

Prayers

To God

Do you believe that God is able to rise above all the circumstances of your day, and inspire you to greater things? Or do you feel that God is just wanting you to get through the day as usual? Pray about this and work out what you think God's attitude towards this day of yours!

For myself

Dear Lord Jesus, I am not very good at keeping on track with my thoughts and feelings during the day. I find myself repeating mistakes, struggling to deal with my persistent inadequacies, and using well worn ways of keeping people away from the real 'me' when I don't want to be disturbed. I ask You, Lord Jesus, to break down the walls of my inhibitions and open me up in spirit to all who speak to me; nurture me in honesty and truth, dependability and consistency. Then, may the witness of my life draw others to the truth of Your Gospel, for You are the One in whom I place all my trust. **AMEN**

For others

Weekly theme: Water

Many of us do not realise the profound affect water has on the planet, including on the weather, and on the ability of life to survive anywhere. Pray that God will show Himself the Lord of all Water, as He did in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 17-19).

Meditation

I was hoping Jesus might speak to me,
and He certainly caught my attention.

I was working away at my desk,
and He said, 'Follow me';

I was in the middle of a meal,
and He said, 'Share with the poor';

I was thinking about myself,
and He said, 'Love your neighbour';

I was checking my bank balance,
and He said, 'Give sacrificially';

I was telling a friend about my work,
and He said, 'Share the Good News';

I was relaxing at home watching the news,
and He said, 'I am the truth';

I was enjoying a drive in my car,
and He said, 'I am Lord of all';

I was living life to the full,
and He said, 'I died for you';

Then I suddenly came to a stop,
and He said, 'Follow me' ... again.

Bible Passage

2 Samuel 5:17-25

¹⁷ When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they all went up to search for him, but David heard about it and went down to the stronghold. ¹⁸ Now the Philistines had come and occupied the Valley of Rephaim; ¹⁹ so David enquired of the LORD,

"Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"

The LORD said to David,

"Go, I will certainly hand the Philistines over to you."

²⁰ David went to Baal Perazim, and defeated them there. He said,

"As waters break out, the LORD has broken out against my enemies before me."

So that place was called Baal Perazim (which means 'the LORD breaks out'). ²¹ The Philistines abandoned their idols there, so David and his men carried them off. ²² However, the Philistines came up again and occupied the Valley of Rephaim; ²³ so David enquired of the LORD, and he said to him,

"Do not go straight up, but go round behind them and attack them opposite the balsam trees. ²⁴ As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, be alert, because the LORD will have already gone ahead of you to strike the Philistine army."

²⁵ So David did as the LORD commanded him, and he drove back the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

Review

In 2 Samuel 5, David's divine anointing was finally accepted by all Israel's tribes (5:3)! This was the starting point of Israel's 'Golden Era' lasting from David's reign through to that of his

son Solomon. In general, 2 Samuel records the fascinating but not straightforward story of David's reign; for despite his own dire sins (see 2 Sam 11:1f.), David's anointing remained with him and we can learn a great deal about leadership from his story.

Yesterday we read about David's capture of Jerusalem, the city fortress known henceforth as 'David's city'. This was a stroke of genius, because Jerusalem was untainted by Israel's past and its capture completed the possession of the Promised Land! But David's anointing still needed to be accepted by the people; God's tired people of Israel, broken after years of war with the Philistines and broken by the tragic strife between supporters of Saul and David.

Today's story is about David's defeat of Israel's long term enemies, the Philistines, which proved to the people that God was at last able to defend them through their king. However, when Scripture records such a battle, we should not merely judge it with distaste as if Old Testament wars have no bearing on faith today. In truth, the world is as full of war as ever, and we must learn that God will guide His people through all the extremes of life.

There are important spiritual features to this story. First, David risked his life in battle to protect God's people, something any true leader must be willing to do. Second, David's anointing and obedience meant he could hear God's guidance and receive the advice necessary to overcome the powerful Philistines twice (5:20,25). Israel could therefore see that their king was an anointed man of God willing to do His will.

Going Deeper

The Philistine attack (5:17-18)

It was never going to be long before the Philistines heard that David had united the tribes of Israel. For most of the Canaanite region, the Philistines were the 'overlords' extracting punitive taxes on the Israelite communities, just as any occupying army of those days would have done. David was a threat to their mini-empire, and operating under their very noses. A read of the last few chapters of 1 Samuel will reveal the tricks David had played on the Philistines while on the run from Saul, and although he had made a few friends, most of the them were as keen to get rid of him as they had been to dispatch the former king Saul.

Verse 17 records the attempts of the Philistine army to track down David in the Judean desert regions to the south east of Jerusalem. It is possible that after taking Jerusalem, David moved back to '*the stronghold*', meaning the safe city of Hebron much further south (5:17 see also 5:13f.), but the threat was with an army of Philistines advancing through the '*Valley of Rephaim*' (5:18), a region barely 10 miles from Jerusalem, lying between David's city and the ancient Benjaminite city of Bethlehem.

One thing may escape our notice. The military action in this passage starts with David defeating the Philistines and evicting them from the region of Benjamin, the tribe of the old king Saul, David's 'enemy'. David's magnanimity is shown in that instead of taking advantage of the tribe that harboured his most fervent enemies, the supporters of king Saul, he liberated them! David was a new kind of king who listened to God's ways, not human ways.

Asking God's guidance (5:19)

In this dire circumstance, David did exactly what an anointed leader of God's people was supposed to do. Before anything else, he '*enquired of the Lord*' (5:19). Back in the days of Aaron and Moses, there was a system in place whereby a leader of God's people could ascertain God's will, through the use of the '*Urim and Thummim*' stones held in the ephod worn by the high priest (Ex 28:30, Lev 8:8, Duet 33:8); when the priest produced one or the other stone from a pocket it was a 'yes' or 'no' answer to a straight question. This was a

rather mysterious practice that appears close to divination and was little more than the throwing of elementary dice.

The time had come, however, for God to do something again in the history of His people, something He had done previously to the greats of Old Testament history; He spoke out loud to David. In the past, God had spoken to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, then to Moses and Joshua before beginning to speak prophetically through judges such as Deborah (Judges 4) or Samson (Judges 14f.). The great prophet Samuel had heard the word of the Lord (1 Samuel 3:2f.), but now God spoke directly to the man He had anointed to be the leader of His people. In answer to David's question about whether he should attack, He said, '*Go, I will certainly hand the Philistines over to you*' (5:19). Those who knew David knew that this was the calibre of the man and the quality of God in whom he believed (see previous stories of David in 1 Samuel 19f.). For everyone else this was clear evidence of God's hand not just on David but on them. This is what they so desperately needed.

David's first victory at Ba'al Perazim (5:20-21)

David's first victory was an important event, and it is recorded simply in verses 20 and 21. David went to face the Philistine army, and just as he had done decades earlier as a young man facing Goliath, he dealt with the Philistines competently and with the Lord's approval (5:19).

It is difficult to decipher some of what is meant by the Bible record here, but it is likely that the term 'Ba'al Perazim' meaning '*the Lord breaks out*' (5:21) was associated with the victory because some manner of surprise attack was mounted to defeat the Philistines. David is quoted as saying, '*as waters break out, the Lord has broken out against my enemies before me*' (5:20), which certainly sounds like military code for a sudden and overwhelming surprise attack.

In verse 21, however, there is a phrase that we might read and misunderstand; it says, '*the Philistines abandoned their idols there ...*' (5:21). We may quickly imagine that the surprise attack was so quick they left these behind, but we would be wrong. The battle clearly went against them but the Philistines took away with them what they wanted and left these idols for a reason. Scripture records with frequency (see Judges 16 and 1 Samuel 5), the presence of a nation's 'gods' on any land was akin to a claim of authority. The Philistines therefore left their calling card, saying they would be back, and they were.

David's second victory over the Philistines (5:22-25)

Scripture wastes no time in telling us that the Philistines came back, precisely to where they had left their idols, in the '*Valley of Rephaim*' (5:22). They knew David was close by and would not run from a fight and wanted to defeat him more than ever. This time, David '*enquired of the Lord*' yet again (5:23), but this time, received a long and complex answer (5:23,24) that sounds again like the setting of a trap.

However, this prophetic announcement instructs Israel's armies to take their place ready to '*attack them opposite the balsam trees*' (5:23). But then, no action is required of them but to observe what God will do to defeat the Philistines, '*be alert, because the Lord will have already gone ahead of you to strike ...*' (5:24)! This is the description of an appearance of God, marching into battle with His heavenly hosts through the wind in the '*balsam trees*' to secure victory directly in front of Israel's troops (vv 23, 24).

The whole action was to have greater significance of course, because although God Himself dealt with the bold Philistines who had left their gods in Rephaim to try to stake their claim to the land, king David knew exactly what to do. His army was assembled and ready for war in the Valley of Rephaim, but God had won the battle; so they did not go home, they turned from their positions and immediately chased all the Philistines out of Israel, as Scripture says, '*from Gibeon to Gezer*' (5:25). There is some dispute about exactly where these ancient

places lay, but Scripture clearly intends us to believe that David, with the Lord's direct and visible help, drove the Philistines out of Israel.

Discipleship

Application

David's wisdom in protecting Benjamin

What is significant here is the way that David, despite the 'foreign policy' he was forced to adopt of fighting the Philistines in order to secure Israel's boundaries, demonstrated a basic 'Kingdom' principle with which we are familiar from the new Testament and the teaching of Jesus. By acting as he did for the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of Saul the first King of Israel and David's own long-time enemy, David put into practice the Gospel command of Jesus to 'love your enemy' (Matt 5:43).

These were the actions of David, 'the Lord's anointed', and he therefore showed to everyone the true nature of the God who had chosen Israel and the 'righteousness' which should be at the heart of the nation. This is perhaps only one small piece of spiritual advice that can be gleaned from the text, but there are others, as I have hinted. David, for example, showed the people what it meant to be dependent on the Lord's direction, and it was some time since Israel had a leader who had done just that. We would have to go back to the time of Moses to find anything comparable.

Depending on the Lord

The second battle between David and the Philistines demonstrates the wisdom of dependence upon God. From a worldly perspective we think we may have to fight, but from God's perspective, he can deal with our battles in a heavenly manner. We must be ready to allow Him to work as He pleases and to reap the rewards of watching Him at work! It may be that the church of God needs to learn that half the victory in any one battle, at least, is not fought personally by us but by the Lord on our behalf. Such an approach requires true faith in God.

Ideas for what to do

- What battles have you faced recently and what battles do you see coming? You may not face war literally, but we all understand the language of having a battle, and it is part of life. Let Scripture teach you how to face the possibilities of battle for what is right.
- Pray for those who have few leaders and need to be led properly. The leaders of God's people today are not always taught well how to engage in life's battles, and many will feel that it is their personal responsibility to fight 'battles' with little reference to anyone else and sometimes little reference to God. Pray for your leaders.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. If you have a map of Israel at the time of David (many Bibles contain such a map at the rear) check out the place names you can find to get a 'feel' for what happened.
2. Why should we expect to find the Gospel in the Old Testament? Why do people NOT expect to find the Gospel in the Old Testament?

3. Why do you think that David had to go out against the Philistines twice?

Final Prayer

While people all around me reject the faith I have, give me the presence of mind, O Lord, to stand firm in You in all circumstances. Your hand is my guide, Your Spirit is my strength and Your love is my comfort. No-one can take this away from me if I remain in Your presence; Thank You Lord; AMEN