

17.36 Famine Because of Saul (2 Samuel 21:1–14)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows

Brackets [. . .] indicate a remark to the teacher that should not be read aloud, or they show answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- Flashcards from “Gibeon” in the Joshua series by A Beka
- Felt or other cut-out numbers: 4, 0, 0 to use at appropriate places (400, 40, 4) in the story

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *atonement*: to make things right by a proper payment (divide the word itself into “at one ment”)

Scripture: (ESV)

2 Samuel 21:1 Now 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.” 2 So 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. 3 And 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?” 4 The 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?” 5 They 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, 6 let 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.”

7 But 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. 8 The 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; 9 and 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.

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. 11 When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, 12 David 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. 13 And 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. 14 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.

Introduction/Review:

What does God think about sin? He hates it. He is “angry with the wicked every day.” What does God do about sin? He punishes it. “The soul that sins, it shall die.” This is what we all deserve because we are sinners. But God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to take all God’s anger and punishment for the sins of His people so that those who believe on Jesus may have God’s anger and punishment for sin taken from them and placed on Jesus. “For He hath made Him . . . to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of

God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Those who do not repent and believe on Jesus have God’s wrath abiding on them.

[Show time line below: Creation, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Judges, Saul, David. Point to Joshua on the time line.] When Israel came back to the Promised Land and was conquering its enemies, one city, Gibeon, thought of a way to trick Joshua so that he would spare them. They had men pretend to come from a far country, wearing worn-out clothes and carrying old, moldy food. Joshua and the leaders promised not to attack the city before they realized that it was close by. They were sorry they had made the promise, but they still kept the promise, “We will let you live.” Do you keep your promises even when it’s difficult?

Story:

Saul’s sin

✓Four hundred years later (1422 B.C. minus 1025 B.C. = 397 years) [display 400], when God had told Saul to destroy the Amalekites totally, Saul didn’t do what God commanded. However, he did try to exterminate the people from Gibeon even though they were not enemies but were now innocent servants.¹ Why was this wrong? Because Israel had promised to let the Gibeonites live.

Is it okay to break an old promise? [No.] Even if it’s 400 years old? [No.] Was it a sin for Saul to try to get rid of these people? [Yes.] What did God think about Saul’s sin? [He hated it.] What had been God’s punishment for David’s sin? [The sword would not depart from his family.] Does God always punish sin right after the sin? [No.] But God *will* punish sin unless He chooses to give grace and mercy.

Sin’s curse

At this point in David’s life, it had been perhaps ✓forty years (1028 B.C. minus 988 B.C. = 40 years) [display 40] since Saul had sinned against the Gibeonites.² All during Saul’s lifetime, God did not punish Saul or the nation of Israel. Now, however, God sent a famine to Israel. Three whole years, one after the other, went by without rain. What happens when there is no rain? [Crops dry up; no food.] Jacob had sent his sons to Egypt for food after only one year of famine. What must it have been like to be *three* years without rain?

Certainly, David was aware of the famine during this time. If his thinking brain connected, “God must be displeased with us,” he didn’t ask God about it until the third year. But when he asked, God answered: “It is because of Saul and his bloody house, for he slew the Gibeonites.” Gibeonites! The ones who had deceived, yet were protected; the ones who were now servants to the Israelites.

Gibeonites’ answer

Servants or not, David the king was not too important to call them to him. “What can I do for you? How can we turn away God’s wrath so that you may bless the Lord’s inheritance?” David asked them.

The Gibeonites answered very humbly. “We don’t want money from Saul’s family, ✓nor should *you* have to slay anyone for us.”

“Okay,” answered David, “whatever you say I will do.”

“Saul just about wiped us out. Let seven of his children or grandchildren be given to us. We will slay them by hanging them in Gibeah, the town of Saul, whom the Lord chose.”

Notice that they respected this man, Saul, who almost cut them off, because they knew God had chosen him. What amazing godliness! Perhaps you have had someone in your life who did evil to you. Could you be like the Gibeonites and still respect him or her?

David said, “I will give seven of Saul’s offspring to you.” He found two of Saul’s sons whose mother’s name was Rizpah. He also took five of Saul’s grandsons, born to Saul’s daughter who had first been promised to David but had been given to another man by Saul. But notice, David did not give Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, to the Gibeonites because of his promise to Jonathan.

As the barley harvest was beginning, these seven men were put to death by hanging so that God's anger would be turned away from Israel. The Bible states, "Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23). Those seven men paid for the curse brought about by Saul.

Rizpah's task

The bodies of the seven men were left hanging for some time before the Lord. Animals and birds, like wolves and vultures, could and would eat those bodies, but Rizpah, the mother of two of those men, didn't want that to happen to her sons. She set up a gunny-sack tent and lived in it several months (✓4 or more months) [display 4]. Any time an animal or bird would come close to the bodies of her sons, she would scare them off. She did this day and night until God's wrath was finally turned away and He sent rain.

Someone told David what Rizpah had done. ✓"Enough is enough," said David. "Take down the bodies of those seven descendants of Saul, get Saul's bones and Jonathan's bones from Jabesh Gilead [locate] on the east side of the Jordan River. Bury all of these men in the tomb of Saul's father."

David's servants obeyed, and God again blessed the land. God's anger against Saul was satisfied.

How about you? Have you trusted Jesus who took God's anger for sin so that you might believe?

¹"When this was done is not certain; the Jews commonly say that he slew them when he slew the priests at Nob, they being hewers of wood and drawers of water to them, and were slain with them; or because their maintenance depended on the priests, they being slain, it was in effect slaying them; but rather this refers to another time, and to other action or actions of Saul, who sought by various means to destroy these people, and root them out of the land" ([2 Samuel 21:1 - Meaning and Commentary on Bible Verse \(biblestudytools.com\)](https://www.biblestudytools.com/2-samuel/21/1-2-samuel-21-1-meaning-and-commentary-on-bible-verse-biblestudytools-com.html)).

²This is the only place Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites is mentioned. It is not found in 1 Samuel at all.

Lessons from This Lesson:

- We see Jesus:

The Bible states, "Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree." The seven descendants of sinful Saul took his curse, but there was a perfect Man who "hung on a cross/tree" so that God's anger would be turned away from those who believe on Him. Jesus Christ suffered all the wrath of God so that His own could be saved from sin and what they deserve—hell.

The seven sons and grandsons of Saul paid for his sin—they atoned for it. Jesus Christ atoned for the sins of all who trust Him to be their Saviour.

Activities:

- Play dough: birds, wild animals, trees
- Snack: Pretend to have a famine by serving only one stale (but healthful) cracker and half a cup of water.
- Talk about the effects of famine: lack of water; loss of weight and strength; scarceness of money; sadness.
- Active game: Beasts and Birds. Choose a "Rizpah" to guard an object. The other students are beasts and birds, trying to get the object. Rizpah may scare them off with a rolled newspaper or part of a swimming "noodle."
- Review the differences between David and Saul using the chart found below.
- Review questions: (Game: When students answer questions correctly, they may "chase" away the raptor or wolf pictures found below that the teacher will hold up.)

1. Why did God send a famine? [Because Saul had slaughtered many Gibeonites.]

2. What was the payment the Gibeonites wanted for Saul's sin? [To hang seven of his descendants.]
3. Rizpah, the mother of two slain men, did what after their hanging? [Chased predators away from the bodies.]
4. Whose bones (name two people) did David bury in the tomb of Saul's father? [Those of Saul, Jonathan, and the seven men who were hanged by the Gibeonites.]
5. When all this was accomplished, what did God do? [Broke the famine; gave rest to the land.]

Memory Verse[s]: I heartily recommend the song and visual at [Psalm 139 - NKJV \(thywordcreations.com\)](http://thywordcreations.com).

- Psalm 139:1 O Lord, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. 5 You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it.

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? 8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; 12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! 18 If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You. . . .

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

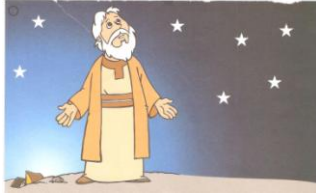
Handwork:

- Print a copy for each student of the line drawings of animals found below. Follow the instructions on the paper, which are to (1) circle the predators that Rizpah might have chased away, and (2) color the animals Rizpah would not have chased away.
- Or, using brown greeting card dividers (see "Organization and Supplies" tab at teachingthebibleto kids.org), draw a brown plant (see example below) and attach dry weeds with double-sided tape.

atonement

Time Line from Creation to David

4000 B.C. Creation



2000 B.C. Abraham

1570 B.C. Moses



1536 B.C. Joshua

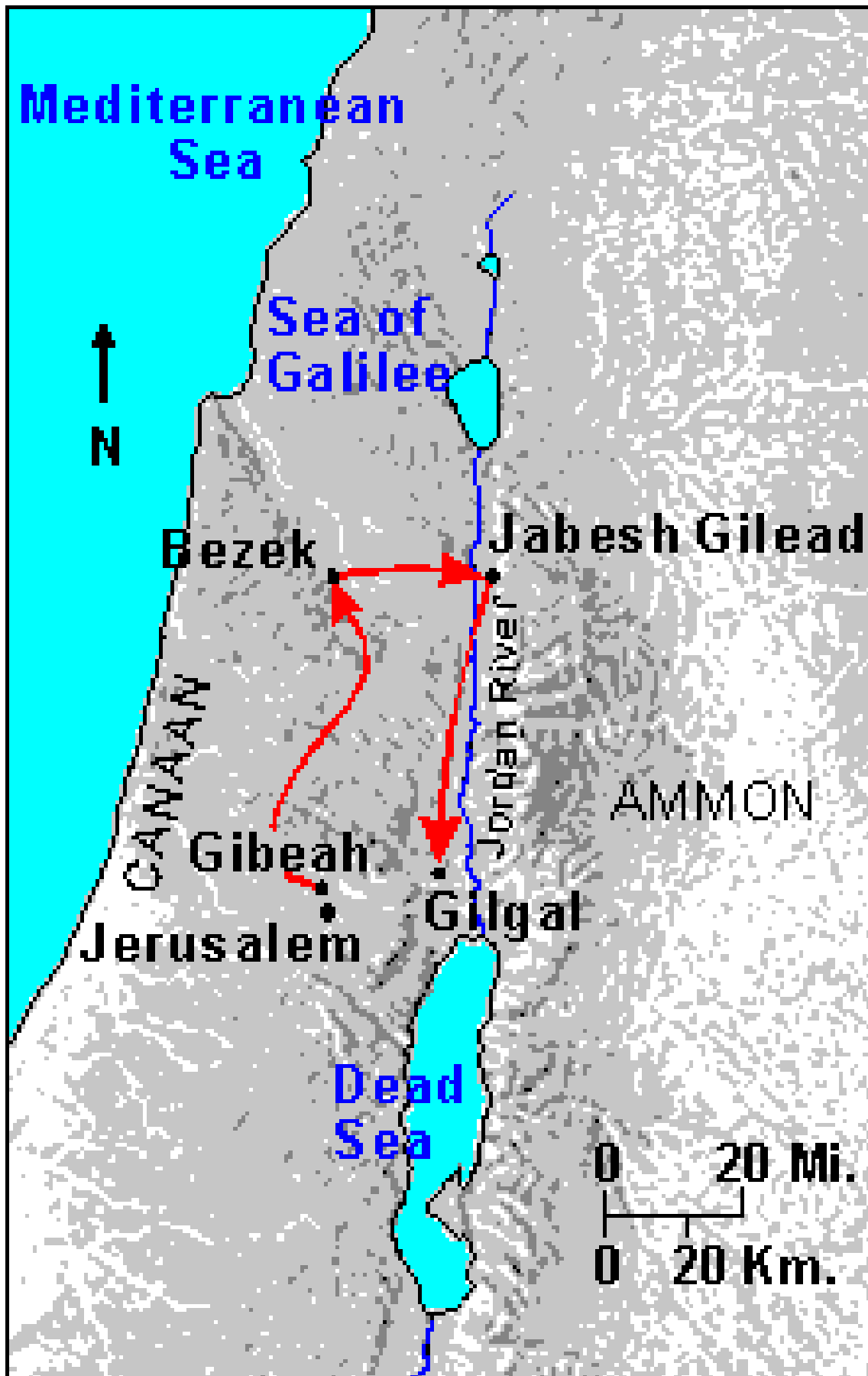
1400 B.C. Judges



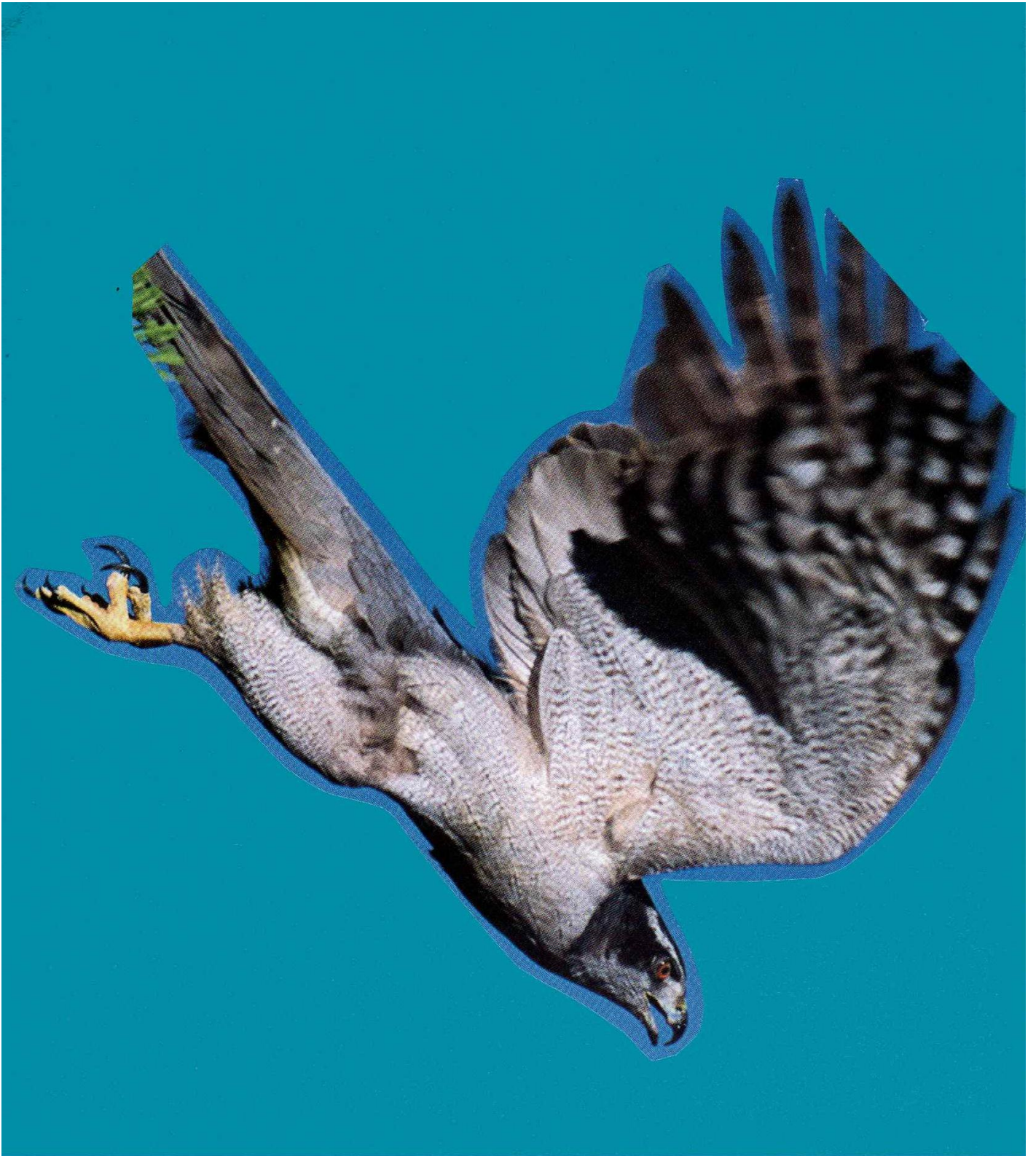
1090 B.C. Saul

1055 B.C. David









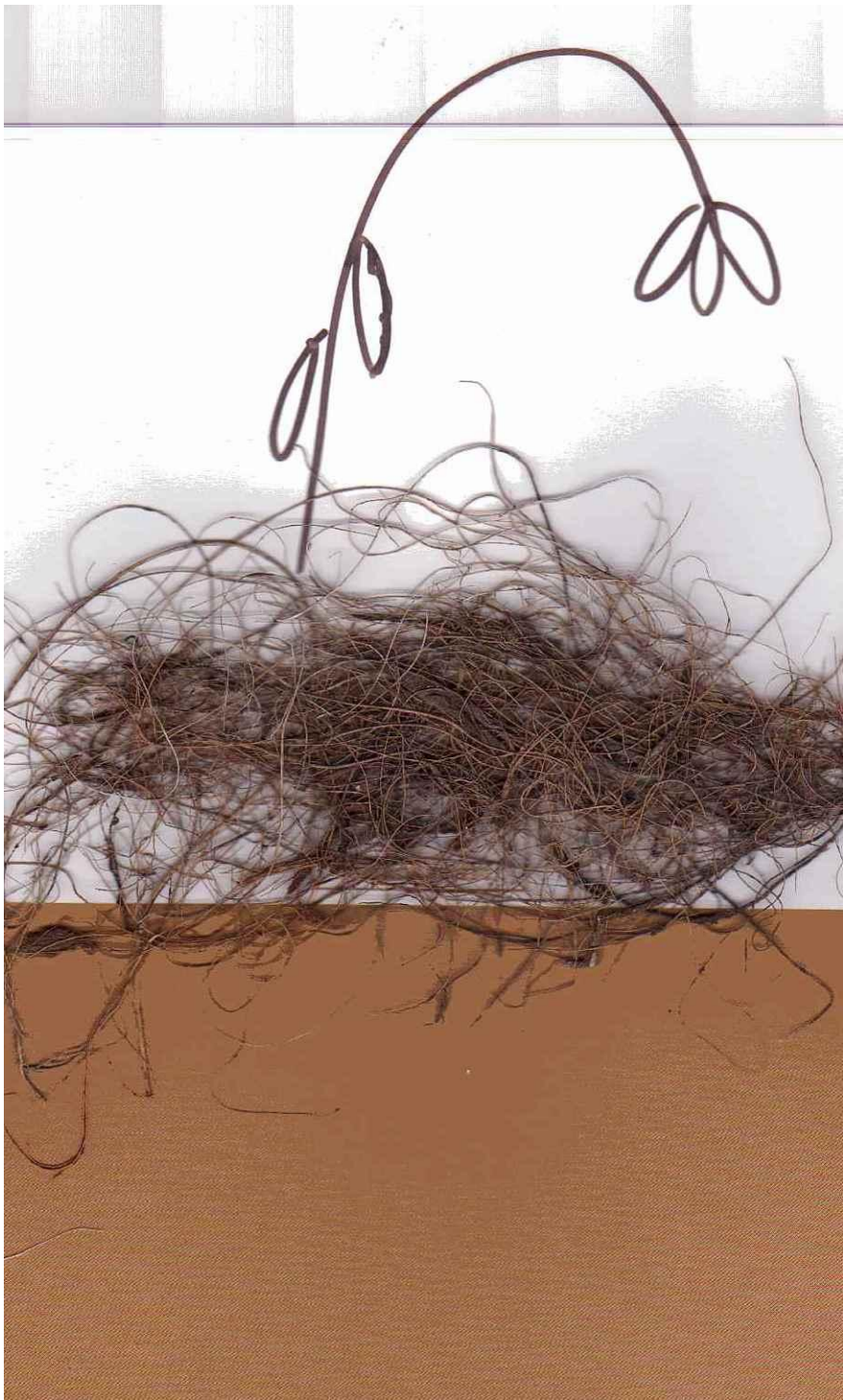


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Comparison Between David and Saul

David	Saul
God's kind of king (2 Samuel 7:8–16)	Man's kind of king (1 Samuel 10:23, 24)
A man after God's own heart (Acts 3:22)	A man after people's praise (1 Samuel 18:6–8)
Kind and benevolent (2 Samuel 7:29)	Cruel (1 Samuel 20:30–32; 22:11–29)
Eternal kingship through Christ (2 Samuel 17:29)	Rejected kingship (1 Samuel 15:23)
Forgiving (1 Samuel 26)	Unforgiving (1 Samuel 14:44; 18:9)
Penitent (2 Samuel 12:13; 24:10)	Lying when confronted (1 Samuel 15:10–31)
Courageous (2 Samuel 17:1; 1 Chronicles 18)	Fearful (1 Samuel 17:11)
At peace with God (Psalm 4:8; 37:11)	Separated from God (1 Samuel 16:14)



Which of these animals did Rizpah chase away? Circle the predators.

Color the animals Rizpah would not have chased away.

