

## Prayer

Glory, honour, power and praise be to You, Lord Jesus Christ. You know all things, and You understand our lives and our need of forgiveness. You give us gifts by Your grace and offer us the privilege of Your attention and care, and for that we are profoundly grateful. Your graciousness is amazing and we praise you, Lord Jesus Christ; AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Justice

*We will pray this week for world justice. The subject is huge and I ask you today to pray that God's people might accept they are called to witness to God's justice in the world.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for local doctors and nurses*
- *Praise the Lord for people all over the world who are being saved*
- *Pray for the nations of Central America and their leaders*

## Meditation

Wonders will never cease! Miracles will never stop!  
Glory will come when people respond to Jesus!

When the Holy Spirit pours out His gifts,  
And people decide to accept them!

When the Word of God is preached from the Word  
And scripture is held in our hearts!

When chairs in church are used, not argued over,  
And people stand or sit as they wish!

When people pray to God because they want to  
And cease to about words or tongues!

When the church we know is moving so fast  
And the rest of the world can't keep up!

The only miracle we need, the only wonder that counts  
Is His death, Resurrection and Pentecost; all in one!

## Bible Study - 1 Samuel 18:17-22

<sup>17</sup> Then Saul said to David, 'Here is my elder daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife; but be valiant for me and fight the LORD's battles.' For Saul thought, 'I will not raise a hand against him; let the Philistines deal with him.'

<sup>18</sup> David said to Saul, 'Who am I, and who are my kinsfolk, my father's family in Israel, that I should be a son-in-law to the king?' <sup>19</sup> But at the time when Saul's daughter Merab should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife.

<sup>20</sup> Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. Saul was told, and the thing pleased him. <sup>21</sup> Saul thought, 'Let me give her to him so that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.' Therefore Saul said to David a second time, 'You shall now be my son-in-law.' <sup>22</sup> So Saul

*commanded his servants, 'Speak to David in private and say, "See, the king is delighted with you, and all his servants love you; now then, become the king's son-in-law."' "*

## Review

In this story, we begin to see an emerging pattern of behaviour that Saul would show to David for the rest of his life. You may remember that in yesterday's study, we wondered whether Saul's action in making David an army commander was a pretext for getting him killed, and now we find out that it was! However, the increasingly paranoid Saul is described in parts of this story as 'pleased' or 'delighted' with David (18:22), and his actions become obscure, beginning with offering David a wife and then giving her to someone else. All of this must have tested David to the limit. What was God doing? Was it right for His people to be led in this way by someone who could not make up his mind, lead the army himself and was beginning to display signs of mental instability?

Before going further, we should remember that, as with the story of David and Jonathan at the beginning of chapter 18, there are sub-plots within this scripture which we may not always spot, and one important theme is common to the earlier story and our passage today. Most of the story of the two 'books' of Samuel concern the whole issue of 'who comes next' as King; it is called a 'succession narrative'. Right at the beginning of 1 Samuel, Eli, the High Priest and Judge, had sons who were unworthy to lead God's people after him (1Sam 2:12ff), but God was already at work through a child, who through faithful service as a youngster, took the place of Eli and became Israel's last great Judge and first great 'Prophet'; his name of course was Samuel (1 Sam 1-3). We should remember that it was the way of the world in those days that sons were expected to continue the duties and responsibilities of the father, but Samuel's sons, like Eli's sons were also scoundrels and unworthy of such a call (1 Sam 8:1-3).

At this time, the people of Israel requested Samuel to anoint a King. After much discussion and argument (1 Sam 8, and also 1 Sam 12), Samuel agreed and anointed Saul as King (1 Sam 9). Now with a king in place, it would have been expected that Saul's son Jonathan would be the next King when his father died, but the relationship was soured by a curse of Saul (1 Sam 14:24ff) on his son, and Jonathan showed no inclination to be King, despite being a valiant warrior. And as we discovered earlier, his friendship with David is presented to us as Jonathan's acceptance that he would not be the future King, but David would be. Now, consider the situation: David was God's chosen to be King after Saul, but he was not married, and has no sons. In due course, the issue will arise about who will succeed David, so the big issue at this point in the story is who will he marry? Who will bear David a son and heir?

Saul probably knew about the friendship between his son Jonathan and David, and secretly anticipated that David would be the next King. That was probably the source of his angst and paranoia, along with the fact that he has cursed his own son, a deadly serious issue in those days. At the beginning of today's story, Saul was content to marry David off to his next available daughter, Merab. He considered this as a bribe to persuade David to do stay in the army fighting battles, a task in which David might well be killed. It was not exactly a devious plot! David graciously accepted the proposition from Saul, even though it implied that any son produced from the union would be able to claim lineage from Saul as much as David. In verse 19, Saul, as paranoid as ever, changed his mind and gave his daughter Merab in marriage to another man. In the mean time, another daughter of Saul, Michal, had fallen in love with David, and Saul sought to persuade the perhaps reluctant David to enter into this marriage, again pursuing his own interests in respect of succession.

The marriage of David and Michal does indeed take place later, as we will discover, but David is forced to flee the court and leave Michal behind. She is then married off to another man by Saul while David is on the run for many years, and later, when David becomes King, he takes Michal away from her husband to be his wife again and by this

time, she has grown bitter. It is Michal who is famously disgusted at David for dancing before the Lord when the Ark of the Covenant is brought into Jerusalem, David's new capital city for all Israel (2 Sam 6:16ff).

All this should alert us. David was indeed someone who was loved by the Lord, and people said about him 'the Lord is with him' (1 Sam 18:12). God would one day make a covenant with him for the leadership of Israel, whereby one of his sons would be on the throne of Judah 'for ever' (32 Sam 7); the beginning of great Messianic promises of God. But the question remains who would bear a son to David and who would come after him? As the story unfolds in the rest of 1 and 2 Samuel, the issue remains unresolved. You have to watch this story carefully and in detail to see how God worked over a long period of time to bring David to the throne and secure a succession that is worthy of the Messianic covenant. God's plans for the salvation of humanity were at stake.

## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you find it offensive when the Bible talks of arranged marriages? Why would God allow such a degrading treatment of women?
2. Do you agree that Saul is showing signs of paranoia? Why do you think that God allowed Saul to remain on the throne?
3. Was David right to accept a daughter of Saul in marriage, and should he not have kept his distance? Why do you think he did not?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The story of David is complex, but so is the story of our lives. It is part of what makes this story so real and appealing that it is in fact so complicated! I often wonder why my own life is so complicated, but after reading the story of Saul and David, I can only come to the conclusion that the Lord is doing things of which I am not fully aware, but only the future will show how what happens now is important to God's plans for the future.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- Over a period of a week, write down some of the complicated things which happen in your life which seem inexplicable. Offer them to the Lord in prayer.
- In similar manner consider the life of the church, and pray that the Lord will use everything happening for good and for the Kingdom; even if this is not immediately clear to everyone!

## Final Prayer

Thank You Lord, for love. Thank You for the different ways in which we show love to each other, within marriage, between parents and children, between friends, within the church and also to our neighbours in the wider world. Sustain us in the pleasure and duty of all our loving relationships, for the good of Your Kingdom; AMEN