

1 Samuel (Sh'mu'el Alef)

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Chapter 11

1 Then Nahash (Nachash), the Ammonite (Amoni), came up and encamped against Jabeshgilead (Yavesh-Gil'ad). And all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.

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.¹

3 And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the borders of Israel, and then, if there is no one to save us, we will come out to thee.²

4 Then the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the tidings in the ears of the people, and all the people lifted up their voices and wept.³

5 ¶ And, behold, Saul came after the oxen out of the field,⁴ and Saul said, What ails the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh.

6 And the Spirit of God prospered Saul⁵ when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.

7 And he took a yoke of oxen and hewed them in pieces and sent them throughout all the borders of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whoever does not come forth after Saul and after Samuel,

¹ Nahash suspected that the Israelites were just trying to buy time, until they could send for help. He wants to humiliate the people of this city, so that they will always bear the mark of their surrender to him, as well as to humiliate the rest of Israel for not coming to their aid.

² He allows them a week's respite to send messengers and see if their brethren will come to their aid. He probably was feeling confident that he could win, as Israel's new king was just a farmer, and did not have everyone's support.

³ They wept because they felt helpless. The odds of their winning must have looked bad. Nahash probably had a huge army, possibly augmented with hired mercenaries.

⁴ Saul has been easing into his new role as king, doing the ordinary stuff of before, enjoying the relative simplicity of private life, while he can. After this day, things will never again be the same.

⁵ Holy boldness came upon him. There was no room for fear, or for thoughts of failure.

I felt this way one time, when God moved me to pick up a hitchhiker, which was not a normal thing for me to do. In fact, my first thought, when I saw that girl at the side of the road with her thumb out was, "I don't pick up hitchhikers." Right after that, however, I saw a car with two men pull up, and I instantly knew that they intended to rape her. It made me furious, and I pulled over in front of them, intending to follow them and get their license plate number. The girl was drunk and saw neither of us. The men in the other car got nervous with me sitting there, and the girl taking so long to notice that she had two rides available. They took off, then I went and got her, took her home to where I lived, and called her mother, who called a friend to pick up her daughter. She was 17 and her mother was a Christian who had been praying for her. It was quite a thrill to get to ride to the rescue that night. I could not have done it if God hadn't helped me.

so shall it be done unto his oxen.⁶ And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.

8 And when he numbered them in Bezek, the sons of Israel were three hundred thousand and the men of Judah (Y'hudah) thirty thousand.

9 And they said unto the messengers that came, Thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabeshgilead, Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot,⁷ ye shall have salvation. And the messengers came and declared it to the men of Jabesh, and they were glad.⁸

10 Therefore the men of Jabesh said, Tomorrow we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seems good unto you.⁹

11 And it was so on the next day that Saul put the people in order in three companies, and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch¹⁰ and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day, and it came to pass that those who remained were scattered so that two of them were not left together.

12 Then the people said unto Samuel, Who were those that said, Shall Saul reign over us? Bring the men, that we may put them to death.

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

14 Then Samuel said to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there.¹²

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.¹³

⁶ A picture is worth a thousand words.

⁷ They predicted that they would win the battle by noon.

⁸ The men of Jabesh took heart because of the promise of help, and the confident way in which victory was predicted, as if it wouldn't be hard to win, and then they could have lunch.

⁹ The men of Jabesh sent a message to Nahash to put him off his guard, as if there had been no response from their brothers, or maybe they had heard that nobody was willing to come to their rescue.

¹⁰ The Ammonite army was still asleep. They had probably been boozing and bragging to each other the night before, about what they intended to do to their captives, thinking that they were going to have an easy time of it.

¹¹ Saul is off to a good start here, as the king, showing magnanimity, giving the rebels a chance to see that God is with him and to change their ways. It is like he gave them the benefit of the doubt that they had not realized he was a good man to be the king, though it proved later that he was not as good as he should have been.

¹² Samuel initiates a renewal of the kingdom, to fix this victory in the people's minds, and to give those who have changed their mind about Saul being king a chance to make a statement about their loyalty by attending this event. It also served to help Saul make the transition from ploughing his fields to setting up an official court.

¹³ Saul would have been robed in royal clothing, a beautiful ring placed on his finger, a crown placed on his head, a throne set up for him, people bowing and paying respects, bringing presents. There would be feasting and singing victory songs about the battle, and dancing. Banners were probably flying, a beautiful tent set up for him. He is finally launched into a kingly lifestyle. His wife and children would have worn rich clothing, and they would have been excited at seeing Saul honoured; people would have paid their respects to them, too. The people probably felt very proud to see their tall, handsome king looking so noble in his countenance and regal in his attire, especially now that he had a military victory to boost their confidence in him.