

# **AWARENESS.SKILLS.KNOWLEDGE.**

## **Intergenerational Women's Ministry and Study of Women In the Bible**

St. Matthew AME Church

Reverend Melvin E. Wilson, Pastor|Teacher – Reverend Leslie Wilson, Facilitator

27 April 2024

This month provides an overview of how her

**S**piritual Gifts

**P**ersonality (Presence/Perspective)

**E**xperiences (Positions/Protection)

**C**ares/Passions

**I**nterest

**A**bilities

**L**ife Talents

contributes to her special God-given purpose, equipping her to **minister to all God's children.**

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“Whether you are called by God to preach the gospel from the pulpit or to serve faithfully in the pew, as woman, you continue to play a significant role in the church, in society and in the advancement of God’s kingdom. We cannot allow culture, tradition, denomination or gender to hinder us from that which God has called and anointed us to do.” Dr. A. Elaine Brown Crawford, Interdenominational Theological Center

St. Matthew AME Church 336 Oakwood Avenue Orange, NJ 07050

Reverend Leslie Watson Wilson, First Lady | Minister to Women

202-256-8531 Cell Lesliemariwilson316@gmail.com

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From “All Women of the Bible” by Herbert Lockyer

### **Rizpah: The Woman Who Guarded Her Dead**

**2 Samuel 3:7; 21: 8-14 (Pages 142-144)**

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## **AWARENESS**

*Rizpah, daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock.*

2 Samuel 21:10 (NIV)

### **What We Know**

- Her name means “a hot or baking stone” which she certainly exhibited passionately in the protection of her murdered sons.
- She was the daughter of a Horite (Genesis 36:24; 1 Chronicles 1:40; 2 Samuel 3:7), became a concubine of Saul's and she bore him two sons – Armoni and Mephibosheth.
- Key – Among all the heart-moving episodes in the Bible, none is so compelling and touching as the story of Rizpah and her care of the dead.

### **She Was A Victim of Vengeance**

- Like millions of women through the centuries, Rizpah was caught up in the holocaust of national strife and war, finding herself bereft of husband and children left to fight a battle against loneliness and poverty.
- Her “husband” Saul had made a peace agreement with the Gibeonites through Joshua but later broke the oath and attempted to annihilate them.
- The treaty was made by Joshua who the idolatrous Gibeonites felt deceived by because the oath was not to destroy them by the sword and was sealed in the Lord's name. But when Saul came into power, he saw them as Israel's enemies, as heathens settled in holy land. It was not until after Saul's death did the Gibeonites seek redress for the profanation (the act of saying or doing something terribly offensive or blasphemous) of the oath given by Joshua.
- The three-year famine on the land of Israel David divinely informed was in consequence of Saul's slaughter. Because of the oath that was to protect the Gibeonites (who used the Leviticus law for justice in 24:17-24), they demanded

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compensation that the seven sons of Saul be hung up “before the Lord” in expiation (act of making amends or reparation for wrongdoing) of what had been done there. It is thus that the innocent children had to bear heavy punishment for the sin of their father.

- The sons were hung on a hillside for all to see. Thus vengeance, a divine prerogative (Romans 3:5; 12:19) was taken out of God's hands and executed by revengeful men in God's name upon seven innocent men. Their cruelty slaughter was not to appease divine wrath, but to satisfy a human thirst for vengeance.

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### **She Was A Defender of the Dead**

- The execution took place during harvest time so the brutal revenge and slaughter was seen, could not be ignored and neither could Rizpah's broken heart. She was strong, her love gave her strength to see those seven blood-covered bodies hanging on trees.
- Rizpah is called noble for protecting the bodies from the vultures waiting to gorge on the corpse. But through the days, weeks, and months she watched those broken bodies gradually blacken, decay and wither and never relaxed her vigil.
- She had no power to do anything, but her act of mercy essentially convicted others because the unburied testified to the vengeance being of man and not of God, for the law demanded that anyone hanged on a tree must be buried before sunset of the same day.
- Her beautiful, sacrificial motherhood wrestled through anxious day and more anxious nights with the foul stench of those rotting corpses filling her nostrils.
- As a widow who feared God, perhaps her tender care of the dead implied an instinctive sense of resurrection.
- What did she do? Made a beautiful sacrifice! She spread sackcloth that is only associated with mourning (Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 3:31) for the dead, on the rock. This “tactic” accomplished two things: (1) it reminded all that the vengeance was of man and not God; and (2) it also was a public expression of humiliation. What would you imagine people were saying about her? To her?
- She defended the dead until the rain came, about 6 months later - a token that God had withdrawn His judgement. Water from heaven, reviving the famine-stricken

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land was recognized as the sign of God's mercy and that the painful watch in sackcloth on the dead was over.

- With her vigil guarding the lifeless remains of Saul's seven sons now over, she was now at liberty to bury their withered corpse.
- King David heard of her motherly devotion and long vigil, remembered the uncared-for bones of Saul and Jonathan and all who had been killed, collected them, and buried them in the family grave at Zelah. Rizpah's desire for proper respect for her dead was fulfilled (c21:13-14)

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### **She Typified the Gloom of Golgotha**

- Different writers draw attention to the similarities between Rizpah, who stood by those seven trees on the hillside, and Mary who stood by the tree upon which her Son was hanged.
- In that "hill before the Lord" (2 Samuel 21:9) we have a shadow of Golgotha.
- Seven innocent men were hanged or as the Latin version puts it, were "crucified" to make atonement for the sin of others. They bore the curse of a broken promise. By His death upon the tree, God's Son satisfied His Father's justice and righteousness and provided a perfect salvation for a sinning race.
- Mary Magdalene is thought of here also for sitting to watch over the place where her dear Lord was buried. Her intent was to embalm His body and like Rizpah was prepared to guard it and defend Him. BUT praise be to God, the "Crucified One", was no longer in the tomb! He rose and provided for all those redeemed by His blood, a glorious resurrection.

## **BLESSINGS OVERFLOW!!!**

**May 25, 2024: WOMAN OF THE MONTH – Babylon The Queen**

**Revelations 18: 7-8 (Book Pages 267-269)**

**June 22, 2024: WOMAN OF THE MONTH – Orpah**

**Ruth 1 (Book Page 119-120)**

**July and August 2024 – Summer Break**

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## **SKILL**

**Step Twenty-Nine: Ministry of Presence**

### **LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM RIZPAH**

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1. In the exercise of the Ministry of Presence:
  - you do not have to have anything figured out.
  - You can be inspiring in your silence.
  - You may have heard the anonymous quote, "I have often regretted my speech, but never my silence."<sup>1</sup> Agree or disagree?
2. Rizpah does for her sons in death what she cannot do for them in life; that is, protect them from predators. Providing the Ministry of Presence, where there are no right answers and there are no simple fixes, can be powerful. Who can you think of where this ministry by clergy or nonclergy helped to ignite a movement?
3. Rizpah's act could also be understood as one that results in a small token of restorative justice. **Restorative justice** is defined as "an approach to [justice](#) that aims to repair the harm done to victims." In doing so, practitioners work to ensure that offenders take responsibility for their actions, to understand the harm they have caused, to give them an opportunity to redeem themselves, and to discourage them from causing further harm. For victims, the goal is to give them an active role in the process, and to reduce feelings of anxiety and powerlessness.<sup>2</sup> Anyone familiar with this form of justice?
4. Some writers read Rizpah's vigil as a manifestation of the gift of powerlessness, sprinkled with the grace of surrender. This understanding makes it possible to view her vigil as an act of resistance where restoration is a feasible outcome. In other words, she triumphs in the end. Yet, in this narrative, it is important that we ask who and what is being restored. Yes, Rizpah's vigil is powerful, but it is not redemptive. While she may have the satisfaction and closure of seeing her and Merab's sons buried, her grief and the trauma of their deaths remain an open wound. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-life/the-ministry-of-presence-11561796.html#google\\_vignette](https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-life/the-ministry-of-presence-11561796.html#google_vignette)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restorative\\_justice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restorative_justice)

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Rizpah's vigil must not be interpreted solely as an act of a peaceful warrior who operates with a heart of peace and a spirit of war. She must not be classified or categorized as a nonviolent resister to the evil of the situation. Her story is a wake-up call for those in theological education and the church to engage in the redemptive (deliverance from sin) work that addresses the realities of traumatic suffering and help persons give meaning to their traumatic experiences.<sup>3</sup> Agree or disagree?

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### **Other Commentary**

“Her actions speak louder than words...we see a mother who demonstrated love and compassion in order to preserve the remains of not only her two sons, but also her stepdaughters' five sons...Mothers all over this nation, especially African American mothers, have found themselves in Rizpah's position. They find themselves taking on the vultures by day and jackals by night [racism, drug addiction, harm socially, economically, educationally, psychologically, spiritually, or physically are a few things that come to mind – what else?].

WE must grieve over the situation before us, but we must keep pressing for justice and honor...through the vigils of mothers and through the fight of mothers, others can be saved, and our land can be healed...For what or for whom do you feel compelled to keep a vigil until justice is done? Pray and fight for justice.” (Source: Women of the Bible For Women of Color, pages 100-103)

### **For Your Information**

The phrase "restorative justice" has appeared in written sources since the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>[22]</sup> The modern usage of the term was introduced by Albert Eglash, who in 1977 described three different approaches to justice:

1. "retributive justice", based on punishment;
2. "distributive justice", involving therapeutic treatment of offenders;
3. "restorative justice", based on restitution with input from victims and offender (Source: Wikipedia)

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.faithward.org/rizpah-turning-tragedy-into-triumph/>

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### **KNOWLEDGE**



Dear (insert your name)

Today I engaged in a conversation about a named woman in the Bible who showed courage in the face of powerlessness. Through her Ministry of Presence, we see a part of God’s plan. I know trusting God and being patient with God is best for my journey and testimony as an Ambassador of Christ. Because “God is doing something wonderful in me!” I must be aware of tools Satan will use – impatience, doubt, arrogance, distrust, strife, and division for example - to keep me from fully serving the Lord in mind, spirit and heart. Because of what I heard, shared, learned, witnessed, thought about, I want to remember most,

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In Jesus Name,

**National Domestic Violence Hotline**

**1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**

**Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**

**988**

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