

- *Are you able to speak to anyone in your church who you regard as wise? If not, pray about this and seek out such a person. This is even more important if you are a leader, for the active support of one who has prophetic gifts can make a great difference.*
- *Pray for those who find it hard to open up to others, and therefore find themselves without the practical and spiritual help of friends. Pray that God's Spirit will help them to face their own inadequacies and be guided to the right people to help them.*

Final Prayer

We hold on to You, O Lord, and join with ancient kings, the disciples, and all the holy people of God's Church in trusting You completely. May others say of us 'God is with them', and may we give glory to You within everything we do. Thank You, good Lord, for Your faithfulness and love. AMEN

Prayer

Open our minds and our hearts, Lord Jesus, to what is happening in this world. Then, as we see the exploitation and injustices perpetrated within the world, may we turn to You for the inspiration, guidance and strength we need, to bring hope and love to all those who are oppressed. May Your Kingdom come, Lord Jesus, and may we all live in its light. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Fire Services

Give thanks for those who risk their lives for others in the course of their daily work. Pray that the fire services of your country will be well understood and properly maintained.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the country of Israel and all people who live there*
- *Give thanks to God for the life of each member of your family*
- *Pray for those suffering with cholera in southern Africa*

Meditation

We try to do our best, Lord Jesus;

But often, we fail to do what's right:

May we never fail You so much
That we ignore the extent of our sin,
And refuse to repent of our wrongdoing:

May we never fail each other so much
That we do not notice when we hurt others,
And forget to turn to them with an apology:

May we never fail ourselves so much
That we do not accept our shortcomings,
And decline to ask for Your help to change.

And so, through humility and by Your Spirit,
Lord Jesus, let us try again to do our best.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 14:1-13

¹ *Joab son of Zeruiah knew that the king was considering Absalom's situation. ² So he summoned a wise woman from Tekoa, and said to her, 'Pretend to be a mourner; dress for mourning, do not put on make-up, so that you appear to be a woman who has been mourning a death for many days. ³ Go to the king and say this to him.' Joab then told her what to say.*

⁴ *When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she bowed down low in homage and said, 'Help, O king!'* ⁵ *The king asked her, 'What is your trouble?'* *She answered, 'I am now a widow, for my husband is dead. ⁶ Your servant had two sons, who fought with each other out in the field. There was no one to separate them, and one hit the other and killed him. ⁷ Now the whole family has demanded of your servant and said, "Give up the one who struck his*

brother; we must kill him in vengeance for his brother who he murdered, even if we destroy the family lineage as well." So they would extinguish the remaining ember and leave my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth.'

⁸ *The king said to the woman, 'Go home, and I will give orders about this for you.'* ⁹ *The woman of Tekoa answered, 'My lord the king, the blame belongs to me and my father's house; the king and his throne bear no guilt.'* ¹⁰ *The king said, 'If anyone threatens you, bring him to me, and he will not trouble you again.'* ¹¹ *But she continued, 'Please, may the king have regard for the LORD, so that the avenger of blood go no further and kill my son.'* He said, 'As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground.'

¹² *Then the woman said, 'Let your servant be allowed to say something else to my lord the king.'* He said, 'Speak.' ¹³ *She said, 'Why then have you planned exactly this against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king makes himself guilty, for the king has not brought his banished son home again!'*

Review

Absalom, David's third son, had lured Amnon, David's first son, to his death in vengeance for raping his sister Tamar. Absalom was banished from court, but was now the principal heir to the throne of Israel, and this left David in a quandary. It seems that he loved all his sons, yet what should he do with Absalom, who had claimed the inheritance of the crown by murder? David's uncertainty meant that he took no action, and this left his court and his rule of Israel dangerously open to political crisis.

Joab, David's faithful army commander, could see what had happened with a better perspective, and realised that the situation between David and Absalom had to be resolved; it did the king no good to be seen to prevaricate over the issue. His plan was to confront him using the same method by which Nathan had dealt with David over his adultery with Bathsheba, and using the analogy of a story to oblige David to see the truth of what was happening in his own life. However, Joab was not like a prophet who could stand before the king and demand respect and attention. If he stood before the king and spoke plainly, David would see through him; so he obtained the services of a 'wise woman' from Tekoa. Someone called a 'wise man' or a 'wise woman' in this way was regarded as a prophet, and this woman from Tekoa joins a select band of female prophets mentioned in the Old Testament, such as Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Miriam (Exodus 15:20).

The story Joab told the 'wise woman' his proposed story and ruse (14:1-3) and she performed her part well (14:4-7), though it is not easy for us to follow what happened, because it involved various ancient social principles and laws with which we are not familiar. The woman presented herself as old and widowed, and therefore completely dependent upon her sons who had a social responsibility for her. In her story, she said that both sons had fallen out and fought out 'in the field', and one had been killed. Now, whatever the widow thought of what had happened, she could only live with the son who had performed the murder because there was nowhere else for her to go, but the family of the murdered son were justly seeking vengeance (Ex 21:14) on her remaining son. He deserved death at the hands of these relatives (Ex 21:24), but if the family exacted this vengeance, then the woman would be disinherited, bringing her family line to an end in Israel!

David's response David, not knowing yet that this was merely a story, clearly had sympathy for the woman (14:8) and promised that she would come to no harm. The

woman from Tekoa however, continued to plead further (14:10,11), seeking the protection of her remaining son as the guarantee of her safety and the lineage of her family in Israel (14:11), to which David again swore his assistance. At each point of the story, David was drawn deeper into the scenario, responding quickly and swiftly with justice to the woman's story.

David's judgement Finally, the woman dared to speak the truth to David. He may have advised the woman justly concerning her own son, but he had not perceived that her story mirrored his own. The woman was like Israel, having two 'sons' who were her future; but they had fallen out and now only one remained. David was willing to protect the widow's son, but was he prepared to protect his own son so that Israel's security could be established? The woman's story trapped David just as Nathan's story of the 'ewe-lamb' (2 Sam 12:1-6) had trapped him previously, and his judgement for the widow was a judgement of his own actions. By failing to receive Absalom back into court, David left Israel without its heir apparent, and without the necessary security. This story is just the beginning of the saga of Absalom's claim to the throne of Israel, a story of intrigue and tragedy on a large scale, in which Absalom eventually took advantage of his father to claim the throne of Israel.

Nevertheless, this passage demonstrates at least one important aspect of leadership, which is that prevarication due to family pressures can damage the authority of a leader. The New Testament tells us that one who is a leader of God's people should take care of family (1 Tim 3:4), and it is possible that Paul had this scripture in mind as he gave this advice. The other issue worth noting, yet again, is the importance of wisdom and prophecy. In this instance, the person who challenged the king was a woman, and the recognition of her gift was taken for granted, even in the apparently male dominated society of the day. God's gifts are greater than our social pre-conceptions! Prophets and wise men or women were people whose word was valued even by the highest leader; Nathan and this 'wise woman' did not put themselves forward as leaders or seek status just because they confronted a king with the authority of God. They simply acted according to what happened and what it was right to do. Such godly people are always a treasure amongst God's people.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What do you think of Joab's entrapment of David? Was it justified, and would such a method be justified today?
2. Is there such a thing as privacy for a leader, and does the family of a leader enjoy any special rights of privacy?
3. Is wisdom and prophecy valued within the life of your church? What can be done to enable wisdom and prophecy to be used within your church?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

There will be times when we are caught, like David, in indecision. Someone who is wise and understands God's Word is worth consulting, and can be crucial in helping us out of our quandaries. It is very important that the leaders of God's people are prepared to yield to the godly wisdom of someone else who they know they can trust, and good to know where to go to obtain good advice when things become difficult. None of us can stand above all circumstances and see them with clarity, and the help of others is always invaluable.

Ideas for discipleship programme