

## Did she, or didn't she—2 Samuel 6:23 X 2 Samuel 21:8

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The Massoretic Text of 2 Samuel 6:23 affirms that Michal the daughter of Saul “had no children to the day of her death”. The same Massoretic Text of 2 Samuel 21:8, at first glance, appears to say “the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite”. But according to 1 Samuel 18:19, it was Michal’s older sister, Merab, who was married to Adriel. What to do? The NIV and most modern versions solve the difficulty by replacing ‘Michal’ with ‘Merab’ in 2 Samuel 21:8, and NIV graciously supplies us with a footnote explaining the proceeding. “Two Hebrew manuscripts, some Septuagint manuscripts and Syriac (see also 1 Samuel 18:19); most Hebrew and Septuagint manuscripts *Michal*.” Being freely interpreted, this means that they followed the two Hebrew manuscripts against all the rest. The reason for the replacement is obvious: the copyist did not understand the Text. The AV and NKJV solve the difficulty in a different way, they render 2 Samuel 21:8 as “whom she brought up for Adriel”. It remains to enquire if the Hebrew verb here can reasonably be translated in that way.

I will begin with Michal. She evidently had a mind of her own, and tried to influence her circumstances as best she could. Her father, king Saul, was using his daughters as ‘chess pieces’ in his ‘game’ to get rid of David. He started by offering Merab, the older daughter, to David, but for some reason he changed his mind and gave her to Adriel (1 Samuel 18:17-19). The next verse says that Michal loved David, and she obviously made her wishes known, because Saul cheerfully took her up. The ‘dowry’ was designed to get David killed, but he actually turned in twice the required amount. Evidently the gruesome ‘dowry’ did not interfere with Michal’s emotions, but for whatever reasons, it does appear that she never bore any children. The list of David’s sons born in Hebron, by six wives, makes no mention of Michal. Actually, after she helped David escape, he became a fugitive, and she probably did not see him again until she was given to Palti (1 Samuel 19:12 and 25:44).

Years later, as David became king of the united kingdom, he demanded the return of Michal. (I find this difficult to understand, since he already had at least six other wives.) So Abner went to get her, and her husband, Palti/Paltiel, followed behind wailing (2 Samuel 3:13-16). To judge by Palti’s attitude, he and Michal must have gotten along reasonably well, or he would not have been so worked up. And Michal may not have been all that thrilled at the change. Not only that, now she would be wife number seven (at least), instead of the one and only. And then there was the episode in 2 Samuel 6:16-22. Anyway, whatever the reasons, Michal never had any children of her own, which brings us to 2 Samuel 21:8.

The Hebrew verb in question here, *yalad*, is massively used in the O.T. in the sense of ‘beget/bear’—‘beget’ when used of a man, and ‘bear’ when used of a woman. However, even in the O.T. it has other meanings, quite apart from the use it received outside the O.T. A Hebrew verb root can receive quite a variety of vowel pointings, producing a variety of meanings. The original Hebrew Text was consonantal, without the vowel pointings added by the Massorettes, and it is the consonants that are inspired. Aside from the central meaning, ‘beget/bear’, the verb *yalad* is used of midwives and of a woman who brings up someone else’s children. The translation found in the AV and NKJV, “whom she brought up

for Adriel”, is perfectly legitimate, and most probably correct. In that time and culture, a married woman without children was a frustrated woman. Michal may have been sterile, and her sister may have been frail, needing help, and may even have died, following her fifth child. Whatever the reasons, Michal’s contribution was sufficiently substantial so that she could legitimately be said to have brought up Adriel’s children.