

1 Samuel 11
June 19, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: As I prepared for today's study, it occurred to me that we as Americans may take our commander in chief (our president) for granted. When we go to the polls to vote, many of us vote for someone whose policy-making decisions align with our thinking. We tend to focus on issues we most care about and vote accordingly. It is my guess that most of us aren't thinking...Boy, if Russia decided to attack the USA, will this President be a strong Commander in Chief? We rest on the fact that we are known for having the strongest armed forces in the world that make us formidable to any foreign country. But having a strong commander to lead our armed forces is extremely important!

Transition: Let's step back in time to the days of Samuel and Saul. In last week's study, we saw Saul, the reluctant young man who was a head taller than anyone else. God chose him to be king. However, he was so reluctant to become a king that he hid among baggage; but the people found him and proclaimed him their king. Israel's first king needed not only to be an admirable individual in his personal appearance and conduct, but he also needed to be an effective military commander. Saul had no experience being a military commander! But he's getting ready to be tested. Let's see if he passes. Would someone volunteer to read 1 Samuel 11?

BOOK:

Saul Rescues the City of Jabesh

11 Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you."

² But Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel."

³ The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you."

⁴ When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. ⁵ Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with the people? Why are they weeping?" Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said.

⁶ When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger. ⁷ He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they turned out as one man. ⁸ When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered three hundred thousand and the men of Judah thirty thousand.

⁹ They told the messengers who had come, "Say to the men of Jabesh Gilead, 'By the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be delivered.'" When the messengers went and reported this to the men of Jabesh, they were elated. ¹⁰ They said to the Ammonites, "Tomorrow we will surrender to you, and you can do to us whatever seems good to you."

¹¹ The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night, they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

Saul Confirmed as King

¹² The people then said to Samuel, “Who was it that asked, ‘Shall Saul reign over us?’ Bring these men to us and we will put them to death.”

¹³ But Saul said, “No one shall be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel.”

¹⁴ Then Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship.” ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings (traditionally peace offerings) before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- When the Spirit of God wants to use you, He will come upon you with power!
- God knows how to protect His people.

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about God in this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

- Pray for our commander in chief so that all decisions are Spirit-led.

LOOK:

God is faithful to deliver His chosen people. When God is ready to act, He will empower His chosen leader with the Spirit of God to accomplish whatever task is at hand, which leads to success.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 1 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, p. 112) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

2. SAUL'S FIRST VICTORY (CHAP. 11)

11:1–6. No sooner had Saul begun his rule than a distant but important part of his kingdom was attacked by the Ammonites. This was the city of **Jabesh Gilead**, about 25 miles south of the Sea of Galilee, east of the Jordan River. Saul's special concern for this community may well lie in possible ancestral ties which he had there. Judges 19–21 records the story of the civil war between Benjamin and the other tribes, which resulted in the annihilation of all but 600 men of Benjamin. With no wives and children, it is apparent that the tribe would become extinct. To prevent this the leaders of Israel proposed that the virgin women of any town which had not sent troops to combat Benjamin should be seized and given to these survivors as wives. When it was discovered that Jabesh Gilead had failed in this respect, the 400 virgins of the city were captured and given to the Benjamites. Since Saul was a Benjamite, it is entirely possible that his ancestry sprang in part from Jabesh Gilead.

When **Saul** learned of the plight of Jabesh Gilead, a city so hopelessly besieged by the Ammonites that defeat was inevitable, he became enraged (1 Sam. 11:6) and set about to raise an army capable of delivering the place. So confident was **Nahash**, king of Ammon, that he made **a treaty** with Jabesh Gilead to the effect that if they surrendered, he would pluck out every **right eye**. If they resisted, Nahash would probably kill them. The **Jabesh** elders asked for **seven days** of grace in which to find help. Nahash agreed, to spare the expense of a long and costly siege, assuming that Saul, who did not even have an army, would be powerless to intervene.

11:7–15. Saul, hearing of the people's plight, **cut up two oxen and sent the pieces ... throughout Israel**, saying that **anyone who would not follow Saul and Samuel** would have their **oxen** similarly dissected. This method of getting the attention of the tribes is remarkably similar to that of the Levite of Ephraim who dissected his concubine's corpse and sent the parts to the various tribes, a part of the story from Judges 19–21 (see comments on Jud. 19:27–30). After assembling 330,000 soldiers **at Bezek**, 12 miles west of **Jabesh Gilead**, Saul marched all night and early in the morning (**the last watch** was the last third of the night) engaged **the Ammonites** in battle **and slaughtered them**. The distinction between **Israel** and **Judah** (cf. 1 Sam. 15:4; 17:52; 18:16) indicates that 1 Samuel was written after the nation was divided in 931 B.C. into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. After this decisive victory **Saul** was hailed as a hero and became firmly entrenched in his monarchical role. And he gave **the LORD** all the glory. This achievement convinced even **Samuel** that God had His hand on Saul, so the prophet convened another assembly at **Gilgal** so that the people could **reaffirm the kingship**. Though the evidence is somewhat meager the occasion described is likely a covenant-renewal ceremony, perhaps on the occasion of Saul's first anniversary as king. The presence of **the LORD**, the **king**, and **the people** would suggest this, particularly in light of the sacrificial festival which highlighted the event (1 Sam. 11:15).

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 109–110). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Saul at Jabesh (11:1–15). The first test for Saul’s reign was the attack of the Ammonites upon Jabesh Gilead across the Jordan. As in the days when the judges ruled, the Spirit came upon Saul, and he became angry. No longer was Saul shy. By exercising his authority as king, he rallied the Israelites. His forces defeated the Ammonites. This confirmed to the people that Saul was an able king.

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). 1 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (p. 169). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Saul Wins Public Support (1 Sam. 11:1–15)

The passage—Israelite politics were in a confused state during this period. Saul had been anointed king by Samuel, and he had been chosen by lot in a national assembly. Nevertheless, he still was not king (11:15). Apparently partisan politics had so divided the people during the gathering at Mizpah that a final selection of a king could not be made at that time. Saul went home to Gibeah with a band of devoted followers and awaited an occasion to demonstrate his ability to unite the nation.

Such an opportunity came in the Ammonite attack on the Israelite town of Jabesh-Gilead. The Ammonites were confident that Israel was too weak and fragmented to lend a trans-Jordan community assistance (v. 3). As a matter of fact, the attackers sought the complete humiliation of all Israel (v. 2).

Saul, however, resorted to strong measures to unite the nation. Infuriated by the Ammonites’ audacity, he threatened to attack any Israelites who failed to come to the assistance of Jabesh-Gilead (v. 7). This, apparently, was language his people could understand. Saul organized the enormous force which responded to his call and, attacking at dawn, completely routed the Ammonite army.

Finally convinced, the people of Israel formally installed Saul as their king in a special ceremony at Gilgal (v. 15).

Special points—Israel’s difficulty in selecting a king reflects the democratic nature of her government under the judges. Saul could not ascend the throne without the consent of his subjects.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.