

Prayer

Jesus, You heal the wounds of my body, and I thank You.
Holy Spirit, You heal the brokenness of my spirit, and I thank You.
Father God, You heal the sinfulness of my soul, and I thank You.
Make me whole like You, Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Life at Home

Give thanks to God for all the good things 'home' means to you, and place into His hands the issues which can make 'home' a difficult place to be. Thank God for your home.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those suffering because of poverty*
- *Pray for those you know who endure personal tragedy*
- *Give thanks for rest and sleep*

Meditation

(On growing faith)

As each and every leaf and flower bursts into life,
Lord, flood my senses with Your living joy,
And may the radiance of your light and life renew me.

As each and every seed finds life within the soil,
Lord, energise my dormant soul by Your love,
And may Your kindness flower in me in faith and hope.

As each and every plant now reaches upwards,
Lord, stretch my mind to show me Your truth,
And enable me to grow in joy and peace and confidence.

Lord, I live my life for You.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 1:1-12

¹ After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. ² On the third day, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground and did obeisance. ³ David said to him, 'Where have you come from?' He said to him, 'I have escaped from the camp of Israel.' ⁴ David said to him, 'How did things go? Tell me!' He answered, 'The army fled from the battle, but also many of the army fell and died; and Saul and his son Jonathan also died.' ⁵ Then David asked the young man who was reporting to him, 'How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan died?' ⁶ The young man reporting to him said, 'I happened to be on Mount Gilboa; and there was Saul leaning on his spear, while the chariots and the horsemen drew close to him. ⁷ When he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. I answered, "Here sir." ⁸ And he said to me, "Who are you?" I answered him, "I am an Amalekite."

⁹ He said to me, "Come, stand over me and kill me; for convulsions have seized me, and yet my life still lingers."¹⁰ So I stood over him, and killed him, for I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord.'

¹¹ The David took hold of his clothes and tore them; and all men who were with him did the same. ¹² They mourned and wept, and fasted until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

Review

2 Samuel is all about David and the story of his kingship. It therefore begins where 1 Samuel finished, in the aftermath of the death of Saul (1 Sam 31). Our reading is part of a more lengthy passage extending to verse 16, but it has been cut short for the purposes of this brief study. These verses tell us what happened when an Amalekite messenger told David about Saul's death, which raises a number of questions about what happened.

In order to get the full picture, we must remember that 1 and 2 Samuel are part of one scroll of the Hebrew Bible, and our 'break' between the two does not reflect the original text. The point is this, if you had read everything in sequence, you would have the following sequence of events in mind. Whilst Saul had been fatally engaging the Philistines in battle in the valley of Jezreel to the north of Israel, David had successfully fought the Amalekites in the south of the country in an action to retrieve his own family from captivity (1 Sam 30) and then returned home. David was still living in exile at Ziklag, a Philistine town to the south west of Israel and Judah, far from where the battle took place in Jezreel. All of this is important, because the writers of scripture included only those facts they thought were important to the story and God's purposes.

There is something very fishy about the report from the young Amalekite, however. The first thing that a reader notices is that the story of Saul's death here is quite different from what is recorded in 1 Samuel 31. In the earlier story, when Saul was mortally wounded, he asked his armour bearer to kill him. When he would not, Saul took his own life. The Amalekite, however, reported that Saul was still alive when he came across him, and at the request of Saul, he had killed him (not the armour bearer), whereupon he took the royal emblems of the crown and armlet from Saul and brought them to David. His story is quite different, and scripture clearly asks us to see the difference, and the impression we gain from this is that the Amalekite was not telling the truth!

You may think that this is a presumption because we do not know which was correct; and perhaps, like other Biblical stories, this is two reports of the same incident from two perspectives? However, this is different. The one story follows the other and is written by the same author. We should also remember that the Amalekites and the Israelites were sworn enemies in every other encounter in scripture; indeed, David had just fought a bitter battle against them 'down south' after they had taken advantage of him and captured his own wives and family! The more we look at this, the more we must suspect that the whole story is full of irony. History tells us that the young Amalekite was unlikely to have been a 'resident alien' living with the people of Israel and fighting with them at Jezreel; he was probably a looter who came across Saul's body after the battle. He then saw an opportunity to ingratiate himself with the man who would be the next king of Israel, and therefore took the crown and the armlet to him, hoping for reward.

Irony is provided by the fact that David had just fought the Amalekites in battle, and also the fact that Saul's greatest sin was committed after a battle with the Amalekites. He was supposed to wipe them out by the Lord's express demand, but instead he sought personal

gain from the spoil of the battle, and spared both people and animals (1 Sam 15:1f.) causing Samuel to despair of Saul's faithfulness to the Lord. Now, Saul's failure and sin had come back to haunt him!

Scholars are still divided about whether the Amalekite told the truth or not, and use meticulous literary methods to try and determine what actually happened. Frankly, I think it is more simple than that. For David, despite the fact that his enemy had been killed, he still accepted Saul as the Lord's anointed and mourned his loss (1:11,12). Scripture goes on to record that he was also furious at the Amalekite, and had him killed; an understandable reaction after all David had been through recently with Amalekites, and if he even gained a whiff of untruth in the young man's story. If he had really fought with Israel, he should not have killed 'the Lord's anointed', and David may well have been correct in his judgement of the man in accordance with the laws of Israel. In addition, as we will begin to find out, David would receive the true authority to lead Israel and Judah from the Lord, and it would take some time yet to repair the damaged peoples of the twelve tribes. The authority of kingship was not something he could receive simply by taking the crown from the hand of an Amalekite. The Lord would give him the kingdom in His own time and in His own way.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What was your first impression of the story we have read today? Has the study changed your views? How?
2. How do you react to the death and destruction in these stories? Where can we see God's hand in it all?
3. Debate in your group whether you accept the interpretation of this story I have presented, or whether the young man was an innocent.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

If we read this story simply as a scripture reading in church on Sunday morning, we might not notice what is going on. One of the deep concerns I have about the way people encounter scripture these days is the inadequacy of getting to know it through church services alone. Good quality research shows that of the most fervent Christians today, few read the Bible with any regularity and depth. This passage shows the need for Christians to engage with scripture on a broader front.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Read through the last few chapters of 1 Samuel and through 2 Samuel 1 all together in order to see how these stories intertwine. What other threads come to the surface of your mind as you read? Allow the Lord to use your reading to show you more than you have seen before.*
- *Truth is sometimes a rare commodity. We all feel that we know the truth and speak it, but are sometimes guilty of communicating in ways that are less than honest. Over a period of time, fast and pray about the issue of honesty, and let the Lord show you if there is anything you need to put right in your own life.*

Final Prayer

Bless those we love this day, Lord Jesus. Keep them in Your care and protect them from all evil. If there are problems between us, may we be humble enough to let you heal us. When we are at peace together, may we give You the glory. You have given us each other. Praise be to You, Lord Jesus, AMEN