



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

16 Days of Activism against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Awareness, Action, Accountability

Contextual Bible studies

Introducing the Bible Studies:

These bible studies are meant to be theological and pastoral tools to encourage reflection and action among LWF member churches on the issue of sexual and gender-based violence. They are shaped to bridge biblical texts and contemporary contexts, by inviting reflection on some of the major challenges that churches face in responding to sexual and gender-based violence. The selection of texts offers not only a lens to analyze various dimensions of sexual and gender-based violence, but also to stimulate thinking on meaningful action. Member churches can adapt these bible studies at any point in the 16 days of activism, in response to the questions, challenges and needs they face, and use them as tools of advocacy and accompaniment, which can move communities towards action for gender justice and prevention of violence.

BIBLE VERSE: 2 Samuel 21:1-14

"Rizpah, the Mourning and the Lamentation."

BACKGROUND: During David's reign, there were good and bad situations, including situations that involved acts of great violence against the people.

The problem is that everything was resolved from the perspective of divine justification, putting words in God's mouth, and blaming Him for the decision to kill other people.

The first verse tells us that the region was struck by hunger for more than three years, perhaps due to droughts or to mismanagement involving insufficient food reserves, such as grains and seeds that could be used in case of emergency.

It is said that David sought counsel from Jehovah, who told him that the house of Saul (who was already dead by then) was to blame. So, King David made a pact with the Gibeonites, a people that Saul had oppressed and injured. This pact was made as a form of compensation for wrongdoing and the

request of the Gibeonites was that all the descendants of Saul be killed, except Mephibosheth.

In this way, King David took two sons of Rizpah and Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and five sons of Michal, daughter of Saul, who she had had with Adriel. These seven boys were handed over to the Gibeonites, who hanged them and left their bodies unburied, which was an affront and a sign of shame being brought on the family.

MOURNING PROCESSES: This is undoubtedly a terrible story of extreme violence against women and young people, who served as a sacrifice to satisfy the thirst for vengeance of the Gibeonites. It is also a story where we are witness to an unbridled exercise of power, without regard to the people. It is a power that was only useful to enter into pacts, reach agreements and probably negotiate access to a source of water (since there was a drought), or to take back the lands that had likely been taken away from them.

But in this narrative of power, it is easier to blame a violent God, in this case Jehovah, than to acknowledge that there was a failure to secure the wellbeing of all the people who depended on the water and the fruits of the land.

Sadly, we see two different reactions by women whose children were murdered, which can help us understand our own grief processes, particularly as women, and especially in the contexts of extreme violence that exist in our countries today.

Michal does not appear in the story. This woman first had violence done against her by her father Saul, then by King David himself, who never loved her. On the contrary, he despised her and used her only to save his life when Saul threatened him with death.

Michal came from a very complicated background, and finally found a partner named Adriel who loved her deeply, and with whom she had five sons.

These five sons were murdered, and King David participated in the murder, without any respect, remorse, or compassion.

Michal remained silent. She was silenced by history. It seems likely that the magnitude of her pain did not allow her to raise her voice, or at least her mourning is not recorded in the historical narrative.

Rizpah did not speak either, or she was not given a voice, but she used her body to express her grief in an act of resistance. It is possible that no one listened to her, or at least the authorities at the time did not.

She put on a sackcloth garment, which was a type of material that was painful on the skin, and then climbed to the top of the rock where the corpses of her children and the other woman were.

She remained there from the beginning of the harvest until the rains came, and in all that time she did not allow any bird to come near to desecrate the

corpses, nor did any wild beast dare approach, because Rizpah scared them away.

Even if no one listened to her, they did see her every day, living her grief, demanding justice, demanding with her body that the evil of the authorities be recognized for what it was.

In the end, she succeeded in convincing David to allow the remains to be buried in the land of Benjamin. Rizpah's mourning lasted from the first days of the harvest until the rains began again, which means it lasted several months.

FOR REFLECTION:

Very seldom do we address the grieving processes that women face every day, because we have not been taught to express our pain and sadness. On the contrary, the faster we show that we feel better after a loss, the better we are perceived by society.

LET'S SHARE OUR EXPERIENCES:

1. How have you spent your times of mourning?
2. Did you receive help or seek help?
3. What do you think Michal and Rizpah were feeling?
4. How would their times of mourning have been?
5. Share everything you consider to be necessary to live well in the present time and think of how we can help ourselves and how we can help other women.

Compiled by: Prof. Angela Trejo Haager

Women and Gender Justice Network for Latin America and the Caribbean.