

1 Samuel 11 - Saul Defeats the Ammonites; Samuel Confirms Saul as King

III. Samuel and Saul narrative (8:1—15:35)

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1 Now **Nahash** the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us and we will serve you."

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1 So after a month, Nahash the Ammonite came up and laid siege to Jabesh-gilead. All the men of Jabesh told Nahash, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you."

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" - "serpent"

- No sooner had Saul begun his rule than a distant but important part of his kingdom was attacked by the Ammonites

— The Ammonites, who were related to Israel through Lot (Gen 19:38), were nomads in the territory east of Gilead

— Jephthah had defeated them earlier (Judges 11:12-33); Nahash evidently sought revenge for Jephthah's victory over his nation

- Jabesh Gilead is about 25 miles south of the Sea of Galilee, east of the Jordan River

— It is interesting that nobody from Jabesh Gilead responded to the call to arms with the nation had to punish the wickedness of Gilead in Benjamin (Judges 21:8-9), but now they were asking their fellow Jews to come and rescue them

Saul's Ancestry

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.

2 But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "I will make *it* with you on this condition, that I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you, and *thereby* I will inflict a disgrace on all Israel."

2 But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "I will make *it* with you on this condition, that I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you, thus I will make it a reproach on all Israel."

2 Nahash the Ammonite told them, "I'll make a covenant with you on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel."

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.

- The savage character of the nomadic Ammonites is attested by Amos 1:13

— The loss of the right eye was intended to disable a man for war, since his left eye was usually covered by his shield; it would also make aiming arrows impossible, thus precluding a military revolt

— Similarly, the amputation of a man's thumbs and big toes (Judges 1:7-8) was designed to incapacitate him for the use of the bow and to destroy his swiftness of foot

3 So the elders of Jabesh said to him, "Allow us seven days to send messengers throughout the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will come out to you."

3 The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Let us alone for seven days, that we may send messengers throughout the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to deliver us, we will come out to you."

3 The elders of Jabesh told him, "Leave us alone for seven days so that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then if no one delivers us, we will come out to you and surrender."

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.

- Nahash's willingness to let his enemies appeal for help shows that he had no fear that reinforcements would come

4 Then the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and spoke *these* words in the hearing of the people, and all the people raised their voices and wept.

4 Then the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and spoke these words in the hearing of the people, and all the people lifted up their voices and wept.

4 When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported the terms to the people, all the people cried loudly.

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.

- They had again forgotten God's promises to protect them since they were His people

— Their reaction was a result of viewing the situation only from the human perspective

5 Now behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen, and Saul said, "What is *the matter* with the people that they weep?" So they reported to him the words of the men of Jabesh.

5 Now behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen, and he said, "What is *the matter* with the people that they weep?" So they related to him the words of the men of Jabesh.

5 Just then Saul was coming in from the field behind the oxen and he said, "What's with the people? Why are they crying?" They reported to him what the men of Jabesh had said.

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.

- Why was Saul farming now that he was Israel's king? As far as we know, he had not yet received direction from God or Samuel to do anything else.

When Saul learned of the plight of Jabesh Gilead, a city so hopelessly besieged by the Ammonites that defeat was inevitable, he became enraged (v6) 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.

6 Then the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and he became very angry.

6 Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when he heard these words, and he became very angry.

6 When Saul heard these words, the Spirit of God came on him, and he was very angry.

6 And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.

- God's Spirit stirred up Saul's human spirit, and he became indignant; the Spirit stirred him to come to the defense of God's people

7 He then took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent *them* throughout the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and after Samuel, the same shall be done to his oxen." Then the dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one person.

7 He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent *them* throughout the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen." Then the dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one man.

7 He took a yoke of oxen, cut them in pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers through all the territory of Israel: "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not come out and join Saul and Samuel!" The fear of the LORD fell on the people and they came out as one man.

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.

- Saul did something drastic to relay the gravity of the Ammonite siege on his fellow Israelites...

— He followed the example of the Levite whose concubine had died in Saul's hometown (Judges 19:29-30) when he dissected his concubine's corpse and sent the parts to the various tribes (see notes on Judges 19:27-30).

8 He counted them in **Bezek**; and the sons of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah, thirty thousand.

8 He numbered them in Bezek; and the sons of Israel were 300,000, and the men of Judah 30,000.

8 Saul mustered them at Bezek, and there were 300,000 Israelis and 30,000 men of Judah.

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

- This was the greatest show of military strength in Israel since Joshua's day

- "...Bezek" - 16 miles west of Jabesh Gilead, on the western side of the Jordan

- The distinction between Israel and Judah (Cf. 15:4; 17:52; 18:16) suggests that 1 Samuel was written—or edited—after the nation was divided in 931 BC into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms

9 They said to the messengers who had come, "This is what you shall say to the men of Jabesh-gilead: 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you will be saved.'" So the messengers went and told the men of Jabesh; and they rejoiced.

9 They said to the messengers who had come, "Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh-gilead, 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you will have deliverance.'" So the messengers went and told the men of Jabesh; and they were glad.

9 They told the messengers who had come, "You are to say this to the men of Jabesh-gilead, 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you will be delivered.'" The messengers went and reported to the men of Jabesh, and they rejoiced.

9 And they said unto the messengers that came, Thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabesh-Gilead, To morrow, by that time the sun be hot, ye shall have help. And the messengers came and shewed it to the men of Jabesh; and they were glad.

10 Then the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you."

10 Then the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you."

10 The men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you and surrender. Then you can do whatever you want to us."

10 Therefore the men of Jabesh said, To morrow we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you.

- The leaders of Jabesh Gilead played with the words and cleverly led the Ammonites into self-confidence, thinking they would surrender

11 The next morning Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp at the morning watch, and struck and killed the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

11 The next morning Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp at the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

11 The next day Saul separated the people into three companies. They came into the camp during the morning watch, and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered so that no two of them remained together.

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.

- Saul divided his troops into three companies and attacked the Ammonites early in the morning, just like Gideon had done previously (Judges 7:16,19)

— With a forced overnight march, he surprised the Ammonites in the early morning hours and slaughtered them

- This achievement convinced even Samuel that God had His hand on Saul, so the prophet convened another assembly at Gilgal (v14-15) so that the people could reaffirm the kingship

12 Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is he that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, so that we may put them to death!"

12 Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is he that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death."

12 The people told Samuel, "Who said, 'Will Saul reign over us?' Bring them to us and we will put them to death!"

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 victory helped the Israelites view Saul as their king, so they committed themselves to him

13 But Saul said, "Not a single person shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has brought about victory in Israel."

13 But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has accomplished deliverance in Israel."

13 But Saul said, "Let no one be put to death this day, because today the LORD has delivered Israel."

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

- Saul sought no personal revenge on those who initially failed to support him (10:27; Cf. Judges 20:13; Luke 19:27). He also gave God the glory for the victory, showing that he had not yet become self-serving.

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

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

14 Then Samuel told the people, "Come, let's go to Gilgal and reaffirm the kingship there."

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

- In light of the military victory and the people supporting Saul as king, Samuel called for a ceremony to renew the Mosaic Covenant (Cf. Joshua 8; 24; Deut 29)

15 So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they also offered sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

15 So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they also offered sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

15 So all the people went to Gilgal and there they made Saul king in the LORD's presence in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings in the LORD's presence, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

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.

- This is the first of three significant meetings between Samuel and Saul at Gilgal (Cf. 13:7-14, when Saul became impatient and offered a sacrifice prematurely; and 15:10-26, when God rejected Saul as king for his disobedient pride following his victory over the Amalekites)

- Peace offerings expressed thanks to God for His goodness; it also emphasized the unity of the participants in the sacrifice

- 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.