

## Prayer

Lord God, You led the Israelites through the wilderness in a cloud by day and a fire by night. Lead me through my wilderness by the power and comfort of Your divine yet real presence. Come with me upon my journey, the surest guide, the noblest friend, the most trusted advisor and the best quality counsellor; free to me by the grace of God! Bring me to the Promised Land of Your Kingdom; here, now and in my eternal future: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Church Conferences

*Different types of church conferences are constantly being arranged, with subjects ranging from church leadership to healing ministry, or revival and renewal. Pray for them*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for the international situation developing in Georgia*
- *Give thanks for the joy of music and song*
- *Pray for national leaders gathered in Beijing for the Olympics*

## Meditation

We receive so much more than we can possibly give.

The things we buy and eat come from elsewhere;  
 We pay for others to do the work and graft of living,  
 Our lives depend upon their honest work and integrity.  
 We count those who give us love and care as friends,  
 And however much we give ourselves to them,  
 Our lives are enhanced by all they say and do for us.  
 The people we meet at church give us much more  
 Than an atmosphere of worship, they give their all;  
 Our lives are blessed by mutual fellowship and love.  
 You Lord God, have made, sustained, and healed us,  
 Comforted, loved, and promised us Your very self;  
 Our lives are changed by the glory of Your presence.

Save us, we pray, from being wrapped up in ourselves!

## Bible Study - 1 Samuel 27:1-7

<sup>1</sup> *David said in his heart, 'Now, one day I will perish by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than to escape to the land of the Philistines; then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I will escape out of his hand.'*

<sup>2</sup> *So David set out and crossed the border, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to King Achish son of Maach of Gath. <sup>3</sup> David stayed with Achish at Gath, he and his troops, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. <sup>4</sup> When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought for him.*

<sup>5</sup> *Then David said to Achish, 'If I have found favor in your sight, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, so that I may live there; for why should*

*your servant live in the royal city with you?’<sup>6</sup> So that day Achish gave him Ziklag; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. <sup>7</sup> The length of time that David lived in the country of the Philistines was one year and four months.*

## Review

David was entirely right in thinking that despite his two spectacular victories against Saul (1 Samuel 24 and 26), the King of Israel would not keep his word and would come against him again and again. It was in Saul's manic nature so to do. Nevertheless, David faced a dilemma. God had told him through the prophet Gad (22:5) to stay in Judah, after he had risen from the low point in his life when he pretended to be mad in order to disguise himself amongst the Philistine (21:10-15). Many commentators on today's passage say that David sinned by going against this instruction and returning to Gath to find a secure place to live amongst the Philistines. This may be right, because David did not consult the Lord (see 27:1f.) about the move, and the decision may have been taken out of weakness and uncertainty rather than strength. Scripture is nothing if not open about the strengths and weaknesses of its great characters, but because other issues are at stake and the Old Testament does not moralise on the matter here, I will therefore not pursue it further.

It is extraordinary that David should take refuge with the Philistine enemies of Israel and Judah, and indeed, work for Achish, the King of Gath by guarding part of his tribal lands, Ziklag. However, verse 6 does indicate that David's occupancy of this area of land eventually becomes permanent and was eventually included in Judah's tribal lands in later days. This should remind us that sometimes, the eyes of scripture are not on the rights and wrongs of the present situation, but on the wider scheme or a longer view of things.

Throughout 1 Samuel, the Philistines have been the 'enemy par excellence'. The writer of 1 Samuel assumes that we know the big picture of what is going on, yet often, because people rarely know this part of the Old Testament, we tend to read it as if it were a sermon illustration or a moral point in its own right. Nothing could be further from the truth, as we will not understand this text unless we realise that this passage begins the winding up of the story of Saul which ends with his death in battle (1 Sam 31). Saul will die in battle with the Philistines, and as the next 5 chapters (27-31) move quickly through this 'big picture', God manipulates David away from any direct involvement in the death of Saul in that battle.

What choice did David have? For if he had formed an alliance with Saul after the partial reconciliation in chapters 24 or 26, he would have been obliged to be involved in the battle in which Saul died, and could have been accused of being involved in some way with his death. The fog of war could have worked against him. However, his partial connection with the Philistines ended on the eve of war with Israel and Judah (1 Sam 29), when the five Philistine Kings refused to allow him to fight. This left David back where he had been for most of the second half of the book of 1 Samuel; on the run from Saul and with no clear allegiance. He played one group of people against another in order to protect his own small band of fighting men. So when Saul died, David was nowhere nearby. He was able to mourn the loss of Saul and assume the throne (of Judah, at least) without any direct blame being attached to him for Saul's demise. It was an important part of the story because it meant that David was able to re-unite the Israelite people without bearing any personal blame for the downfall of their first influential king, Saul.

These were strange times, and how easy it would have been to criticise David for conniving with the enemy. Following this passage, David pursued minor conflicts (27:8-12) on behalf of the Philistines which left many people dead, and told lies to cover up his activities and covert operations! It is easy for us to moralise from a distance without any understanding of why other people have acted as they have done or of God's wider plans. The question remains for each of us; are we prepared to submit our decisions and actions to the Lord,

even in the bizarre and sometimes strange situations in which we find ourselves. If we are, then God can lead us through strangeness and obscurity back into the mainstream of His greater plans for His people. It was true of David and has been true of many other great workers of the Lord.

I hope you will not mind if I end with an example of what I have just said. How can we, in the West, criticise David for killing people in battles that secured the future of God's people, when we eat food produced in such a way as to decimate vast areas of the world? Beef raised on land 'reclaimed' from Brazilian rain forest, for example, has indirectly killed people and communities, and potentially endangered the existence of the planet upon which God has placed us! Consider as well the established facts of the way that coffee, tea and cocoa are produced, keeping millions in poverty with no hope of life with any meaning or dignity! I know this is controversial; but this is my point. Will we be hypocrites and condemn David, or be a people of God who live in a compromised world with every attempt to do what is right for the Kingdom, but accept that we have to do so in a compromised and flawed world. In this life, we live by the grace of God not by our personal purity, but the plans of the Lord to bring His Word and His life into the world. Much of the time, we will not understand what is happening around us, and this is very true of the passage which we have read today. But this does not mean that it is not part of God's great scheme of things.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What is your reaction to this passage of scripture? Which parts of it puzzle you, and which parts seem sensible?
2. How firmly and omitted do you think David was to the cause of the Philistines in this passage?
3. Examine the illustration that I gave at the end of this study. Do you think this illustration is fair? Can you give a better illustration, or a different one?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*It is not easy to live in a place of 'not knowing'; when things are uncertain and there is nothing to do except keep going and do one's best. It is even harder to do things which may appear to be contrary to what you believe to be the Lord's will, but you have to be very clear about the Lord's guidance if you are to stand firm!*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Have you experienced anything like this in your life, and what has been the reaction of other people around you? Have you been accused of sanding against God's work? How have you reacted to this?*
- *Pray for those people who find themselves in difficult places, particularly within families, in their witness to the faith and to the Gospel. Pray for the Lord to show them His wider plans which will inspire them to stand firm.*

## Final Prayer

God of glory and God of grace; show Your glory in our lives by doing great things amongst us, and show Your grace by enabling us to love each other without hindrance from the past or cultural pre-conditioning. Remove from our souls everything that would prevent us from fulfilling our true potential in You. Praise You, Lord Jesus Christ, praise You!