

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

We praise you and bless You, Holy and majestic Lord. You stand above all the cultures, institutions, governments and organisations of the world with the authority of the only One who can make all things happen according to Your own will and purpose. We place our trust in You because You alone can make good things happen out of everything we experience day by day. All glory be to You! ALLELUIA

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: CULTURE

**1. For yourself**

*Pray today in thanksgiving for everything you have been given by God; especially for your country of birth and your culture*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Thank God for those who you love and are a part of your life. Thank God for the culture in which you live, for its benefits, and everything you enjoy about it*

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

*Pray for the church, and pray that it will both be completely true to the Gospel and also a witness to people in the culture of today*

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

*Pray against the forces within the world that work to make some culture dominate others, and pray for God's people to be an influence for good within the world.*

### Meditation

I go out to do my daily work;  
With the radiance of this day's light  
Glowing on my every move:  
The Creator knows my doing.

I thank Him for this opportunity;  
He has selected me for a task  
And in its doing I am fulfilled:  
The Creator knows my being.

I focus to dispel my wandering;  
The motivation of His presence  
Directs my mind and rules this work:  
The Creator knows my thinking.

I serve the only God for all my life;  
His wisdom ever goes before  
And all my graft is for His glory;  
The Creator knows my living.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – 1 Samuel 19: 18-24

<sup>18</sup> Now after David fled and escaped, he came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel went and settled at Naioth. <sup>19</sup> Saul was told,

‘David is at Naioth in Ramah.’

<sup>20</sup> Then Saul sent messengers to take David. But when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing in charge of them, the spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also fell under the influence of the prophetic spirit.

<sup>21</sup> When Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they also fell under the influence of the prophetic spirit. Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also fell. <sup>22</sup> Then he himself went to Ramah. He came to the great well that is in Secu; he asked,

‘Where are Samuel and David?’

And someone said,

‘They are at Naioth in Ramah.’

<sup>23</sup> He went there, toward Naioth in Ramah; and the spirit of God came upon him. As he was going, he fell under the influence of the prophetic spirit, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. <sup>24</sup> He also took off his robes, and prophesied before Samuel. He lay exposed all that day and all that night. Therefore it is said,

‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’

## Review

***1 Samuel 19 ends with an extraordinary story about a meeting between Samuel and his band of prophets, and David. The party is then gate-crashed by messengers from Saul, come to deal with David, and eventually Saul comes Himself. But all come under the influence of God’s spirit of prophecy.***

The last few verses of 1 Samuel 19 come as something of a surprise. We already know that David had managed to get away from Saul (19:18) with the help of his wife Michal (19:8-17). We might also have expected that David would meet up with Saul, the man who had anointed him, to discuss what had happened (19:18). What we are not expecting is the extraordinary events that took place next (19:20-24).

As we read this passage, it seems that some powerful work of God’s Spirit is taking place. Samuel was living in Ramah together with a group of other prophets, and together, they are ‘prophesying’. But the words used to describe this prophecy are unique in the Bible. Of course, we read that God’s Spirit is at work in many wonderful and powerful ways throughout Scripture; for example, His power and authority at the beginning of Creation (Genesis 1:2,3), or the anointing of God’s Spirit on the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2f.). However, the words used to describe prophecy here are different.

Before taking this further, something important must be said. If we stand back to look at this passage, and turn away from our natural inquisitiveness at what is said here, then we may find that the reading could indeed be relatively simple. As each of the main characters of the book of 1 Samuel, first Samuel, then David and then even Saul, arrive at Ramah and fall under the influence of God’s prophetic spirit, we discover that God alone is in control of their lives and their destiny! The long and fascinating tale weaved by 1 & 2 Samuel is the stuff of great drama, but we should not forget that it comprises stories about real people whose lives came together under God’s purposes. The end result of the saga of 1 & 2 Samuel, is that all Israel is governed by one King, King David, under God. More than this, the story points forward to a time when one of David’s descendants will reign, supreme, (2 Samuel 7:8-16) as God’s Messiah! In our study of this intriguing passage, we should not allow ourselves to miss this vital point.

So now to the story line itself. David went to Ramah to find Samuel, the man who had anointed him, and from whom we have not heard since. Neither do we hear about the meeting of the two, though we may well imagine that they had much to share. David may have been anointed king over all Israel, but he was far from claiming the title, even though he had done everything right, whether from an earthly or a spiritual perspective. Moreover, Saul remained in charge of Israel, and was seeking his life! But we are not told about such things, instead, the events reported next come from Saul’s perspective! We are told that Saul was as determined as ever to have David killed, so he sent ‘messengers’ to get David (19:19), a euphemistic term for soldiers with the authority to kill!

The story now takes a dramatic twist, for when the messengers arrive at Ramah, they immediately come under the spiritual influence of Samuel and his band of prophets (19:20)! Now before we can go further, we need to try and understand what exactly Scripture means by this, for it is not clear. Most Bible versions tell us that the messengers ‘prophesied’ (19:20, 21, 24), but some (notably the NRSV) say that they fell under the influence of what they call a ‘prophetic frenzy’. This suggests that Samuel and his prophetic group were in some kind of ecstatic trance!

Some scholars think that that Israelite prophets of David's time practiced the same kind of techniques that Scriptures says was used by the prophets of Ba'al. In the story of Elijah, for example, we are told that they danced themselves into a high state of excitement when inciting Ba'al to consume sacrifices (1 Kings 18). However, it is not helpful to make this link. In the text of the Bible, the words used for this prophetic experience are complex, and they seem to suggest that the prophets were wholly immersed in their spiritual experience, perhaps overcome by the presence of the Spirit of God; and we would be foolish to push what this might mean too far. There are many occasions when the Bible describes people being overcome by God's presence, without suggesting that they were in some way working themselves up into a frenzy. Examples of this are Ezekiel's vision of God by the river Chebar (Ezekiel 1:28 etc.), or Jeremiah's dramatic prophetic deed of smashing pots to signify the destruction of Israel (Jeremiah 18).

Whatever happened in the prophetic experience, Saul eventually came to Ramah to join the messengers he had sent, and he was taken over by this same experience. He dramatically stripped himself of his royal robes, and lay there, overcome (19:24)! In the presence of God and of His servants, Saul could not pretend to any position of superiority, he was a man like Samuel and David, and all of them shared this extraordinary experience of prophecy.

The writer of 1 Samuel writes in this way to tell us that at this dramatic moment in the story, God is in charge of what is happening. We might think that David's possibility of becoming king is remote, and Samuel's authority to anoint David sounds like a joke, but we would be wrong. Before God, all these great characters of the Old Testament are men under the authority of God. We will soon begin the long story of David's epic exploits in hiding, and many years will pass before he climbs back up to the position of Israel's rightful king. But God is in charge.

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## Discipleship

### Questions for groups

1. If you have a copy of a New Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, the New International version, or any others, check out how they translate this passage and compare notes.
2. What experience do you have of God's Spirit at work in your life? Can you explain it, and are there parts which you cannot explain?
3. Why do you think God intervened in the story of David and Saul in this way?

### Discipleship challenges

- *Have a day of prayer and fasting in which you ask the Lord to reveal to you more of His Spirit and more of what He wants to do through you by His Spirit.*
- *When you are praying, listen out for what the Lord is saying to you through these prayers and write down what the Lord is saying to you.*

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## Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, we are amazed at Your mysterious ways. Yet you guide us along the path of life with power and grace, enabling us to fulfil our lives through the gracious gifts You bestow. All praise to You, Living Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

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