

# *Truth for Today*

## **The Bible Explained**

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## **1<sup>st</sup> Samuel Chapter 11**

### **Saul's first victory**

*[The English standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

#### **Background**

At the time when the judges ruled there was no king in Israel, and according to Judges 21 v.25, 'Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.' Israel was going through a bad spell in their history with God. God always loved and cared for His people, but He allowed them to choose their own way. Once more they had been disobedient, and they were reaping the consequences of their ways. God allowed His people only to go so far then He provided His man to come in and bring some sort of godly order and respect for the LORD. The man He raised up was Samuel. Samuel was a very godly man, and he became priest over Israel. Samuel gained respect by his actions and words, and the people trusted him. Samuel challenged the people to put away all their foreign gods and to direct their hearts to the LORD and to serve Him only (1 Samuel 7 v.3). God gave Israel victories over their enemies, the Philistines and there was peace with the Ammonites. Samuel became an old man, and his sons did not have a good testimony amongst the people, so they demanded that Samuel appoint them a king. Their cry was, 'Give us a king to judge us' (1 Samuel 8 v.6). God recognised that the people once more were rejecting Him, and He told Samuel to do what the people asked. Samuel was most unhappy with the people because they refused to obey him. A man of the tribe of Benjamin (one of the smaller tribes) was chosen, Saul the son of Kish. He was a man of some stature, handsome, and from his head upwards, taller than any of the people. Samuel made known the word of the LORD to Saul and the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul enabling him to prophesy with the prophets. Samuel instructed Saul to do what God indicated and confirmed that the LORD would be with him. God gave Saul another heart that day (1 Samuel 10 v.9). Samuel called all the people together at Mizpah to meet Saul the king whom God had chosen. Some rejoiced, whereas others doubted. Saul then went back to his home in Gibeah, and some mighty men went with him.

#### **1 Samuel 11 – Saul's first victory**

Saul's first victory was against the Ammonites. The Ammonites were a constant thorn in the flesh of the people of Israel. Joshua had fought against the Ammonites and won a great victory. But he did not kill all of them, so they continued to multiply and become a serious enemy again. Ammon would speak to us of Satan who is the prince and power of the air and will always be our enemy, ready to attack us at every opportunity. The Bible encourages us to overcome Satan by putting on the armour of the Lord every day. This protects us from the evil one, see Ephesians 6 vv.10-18. Christians need to take decisive action against Satan who is, and always will be, against them until the day when the Lord finally banishes him once and for all into the lake of fire. 'Therefore, submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you' (James 4 v.7, NKJV).

Incidentally, the word nahash means 'serpent' in Hebrew. Nahash had besieged Jabesh-gilead and the people had all but given in to him. They were in such a weak condition that they were willing to make a treaty with Nahash the 'serpent.' A deal with the devil! How dangerous is that!

Nahash was sly, as he agreed to their treaty but obviously with conditions. There are always conditions, or wages to pay, when you make a deal with the devil. Nahash demanded that the right eye of every man was gouged out. Why was this so significant? The men when they went out to battle held their shield in their left hand and their sword in their right. If their right eyes were gouged out, they would not see to defend themselves as their left eye would be behind their shield. Satan wants to render you and I useless in the battle for the souls of men and woman boys and girls. Satan in the very beginning was cunning as he enticed Adam to sin.

The elders of Jabesh were wise and they asked Nahash for seven day's respite so that they could send messengers throughout the territory of Israel to see if they could find someone to save them. The number seven is significant in the Bible as it speaks of 'completeness' or 'finished.' It is often used in the Bible when God is involved and at work. They told him that if they found no one to save them, they would give themselves up. The people of Jabesh were in a sorry state! They, like all Israel, had turned their back on God, just like we do at times, forgetting God's caring, loving, and protecting hand.

The messengers went to Gibeah where Saul lived and told its people about their predicament and the people wept aloud. Saul was doing his day job, which was to farm his fields by driving his oxen. From there Saul heard the people weeping, I think this cry would be a loud wailing and tears. Saul asked what was wrong. So, they told him about the treaty the men of Jabesh had made with Nahash.

### **The LORD's influence on Saul**

Verse 6 says that 'The Spirit of God rushed upon Saul.' I am not fully sure what this expression means. It was also used when the Spirit of the LORD left Saul and came upon David. Whatever it means it is obvious that the LORD came upon Saul to influence his thinking. The Spirit of God was going to do some work through him. It says he was 'angry' when he heard what was going on. Anger is something that we don't relate much to a loving and caring God. However, it is important to note that God is a righteous, holy God, who will judge this world which rejected His Son. Remember when the Lord Jesus Himself was so angry with those who used the temple courts for buying and selling that he acted by tipping over their tables?

Saul did a strange thing! He took a yoke of oxen (two oxen) and cut them up in pieces. Then he sent the pieces with the messengers throughout the territory of Israel. Some may ask if this was necessary, however God required the people of Israel to listen, to respond, to stand up and be counted, and to be united against their enemy. When God's people are united there is power, and Satan is displeased. Along with each piece of meat there was a message from Saul, 'Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!' (v.7, ESV). Oxen were animals that each family needed to plough their fields. Oxen when harnessed need to pull together in the same direction as they work. The people were afraid, and they came out as 'one man.' This means that they were united, and all came out together. It is interesting to note that it was, the dread of the LORD that fell upon the people' (v.7, ESV). The people understood this clear message that came to them through Saul. It is also interesting to note that Saul not only mentions his name but Samuel's also. I think Saul recognised that he needed Samuel with him to unite the people as some were very unsure of their new king. Also, he knew that God was with Samuel who was a godly man and respected by the people.

### **Saul's battle plans**

The response of the people was remarkable as all together 330,000 responded. There were 300,000 people of Israel, and 30,000 men of Judah. Saul mustered them together at Bezek. The messengers were instructed to go to the men of Jabesh-gilead and give them this message, 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have salvation.' The men of Jabesh were glad and were very cunning themselves, they told Nahash that the next day they would give themselves up. Saying this may have tricked Nahash into thinking that he had won the battle without even a fight. Saul was a great warrior; a strategic commander and he prepared the people for the battle. It was

all about surprise. He put the people into three companies and commanded them to attack in the morning watch. The morning watch was between 2am to 6am, just before the dawn. The Ammonites may have been celebrating their guaranteed victory the night before and they were taken off-guard. Saul's armies walked into the middle of the camp and killed the Ammonites until the sun was hot, I presume it was until noon. It was a complete slaughter, and only a few here and there survived. God had, through Saul, given the people of Israel victory over the Ammonites, but more than this, the whole of Judah and Israel were now united. God loves when there is unity.

God gave Saul his first victory. 1 Samuel 10 v.19 stated,

'But you have today rejected your God, who Himself saved you from all your adversities and your tribulations: and you have said to Him, 'No, set a king over us!' (NKJV)

The people now saw that God had given them what they asked for, a warrior king. But he was not the king that God really wanted for them, it was King David, the man after God's own heart. In David, God would display features of His future King, His anointed One, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

### **The Kingdom is renewed**

In chapter 11 verse 12 the people said to Samuel, 'Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?'' (ESV). Some had doubted the choice of Saul as king. So the people continued, 'Bring the men, that we may put them to death.' Saul through his actions had now gained favour with the people. Before Samuel had time to reply, Saul told them that no one would be put to death that day for what they had said or thought. It was the LORD who in His goodness and power worked salvation for Israel. Saul never claimed that it was his quick thinking, courage, or valour, that had gotten the victory. Saul recognised it was the LORD God of Israel who had done great things, not himself. Then Samuel intervened, he grasped the opportunity while the people were in this frame of mind to make Saul king over Israel. Samuel took them to Gilgal which was on the other side of the Jordan River. Gilgal was where Saul was publicly anointed to be a prince and where Samuel in the presence of Saul offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to God, 1 Samuel 11 v.15. Gilgal seemed to be a place of consecration, spiritual renewal, and change. All the people came with Samuel. This was important because they could not blame God on His choice of King. It was the people that made Saul king before the LORD. It seems that Samuel may have privately anointed Saul as King, but now the people were all in agreement that Saul was their king. There was great rejoicing, the people of Israel were united, and the kingdom of Israel was renewed.

### **Conclusion and lessons from chapter 11**

1. God's sovereign plan. Each person has responsibility as to his individual choices, but God is in full control. God uses who and what he will to accomplish his overall plan. We wonder why He allowed Saul to be king when David was His desired king. But God allowed Saul to play his role in response to Israel's desires as He moves the scenes to accomplish His will.
2. Man's displeasure with, and disobedience to, God. Disobedience to God brings man kind into difficulties with God. In the Old Testament, God sometimes reacted immediately to the disobedience of His people. There are always consequences if we disobey God. If Christians sin nowadays, God still loves them, but they feel like they are distant from a holy God and that they have let Him down. Thankfully Christians can repent and be forgiven, but the consequences of the sins they have committed may last for a while or for the rest of their lives.
3. God's grace and forgiveness to man. How often we read in the Old Testament about God's grace and forgiveness to His earthly people, Israel. He never gives up on them. We see this with their rejection of the judges and their desire for a king. But what about us? We are sinners. We do not deserve grace and forgiveness. But God

loves us so much that in mercy He sent His son to die for our sins, to take the punishment we deserve. When we repent of our sins, God forgives us, and pours out spiritual blessings upon us.

4. God's love for His earthly people. It always humbles me to see God's love through out the journey of His people from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. He brought them out of slavery in Egypt. He fed, guided, and cared for them in the wilderness. He gave them the Promised Land. He empowered them to win battles against their enemies. But no matter what He did the people rebelled, they were disobedient, they craved other gods, and nothing is ever good enough for them. Does this not show us the heart of mankind? But God time and time again showed His love for Israel. Reverently it would not be wrong for us to think that He had reason to let them go their own way. The Bible tells us that in a day to come the Lord will come into the world and set up His kingdom forever. The Jewish nation will be under severe stress, but He will conquer their enemies. Then they will respond to the Lord, who will reign in righteousness in Jerusalem. God will always love and never give up on His people, Israel.
5. God's man for the moment. Throughout the Bible God always has His man on the ground. Samuel was God's man for the moment here in chapter 11. Samuel as a young boy was given to serve God by his mother Hannah. Samuel served God faithfully throughout his life. As a Christian, God has placed you where He wants you to be. Your life is His. You belong to Him. Sometimes we find things difficult. We feel we are not serving Him as we think we should. But what we must remind ourselves that God has placed us where we live and work for a reason and we need to be alert to God's working through us.
6. Never give up. The people of Jabesh-gilead had completely given up on God. They had made a deal with the enemy. How did they get to that position when they all knew from Israel's former history that God cared for them. How easily we can also get into a state like theirs! We neglect our fellowship with God. We don't pray or read our Bibles. We walk away from church and Christian company. We allow sin to take control of our thoughts, which is then seen in our deeds. We get into a real mess. The lesson here is never to give up because God's thoughts are always for our good and our reconciliation to Him. He will never give up on us.
7. God's timing. We live in a society today which wants everything to happen instantly. Information is always at the touch of a few computer buttons. So, it is quite hard for us to be patient. But as Christians we need to be patient and need to understand God's timing, it is always best. The wise ones of Jabesh-gilead asked for seven days and sought help from the source that is ever abounding, the hand of God. Let us always remember Ecclesiastes 3 v.1, 'For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.'

Saul's first victory was quite significant, for him, for the people, and for God's sovereign plan. Saul had to be king before David was God's anointed king. David is a picture of His Son, who will be King of kings and Lord of Lords. I trust and pray that the Lord has spoken to you through this message today.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on Saul's first victory from 1 Samuel Chapter 11, talk number T1312, in our Samuel to King David series.

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