

to minister to us when we most need it, so that we may serve You faithfully for all our lives.
AMEN

Prayer

In those moments when life feels numb and love is distant from my heart, Lord Jesus, come gently with a word, a touch, a sense of Your presence, and place the seed of renewal in my heart. Then, with every day that passes, may I increasingly know the transforming power You have placed within me. So may I rejoice in Your graciousness and care, Lord Jesus Christ; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Finance

The world of finance covers every aspect of life; this week we will pray for the world of finance and its impact on people. Pray for the management of money in your church.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the blessing of Christian fellowship
- Pray for the success of political talks in Zimbabwe
- Pray about the current difficulties in the world economy

Meditation

Where is the mind of a servant of God?
Dwelling on the Word and searching for truth;
Observing the world and working at what is right.

Where is the heart of a servant of God?
Fighting for justice, and for the poor of the land;
Following the Spirit's lead in the conquest of sin.

Where is the spirit of a servant of God?
Yearning for holiness and the things of God;
Searching for the truth and the life of Christ.

Where is the soul of a servant of God?
Committed wholly to the Lord and the doing of His will;
Longing for the day when He will come again.

Where is the body of a servant of God?
Doing what Christ requires, with thought and care,
Putting the Gospel into practice, for all to see.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 3:1-11

¹ The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. ² Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel; ³ his second, Kileab the son of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; ⁴ the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; ⁵ and the sixth, Ithream the son of David's wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron.

⁶ During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. ⁷ Now Saul had had a

*concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, 'Why did you sleep with my father's concubine?'*⁸ Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said and he answered, 'Am I a dog's head, and on Judah's side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven't handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offence involving this woman!' ⁹ May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath ¹⁰ and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba.'

¹¹ *Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him.*

Review

After Saul was killed in battle, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah split apart as in the passage we read yesterday. David controlled Judah in the south, and Ishbosheth controlled parts of the north with the army commander Abner. Initially, there were some minor skirmishes between the two (see 2 Samuel 2:8-32), but all in all, a period of around seven years passed in this unhappy state of division, and today's passage describes something of what went on in those years. In the south, David settled down and became a father many times over. In the north of Israel, things were much less stable, and a series of incidents showed who was really in charge there, and it was certainly not Ishbosheth, the supposed King of Israel. The records of scripture give us the background to this, and help set the scene for the eventual succession of David to the throne of all Israel.

2 Samuel 3 begins with an interesting comparison between the north and the south of Israel; 'David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker'. This phrase summarises our passage today very well, but this reminds us of Jesus and John the Baptist. The Gospel of John records that John the Baptist said of Jesus 'He must become greater, and I must become less'. With both David and Jesus, each of them anointed by God for their tasks, God was able to raise them up because of the work of the power of God within them. The anointing of God made the difference.

In the following verses (3:2-5), there is a list of the different sons born to David whilst he lived in Hebron as King of Judah. When we read the list, we are struck by David's polygamy, and somewhat offended by the apparent acceptance of this by scripture. Many of the Kings of Israel and Judah married a number of women, and although we can accept that it may have been expected in those times, we find it hard to understand why God did not reveal a better way to David. However, we will find that God did indeed speak to David about his wives and their sons as time went by, and this becomes an important issue. The reason scripture gives us this list is because many of the sons mentioned here become players in the story of 2 Samuel, which, although about David, is also about who will succeed him after his death and be the one to build the great Temple.

This is important, and scripture invites us to see how the bearing of many sons almost compromises God's covenant with David that a son of his would sit on the throne of Israel for ever. After the birth of Solomon (2 Sam 12:24 – who with hindsight we know to be David's successor) scripture describes how one son of David after another fails to live up to God's call. The writer of Samuel asks us to see all this and implies that although David was the Lord's anointed his dealings with women were less than what God expected of him. In this way, scripture may well be suggesting to us that polygamy was not right, and certainly did not help God's purposes.

The whole issue of succession from one king to another also lies behind the strange story of Abner, Rizpah and Ishbosheth, which concludes our story today. Abner, the commander of Saul's army, had been instrumental in putting Ishbosheth on the throne of Israel (2 Sam 2:8-11). However, he was concerned to 'strengthen his position' (3:6). What he did was to sleep with Rizpah, one of the concubines (wives) of the deceased Saul. He probably did this because he could see that Ishbosheth was a weak king (3:11) and knew that if he had a son by the concubine of Saul, he might be able to claim the throne for his own descendants by association with the family of Saul through Rizpah. It sounds far-fetched to us, but this was the world of ancient Israel, and it would not be the last time such manoeuvrings would take place in the royal family of Israel.

When Ishbosheth found out what had happened he was furious, and he confronted Abner. The result of the furious argument that followed was that Abner lost faith in Ishbosheth, and declared that he would himself transfer the allegiance of Israel back to David. Abner was the 'power behind the throne', and was as good as his word, as we find out next.

The amazing thing about this whole story is that God did not allow the wayward marriages of the house of David (or Saul, for that matter) to divert His covenant plan for raising up a Saviour from the house of David, who would be known as 'the Son of David'; that is, Jesus Christ our Lord. In the history of the house of David, God was still able to overcome the problems of human sin in order to deliver salvation for all through Jesus Christ.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Make a list of the sons of David and keep it to hand for the forthcoming studies of 2 Samuel. Which ones have you heard about, and which are new to you?
2. Make a list of the wives of David and check out which of them you have come across before in scripture. How did David come to marry them?
3. Was Abner really changing his allegiance or trying to oust Ishbosheth? Discuss the political ramifications.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Magazines today are filled with the gossip about celebrity marriages and pregnancies. To some extent, 2 Samuel reads rather like this. The more we read, the more scandal we come across. Many people think of David as something close to a saint, who was used by God to do great things. It is indeed true that he did great things, but he was certainly no 'saint'. God used him and loved him, just as he does us.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If it is possible for you to do this, try to find an opportunity to discuss the more scandalous side of David's life with some young people. Find out what they think about what David did. Is their response different from yours? If so, why?*
- *Fast and pray for the leaders of God's people. There are many temptations placed before leaders and some are sexual. True leaders of God's people need to be able to handle themselves well and resist all temptation.*

Final Prayer

When it is right, Heavenly Father, give us the space to be quiet and peaceful; and in that place, heal our bodies, revive our spirits and restore our souls. We trust in Your guidance