

Saul's Blood-guilt Brings Famine upon Israel (c. 995 – c. 992 BC)

2 Samuel 21:1–14

- 1 During David's reign there was a famine for three consecutive years. So David inquired of the LORD. The LORD said, "It is because of Saul and his bloodstained family, because he murdered the Gibeonites."
- 2 So the king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke with them. (Now the Gibeonites were not descendants of Israel; they were a remnant of the Amorites. The Israelites had made a promise to them, but Saul tried to kill them because of his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.)
- 3 David said to the Gibeonites, "What can I do for you, and how can I make amends so that you will bless the LORD's inheritance?"
- 4 The Gibeonites said to him, "We have no claim to silver or gold from Saul or from his family, nor would we be justified in putting to death anyone in Israel." David asked, "What then are you asking me to do for you?"
- 5 They replied to the king, "As for this man who exterminated us and who schemed against us so that we were destroyed and left without status throughout all the borders of Israel—
- 6 let seven of his male descendants be turned over to us, and we will execute them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, who was the LORD's chosen one." The king replied, "I will turn them over."
- 7 The king had mercy on Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, in light of the LORD's oath that had been taken between David and Jonathan son of Saul.
- 8 So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Aiah's daughter Rizpah whom she had born to Saul, and the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab whom she had born to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite.
- 9 He turned them over to the Gibeonites, and they executed them on a hill before the LORD. The seven of them died together; they were put to death during harvest time—during the first days of the beginning of the barley harvest.
- 10 Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest until the rain fell on them, she did not allow the birds of the air to feed on them by day, nor the wild animals by night.
- 11 When David was told what Rizpah daughter of Aiah, Saul's concubine, had done,
- 12 he went and took the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan from the leaders of Jabesh Gilead. (They had secretly taken them from the plaza at Beth Shan. It was there that Philistines publicly exposed their corpses after they had killed Saul at Gilboa.)
- 13 David brought the bones of Saul and of Jonathan his son from there; they also gathered up the bones of those who had been executed.
- 14 They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin at Zela in the grave of his father Kish. After they had done everything that the king had commanded, God responded to their prayers for the land.

David's Oldest Son Amnon Rapes His Half-Sister Tamar (c. 986 BC)

2 Samuel 13:1–22

- 1 Now David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar. In the course of time David's son Amnon fell madly in love with her.
- 2 But Amnon became frustrated because he was so lovesick over his sister Tamar. For she was a virgin, and to Amnon it seemed out of the question to do anything to her.
- 3 Now Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah. Jonadab was a very crafty man.
- 4 He asked Amnon, "Why are you, the king's son, so depressed every morning? Can't you tell me?" So Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar the sister of my brother Absalom."
- 5 Jonadab replied to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend to be sick. When your father comes in to see you, say to him, 'Please let my sister Tamar come in so she can fix some food for me. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I can watch. Then I will eat from her hand.'"
- 6 So Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. When the king came in to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come in so she can make a couple of cakes in my sight. Then I will eat from her hand."
- 7 So David sent Tamar to the house saying, "Please go to the house of Amnon your brother and prepare some food for him."
- 8 So Tamar went to the house of Amnon her brother, who was lying down. She took the dough, kneaded it, made some cakes while he watched, and baked them.
- 9 But when she took the pan and set it before him, he refused to eat. Instead Amnon said, "Get everyone out of here!" So everyone left.
- 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the cakes into the bedroom; then I will eat from your hand." So Tamar took the cakes that she had prepared and brought them to her brother Amnon in the bedroom.
- 11 As she brought them to him to eat, he grabbed her and said to her, "Come on! Get in bed with me, my sister!"
- 12 But she said to him, "No, my brother! Don't humiliate me! This just isn't done in Israel! Don't do this foolish thing!"
- 13 How could I ever be rid of my humiliation? And you would be considered one of the fools [wicked pervert] in Israel! Just speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you."
- 14 But he refused to listen to her. He overpowered her and humiliated her by raping her.
- 15 Then Amnon greatly despised her. His disdain toward her surpassed the love he had previously felt toward her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and leave!"

16 But she said to him, “No I won’t, for sending me away now would be worse than what you did to me earlier!” But he refused to listen to her.

17 He called his personal attendant and said to him, “Take this woman out of my sight and lock the door behind her!”

18 (Now she was wearing a long robe, for this is what the king’s virgin daughters used to wear.) So Amnon’s attendant removed her and bolted the door behind her.

19 Then Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went on her way, wailing as she went.

20 Her brother Absalom said to her, “Was Amnon your brother with you? Now be quiet, my sister. He is your brother. Don’t take it so seriously!” Tamar, devastated, lived in the house of her brother Absalom.

21 Now King David heard about all these things and was very angry.

22 But Absalom said nothing to Amnon, either bad or good, yet Absalom hated Amnon because he had humiliated his sister Tamar.

Absalom, Tamar’s Brother, Murders Amnon (c. 983 BC)

2 Samuel 13:23–39

23 Two years later Absalom’s sheepshearers were in Baal Hazor, near Ephraim. Absalom invited all the king’s sons.

24 Then Absalom went to the king and said, “My shearers have begun their work. Let the king and his servants go with me.”

25 But the king said to Absalom, “No, my son. We shouldn’t all go. We shouldn’t burden you in that way.” Though Absalom pressed him, the king was not willing to go. Instead, David blessed him.

26 Then Absalom said, “If you will not go, then let my brother Amnon go with us.” The king replied to him, “Why should he go with you?”

27 But when Absalom pressed him, he sent Amnon and all the king’s sons along with him.

28 Absalom instructed his servants, “Look! When Amnon is drunk and I say to you, ‘Strike Amnon down,’ kill him then and there. Don’t fear! Is it not I who have given you these instructions? Be strong and courageous!”

29 So Absalom’s servants did to Amnon exactly what Absalom had instructed. Then all the king’s sons got up; each one rode away on his mule and fled.

30 While they were still on their way, the following report reached David: “Absalom has killed all the king’s sons; not one of them is left!”

31 Then the king stood up and tore his garments and lay down on the ground. All his servants were standing there with torn garments as well.

32 Jonadab, the son of David’s brother Shimeah, said, “My lord should not say, ‘They have killed all the young men who are the king’s sons.’ For only Amnon is dead. This is what Absalom has talked about from the day that Amnon humiliated his sister Tamar.

33 Now don’t let my lord the king be concerned about the report that has come saying, ‘All the king’s sons are dead.’ It is only Amnon who is dead.”

34 In the meantime Absalom fled. When the servant who was the watchman looked up, he saw many people coming from the west on a road beside the hill.

35 Jonadab said to the king, “Look! The king’s sons have come! It’s just as I said!”

36 Just as he finished speaking, the king’s sons arrived, wailing and weeping. The king and all his servants wept loudly as well.

37 But Absalom fled and went to [his mother’s father] King Talmai son of Ammihud of Geshur. And David grieved over his son every day.

38 After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he remained there for three years.

39 The king longed to go to Absalom, for he had since been consoled over the death of Amnon.

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Chronological Notes

- 1) There is no indication of when during David’s reign the famine of 2 Samuel 21:1–14 occurred. It was most likely after Mephibosheth had come under David’s protection in Jerusalem (cf. 9:1–13) and before Absalom’s rebellion (cf. 16:7–8).¹ Dale Ralph Davis comments, “Our passage begins by reporting a famine ‘in the days of David’ (v. 1)—sometime during David’s reign. By this very general time reference the writer keeps us from assuming that the episode of 21:1–14 followed chronologically the events of 2 Samuel 20. He does not place the famine in any tight time sequence; the famine, he says, happened sometime during David’s reign. The writer does drop one hint. Verse 7 suggests that David had already brought Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s

¹ Robert D. Bergen, “1, 2 Samuel,” *NAC*, 443–44. So also A. F. Kirkpatrick, “The Second Book of Samuel,” *CBC*, 192.

son, to Jerusalem before the famine and/or executions reported here. Hence 21:1–14 takes place after 2 Samuel 9. Those wanting to scour the depths of this matter may search elsewhere.”²

² See the lucid discussion in Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 252–54; also M. H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Authorship and Other Biblical Studies*, 193–94. For a differing view, cf. R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King*, 199–200.