

## Prayer

Almighty God and Creator of all; restore my fallen soul .....  
Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth; heal my worn body .....  
Holy Spirit, breath of God, comfort my aching heart .....  
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to You .....  
Almighty God, Lord Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit ... AMEN.

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Pastors

*Pray for those who have the spiritual job of giving you spiritual and pastoral guidance and counsel. Pray for their strength and health and protection from the works of Satan.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who suffer due to the world economic crisis*
- *Pray for the nation of China*
- *Praise God for the joys of family life and the bonds of love*

## Meditation

It was early in the morning when I realised the sign.  
A feeling of uncertainty came over me,  
and then I heard a voice;  
A clear voice within my conscious mind which said  
'PRAY'.

I did not need to hear this word again  
for I knew exactly what it meant;  
God did not have some great thing for me to do,  
a 'message from on high' to share at church,  
(and become the centre of attention.)

No. The Lord needed me to pray right then,  
and in so doing, be obedient;  
I knew within my heart the prayers that needed to be said;  
so I said them.

Dear Jesus, help me hear that voice  
whenever it speaks again, and do Your will.

## Bible Study - 1 Samuel 19:18-24

<sup>18</sup> Now David fled and escaped; he came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel went and settled at Naioth. <sup>19</sup> Saul was told, 'David is at Naioth in Ramah.' <sup>20</sup> Then Saul sent messengers to take David. When they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing in charge of them, the spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also fell under the influence of the prophetic spirit.

<sup>21</sup> When Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they also fell under the influence of the prophetic spirit. Saul sent messengers again the third time, and

they also fell. <sup>22</sup> Then he himself went to Ramah. He came to the great well that is in Secu; he asked, 'Where are Samuel and David?' And someone said, 'They are at Naioth in Ramah.' <sup>23</sup> He went there, toward Naioth in Ramah; and the spirit of God came upon him. As he was going, he fell under the influence of the prophetic spirit, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. <sup>24</sup> He also took off his robes, and prophesied before Samuel. He lay exposed all that day and all that night. Therefore it is said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

## Review

Since David had fled from Saul's court, it was not too difficult for Saul to work out that he had gone to see Samuel, and so he set out to try and capture him. He sent his men to do the dirty work; the Old Testament equivalent of a contract killing! This is a fascinating story of what happened next because the Spirit of God had come in power on the group of prophets where Samuel and David were staying and this power was too great for the hired killers to withstand and fell under its power, as eventually did Saul! He stripped off his royal robes, humbled by the presence of Almighty God, and was completely overcome for a full day. It was as if God was taking matters out of Saul's hands, stopping him in his tracks.

All this is fairly clear, but it is likely that you will have read this passage with some surprise. There are few passages like it in the Old Testament! Much controversy has raged over the years about what it means to fall under the 'influence of the prophetic spirit' (19:20 etc.). Many modern translations put this differently, describing the prophets as 'falling into a prophetic frenzy' (in verses 20,21,23 and 24). My translation is a little different, because the word 'frenzy' conjures up a negative reaction in us to what was not intended to shock us or make us think that the prophets were freaks.

The Hebrew word used here to describe what happened to the prophets is complex. It is an emphatic form of the verb 'to prophesy' which indicates being wholly immersed in the experience, and the problem has always been how to express this in straightforward English! The simple word 'prophesying' does not give this sense of being overcome by God's Spirit, though many traditional translations use this. There is one other passage of scripture (1 Sam 10:5-13) which uses the same Hebrew word and the issues there are the same as those here, so what are we to make of it? I think it best simply to remember that what is being described is being completely overcome by Spirit of God. There are times in the stories of the great prophets when the prophetic experience completely takes them over, for example, Ezekiel's experiences by the river Chebar (Ezekiel 1f.), or what happened to Jeremiah when he dramatically took a potter's vase and smashed it outside the city wall of Jerusalem as a sign to the people of God's wrath (Jer 18:19)

So is this some extreme ecstatic experience as implied by the expression in modern translations; 'prophetic frenzy'? I am not convinced. The reason why some scholars use the expression 'prophetic frenzy' is that research into the religious practices of people in that region in ancient times shows that, for example, prophets of Ba'al got themselves into a wild state dancing, cutting themselves, singing and also engaging in sex, whilst imploring their gods to 'do something'. The assumption is that Hebrew prophets did the same sort of thing. This is quite wrong, in my opinion, as the Old Testament goes out of its way to explain the gift of prophecy as totally unlike the ecstatic trances of Ba'al prophets; read, for example, the story of Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al in 1 Kings 18.

In our story today, however, the end result of the powerful influence of God's prophetic Spirit was that Saul joined his enemies, David and Samuel under the influence of the Spirit. He took off his kingly garments and lay exposed all night, in utter indignity and humiliation before God and everyone else. Nothing is said of what everyone else was actually doing under the influence of God's spirit. They may have been caught up in prophetic worship,

singing songs to the Lord, perhaps sharing food and prophesying in various ways about the things of God; but they were totally consumed by what they were doing.

I have translated this passage very carefully today, in order to convey more of a sense of the presence of God's gracious and powerful Spirit than the coarse expression 'prophetic frenzy', and also to explain that this was a far deeper spiritual experience than simply speaking out 'words of prophecy'. It was God's purpose to stop Saul in his tracks, bring him low, and affirm the spiritual heritage and anointing of Samuel and David, and in this, God's Spirit was entirely successful. This is a surprising text, but the only way we can make sense of it is to read it in the light of the rest of scripture and what it says about God, people and the Holy Spirit.

## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you have a copy of a New Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, or the New International version? Check them out against the study you have done.
2. What experience do you have of God's Spirit at work in your life? Can you explain it, and are there parts which you cannot explain?
3. Why do you think God intervened in the story of David and Saul in this way?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*I have come across those who have a real mistrust of the work of the Holy Spirit in our day, and have made much of the issue of the unseemly 'prophetic frenzy' of Saul, suggesting that such things are not appropriate for Christians. Put like that, maybe they are right, but if scripture is properly understood, they are not. It is important to know the difference.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- Have a day of prayer and fasting in which you ask the Lord to reveal to you more of His Spirit and more of what He wants to do through you by His Spirit.
- When you are praying, listen out for what the Lord is saying to you through these prayers and write down what the Lord is saying to you.

## Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, we are amazed at Your mysterious ways. Yet you guide us along the path of life with power and grace, enabling us to fulfil our lives through the gracious gifts You bestow. All praise to You, Living Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN