

FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 11

Saul Defeats the Ammonites

Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead, and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you.” 2 But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, “On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.” 3 The elders of Jabesh said to him, “Give us seven days' respite that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you.” 4 When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people, and all the people wept aloud. 5 Now, behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen. And Saul said, “What is wrong with the people, that they are weeping?” So they told him the news of the men of Jabesh. 6 And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. 7 He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, “Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!” Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. 8 When he mustered them at Bezek, the people of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. 9 And they said to the messengers who had come, “Thus shall you say to the men of Jabesh-gilead: ‘Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have salvation.’” When the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, they were glad. 10 Therefore the men of Jabesh said, “Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you.” 11 And the next day Saul put the people in three companies. And they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

11:1 *Ammonite.* The Ammonites were descended from Lot (see Ge 19:38; Dt 2:19) and lived east of the tribal territory of Gad near the upper regions of the Jabbok River (see Dt 2:37; Jos 12:2). Previous attempts by the Ammonites to occupy Israelite territory are referred to in Jdg 3:13; 11:4–32. The Philistine threat to Israel in the west presented the Ammonites with an opportunity to move against Israel from the east with supposed impunity. (CSB)

Descendant of Lot's younger daughter (Gn 19:38; Dt 2:19). Ammonites lived east of the territory of Gad near the upper regions of the Jabbok River (Dt 2:37; Nahash was a Transjordanian warlord whose hostility toward Jabesh-gilead apparently stemmed from a claim that the land was his (Jgs 11:12–13). The expanded version of 1Sm among the Dead Sea Scrolls describes his policy of gouging out the right eyes of the people he conquered. This engagement with the Ammonites represents Saul's first challenge as the anointed leader of Israel. (TLSB)

Jabesh Gilead. A town east of the Jordan in the tribal area of Manasseh. (CSB)

11:2 *gouge out the right eye.* Besides causing humiliation (see note on Jdg 16:21), the loss of the right eye would destroy the military capability of the archers. (CSB)

Cruel torture of captives would not only be humiliating and disfiguring but would also incapacitate them militarily, because they would lack depth perception. Cf Jgs 16:21. (TLSB)

11:3 Desperate, the elders negotiate a siege treaty. Requesting a week's time for deliberation and help, they seem to accept Nahash's terms. Nahash is overly confident that the alarm and request for help would be futile. (TLSB)

11:4 *Gibeah of Saul.* Close family ties undoubtedly prompted the inhabitants of Jabesh to seek help from the tribe of Benjamin (see Jdg 21:12–14). (CSB)

Saul's hometown, where there were a few fighting men, but no real army. (TLSB)

wept aloud. People raise a public lament. (TLSB)

11:5 *Saul was coming from the fields.* After Saul's public selection as the king-designate at Mizpah (10:17–27), he returned home (10:26) to resume his normal private activities and to wait for the Lord's leading for the next step in his elevation to the throne. (CSB)

11:6–11 Saul uses threats to rally the people, similar to the act of the Levite in Jgs 19:29–30. Both were invitations to a holy war. Not merely the threat, but the Lord's presence rallies the people of Israel for battle. (TLSB)

11:6 *the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul.* For similar endowment of Israel's deliverers with extraordinary vigor by God's Spirit see 10:6, 10; Jdg 14:6, 19; 15:14. (CSB)

The Spirit rouses Saul's righteous anger. Such special endowments by the Spirit occurred among the earlier judges, particularly Samson (Jgs 14:6, 19; 15:14). (TLSB)

anger was greatly kindled. Lit, "his nose swelled greatly," his nostrils flared with rage. (TLSB)

11:7 *pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel.* For a similar case see Jdg 19:29. (CSB)

Saul's oath takes on the form of a covenant ceremony, since God had used a similar act to establish His covenant with Abraham (Gn 15). (TLSB)

dread. Perhaps recalling that event, people respond in fear. Dread is similar to proper "fear of the LORD." (TLSB)

11:8 *Bezek.* Located north of Shechem, west of the Jordan River but within striking distance of Jabesh Gilead. (CSB)

North of Shechem, several miles west across the Jordan. Within easy striking distance from Gibeah, c 17 mi from Jabesh-gilead. (TLSB)

Judah. Saul's tribe, Benjamin, was small and previously held in disrespect by Judah, which sometimes exhibited a separatist or isolationist attitude toward the other tribes (cf 2Sm 2:8–11). (TLSB)

thirty thousand. Nearly a tenth of the military contingent. (TLSB)

11:10 *give ourselves up.* Hbr has double sense, as "we will come out to you." Deception, yet truth is also revealed. The defiant message lulled the overly confident Ammonites into complacency. (TLSB)

11:11 *three companies.* Saul's strategy to divide the large military force and surround the Ammonites in a pincer movement was a tactic used by Abimelech (Jgs 9:36–37). (TLSB)

morning watch. The third watch, from about 2:00 A.M. until about 6:00 A.M.. (CSB)

Lit, “last watch of the night,” traditionally the third watch (2 a.m. until 6 a.m.). See p 1567. Undoubtedly, this is a surprise attack by Saul and his troops. (TLSB)

11:1–11 In the Spirit of God, Saul acts boldly and strategically. When circumstances call for boldness and righteous anger, do you act confidently? The Lord is our “very present help in trouble” (Ps 46:1). In challenging times, God’s Spirit empowers you to face the challenge. • O Holy Spirit, fill me with passions that reflect Your desire for my life. When I am to be an instrument of Your help or hope, give me Your words and gifts. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)

The Kingdom Is Renewed

12 Then the people said to Samuel, “Who is it that said, ‘Shall Saul reign over us?’ Bring the men, that we may put them to death.” 13 But Saul said, “Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel.” 14 Then Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom.” 15 So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

11:13 *the LORD has worked salvation in Israel.* Saul recognizes Israel’s true deliverer (see note on 10:18). The victory, in combination with Saul’s confession, places yet another seal of divine approval on Saul as the man the Lord has chosen to be king. (CSB)

Saul recognizes God’s hand in the great deliverance from the Ammonites. Not vengeful against those who questioned his leadership, he magnanimously treats them kindly, aware that this is all part of the Lord’s gracious plan. (TLSB)

11:14 *let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom.* Samuel perceives that it is now the appropriate time for the people to renew their allegiance to the Lord. The kingship of which he speaks is the Lord’s, not Saul’s. Samuel calls for an assembly to restore the covenant relationship between the Lord and his people. He wants to inaugurate Saul’s rule in a manner demonstrating that the continued rule of the Lord as Israel’s Great King is in no way diminished or violated in the new era of the monarchy. Verses 14–15 are a brief synopsis of the Gilgal assembly and are prefaced to the more detailed account of the same assembly in ch. 12. (CSB)

God’s rule is eternal. Although Israel was not yet a united kingdom in an earthly sense, the Lord had renewed His rule and the people recognize this in the persons of Samuel and Saul. (TLSB)

Gilgal. Located east of Jericho near the Jordan River. It was a particularly appropriate place for Israel to renew her allegiance to the Lord (see Jos 4:19–5:11; 10:8–15). (CSB)

Means “turning.” Located between Jordan River and Jericho, once again it marks a turning point in Israel’s history (Jsh 4:19–24; 5:2–9; 10:8–15). Samuel had made it an annual stop on his judicial circuit. Saul’s kingship was privately announced at Ramah and solemnized at Mizpah (10:17–27). The people officially affirm him here in a solemn public assembly. (TLSB)

11:15 *made Saul king before the LORD.* Saul had previously been anointed in private by Samuel at Ramah (10:1) and publicly selected as the king-designate at Mizpah (10:17–27). In the subsequent Ammonite crisis (v. 1–13) his leadership did not rest on public recognition of his royal authority, but on the military victory. Now at Gilgal Saul is inaugurated as God’s chosen king and formally assumes the privileges and responsibilities of this office. (CSB)

peace offerings. This type of offering was an important element in the original ceremony of covenant ratification at Sinai (Ex 24:5, 11). It represented the communion or peace between the Lord and his people when the people lived in conformity with their covenant obligations (see Lev 7:11–17; 22:21–23). (CSB)

Prepared as a sign of reconciliation between all the tribes and the Lord, they mark a ratification of the covenant similar to that at Sinai (Ex 24:5–11). The people gave offerings also in recognition of the monarchy as a continuation of the theocracy, for which they finally rejoice in grand style. (TLSB)

rejoiced greatly. Rejoicing is the expression of people who have renewed their commitment to the Lord, confessed their sin (see 12:19) and been given a king. (CSB)

11:12–15 The nation unites in worship and praise to the Lord for the victory by Saul’s leadership and by God’s hand. In our repentance today, God provides “turning points” in our lives, so we again hear His words of comfort, promise, and hope. Knowing that Jesus is indeed our Savior and Lord, we can act confidently as agents of God’s kingdom. • Father in heaven, look down upon me when things seem to be turning upside down, and help me to see Your Son’s gentle, nail-pierced hand at work in my life. By Your Spirit I pray. Amen. (TLSB)