

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Dear Jesus, when weariness overcomes my troubled heart, shine a light into my soul and take the weight off my heart, I pray. Shine the light of Your Word into my thoughts so that my own words may be good and wholesome, and keep me so close to You that the burden of my habitual sins rolls away from me and I rest in You, and not the arms of the enemy. You, dear Jesus, are there for me when I need you; You are constantly present and I praise You; thank God, AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: WEALTH

**1. For yourself**

*Seek the Lord's help for any personal financial needs, and do not be ashamed of the truth about things such as debt or things you have done wrong with money, for example, gambling*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Pray for any amongst your circle of friends who may have a problem with money, either in hoarding it, gambling, maxing out on credit cards or the like. You will probably not know for whom these are problems, but pray in earnest; these things are endemic and often hidden*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Pray that the church of God will become a shining beacon of morality in a world dominated by greed and corruption*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Pray for your nation and that it will promote honesty and integrity in business, commerce, finance, the arts, sport, entertainment, and every prominent area of national life*

### Meditation

Some people like to pray generally,  
No names, just impressions, feelings,  
wants and pleadings from the heart.  
Their God is but an abstract thing,  
As real as a star in the sky;  
Proved only by some theory or other  
Proposed by someone else.

Can you pray like that? Can I?  
No God is God unless He is there  
For us to speak to one to one:  
No God is God unless He has done  
What is needed to bring His creation back  
To its Creator; and without fear;  
And Christ has done just that.

Jesus is the one; He shows us God.  
Let Him be to you who He really is;  
God who cares.  
God who delights to speak to us, personally.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – 1 Samuel 17:1-18

<sup>1</sup> Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Socoh, part of Judah; they pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. <sup>2</sup> Saul and the Israelites assembled and set up camp in the Vale of Elah and drew up in battle line to meet the Philistines. <sup>3</sup> The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them.

<sup>4</sup> A champion named Goliath, from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall, <sup>5</sup> had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of mail weighing about 125 pounds, <sup>6</sup> and he wore bronze shin guards, and had a bronze javelin slung over his back; <sup>7</sup> the shaft of the spear was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed about 15 pounds, and his shield-bearer went ahead of him.

<sup>8</sup> Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel,

'Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. <sup>9</sup> If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.'

<sup>10</sup> Then the Philistine said,

'Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.'

<sup>11</sup> On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

<sup>12</sup> Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah, who had eight sons. In Saul's day he was old and well advanced in years. <sup>13</sup> Jesse's three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war: The firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah. <sup>14</sup> David was the youngest, and the three oldest followed Saul, <sup>15</sup> but David went backwards and forwards from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

<sup>16</sup> For forty days, the Philistine came forward each morning and evening and took his stand.

<sup>17</sup> Now Jesse said to his son David,

'Take this measure of roasted grain and these ten loaves for your brothers, and hurry to their camp. <sup>18</sup> Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit; see how your brothers are and bring back from them a token of reassurance.'

### Review

***Dramatically, the storyline in 1 Samuel changes to reflect the warlike times. The Philistines and their champion Goliath threaten Israel, but Israel's champion, David is still living a domestic life, unaware of the drama of what he will be called to do.***

Israel was indeed at war, and King Saul never had the luxury of reigning at a time of peace. From the point of view of the people of Israel, their borders had been set by God and the tribal lands were as sacrosanct then as they are to the people of Israel of this day. The Philistines had broken through part of this border and they presented a clear threat to the nation of Israel and King Saul, and he could do no other than engage them in battle. It was a battle he frankly did not expect to win, but he did, and it changed the course of Israelite history. As we shall see, the man who was responsible for victory was of course the young David.

In the days of Abraham, centuries before, the western plains of what is now the Gaza Strip had been occupied by a relatively easy going people, with whom the patriarch arranged a contented peace (Genesis 22:25-34). But during the years Israel were enslaved in Egypt, it seems that a more warlike people had inhabited the region, and as soon as the people of Israel became masters of the promised land of Canaan, they had trouble dealing with their South West and neighbours, the Philistines. We first learn about them in the stories of the embattled judge Samson (Judges 14,15,16). With very few words, 1 Samuel reminds us that Israel was in a perpetual state of war with these people (17:1-3), indeed, they were encamped within the tribal lands of Judah (17:1), having aggressively encroached on the border.

Now for the drama. The Philistines had a champion, a man who could stand out in front of the army as a commanding warrior, issuing threats to their opponents, in this case, the Israelites. We are given a description of this man, Goliath, and there is every reason for us to think that it has some accuracy (17:4-7). History is littered with descriptions of real, very large men, who did for their nations what Goliath did for the Philistines. However, the person who wrote down this record here in 1 Samuel had a different reason for describing his size and weaponry (17:4-7). By the time we reach the end of his story, he will make the point that there is a power far greater than mere military muscle.

Goliath stood and taunted the people of Israel. His taunt was no more than a 'dare', of course, for if someone came to take up the fight with him, the end result would be a pitched battle between the two armies. But the winner of such a challenge would give a huge psychological advantage to his side, and everyone knew it. So we read Goliath's full threat in verses 8 and 9, and the Philistine then makes it 'personal' and '*defies the ranks of Israel*' (17:10), he is determined that battle will take place and he is utterly confident in his own strength.

All of this brings terror to the people of Israel, who are described in verse 11 as '*dismayed and terrified*'. We will have to hold that thought, however, for the story line now takes us in a completely different direction, and we will return to the warriors awaiting battle in the Valley of Elah in the next study. This story is crafted by a master writer, who now contrasts the sheer terror of impending battle with the homely details of what was happening to David, the man who would soon take centre stage. Now, the story was not told and recited through the centuries to people who did not know what would happen next, but to people who did; they knew all about David, the man who defeated Goliath to bring glory to Israel. So the purpose of this story was not merely to recount history, but to declare that God intervenes in human history to save His people. The story of David is one of many stories in the Old Testament that reveal this fact about God before He eventually sends His Son Jesus to do the huge work of saving all who have faith in Him.

So it is with awe and wonder that we read now not about the scene of human battle, but the landscape of God's work in the everyday life of the young David. In those days, the last of eight sons had little inheritance and no prospect of wealth in the extended family of the day. David's job was to be obedient, and to serve those above him, and the simple description of him travelling '*backwards and forwards*' (17:15) says it all. The young David was earning his keep in service of others. It has been said that this is where all the great servants of the Lord have started.

Nevertheless, this was a time of war, and the work required of David was demanding. We are told that Goliath, the Philistine, '*took his stand*' for 40 days (17:16), during which David brought provisions to his older brothers in the army (17:13), and looked after the family flock at home (17:15). The story records also that he took a mysterious consignment of ten cheeses to the commander of the unit in which his brothers served. What was this? Was it simply a kind provision of food? There is another possible explanation, which is to do with the fact that the old Jesse needed to ensure the survival of his elder sons for the sake of the family in the forthcoming battle. The ten cheeses may have been an 'under the table' payment to ensure that his sons were not allocated to the thick of the battle, in which case the 'token of reassurance' (a strange phrase) was the written guarantee sought by Jesse. There is plenty of evidence of such manoeuvring in other Old Testament battles (e.g. 2 Samuel 11:14f.)!

David is only a messenger, of course, and as the story unfolds, the spotlight increasingly falls upon him. Our passage today does little more than set the scene for the battle ahead, but it nevertheless gives us a fascinating insight into Israel in the days of King Saul. It also tells us more about the early life of the young David.

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## Discipleship

### Questions for groups

1. What does this passage of Scripture tell us about David, and what does it tell us about King Saul?
2. What powers and authorities stand against the church today and dare it to fight? Why is this so?
3. Who is the champion in whom God's people may place their trust, who stand against the world's Goliath's?

### Discipleship challenges

- *Have you ever been tempted to think that God has greater things for you than you imagine? Do not be ashamed to think such thoughts, but bring them before the Lord to get His realistic evaluation of them rather than assess such thoughts yourself.*
  - *Our reading is the story of a battle brewing, and you can 'feel it in the air'. Do you think that we can 'feel it in the air' when a spiritual battle is brewing in the life of the church? What battles are looming in your opinion, and why?*
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## **Final Prayer**

Father God, and Lord of all, You have given the world to humanity, and we use it as if we own it, and we fight over it and spoil it. Give us eyes to see the inhumanity of the battles that people fight with each other, and a heart to stand against violence, war and battle. Make us people of peace, but make us strong enough to stand for it, we pray. AMEN

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