

Prayer

Thank You and praise you, Heavenly Father, for the privilege of gathering together for worship this day: may we honour You by our thoughts, words and deeds, both in worship and in resting. May we be a testimony to the greatness of Your saving power throughout the world, and may we demonstrate the love we celebrate this day throughout our lives and so fulfil our calling. Thank You and praise You, Heavenly Father: ALLELUIA!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Gifts of the Spirit

This week we will pray using the theme of the famous 'gifts of the Spirit'. Pray that God will bless His people with these gifts, and that His people will be open to receive them.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for young people who know nothing but a life of crime*
- *Give thanks for the fellowship of believers throughout the world*
- *Pray for small businesses which are closing due to the economy*

Meditation

Lord Jesus, give me a heart committed to worship,

which touches every part of my life;
which cannot take place without You or me;
which leads me to bow down in repentance;
which lifts my heart to receive God's love;
which raises my voice in praise and in song;
which feels like music playing in my soul;
which is a sacrifice of my time and money;
which receives the truth of God's Word;
which excites the heart and restores the soul;
which changes my heart towards others;
which sees things differently in the light of Christ;
which empowers me to fulfil God's call.

Then, Lord Jesus, may I never stop worshipping You!

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 10:1-5

¹ *Some time later, the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun succeeded him. ² David said, 'I will deal faithfully with Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father dealt faithfully with me.'* So David sent representatives expressing his condolences for the loss of his father.

When David's envoys came into the land of the Ammonites, ³ the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanun, their lord, 'Do you really think that David is honouring your father by sending representatives with condolences to you? Has he not sent them to explore the city, to spy it out, and to overthrow it?' ⁴ *So Hanun seized David's representatives, shaved off half of each man's beard, cut*

off their garments at the buttocks, and sent them away. ⁵ When David was told, he went to meet them, for the men were utterly humiliated. The king said, 'Wait at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return.'

Review

A change had taken place in David since the blessing of the covenant that was granted to him and his dynasty (2 Sam 7), and the qualities of love and faithfulness shown to him by God began to affect his style of leadership. For example, he dealt with Mephibosheth on the basis of 'covenant faithfulness' (9:1-8), and in our story today, he attempted to show loyal faithfulness to the nation of the Ammonites, who he regarded as allies.

We have not heard much of the Ammonites in the story of David so far, but they are mentioned briefly in 2 Sam 8:12 as one of the kingdoms 'subdued'. This probably means that David came to a political arrangement with the Ammonite King after an earlier show of force. The Ammonites lived on the eastern side of the Jordan River before it flowed into the Dead Sea. They were as close to Israel and Judah on the eastern side as the Philistines were on the west, and peace with them was crucial for the stability of the nation of Israel. What happened next, however, became a crucial test of David's desire to operate an ethical foreign policy.

The incident, and the disgrace David heard of the death of the King of Ammon and sent representatives of his court to express official condolences with good intent to his son and heir, Hanun. Indeed, the text clearly indicates this good intent by using the Hebrew word 'cheseth' (faithfulness) in verse 2 'I will deal faithfully with Hanun ...'. Hanun's advisors turned around David's good intent, however. They did not appreciate David's approach, indeed they did not appear to understand anything other than the language of suspicion. They interpreted David's good intentions as a devious attempt to prepare the way for invasion. They saw the increasing power and influence of David's Israel on the other side of the Jordan, and they clearly thought that they were next in line for invasion (10:3).

What was done next to the representatives of David may appear vaguely humorous to us who live in a different age. We treat nudity as entertainment, but to ancient people, the message was very different; a man's beard was a sign of his honour, and to have it cut in any way was an insult of grave magnitude. Further, having their clothes cut off at the waist exposed them in a manner that would be embarrassing even today! It was a disgrace normally meted out as a severe punishment in civil justice. They must have made their way back towards Jerusalem as best they could.

David's kindness David went out to meet the representatives and assisted them as best he could, granting them the respite they needed to recover their honour and dignity (10:5). This itself was an act of kindness by David. What is interesting is what happened next. I have not included the whole of 2 Samuel 10 in the scripture passage because it is too long, but briefly, the story is this. David sent his army under Joab to confront the Ammonites. They called for help from the Arameans (Syrians), but Joab defeated them, but without a great deal of slaughter (2 Sam 10:9-14). The Arameans however, were not happy at being defeated and brought in more troops to try and overcome Israel's forces. At this point, David himself, at the head of his army, defeated the Arameans and ensured that the Ammonites would not seek their help again. The result was that the Ammonites became far more subservient to Israel than previously (2 Sam 10:15-19).

Justifiable war? It may be a subtle point, but the story does seem to bear out the shift in David's morality. He naturally dealt kindly with his own men who had been humiliated, but he did not attack the Ammonites as if to 'drive them out' or 'wipe them out', words which we have heard all too often in past descriptions of battles in the Old Testament. The action

that followed was designed to limit the Ammonites and prevent them posing a future threat to Israel; it was not designed to exterminate them because of the offence they caused.

Although war is never a pleasant thing whether in the life of the world today or when it is described in the Bible, it is at least easier to read about it as an unpleasant political necessity for peace on Israel's borders, rather than a holy war of attrition. We cannot be completely sure whether the author of 2 Samuel really thought that God's covenant promise to David affected the manner in which he conducted war. However, I do believe that the battles that follow in 2 Samuel and the books of Kings demonstrate a more 'humane' approach to securing the borders of Israel than the previous wars at the time of Joshua or the Judges. The embarrassment of the representatives of David was shocking in itself, but it did not provoke David to anything more than expedient action.

There is a wider 'seed change' occurring in the story of David, due to the covenant promise of God. But a significant incident lay ahead, and one which significantly dented David's positive image. However, as we read about him and his actions, it is important to recognise that David is now the one on whom God's 'favour' rests, and whose dynasty is the key to God's plan of salvation for Israel and all people.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What were the reasons why the author of 2 Samuel included the story of the embarrassment of David's representatives.
2. What spiritual aspects of this story are reflected in the experience of the church today?
3. In what way does the church of God have to fight enemies?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The subject of war and fighting in the Old Testament is difficult, because the times and the cultures of the ancient middle east required people to live in quite different ways to ourselves. It is always important for us to be able to place ourselves in the shoes of other people and try to understand what they did and why, from their point of view. In fact, our ability to attempt this for peoples in the past may reflect our ability to empathise with other people who are different from us in the present; and this is indeed a very important matter.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Think back through your own past, and reflect on those times when you have had to 'fight' some battle or other in order to get something done, or make a point, or defend a friend, for example.*
- *Pray about the violence that is in our world. Pray that God's love may so affect the leaders of the nations that their will to be violent is curbed and their capacity to be generous spirited may be increased.*

Final Prayer

Glorious redeemer! You have taken my life from darkness to light, from death to new life and from despair to hope. Lead me on a path which reflects the new life, light and hope You have created in my soul; and fulfil the promise of these great gifts, I pray. Thank You, Glorious Redeemer! AMEN