

1 Samuel Chapter 11

1 Samuel 11:1 "Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-gilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee."

“Nahash the Ammonite”: Nahash, meaning “snake,” was king of the Ammonites, the descendants of Lot (Gen. 19:36-38) who lived east of the Jordan.

“Jabesh-gilead”: A town east of the Jordan River about 22 miles south of the Sea of Galilee, in the tribal territory of Manasseh (Judges 21:8-14).

In God’s providence, the renewed “Ammonite” hostilities provided an occasion for Saul’s newly established kingship to be tested.

Jabesh-gilead is a city in the land of the half tribe of Manasseh. "Nahash" means serpent. This should let us know that he was an evil man. The Ammonites felt that Israel had taken land belonging to them. It seems, the men at Jabesh were willing to make a treaty with Nahash, and were even willing to go into servitude, if that was what it took to avoid a war with them.

1 Samuel 11:2 "And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this [condition] will I make [a covenant] with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it [for] a reproach upon all Israel."

Such barbarity would humiliate the Israelites and incapacitate them for further fighting. Severe cruelty is not without precedent in the warfare of the ancient Near East (2 Kings 8:12; 25:7).

“Thrust out all your right eyes”: This barbarous mutilation was a common punishment of usurpers in the ancient Near East which would disable the warriors’ depth-perception and peripheral vision, rendering them useless in battle.

Nahash's name fits him very well. This is a very cruel thing to do to any one person, much less all the people. The poking out of their right eyes would make all of Israel look bad in the sight of the countries around them. I would doubt if anyone would allow their eye to be poked out without a fight.

Verses 3-7: God used Saul’s righteous “anger” to deliver the Israelites from the Ammonites. This is one example in Scripture where anger is justified and leads to justice (Exodus 22:21-24; John 2:13-22).

1 Samuel 11:3 "And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if [there be] no man to save us, we will come out to thee."

“Seven days”: the elders at Jabesh were hoping for deliverance from the Israelites west of the Jordan.

It appears they are not aware that Saul had been anointed king. They will look for someone to save them first. The seven days would give them time to search for help throughout Israel. It is strange, to me, that this evil Nahash waited the seven days. God had to move on him to make him willing to wait.

1 Samuel 11:4 "Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people: and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept."

“Gibeah”, Saul’s hometown, became his base of operations. Although Gibeah functioned as Israel’s capital, the city failed to achieve prominence, a fact well illustrated by the archaeological excavations undertaken there.

Saul’s home and the first capital city of the monarchy and was about 3 miles north of Jerusalem (10:26).

Gibeah was the home of Saul. Up until this time we have not heard much of the kingship of Saul. The people wept, because it appears they, too, did not think of Saul as being someone who would save them.

1 Samuel 11:5 "And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field; and Saul said, What [aileth] the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh."

“Out of the field”: Saul continued to work as a farmer while waiting for the time to answer Israel’s expectations of him as the king.

Their weeping had been so loud, that it found the ears of Saul. It appears that Saul had been working in the field, and came home at the end of the work day. He did not, even now, consider himself king.

1 Samuel 11:6 "And the spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly."

“The Spirit of God came upon Saul”: To fill him with divine indignation and to empower him to deliver the citizens of Jabesh-gilead (10:6).

This is the very same statement that was made, every time the power of God came upon Samson. Saul was a weak man, but the power of God in Saul made him a mighty warrior. He was very angry, when he heard they were going to poke out the right eyes of the men at Jabesh.

1 Samuel 11:7 "And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent [them] throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent."

“Hewed them in pieces”: Saul divided the oxen in sections to be taken throughout Israel to rouse the people for battle (see a similar action in Judges 19:29; 20:6).

These were the oxen that Saul had been plowing with. He killed them and cut them in little pieces, then sent them throughout Israel. He threatened to do the same thing to their oxen, if they did not come and help him fight these wicked Ammonites and especially this serpent, Nahash. The fear of the LORD caused all the armies of Israel to come, and fight these Ammonites. Saul and Samuel would lead the battle.

1 Samuel 11:8 "And when he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand."

“Bezek”: A city 13 miles north of Shechem and 17 miles west of Jabesh-gilead.

“Children of Israel ... men of Judah”: This distinction made between Israel and Judah after the kingdom was divided indicates the book was written after 931 B.C. when the kingdom had been divided.

Bezek was in the land of Issachar. Saul is the acting commander-in-chief of the army. He numbered the people, to make sure they had all come. This is one of the first mentions of the tribe of Israel separate from the tribe of Judah. All together the army had 330,000 fighting men.

1 Samuel 11:9 "And they said unto the messengers that came, Thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, Tomorrow, by [that time] the sun be hot, ye shall have help. And the messengers came and showed [it] to the men of Jabesh; and they were glad."

From Jabesh-gilead, that is, Saul and Samuel said to them, as follows.

"Thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabesh-gilead": When they returned unto them, as they were now departing.

"Tomorrow, by that time the sun be hot": When it smites with the greatest heat, as at noon: this tomorrow seems not to be the next from their return home, or going from Saul, but the tomorrow after they were gotten home, and should deliver the message to those that sent them (1 Sam. 11:10). And so Josephus says, it was on the third day the assistance was promised them.

"Ye shall have help": Saul with his army by that time would come and raise the siege: and the messengers came and showed it to the men of Jabesh. What Saul had promised, and what a numerous army he had raised and had now upon the march for their relief. And tomorrow would be with them.

"And they were glad": It was good news and glad tidings to them; it cheered their hearts, and gave them spirit.

The messengers that the elders had sent for help would take the message back that help was on the way. By noon the next day, they would be there to help fight against the Ammonites. Saul

will have his first opportunity to lead his people in battle. The messengers made it back through to the elders with the good report.

1 Samuel 11:10 "Therefore the men of Jabesh said, Tomorrow we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you."

This was said To Nahash the Ammonite.

"Tomorrow we will come out unto you": Meaning if they had no help, which they were well assured they should have. But this condition they expressed not, which they were not obliged to, but left him to conclude they had no hope of any, the messengers being returned, and the next being the last of the seven days' respite. And by this deception the Ammonites were secure, and not at all upon their guard against an approaching enemy.

"And ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you": Make shows of them, pluck out their eyes, or put them to death, or do what they would with them.

The men of Jabesh stall for a little more time, by telling these Ammonites they are going to give up the next day.

1 Samuel 11:11 "And it was [so] on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together."

"Three companies": A military strategy of dividing up forces, it lessened the possibility of losing everyone to a sneak attack while giving greater military options.

"In the morning watch": The last of the 3 watches (2:00 – 6:00 a.m.), this surprise attack was before dawn, before the Ammonites were prepared for battle.

The "morning watch" (from 2.00 to 6:00 a.m., or sunrise), was the third watch of the night. For the first watch (from sunset until 10:00 p.m.; see Lamentations 2:19); for the second watch (10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m.; see Judges 7:19). The division into "three" attacking "companies" was a common military tactic (Judges 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:17).

Saul did not even wait until noon the next day. He separated the men into 3 groups and all of them attacked the Ammonites at once from three different directions. There was a great slaughter of Ammonites. It seems so there was just a small remnant left.

Verses 12-15: The ceremony at "Gilgal" was a religious coronation, whereas the events (in 10:17-25), were political. Saul's victory rallied enthusiasm and support for him from the people. Samuel used this opportunity to help Israel renew its allegiance to God. The inauguration of Saul as its earthly king in no way diminished God as the one true King.

1 Samuel 11:12 "And the people said unto Samuel, Who [is] he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death."

The great weight and influence of the seer among the people is strikingly shown by this record of their turning to him, even in the first flush of this great victory of Saul's. It was Samuel to whom the people looked to bring to punishment the men who had dared to question the wisdom of electing Saul as king. It should be remembered too, that the royal summons to Israel which accompanied the bloody war-signal of King Saul, ran in the joint names of Saul and Samuel (see 1 Sam. 11:7).

We remember that the sons of Belial had complained about Saul ruling over them. The people are so delighted with the outcome of this battle; they want to kill everyone who thinks Saul should not be king. They bring their suggestion to Samuel. Possibly they remember that Saul would not punish them before, when they said this.

1 Samuel 11:13 "And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for today the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel."

"The Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel": Saul recognized the deliverance of the Lord and refused to kill those who had rebelled against his kingship (10:27).

Saul stops them from killing any of the Israelites. This is a day they should thank God for giving them this great victory. It is not a day for killing their own people. Saul places all the praise on the LORD for saving them. He is a modest man at this point. He is fully aware it is the power of God working in him, that brought the great victory.

Verses 14-15: (See the note on 10:1).

1 Samuel 11:14 "Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there."

"Gilgal" (see note on 10:8).

"Renew the kingdom": The reaffirmation of Saul's kingship by public acclamation.

The sanctuary was at Gilgal. This is a day of rejoicing before the LORD, and a day of formally accepting Saul as their king. With this victory behind them, everyone would want him to be king.

1 Samuel 11:15 "And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."

"They made Saul king before the Lord": All the people came to crown Saul king that day. The process of entering the kingship was the same for both Saul and David:

- (1) Commissioned by the Lord (9:1-10:16; 16:1-13);
- (2) Confirmed by military victory (10:17-11:11; 16:14-2 Sam. 1:21); and
- (3) Crowned (11:12-15; 2 Sam. 2:4; 5:3).

Saul is now their recognized king. All of the ceremonies were witnessed by the LORD in Gilgal. The sacrifices were celebrating the peace, after this great battle they had just been in. Saul had already been made king by the LORD. He had already been anointed by Samuel.

This was a celebration of him accepting the office of king, and the people accepting him. This was a time of celebrating victory over the Ammonites.

1 Samuel Chapter 11 Questions

1. Who brought his troops, and camped against Jabesh-gilead?
2. Where is Jabesh-gilead located?
3. "Nahash" means _____.
4. Why did the Ammonites hate Israel?
5. What were the men of Jabesh-gilead willing to do, to avoid war with the Ammonites?
6. What condition did the Ammonite make?
7. Why did he want to do such a terrible thing?
8. How much time did they ask Nahash for, before the battle?
9. If they could not find a man to save them, what would they do?
10. Where was Saul at this time?
11. Did they come and tell Saul?
12. What did the people do, when they were told of the terrible fate awaiting Jabesh-gilead?
13. Where had Saul come in from, when he heard the weeping?
14. The _____ of God came upon Saul.
15. His _____ was kindled greatly.
16. Saul was a weak man, but became powerful by the power of _____ within him.
17. What did he do with a yoke of his oxen?

18. What did he threaten to do to those, who did not come and help him fight these Ammonites?
19. How many of Israel came to fight?
20. How many of Judah came?
21. What message did they send back to Jabesh-gilead?
22. How did the men of Jabesh-gilead stall the Ammonites another day?
23. When did Saul attack?
24. How had he divided his troops?
25. Who won the battle?
26. What did the people tell Samuel, they wanted to do with those opposed to following Saul?
27. What was Saul's answer to this request?
28. Samuel told the people to come with him to _____.
29. What do they do in Gilgal?
30. He was already anointed as king, what is the celebration, here, for?