

## Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus for the gift of this day. Lead me through its joys and trials, and through everything that happens help me understand something of Your will for me. May I continue to praise You through the whole of the day, and grow stronger in faith each hour. All glory be to You Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Crime

*Please join with prayers this week on the subject of crime. Crime threatens countries in different ways, so pray for the most important issues affecting your country at the moment.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for food and friendship
- Pray for aid workers throughout the world who need our support
- Pray for those traumatised by the effects of war and violence

## Meditation

Lead me faithfully on the pathway of discipleship, O lord  
Guide me day by day and hour by hour until I come to Your rest.  
Sometimes I do not know where it is, and have to ask the way;  
Sometimes I turn away from your gracious offer of help;  
Sometimes I continue to explore but I am too tired and need to stop;  
Sometimes I really want to stop where I am, but need to walk on further;  
Sometimes I take advice from others who suggest a different route;  
Sometimes I hope that my own path will lead me to where I need to be;  
Sometimes I tire of all the burdens I carry which slow me down;  
But there is something wonderful to be found in simple obedience,  
In walking Your pathway towards the goal, and finding true peace.

## Bible Study - 1 Samuel 30:1-10

<sup>1</sup> Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negeb and on Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag, burned it down, <sup>2</sup> and took captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great; they killed none of them, but carried them off and went their way. <sup>3</sup> So when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned down, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.

<sup>4</sup> Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept, until they had no more strength to weep. <sup>5</sup> David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. <sup>6</sup> David was in great danger, because the people spoke of stoning him as they were all bitter in spirit for their sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

<sup>7</sup> David said to the priest Abiathar son of Ahimelech, 'Bring me the ephod.' So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. <sup>8</sup> David inquired of the LORD, 'Shall I

*pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?’ He answered him, ‘Pursue; for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue.’<sup>9</sup> So David set out, he and the six hundred men who were with him. They came to the Wadi Besor, where those stayed who were left behind.<sup>10</sup> But David went on with the pursuit, he and four hundred men; two hundred stayed behind, too exhausted to cross the Wadi Besor.*

## Review

David had been in the north with the Philistines, where the Philistine Kings despite the support of Achish had rejected him from fighting against Israel (see previous study). Coming back south across the central highlands of Israel, David returned to discover to his horror that whilst they had been away the Amalekites had attacked their home city of Ziklag and carried off their wives, children and cattle (see 30:2,20). This was a terrible blow to the people, and there was an outpouring of anger against David because the people felt let down by him due to his absence at a time of need. Having consulted the Lord through Abiathar the priest and through using the ancient ‘ephod’ (30:7), David decided to press on immediately in the hope of finding those who had been kidnapped. So whilst Saul and the Philistines were preparing for their epic battle in the north of the Israel, the problems of his own people in the south of the country occupied David.

There are a number of interesting features of this story; firstly, the Amalekites. They were Israel’s foe at the time of the famous incident (1 Samuel 15) in which Samuel gave Saul the strictest of instructions to kill all the Amalekites and their cattle. However, Saul failed to do this and allowed his troops to take what they wanted, as would have been usual after a battle in those days. Samuel had a blazing row with Saul over this which led to a complete division between the two, and this was the beginning of the end of Saul’s real authority as King over Israel and Judah. So it was that the Amalekites appear in this story, now challenging David! There is a great deal of irony in all this, and we shall see that David does eventually find and defeat the Amalekites, doing exactly what the Lord requires of him in this case, and also rescuing his own people. This is more than a clue about the Lord’s love for David and the increasing isolation of Saul at the end of his life.

It must have been extremely distressing for David’s men to come home expecting a welcome after a long trek, only to discover that their families had been taken hostage. They wept, it says ‘until they had no more strength to weep’ (30:4); but in this case their weeping turned to anger at their leader. As they vented their wrath, by contrast, David ‘strengthened himself in the Lord’ (30:6) despite his own distress at the loss of his wives and extended family. We discover also that with David was one of the great priestly figureheads of Israel, the priest Abiathar, who was in possession of the ‘ephod’, Israel’s traditional priestly vestment used for making enquiries of the Lord. David went to Abiathar, and although we are not told the methods used to ‘inquire of the Lord’, David received the answers to his prayers which was a message from the Lord to pursue the Amalekites immediately.

This was no small matter. The troops were exhausted after their trek from the north, and after the earlier bad feeling, it was no small matter for David to call them to order again. He put his reputation on the line by presenting the people with a coordinated plan to rescue their wives and families, and supported by a Word of the Lord via the ephod, David gained sufficient support to proceed with his plan. David set out with 600 men, but the story tells how 200 men of his army were unable to continue because of the stress of tiredness. This sounds very understandable, but we will find that this division of the army becomes important as the story unfolds (see next study). The stage is set for an intriguing battle with the Amalekites, which we will read next in these studies.

The most significant point that we can take from this passage is the courage of David to stay close to the Lord when a disaster was unfolding all around him. It is extremely easy to turn to our own resources when faced with difficult circumstances, and what David did is an example to us, and as soon as he pursued the Lord’s agenda, things fell into place. In the wider picture of things, this story shows that if we fail to be obedient to God then problems are created for the future, just as Saul’s earlier failure meant that the Amalekites were able to carry out this raid. However, there is no point in making a fuss about problems or failure, when it is important to move on and do what the Lord says, as David did. The Lord will always give us strength if we are prepared to follow Him and do His will.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Is it possible for us to understand what it was like to have one’s home ravaged by invaders as in this passage? How would you react?
2. Try to picture yourself in David’s situation, and imagine how he might have gone about ‘strengthening himself in the Lord’ (30:6)
3. Are these roots of war surmountable, or are they always present in the world?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*Stories such as this from ancient times are hard to interpret and use because they speak of things which are quite beyond our experience. War today is a matter of fearsome technology rather than the brutal physical confrontation as in times past. Yet God is involved in every form of human conflict, and we need to understand how He can teach us and guide us through every situation which afflicts humanity.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Pray for those who are hurting because of the bloodshed and violence of war, and because war has robbed them of their livelihoods and homes. Pray for the Aid agencies which try to help such people, especially Christian ones.*
- *Would you describe yourself as a pacifist? Discuss your stance over this with a friend and try to do so with an open mind to the complex issues which are involved.*

## Final Prayer

Keep me honest, Lord God, I pray. Show me how my life might reflect truth and integrity in the eyes of others; not so that I can claim anything for myself, but so that I might simply do Your will, and accomplish what is right. I ask this prayer in Jesus’ name; AMEN