

Strange and Terrible

2 Samuel 21:1-14

David Feddes

¹Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." ²So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.



Covenants must be kept

Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them... All the leaders said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. This we will do to them: let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them.” ... So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation. (Joshua 9:15-21)

³And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" ⁴The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "What do you say that I shall do for you?"

⁵They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, ⁶let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give them."

⁷But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

⁸The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; ⁹and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.

Merab: almost married David

“The king will enrich the man who kills Goliath with great riches and will give him his daughter.” (1 Sam 17:29)

Saul said to David, "Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight the LORD's battles." ... But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife. (1 Sam 18:17,19)

Rizpah: caught in crossfire

Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. And Ishbosheth said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?" Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ishbosheth and said, "Am I a dog's head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul your father, ... yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman." (2 Sam 3:7-8)



¹⁰ Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night.

¹¹When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, ¹²David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa.

¹³And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. ¹⁴And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land.

Strange and terrible Scripture

- Cultural oddities and gross cruelties
- Commands to wipe out Canaanite peoples
- Slavery (woodcutters and water carriers)
- Wrathful God lets people starve
- Punishing nation for a dead king's sins
- Punishing children for father's sins
- Dreadful deeds by alleged heroes
- Polygamy and mistreatment of women
- Human sacrifice seems to get results

Family punishment for sin

...punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me. (Ex 20:5)

- **Eli:** All the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men. (1 Sam 2:33)
- **Jeroboam:** I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam and will cut off from Jeroboam every male. (1 Kings 14:10)
- **Ahab:** For the whole house of Ahab shall perish. (2 Kings 9:8)

National punishment for sin

- A nation can come under God's judgment.
- If a nation's leadership does wrong, the whole nation may suffer for it if nothing is done to address the wrongs.
- Israelites are not automatically right in relationship to other peoples. They did wrong in killing many Gibeonites.
- America is not automatically right. In the past and the present, America has killed, oppressed, and mistreated many.



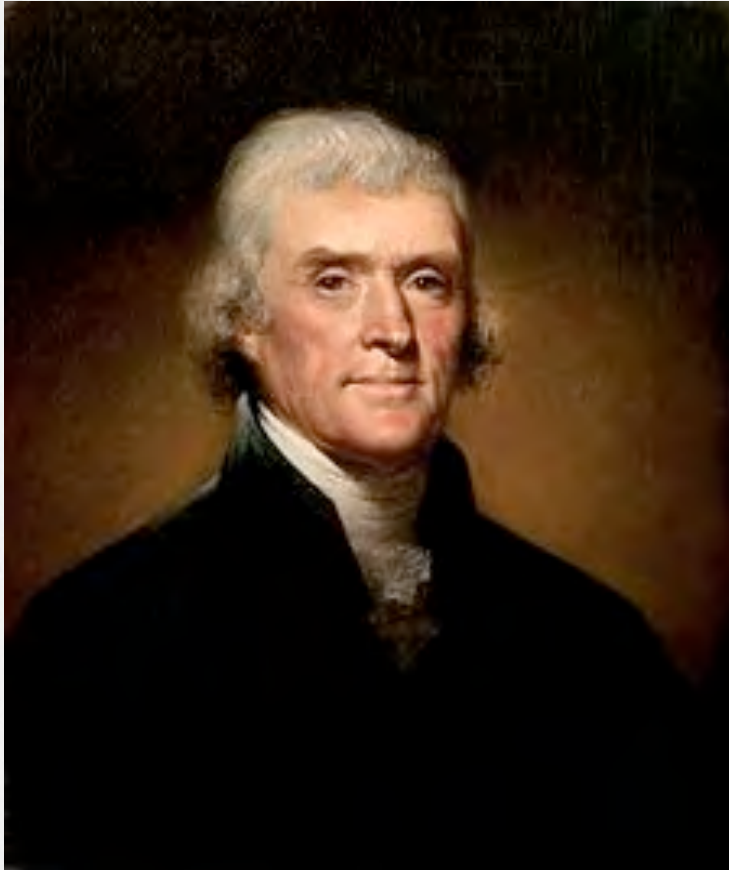
King James Version of Thanksgiving

King James thanked
“Almighty God for his
great goodness and
bounty towards us”
for “this wonderful
plague among the
savages.”

Feast of eternal friendship

- In 1623 British officials in Virginia made a treaty with natives near the Potomac River and proposed a toast symbolizing eternal friendship.
- The chief, his family, advisors, and two hundred others drank the toast—and dropped dead of poison.

Thomas Jefferson



- Blasted King George for the slave trade
- Said of slavery: “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever.”
- Tried everything to deal with the problem of slavery—except freeing the 200 slaves that he himself owned.

Abraham Lincoln



The Almighty has his own purposes...
If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through his appointed time, he now wills to remove, and that he gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him?

Abraham Lincoln



Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

Prepare to meet your God!

- For three transgressions of _____, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment.
Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammonites, Moab, Judah, Israel. (Amos 1-2)
- Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it? (Amos 3:6)
- I punished you with _____, yet you did not return to me. (5x) Prepare to meet your God, O Israel! (Amos 4:6-12)

God bless America?

- World leader in selling pornography
- World leader in buying drugs
- World leader in war and selling weapons
- Countless millions of abortions
- Living in luxury while many needy suffer
- Claiming Christianity but worshiping idols
- Does disaster come to a city [New York, Washington DC, New Orleans], unless the Lord has done it? (Amos 3:6)

What God said (and didn't say)

- This three-year famine was prolonged and very unusual. It seemed unnatural, so David asked God the reason for it.
- God told David the reason: Saul's mass murder of Gibeonites had never been publically condemned or punished.
- God did not tell David what action to take. It was David who chose to let the Gibeonites decide on the punishment.

Prayers for punishment

- "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" (2 Sam 21:3)
- Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them... Let them be blotted out of the book of the living. (Psalm 69:24,28)
- Souls cry out: "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev 6:9-10)

What David did

Handed over seven of Saul's family to be killed.

- **Violated God's law:** "Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin." (Deut 24:16)
- **Violated vow:** Saul said, "Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." And David swore this to Saul. (1 Sam 24:21-22)

Hidden motives

Hidden motives can shape “objective” decisions.

- **Someone else’s children:** If Merab had actually become David’s wife years earlier and gave birth to five sons by David, would David have handed his own sons over to the Gibeonites simply because they were Saul’s grandsons?
- **Potential threats:** If Mephibosheth had not been a son of David’s buddy Jonathan, if he had not been disabled, if he had been a possible heir to the throne, would David have protected him?



A British rabbi says that Rizpah is “every mother who sees her sons killed before their time for reasons of state, be they in time of peace or in war. All that remains is for her to preserve the dignity of their memory and live on to bear witness and call to account the rulers of the world.”

Can't rescue the land by defiling the land

And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deut 21:22-23)

Competing prayers

- Hungry, Israelites were praying for God to send rain, provide food, and end the famine.
- David was praying for insight into the cause of the famine.
- Bereaved, downtrodden Gibeonites were praying for God to judge the family and the nation of the king who killed so many of them.
- Heartbroken Rizpah was praying for God to give her executed sons a decent burial and remove their curse and shame.

Lawful burial

God heard the Gibeonites' cry for justice against Saul, but he also heard grief-stricken Rizpah. Rain came only after Saul and his family received lawful burial.

Rizpah guarded the bodies “until rain fell upon them from the heavens... And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father... And they did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land. (2 Sam 21:10,14)

Lord of the lowly

- Why should a king keep an old treaty with some woodcutters of a different nationality? Who defends their rights or avenges them?
- The nation and a future generation of the king's offspring can go on as though nothing happened, and enjoy the benefits of wiping out people and seizing what was theirs.
- If some young men must die for the nation to prosper, who cares about an old woman crying over her sons and trying to guard their dignity?

All sinned, death reigned, but now grace reigns

Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... death reigned... where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:12-21)

Sacrifice to save the nation

Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.” (John 11:49-52)

Strange and Terrible

A dramatic, golden-hued image of the crucifixion of Christ. The cross is the central focus, with Jesus on it. The background is a stormy sky with dark, heavy clouds and bright, glowing lightning bolts striking down. The overall color palette is dominated by deep reds, oranges, and yellows, creating a sense of intense heat and divine fire.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." (Gal 3:13)



Like Rizpah long ago, Jesus' female followers, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, wanted to end Jesus' disgrace and bury his body properly.



"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.
(Rev 1:17-18)