

Rizpah's story

By Caleb Yoder

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(Either standing or on a stool)

This is the time of day when the sun starts to really beat down. This is a bitter vigil that I've undertaken, but I'll carry it through to the end. I've slept out here for weeks now, braving the cold and the heat. My meals are the scraps of food that passers-by give me.

I guess on the bright side, there's no rain... Ha! – it hasn't rained in months, and this famine has dragged on for the third year now.

When people pass by, they say nothing, but I know what their thinking. They think I've gone mad. I see it in the look of their faces. Maybe it's pity, but as soon as my eyes meet theirs, they quickly look away. Over and over, whether it's men, women, or even children pass by. I suppose they don't know what to do with me.

I know that if had I wanted to, I could have remained in the royal housing. Though my husband King Saul is long dead, King David allowed me to live there. At one time, I loved the privileges of being part of the royal harem, of fine clothing, fine dining, and good wine. But that all becomes meaningless after a while. Why would I care about it now?

There (gesturing upward), they've hung up the bodies of my sons – Mephibosheth and Armoni – along with five of their nephews. There was nothing I could do to prevent their deaths. Those boys were my all. I don't know what to do without them. So, I will defend their bodies, defend them from vultures by day and wild animals at night.

The sun is drying up my sons' bodies. Soon they will be bones. I can't prevent that, but I can keep scavengers and vultures away, so that at least their bones are not scattered.

I will not let them suffer that dishonor. My family has suffered humiliation after humiliation, and I am out here like a crazy woman because I at least believe my sons have some dignity.

I thought that we were Yahweh's people. I heard that that the Law of Moses says a body must not be allowed to remain exposed to the elements more than a day. But in the violent chaos of this land, who still cares any more about honoring God's law? I alone am left to defend the honor of my sons, and the nor of others like them.

I'm not claiming they were innocent, but if they are not allowed to live, then at least they can be treated with respect in death. So, I am doing what I can, and the King knows very well that I am out here.

Look, is it any real mystery why I am out here? I don't understand what mother so unfortunate as me wouldn't be doing this. I'm not crazy, and if I'm angry, well, at least I'm not filled with bitterness.

God, and maybe God alone, knows that my heart isn't vengeful. I don't wish revenge on the Gibeonites who killed my sons. I know the Gibeonites have suffered plenty. Why do we need to perpetuate this cycle of violence? No one will every be satisfied. Does not Yahweh want our land to have peace?

Why can't we all mourn our dead and then be at peace?