

Prayer

Forgive us for every minute of this day when we have failed to live according to Your ways, O Lord; and by Your grace, remind us when we fall short of the best standards of Christian discipleship. May we live for You and die to self, and in so doing gain the prize of eternal life. All praise and thanks to You, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Life at Home

Pray for your home, and ask the Lord to dwell with you, and ask Him to help you make it into a place of blessing where people are free, happy and at peace.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the success of political talks in Zimbabwe*
- *Pray about the current difficulties in the world economy*
- *Give thanks for the inventions of scientists and engineers*

Meditation

What seems so glorious now will never lead you heavenward;
so let the Spirit lead you to where He will give you life.

Forsake wealth, it pledges much, but consumes the weaker soul;
accept such poverty as leaves you free to find salvation!

Forsake status, it saps the human heart of honesty and warmth;
accept the lowest role so God can shape you as He will!

Forsake power, it tempts the strong to trust in strength and force;
accept your weaknesses, and trust in His empowering love.

Forsake success, it traps you into thinking that you have achieved;
accept that losing often marks the spot where new things start.

And if you did not think that God had come to turn the world around,
You may just find that when He does, true life can really happen!

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 2:1-10

¹ After this David inquired of the Lord, 'Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?' The Lord said to him, 'Go up.' David said, 'To which shall I go up?' He said, 'To Hebron.' ² So David went there with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ³ David brought the men who were with him, each one with his household; and they settled in the towns of Hebron.

⁴ Then the people of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. When David was told, 'It was the people of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul,' ⁵ He sent messengers to the people of Jabesh-gilead, and said to them, 'May you be blessed by the Lord, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord by burying him. ⁶ May the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you now, and I will also reward you because you have done this; ⁷ Therefore

be strong and brave. Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.'

⁸ But Abner son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, had taken Ishbaal son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim. ⁹ He made him king over Gilead, Asher, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel. ¹⁰ Ishbaal, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David.

Review

With Saul now dead, one would have thought that David would sweep all before him in glorious triumph, quickly establishing himself to be the leader of God's people and fulfilling his anointing by Samuel. He had a strong claim to all Israel, moreover, David possessed the only active army left fighting in Israel and Judah, since Saul's battle with the Philistines resulted in the virtual destruction of the Israelite army. However, David knew that the situation was far from simple. The Philistines controlled a significant part of the traditional Israelite tribal lands around the northern Jezreel valley, but he controlled Judah. There was an uneasy tension in the land because the people of God were divided and defeated.

The first thing David did was to consult the Lord about what to do. We assume that he consulted the Lord with the priest Abiathar who had stayed close to David since his separation from Saul (1 Sam 30:7, 23:6,9; 22:20ff). The instruction he received was to go to Hebron, the place Abraham had stayed when he first came into Canaan, the place where he bought a field 'by the oaks of Mamre' in which he buried his wife Sarah, and in which he was eventually buried himself (Gen 13:18; 23:2,19; 35:27; 37:14). When the people of Israel first came into the land of Canaan, Hebron was also given by Joshua to Caleb (Josh 14:13ff), the man who had given an honest report of the land before the invasion.

This was a good place for David to exercise his authority; and having settled his family there, the local Judeans anointed David king of Judah (only). This, of course, was the second time that David had been anointed. David must have accepted that his two anointings were of a different order; his anointing by Samuel was his initial authority from God, but the second anointing acted as a confirmation of the first.

In the north-east, the commander of Saul's army, the resourceful Abner, was able to find another son of Saul named Ishbaal (sometimes written as Ishbosheth), who had not been killed in battle. Abner made Ishbaal king (2:9) in the north-east of Israel, and set up his base at the relatively unknown city of 'Mahanaim', many miles from where the action had taken place with the Philistines. Ishbaal and Abner's small kingdom included many northern tribes, but not all. The Philistines had overthrown Issachar and Naphtali, for example, and in reality, the fledgling kingdom was fragile, consisting of a largely unprotected association of Israelite towns and ruled over by a puppet King under the thumb of an army commander (2:9). Incidentally, the reason for Ishbaal's later name change in scripture is complex, but important. It is reckoned that the Israelites took the 'ba'al' ending from Ishbaal's name because it was associated with the god 'Ba'al', and replaced it 'bosheth'. The second name did in fact mean 'man of shame', and indicated contempt for a man who had been anointed king over Israel and yet bore the name of a foreign god!

In the midst of this unsatisfactory situation, David discreetly and cheekily sent messengers through Ishbaal's domain to Jabesh-gilead (further north than Mahanaim) in order to see whether there might be any hope of uniting Israel. He made overtures to the men of Jabesh-gilead, praising their bravery and defence of Saul (2:4-7). David demonstrably had nothing to do with Saul's death, so he hoped that the people of Jabesh-gilead might warm to him as their potential leader. There was no answer to David's overtures, however, and

he gained nothing by these underhand means. Many years would pass before this stalemate would erupt into civil war between northern Israel and southern Judah, in which David would eventually seize his chance to secure the allegiance of all Israel.

The issue of kingship over God's people was important. The Lord had made it clear through Samuel that the proper way for a King to rule over His people was under the anointing of a prophet or priest, and that would not change. Whilst David was anointed in our passage today, and he had originally been anointed by the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 16), Ishbaal was an upstart in the Lord's eyes, he was no 'King' over the Lord's people.

Too often when things seem to be taking their time and the people of God have to endure barren times, we resort to our own methods of organising things instead of looking to the past to see how the Lord might be working through what has already happened to surprise us by his faithfulness and consistency. The people of God were damaged and bruised after Saul's abuses of power and the defeat at the hands of the Philistines. The answer was not for them to do what every other nation did, and appoint a King shored up with as much military support as possible. Had they looked for the signs of God at work, they would have noticed that David was there, patiently waiting on the Lord's word, and suggesting to the people (as in the messengers to Jabesh-gilead) that he was ready for them; but only on the Lord's terms, not theirs.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. The people of Israel were divided into 'north' and 'south' even before the reign of David. Why do God's people so easily divide?
2. If you have a concordance, look up the word Jabesh-gilead. Learn about other stories in scripture which happen around this town..
3. In what ways do we show impatience with God in the life of the church? How may we learn to wait upon Him for His answers to our problems?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The story of David is in many ways only just beginning. He spent years in hiding and was then King of Judah, but how many more years would it be before he was able to exercise the kingship for which the Lord was preparing him? There is great wisdom in taking the long view of history, and accepting that although the Lord's moment might come at any time, the delays are only ever temporary!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Make a list of the things you have prayed for over a long time. Present them to the Lord and ask Him to give you the patience to wait for the answers that He will give.*
- *You may well know someone who is waiting for things to happen, but is frustrated by the delays. Seek out him or her, and pray for the root of the problem. The Lord will bless your prayers.*

Final Prayer

Speak to us, dear Jesus, in the storms of life and in the calm of rest; and lead us through the trials we experience by the comfort, power, love and strength of the Holy Spirit. May we hear Your word of encouragement crystal clear, and may we follow the Spirit's leading step by step, to prove our faith to all and take the eternal prize of life! AMEN