was not a queen.

A concubine possessed a recognized relationship to the king without the full security and authority of a wife of highest rank.

When Saul died, whatever protection his household had given her became uncertain.

She was identified through her relationship to men with power, while possessing little public power of her own.

But a person does not become unimportant merely because powerful people treat that person as secondary.

God knew her name.

God knew her father's name.

God knew the names of her sons.

And Scripture preserved what she did when others might have allowed her grief to disappear.

Years passed.

David became king over all Israel.

Abner and Ishbosheth were dead.

Saul's kingdom was gone.

But something from Saul's reign remained unresolved.

Second Samuel 21 begins, "Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year."

The suffering continued through one year.

Then another.

Then another.

The text says, "and David inquired of the LORD."

We are not told why David waited until the third year.

We should also never assume that every drought, illness or disaster can be traced to one particular sin.

Job's friends made terrible mistakes because they believed they could explain suffering too easily.

In this specific case, however, God revealed a specific cause.

The Lord answered, "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites."

The Gibeonites had entered Israel's history in Joshua 9.

They deceived Israel's leaders concerning where they lived.

The leaders failed to seek counsel from the Lord before making an agreement.

Nevertheless, Israel swore an oath to let the Gibeonites live.

The oath had been made in the name of the Lord.

Their deception did not give Israel permission to become faithless.

Generations later, Saul attempted to destroy them.

Second Samuel says he did it "in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah."

Saul may have called his action zeal.

God called it bloodguilt.

Religious enthusiasm does not transform disobedience into obedience.

Patriotism does not make a broken promise holy.

Good intentions do not cleanse innocent blood.

The separate account of Saul's attack is not preserved for us.

But 1 Samuel 22 shows that Saul was capable of terrible violence when he believed his position or national interest was threatened.

He ordered the priests of Nob to be killed.

Men, women, children and animals were struck with the sword.

The Bible does not permit us to turn Saul's zeal into a virtue when God's covenant stood in its way.

Saul was dead, but the consequences of his actions remained.

Time had passed, but time had not converted wrong into right.

The people may have stopped discussing what happened to the Gibeonites.

God had not forgotten.

There is a difference between inheriting guilt and inheriting consequences.

We are not automatically personally guilty for everything done before we were born.

Yet we may inherit wounds, debts and broken relationships that responsible leadership must address.

David did not create Saul's bloodguilt.

David was now the king responsible to deal with it.

That distinction matters.

There are two wrong ways to respond to an inherited problem.

One wrong response is to accept personal guilt for an act we did not commit.

The other wrong response is to say, "I did not cause it, so I have no responsibility to address it."

David could truthfully say that he did not order Saul's campaign against the Gibeonites.

He could not truthfully say that their suffering was none of his concern.

He now held the office from which repair could begin.

This is one of the burdens of leadership.

Sometimes a leader receives a problem created by someone else.

A new pastor may inherit a wounded congregation.

A new employer may inherit promises made by a former manager.

A parent may discover that pain has been carried quietly through generations.

We do not heal those wounds by pretending that we personally committed every past wrong.

We also do not heal them by refusing to listen because the wrong came before us.

David inquired of the Lord.

Then he went to the people Saul had harmed.

He called the Gibeonites and asked, "What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD?"

The word translated atonement here concerns making satisfaction or removing the offense.

The Gibeonites said they did not want silver or gold.

They requested seven men from Saul's descendants.

They said, "Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD."

We must observe the language carefully.

God identified the cause of the famine.

The Gibeonites proposed this remedy.

David agreed and selected the men.

The passage does not say that God directly commanded David to execute these particular seven men.

It also does not tell us every fact concerning their relationship to Saul's campaign.

We should not pretend the difficult questions are easy.

Deuteronomy 24:16 says, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers."

Were these men participants in Saul's bloody house?

Did ancient royal responsibility include facts the narrator assumes but does not explain?

Was David acting only for covenant justice, or did the removal of Saul's male descendants also serve a political purpose?

The text does not answer every question we would ask.

It leaves us standing in a morally painful scene.

That discomfort is part of faithful reading.

We often want the Bible to resolve every tension in one sentence.

We want a clear label under every person.

Hero.

Villain.

Innocent.

Guilty.

But the historical books frequently show us broken people making consequential decisions in a broken world.

God's judgment upon Saul's bloodguilt is clear.

The Gibeonites' suffering is real.

David's duty to respond is real.

The agony of seven families is also real.

We do not honor one truth by erasing another.

The Gibeonites must not be forgotten simply because their claim makes us uncomfortable.

Rizpah's sons must not be reduced to objects simply because their deaths were included in a national settlement.

The Bible is honest enough to place both wounds in the same chapter.

David spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, because of the oath between David and Jonathan.

That was covenant faithfulness.

But another man named Mephibosheth was not spared.

He was Saul's son by Rizpah.

David took Rizpah's two sons, Armoni and Mephibosheth, along with five other descendants of Saul.

The KJV identifies the five as sons of Michal whom she brought up for Adriel.

First Samuel identifies Merab as Adriel's wife, and 2 Samuel 6 says Michal had no child.

Several ancient witnesses therefore read Merab here.

That textual question deserves honest study, but it does not change what happened to Rizpah.

Both of her sons were selected.

The seven were delivered to the Gibeonites.

They were put to death together at the beginning of barley harvest.

Their bodies were left publicly exposed.

Public exposure carried meaning in the ancient world.

It displayed defeat.

It magnified shame.

It warned anyone who looked that power had acted against these men.

The Philistines had once displayed the bodies of Saul and his sons at Bethshan.

The men of Jabeshgilead risked their lives to recover them.

Now descendants of Saul were again displayed before the public.

The shame that had fallen upon Saul's body returned to his house.

And once again, courageous action would be required before the dead received honor.

Kings made agreements.

Kings broke agreements.

Kings negotiated payment.

But mothers carried the grief.

Now Rizpah acts.

Verse 10 says she "took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock."

Sackcloth was the fabric of mourning.

The rock became the place of her sorrow.

The vigil began at the opening of barley harvest, during the dry season, and continued until water fell from heaven.

Scripture does not tell us the exact number of weeks or months.

We should not turn an estimate into a Biblical fact.

It tells us enough.

This was not one terrible afternoon.

This was prolonged grief.

Day after day, birds of prey descended.

Night after night, animals approached.

Rizpah drove them away.

When morning came, Rizpah was there.

When the heat settled upon the rock, Rizpah was there.

When shadows lengthened, Rizpah was there.

When darkness concealed the animals until they came close, Rizpah was there.

When one day became another, Rizpah remained.

People sometimes speak about strong women in the Bible as though strength must always be attractive and comfortable.

Rizpah's strength was not comfortable.

It was sackcloth upon stone.

It was exhaustion beneath an open sky.

It was grief that had no power to reverse the event.

She could not stop the execution.

She could not bring her sons back.

She could not remove the bodies without authority.

She could not command the king to listen.

She could protect what remained.

Rizpah could not reverse what had happened, but she would not permit what remained to be dishonored.

Deuteronomy 21 required an executed body to be buried before nightfall.

These bodies remained exposed far longer.

We are not told whether Rizpah consciously framed her vigil as a legal protest.

The Bible does not record her explanation.

We know that her action was mourning.

We know that it was protection.

We know that it was devotion.

And whatever she intended, her presence made the unfinished wrong impossible to ignore.

Some love can repair what has broken.

Some love can return what has been taken.

Rizpah's love could do neither.

Sometimes love has no miracle to perform.

Sometimes love remains.

There are hospital rooms where no sentence can remove the fear.

There are gravesides where no explanation can lessen the absence.

There are parents who cannot make an adult child choose wisely.

There are families who cannot recover the years already lost.

Faithfulness is not always measured by whether we produced the outcome we wanted.

Sometimes faithfulness means that we refuse to abandon a person in pain.

Sometimes ministry is presence.

Rizpah remained.

We should be careful with that application.

Rizpah's vigil does not mean every grieving person must demonstrate the same physical endurance.

Some grief is visible.

Some grief occurs behind a closed door.

Some people can organize a memorial, call officials and care for everyone around them.

Others struggle to rise from bed.

The Bible does not shame the person whose grief looks different from Rizpah's.

It shows us that her grief was not meaningless merely because she could not undo the loss.

Tears are not evidence that faith has failed.

Jesus stood outside the tomb of Lazarus knowing that resurrection was moments away.

Still, "Jesus wept."

Faith does not require us to call death good.

Faith allows us to grieve in the presence of the God who will finally defeat it.

Then comes one of the quietest and most powerful sentences in the account.

Verse 11 says, "And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done."

We do not know who carried the report.

We do not know how many people passed the rock before someone spoke to the king.

We do not know what Rizpah said.

Scripture records what she did.

David did not hear what Rizpah said.

David heard what Rizpah did.

She had no seat in the council.

She had no official title.

She had no army.

She apparently had no audience with David.

Her faithful action traveled where her voice may never have been permitted to go.

This does not mean every ruler will respond to faithful witness.

The Bible gives us no formula by which persistence controls another person.

Our responsibility is faithfulness.

The outcome remains in God's hands.

In this account, David responded.

He did more than order the seven bodies removed.

He went to Jabeshgilead for the bones of Saul and Jonathan.

Years earlier, the men of Jabeshgilead had risked their lives to recover those bodies from the Philistines.

Now David brought Saul and Jonathan home.

He gathered the remains of the seven who had been executed.

Saul's fractured house was reunited in burial.

They were placed in the sepulchre of Kish, Saul's father.

Rizpah could not give her sons life.

She helped ensure that they were given dignity.

David's response also joined several unfinished stories.

He remembered the courage of Jabeshgilead.

He remembered Saul, the king who had once hunted him.

He remembered Jonathan, the friend he loved.

He remembered the seven whose bodies remained exposed.

He did not bury the seven in an anonymous field.

He placed them in the family sepulchre of Kish.

Burial declared that they belonged to a family.

They possessed names.

They possessed history.

They were more than the seven requested in a negotiation.

This is why Christians treat the body with honor.

The body is not the whole person, and death separates the spirit from the body.

Yet the body is not meaningless refuse.

God created human beings as embodied persons.

Jesus took a real human body.

He died in that body.

He rose bodily from the grave.

We bury the dead with dignity because the person mattered and because resurrection remains in God's promise.

Her vigil did not erase the tragedy.

Her sons remained dead.

Biblical hope never asks us to pretend that loss did not happen.

The result on that day was burial, honor and closure.

Then verse 14 says, “And after that God was intreated for the land.”

Notice the order.

The famine’s cause was revealed.

The Gibeonites’ demand was satisfied.

The seven men were executed.

Rizpah kept watch.

David heard.

The remains were gathered.

The dead were buried.

After that, God was intreated for the land.

We must not say that Rizpah earned the rain.

We must not say her grief placed God under obligation.

We can say that the account was not finished when the seven died.

Something remained undone until the dead were treated with honor.

This does not mean burial purchased the rain.

It means the narrator refuses to close the account at the point where vengeance was completed.

The story moves beyond payment to burial.

It moves beyond the demand of the injured to the dignity of the dead.

It moves beyond a king’s agreement to a mother’s endurance.

Then it moves beyond human action to God’s response.

Biblical justice is not satisfied with making suffering change sides.

It seeks truth concerning the original wrong.

It seeks responsibility from those who possess authority.

And it refuses to forget that every person in the account bears the image of God.

God would not permit Israel to forget the Gibeonites whom Saul had harmed.

Rizpah would not permit David to forget the sons who had died.

The dignity of one wounded people did not require the permanent degradation of another.

That truth speaks to the church.

We must not use people as symbols and then forget they are human beings.

We must not reduce the dead to statistics.

We must not celebrate a public result while ignoring the private grief it produced.

Godly leaders must listen beyond the palace.

David eventually noticed suffering that his decision had placed upon a rock.

Every leader needs the humility to hear what the overlooked are doing and ask what remains unfinished.

Rizpah also speaks to those who believe their service is invisible.

God saw every day upon that rock.

He saw every bird she drove away.

He saw every fearful night.

He saw the love behind her endurance.

The king eventually heard, but God had never stopped seeing.

Rizpah's story, however, cannot end our message.

She could guard the dead, but she could not defeat death.

She could preserve her sons' remains, but she could not restore their lives.

She could move an earthly king, but she could not empty a grave.

For that, we must look to Jesus Christ.

Jesus was also publicly exposed.

Galatians says, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

He did not die for His own sin.

He willingly bore ours.

No ruler forced upon Him a debt that belonged to His father.

Jesus said, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again."

Women remained near His cross when others had scattered.

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for His body.

Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloes.

They removed Jesus from public shame and placed Him in a new tomb.

Mary Magdalene later came to the place of burial while it was still dark.

She expected to grieve beside the dead.

Instead, she heard the risen Christ call her name.

Rizpah shows us what faithful human love will do beside the dead.

Jesus Christ reveals what divine love has done about death itself.

Rizpah waited until rain fell from heaven.

The disciples waited until the first day of the week.

Then the stone was rolled away.

The tomb was empty.

Jesus Christ was alive.

That is the hope we offer to the grieving.

Christian hope does not tell you that death is harmless.

It tells you that death will not have the final word.

Christian hope does not command you to stop loving the person you lost.

It points you to the Savior who conquered the grave.

Christian hope does not depend upon our ability to remain strong every day and every night.

It rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you understand Rizpah's helplessness.

You cannot undo what you have done.

You cannot remove your own guilt.

You cannot give yourself eternal life.

Jesus can save you.

The Bible says that all have sinned.

The wages of sin is death.

But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

He was buried.

He rose again.

Salvation is not earned by remaining upon a rock.

It is not earned by enduring enough sorrow.

It is not earned by religious works.

It is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you have never trusted Christ, you may call upon Him today.

Admit that you are a sinner.

Believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again.

Receive Him as Savior and Lord.

The promise of Scripture is clear: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for preserving the story of Rizpah. Thank You for seeing people whom the world overlooks and hearing grief that never reaches a throne. Comfort those who mourn.

Strengthen parents who are praying for their children. Teach us to remain with people when we cannot repair what has happened. Give our leaders humility to notice unfinished wrongs and courage to act. Most of all, thank You for Jesus Christ, who willingly bore our sin, entered death and rose again. Save every person who turns to Him in faith. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

If you still have questions, please do not leave alone with them.

Meet with us in the Pastor's Study after the service. Let us open the Bible together and talk honestly.

To the grieving person, remember that tears are not a failure of faith.

Rizpah's sackcloth was not condemned.

The shortest verse in the Bible tells us, "Jesus wept."

To the person who feels powerless, remember that faithfulness does not require a title before it matters.

You may not control the result.

You can honor God in what remains within your reach.

To the parent carrying sorrow for a child, remember that you cannot make every decision for another person.

You can pray.

You can love.

You can speak truth.

You can refuse to treat that life as disposable.

To every leader, remember the rock outside the palace.

Ask whose suffering has not reached your meeting.

Ask what remains unfinished.

Ask whether people have been treated as problems to solve rather than lives to honor.

And to every Christian, remember the difference between Rizpah's vigil and Christ's victory.

Rizpah remained beside the dead.

Jesus entered death and came out alive.

Because He lives, those who trust Him possess a hope no grave can destroy.

The resurrection also changes how the church stands beside grief today.

We do not need to rush mourners past their sorrow.

We do not need to fill every silence with an explanation.

We do not need to say, "Everything happens for a reason," as though a familiar sentence could explain every loss.

We can sit upon the rock with them.

We can bring a meal.

We can remember a name after everyone else has returned to normal routines.

We can speak the promises of Christ without using those promises to silence tears.

We can say that death is an enemy and that Christ has defeated it.

We can say that absence hurts and that resurrection is coming.

We can remain because Jesus has promised never to leave nor forsake His people.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

WHO WAS RIZPAH?

Biblical Commentary

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

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Primary passages: 2 Samuel 3:6-11; 2 Samuel 21:1-14

Commentary Purpose

Rizpah appears in two episodes separated by years of conflict and political change. In the first, powerful men argue over an accusation involving her. In the second, her own sustained action becomes impossible for the king to ignore. Reading the passages together prevents Rizpah from being reduced to a single dramatic image. She was a member of Saul's household, a mother, a politically vulnerable woman and the person whose vigil became the turning point in the burial of Saul's house.

Second Samuel 21 is among the most morally difficult narratives in the books of Samuel. It joins divine judgment for Saul's bloodguilt with a humanly negotiated execution of seven descendants. It also places an extraordinary act of maternal devotion inside questions about collective responsibility, royal motive, violated burial law and covenant repair. The text calls for neither easy defense nor easy accusation. It calls for careful observation.

Commentary in Brief

Israel's three-year famine is traced to Saul's attack upon the Gibeonites, a protected people with whom Israel had sworn an oath. David asks the Gibeonites what satisfaction they require. They demand seven members of Saul's house, and David agrees. Two of the men are Rizpah's sons.

After their execution, Rizpah guards the exposed bodies from scavengers through a prolonged season. David hears what she has done. He then retrieves the remains of Saul and Jonathan, gathers the seven and gives the entire household an honorable family burial. Only then does the narrator state that God was entreated for the land.

Rizpah cannot undo the deaths. Her faithful presence nevertheless changes what happens next. The story honors grief that acts, exposes leadership that has left something unfinished and points beyond every human vigil to Christ's victory over death.

Second Samuel 3 6 through 7 Rizpah in a Struggle for Power

The setting is civil conflict. David rules from Hebron while Ishbosheth, a surviving son of Saul, claims authority over much of Israel. Abner, commander of Saul's army, is the stronger practical figure within Ishbosheth's government.

Verse 7 identifies Rizpah as "the daughter of Aiah" and "Saul's concubine." The reference to her father gives her a family identity, but Scripture supplies no further ancestry. Her status as concubine placed her within the royal household without giving her the standing of a principal royal wife.

Ishbosheth asks Abner why he has gone in unto his father's concubine. The narrator never states whether the charge is true. The accusation carries political force because possession of a former king's women could signal a claim to royal succession. Absalom later takes David's concubines publicly as part of his rebellion. Adonijah's request for Abishag is treated by Solomon as a request for the kingdom.

The text records the effects of the accusation upon men and kingdoms, but it records no answer from Rizpah. Ishbosheth treats her as evidence against Abner. Abner treats the accusation as an insult against his own loyalty. The woman at the center is given no recorded voice.

Second Samuel 3 8 through 11 Abner's Anger and Rizpah's Silence

Abner answers with outrage, recounts his loyalty to Saul's house and vows to transfer the kingdom to David. Ishbosheth cannot answer because he fears Abner. The exchange reveals the weakness of Ishbosheth's rule.

Rizpah's first appearance therefore contributes to a major political change, though she does not control it. Her identity is caught within male claims to authority. This background matters when she appears again. In chapter 21, men with power again make decisions involving her body, family and future. This time her actions, rather than an accusation about her, move the narrative.

The sermon should not invent Rizpah's thoughts during the confrontation. It may responsibly observe the pattern: she is spoken about, politically significant and personally unheard.

Second Samuel 21 1 A Famine and a Divine Answer

The phrase "three years, year after year" emphasizes persistence. This is not one poor harvest but a continuing national crisis. David inquires of the Lord, and the Lord identifies the matter of Saul and his bloody house because Saul slew the Gibeonites.

The verse describes a specific revealed connection between famine and sin. It does not authorize believers to assign a hidden moral cause to every natural disaster. Scripture frequently warns against explaining suffering by simplistic accusation. Here the cause is known only because the Lord reveals it.

"Bloody house" can refer to bloodguilt attached to Saul's dynasty or household. It may imply participation beyond Saul personally, but the narrator does not list the perpetrators or define the responsibility of later descendants. That silence becomes important when the seven are chosen.

Numbers 35 states that blood defiles the land. Biblical bloodguilt is not erased by political transition or the death of the ruler responsible. David inherits a kingdom whose moral obligations include wrongs committed under Saul.

Second Samuel 21 2 The Gibeonites and Israel's Oath

The narrator pauses to explain that the Gibeonites were not Israelites but a remnant of the Amorites. Israel had sworn unto them. Joshua 9 supplies the background.

The Gibeonites had used deception to secure protection. Israel's leaders had failed to ask counsel of the Lord before swearing the agreement. Once the oath was made in the Lord's name, however, Israel regarded it as binding. The people could not repair their leaders' carelessness by becoming faithless themselves.

Saul later sought to kill the Gibeonites "in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah." His zeal may have been nationalistic, religious or both. The text does not praise it. Zeal that violates God's command and a sworn covenant becomes destructive presumption.

No other passage narrates Saul's campaign against them. First Samuel 22 offers a revealing parallel by recording Saul's destruction of the priestly town of Nob. Saul's reign included violence against communities he considered threats.

Second Samuel 21 3 David Seeks Atonement

David asks two questions: What shall I do for you, and wherewith shall I make the atonement? The purpose is that the Gibeonites may bless the inheritance of the Lord.

The language of atonement here concerns satisfaction, purgation or removal of an offense. It does not mean that the Gibeonites can forgive eternal sin or perform the priestly work fulfilled in Christ. David is seeking a covenant settlement for bloodguilt that has affected the land.

David's question recognizes the Gibeonites as the wronged party. People with less social power are asked what restitution requires. That is a meaningful act. The danger appears when the king commits himself to their answer before the reader hears its terms.

Second Samuel 21 4 through 6 The Demand for Seven Descendants

The Gibeonites refuse silver and gold from Saul's house. They also say, "neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel." The line may mean they lack authority to carry out execution without the king, or it may initially deny a generalized demand against Israel.

They then request seven men of Saul's sons to be delivered for public execution in Gibeah. Seven may represent completeness, but the text does not explain why this number was chosen.

The Hebrew verb translated "hang them up" is capable of describing impalement, fixing up or public exposure. Verse 9 adds that they were put to death. The interpretive certainty is the public execution and exposure, not the precise method.

The phrase "unto the LORD" or "before the LORD" connects the act to resolution of the covenant offense. It must not be preached as an endorsement of ordinary human sacrifice. The Gibeonites request the men, and David says, "I will give them." The text does not record God commanding these exact deaths.

Second Samuel 21 7 The Mephibosheth Who Was Spared

David spares Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, because of the Lord's oath between David and Jonathan. The passage deliberately keeps covenant faithfulness in view.

Saul violated Israel's oath to the Gibeonites. David preserves his oath to Jonathan. The contrast supports a positive evaluation of David's covenant loyalty, but it also creates tension. The king's oath protects one descendant while others are exposed to the demand.

Readers must distinguish Jonathan's son Mephibosheth from Rizpah's son of the same name. Jonathan's son had previously received covenant kindness from David in 2 Samuel 9. Rizpah's son is one of the seven delivered.

Second Samuel 21 8 Rizpah's Sons and the Michal Question

Rizpah's sons are named Armoni and Mephibosheth. They are sons she bore to Saul. Scripture supplies no other narrative about their lives, character or participation in Saul's campaign against the Gibeonites.

The KJV and Masoretic Text identify the five other men as sons of Michal whom she brought up for Adriel. First Samuel 18:19 identifies Merab, Michal's sister, as Adriel's wife. Second Samuel 6:23 says Michal had no child unto the day of her death. Several ancient witnesses therefore read Merab in 2 Samuel 21:8.

Some attempt to preserve "Michal" by interpreting the phrase as five sons of Merab whom Michal reared. That is possible under the KJV wording, though the Hebrew does not explicitly name Merab in the verse. The Commentary should acknowledge the textual evidence rather than claim that no difficulty exists. The identity of Rizpah's two sons is not disputed by this variant.

Second Samuel 21 9 Execution at Barley Harvest

David delivers the seven to the Gibeonites. They fall together and are put to death at the beginning of barley harvest. The timing normally points to spring and the opening of the dry season.

The executions raise an apparent tension with Deuteronomy 24:16, which rejects putting children to death merely for their fathers. The narrative may presume shared household responsibility, corporate royal liability or information about participation that it does not narrate. It may also be recording a negotiated act without presenting every human decision as ideal.

The text does not give enough information to pronounce the seven personally innocent or guilty. Responsible interpretation should state the moral problem without filling the silence in either direction.

David's motives are similarly mixed or unstated. Relief of famine and repair of a violated covenant are explicit. Removal of Saulide males could also strengthen David politically. The narrative's later attention to honorable burial cautions against reducing David to a calculating murderer, while the obvious political benefit cautions against refusing all questions.

Second Samuel 21 10 Sackcloth Upon the Rock

Rizpah takes sackcloth and spreads it for herself upon the rock. Sackcloth is associated with mourning, distress and humiliation. The rock becomes a place of watch rather than a tomb.

The vigil extends from the beginning of harvest until water falls from heaven. If the ordinary autumn rains are intended, this may represent several months. The text never gives the number. Exact claims found in sermons should be recognized as estimates.

By day she prevents birds from resting upon the bodies. By night she prevents beasts from approaching them. The wording conveys continual protection. She cannot bury the dead under the conditions imposed, but she refuses to allow scavengers to consume them.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 required that an executed body not remain upon a tree overnight. Extended exposure was therefore outside ordinary Israelite burial practice and compounded the shame. Rizpah's vigil protects her sons from a further dishonor that proper burial should have prevented.

The verse does not call her action protest. That description is a reasonable narrative interpretation because her visible persistence bears witness against abandonment and precedes David's response. It should not be presented as though Scripture quotes Rizpah announcing a political program.

Her action is certainly grief, maternal devotion and protection. She cannot alter the verdict, recover the lives or command burial. She remains faithful within the narrow space still available to her.

Second Samuel 21 11 The Report That Reaches David

The narrator records no words from Rizpah in either of her appearances. Verse 11 instead reports that David was told what she had done.

This sentence is the hinge between exposure and burial. The text does not say that David independently decided to act at the same time. It places the report first and his recovery of the bones next. The natural narrative reading is that Rizpah's action moved David's response.

The narrator again calls her Saul's concubine. The title that once marked her vulnerability now identifies the woman whose conduct reaches the throne. She does not acquire formal office. Her faithful action nevertheless gains moral influence.

The verse should not be used to promise that every silent witness will change a ruler. Scripture describes what happened here, not a technique for controlling authority. It does establish that an apparently powerless person's sustained faithfulness can expose what power has ignored.

Second Samuel 21 12 through 13 Saul Jonathan and the Seven

David goes to the men of Jabeshgilead for the bones of Saul and Jonathan. First Samuel 31 explains that the Philistines displayed Saul's body and the bodies of his sons at Bethshan. Valiant men from Jabeshgilead recovered them and carried them away.

The people of Jabeshgilead had an old bond with Saul, who rescued their city in 1 Samuel 11. Their recovery of his body repaid courage with courage. David now completes another stage of honor by bringing the remains to Saul's ancestral territory.

The bones of the seven are gathered with those of Saul and Jonathan. The action enlarges beyond Rizpah's two sons. Her vigil becomes the occasion for the remembrance and burial of an entire royal household.

The term "bones" does not by itself calculate the vigil's length. Ancient narrative may describe human remains by their enduring part without offering a forensic timetable. It supports a prolonged exposure but not an exact number of months.

Second Samuel 21 14 Burial and Divine Response

The remains are buried at Zelah in Benjamin, in the sepulchre of Kish, Saul's father. This is family burial, ancestral burial and royal closure. The seven are no longer merely bodies displayed as payment. They are returned to names, kinship and memory.

The servants perform all that the king commands. “And after that God was intreated for the land.” The chronological marker deserves attention. The account does not formally conclude the divine response after the execution. It concludes after Rizpah’s vigil, David’s action and honorable burial.

Verse 10 has already mentioned water falling from heaven. That rain may indicate the drought beginning to end or may simply mark the endpoint of the vigil. Verse 14 gives the narrator’s theological conclusion: God responds after the burial process is complete.

The text does not state that Rizpah manipulated God, earned divine favor or personally offered the prayer that God answered. Her importance is narrative and moral. What she did moved the king to address a dimension of the crisis that had remained unresolved.

The Meaning of Rizpah’s Vigil

Rizpah’s grief is neither passive resignation nor magical power. It is faithful action under severe limitation. She cannot undo the execution. She can protect the bodies. She cannot command David. She can remain where the consequences of royal decisions are visible.

Her vigil preserves dignity. Ancient exposure treated bodies as warnings, curses or trophies. Rizpah refuses to let the men become food for scavengers. Her love insists that those used to settle a national debt are still human beings who belong to a family.

Her vigil also preserves memory. Political settlements often encourage people to move quickly past the human cost. Rizpah’s continued presence prevents disappearance. She does not allow the public to behave as though payment ended responsibility.

Finally, her vigil exposes unfinished leadership. David had addressed the Gibeonites’ claim, but burial remained. When he hears of Rizpah, he does not merely end her watch. He reconsiders the treatment of Saul’s whole house.

Grief Faithfulness and Human Dignity

Rizpah should not become a standard by which every grieving person is judged. Some mourn publicly and some privately. Some possess strength for practical action, while others can barely complete the next hour. Scripture records her particular faithfulness; it does not condemn other expressions of grief.

Her story gives dignity to presence. Modern ministry often values speech, solutions and visible results. Rizpah offers no recorded explanation and achieves no earthly resurrection. Her presence still matters.

The passage also warns against treating human beings as instruments. The Gibeonites had suffered real wrong and deserved recognition. The seven executed men and their grieving families also retained human dignity. Biblical concern for one harmed group does not require indifference toward another.

For leaders, the account asks whether suffering outside official spaces has been noticed. David responds when someone reports what Rizpah has done. Wise authority remains open to correction from people who have no ordinary access to power.

Rizpah and the Gospel

The passage should not be forced into a detailed allegory in which every character and action directly predicts Christ. It does provide canonical themes that lead naturally toward the Gospel.

Jesus was publicly exposed upon a tree and bore the curse of sin. Unlike the seven, He knowingly and willingly laid down His life. He was not punished for a father's wrongdoing. He bore the sins of others by His own consent in accordance with the Father's saving purpose.

Faithful women remained near the cross and later came to the tomb. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus secured an honorable burial. Human love could carry, wrap and place the body, but it could not produce resurrection.

The decisive Gospel movement occurs when the tomb is found empty. Rizpah reveals what faithful love may do beside the dead. Jesus reveals God's victory over death. The Christian message does not promise that every present loss will be reversed before our eyes. It promises resurrection life in Christ and the final defeat of death.

Doctrinal and Pastoral Application

Broken covenants matter to God. Saul's zeal could not cancel Israel's oath. Churches and leaders must resist using religious purpose to excuse dishonesty, cruelty or disregard for promises.

Unresolved bloodguilt cannot be healed by silence. The text does not give a simple modern policy for corporate wrongdoing, but it establishes that communities may bear consequences from a leader's unaddressed violence.

Restitution must preserve human dignity. David rightly asks the harmed Gibeonites what should be done, yet the resulting settlement leads to another scene of suffering. Justice requires attention to both responsibility and the treatment of persons.

Grief may become faithful witness. Rizpah does not receive her sons back, but her refusal to abandon them changes their treatment. Faithfulness is meaningful even when it does not produce the outcome first desired.

Leaders must listen to conduct as well as speech. David hears what Rizpah has done. Some people will never gain access to a microphone, meeting or throne room. Their endurance may reveal a truth that official reports have missed.

Christian hope exceeds honorable burial. Burial matters because the body and the person matter. Resurrection gives burial its future. Those who belong to Christ grieve genuinely but not without hope.

Conclusion

Rizpah first appears as a woman whose name is used in a contest between men. She later appears as a mother whose actions move the king. Scripture gives her no recorded speech, but it gives her moral presence.

She cannot change the decision that took her sons. She can refuse to leave their bodies unprotected. Her vigil carries their humanity back into the consciousness of the king. David gathers the dead, reunites Saul's house in burial and completes what had remained undone.

The final answer to the question Who Was Rizpah is therefore larger than a social title. She was Saul's concubine and the daughter of Aiah. She was the mother of Armoni and Mephibosheth. She was also a grieving woman whose faithful love preserved dignity, awakened royal action and ensured that the dead were not forgotten.