

1Samuel 11-12

- The reign of Saul has begun
 - He is celebrated by the people and anointed by the Spirit
 - And as he begins his reign, he will be tested early
 - But the Lord will show Himself through Saul to confirm Saul's authority as king
 - This is an important early step for Saul, since being king isn't merely about personal charisma or good looks
 - The people need to know that Saul isn't merely a poser
 - Yet we know that Saul has no formal training for this role
 - So it's entirely likely that Saul could be in way over his head
 - But the Lord's Spirit rests on Saul and that's all the preparation he needs for the job
 - The story begins in chapter 11

1Sam. 11:1 Now Nahash the Ammonite came up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us and we will serve you."

1Sam. 11:2 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."

1Sam. 11:3 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."

1Sam. 11:4 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.

1Sam. 11:5 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.

- The story begins with an Ammonite named Nahash
 - The Ammonites were the longtime enemies of Israel living east of the Jordan

- They are the descendants of Ammon, one of sons from Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters
- They have long tormented the Israelites
- Earlier in the book of Judges, the Ammonites had been defeated under the judge Japhthah
 - Now we hear of an Ammonite names Nahash who seems to be intent on exacting revenge for the earlier defeat
 - He attacks at a place in the Jordan river valley about 25 miles south of the Sea of Galilee
 - The town is called Jabesh-gilead and it apparently had no chance to defend itself against the Ammonites
- So the men of the town offer to surrender to the Ammonites
 - In return they ask for a covenant of peace
 - A covenant would have committed the Ammonites to preserve and defend the people of the city
 - They would have still been slaves of the Ammonites, but at least they wouldn't be killed
- In v.2 Nahash, whose name means serpent, replies that he will make a covenant if every person in the city agrees to have their right eye gouged out
 - While this may sound especially cruel – and certainly it is harsh treatment – it was not an unusual request
 - Taking the right eye of an enemy vanquished in battle was a custom of the day
 - The point of maiming someone in this way was to eliminate their effectiveness in battle
 - Without a right eye, warriors couldn't aim a bow and arrow
 - And a soldier couldn't look out behind a shield that protected the left eye
 - Furthermore as Nahash says, the effect would be to make the people a reproach in the land

- Their lack of two eyes would forever mark them a defeated vassals of the Ammonites
- This is certainly a stiff penalty to keep your earthly life
- In response the people tell Nahash to give them seven days to see if they can find a better offer
 - They are looking for defenders willing to lay their lives on the line to defend the city
 - Now why would Nahash agree to this condition?
 - The only explanation is that Nahash had little reason to think help would come
 - Remember, we're at the end of the time of judges when the nation did what was right in their own eyes
 - Which means they didn't operate as a single nation
 - Each tribe and city lived semi-independently and often with disregard for sister tribes
 - And Nahash assumes no one else is going to take up the invitation to enter into a battle to the death for this city
 - So he's willing to wait a week to get what he wants without a battle
- When the word reaches Saul's town, the people react with weeping out of sympathy for their brothers in Jabesh-gilead
 - They weep assuming nothing could be done to stop this assault
 - Israel doesn't have a standing army
 - And they have lost their warring strength for the most part
 - So the people naturally assume they have no way to save this town
 - Then Saul hears about the threats
 - Interestingly, we find him plowing his field
 - He is the king of the land and yet he's simply returned to the work he did before

- Why is Saul not acting as king?
 - The likely answer is that Saul didn't know what else to do as king
 - There was no palace to move into
 - There was no calendar of kingly events to attend to
 - And he still needed to eat
- Also, this willingness to return to everyday activities continues to suggest he is a humble man at this point
 - He has no expectations for himself
 - Perhaps Saul has begun to wonder if his new title means anything more than a ceremonial role
 - We can only speculate but all that is about to change for Saul

1Sam. 11:6 Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when he heard these words, and he became very angry.

1Sam. 11:7 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.

1Sam. 11:8 He numbered them in Bezek; and the sons of Israel were 300,000, and the men of Judah 30,000.

1Sam. 11:9 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.

- Notice at the outset that the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Saul in a mighty way
 - The Spirit's power and direction is responsible for the sequence of events that follows, which tells us that the Lord is working to create the outcome
 - But take note first that the Spirit is said to come upon Saul
 - This suggests the Spirit was not already with Saul
 - Yet we saw earlier in this book when the Spirit came upon Saul and changed his heart

- This is evidence that the work of the Spirit in this time doesn't involve a permanent indwelling
 - The Spirit comes at a time for a purpose
 - But then He may depart and that departure isn't necessarily an indication that the Spirit disapproves of or has abandoned the individual
 - It simply reflects the difference in the ministry of the Spirit in this day compared to the Church age
 - The Spirit comes as goes as needed to effect the outcome the Lord desires
- The effect of the Spirit's arrival in this moment is to fill Saul with righteous anger, bold courage and wisdom
 - Saul had a family connection to this town
 - During the civil war at the end of Judges, the tribe of Benjamin was so devastated they the remaining men took wives from this town
 - So Saul is angered over the prospect of his people suffering
- So he immediately takes a yoke of oxen plowing his field and kills them on the spot in the field
 - And he took the pieces of oxen and called messengers to carry them throughout the land of Israel calling for "volunteers" for the fight
 - He says that Saul and Samuel call for men to join the fight to remind the people that he was anointed by Samuel
- The point of the oxen pieces is obvious: refusing your king's request meant losing your livelihood as farmers
 - No oxen meant no animals to work the field
 - And Saul chose this sign because he anticipated that the people might refuse his request by citing the need to remain in the fields and plow
 - So Saul takes that excuse away, since without oxen they will have no need to remain in the fields

- Saul's choice to cut up the animal also harkens back to another event that took place in his home town
 - That event is recorded in Judges 19
 - We'll cover it in our Judges story
- Notice that the people felt the "dread of the Lord"
 - That's a term we don't hear often
 - The "dread of the Lord" can also be translated the "fear of the Lord"
 - And that's a phrase we know well
 - It means that men and women realize they are being called to obey the Lord
 - And they are concerned with the consequences of not doing so
 - This is a healthy state for God's people
 - In our modern, "enlightened" culture we assume that fear is never a good thing
 - But that's not the Bible's perspective
 - Fear of the Lord is a very good thing
 - Luke tells us that fear of the Lord is external evidence that a church is healthy

Acts 9:31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

- Fear of displeasing the Lord and fearing the consequences of sin is absolutely the best place a Christian can be in a fallen world
 - And it's the absence of this perspective that leads men and women to feel comfortable with sin
 - And comfort with sin is never preferable to fear of the Lord
- In this case, the fear of the Lord led the nation to respond in the right way by coming to fight in Saul's army

- A total of 330,000 men assemble in response to Saul's call
 - This is by far the greatest military force assembled in Israel since the days of Joshua 300 years earlier
 - They are assembled in Bezek, which is about 16 miles from Jabesh-gilead
- The number is notably specific
 - 300,000 and 30,000 points to the Lord's work in raising this army, the number 3 being the number of God
 - So here's the Spirit driving the people to respect the authority of God's anointed
- Finally, Saul tells the messengers to send word to the city that they will be rescued before the end of the afternoon the following day
 - Remember Saul has only seven days to bring this fight to the city
 - This includes travel time
 - So we know these events are unfolding rapidly
 - And when the city hears the news, they are glad for obvious reasons

1Sam. 11:10 Then the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you."

1Sam. 11:11 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.

- The next day was the seventh day, and so the city owed a response to Nahash
 - To buy some time, the men of the city cleverly say to Nahash they will come out of the city tomorrow, and he may do whatever seems good
 - In Hebrew, the words they spoke were a little different
 - They say you can do what is right in your eyes
 - It's a way of suggesting they are ready to have their eyes put out

- And yet they know they are merely drawing the army out in to the open where they can be defeated by Saul
- The next morning Saul approaches with three companies of men, probably about 100,000 in each
 - This is a huge force and probably dwarfed the Ammonites
 - Since the Israelites hadn't mustered a force of this size in three centuries, we can be sure the Ammonites were not expecting such an opponent
- Saul routs the army of the Ammonites, scattering them so far apart that no man stood with another
 - This is a huge victory for Saul, one the people never expected
 - We know they didn't expect it because just a week earlier they were weeping at the news of the Ammonites threats
 - No one could have anticipated that Israel could act in unison and with such power and success
- This was something altogether new
 - The time of Judges was a time when the people did what each person thought was right and best for himself
 - It was a selfish and hedonistic culture
 - Judges only managed to hold the people to God's law for short periods of time
 - But inevitably the people turned back to their fleshly desires
- Their individualistic sin led to ruin time and time again, so the prospect of uniting in service to God and to great effect was virtually unknown in the land
 - But now under a king the people had a taste of what was possible when led by God's anointed
 - And they are excited for what the future under a king means
 - And they are determined to put to an end any dissension against the Lord's anointed

[1Sam. 11:12](#) 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.”

[1Sam. 11:13](#) But Saul said, “Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has accomplished deliverance in Israel.”

[1Sam. 11:14](#) Then Samuel said to the people, “Come and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there.”

[1Sam. 11:15](#) 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.

- We remember at the end of chapter 10 that some men were dissenting at the coronation of Saul as king
 - At that time we’re told Saul said nothing in response to their objections
 - Saul knew he was in no position to fight them anyway
 - This was a wise decision on his part
 - Engaging in a fight before you have the high ground is suicide
 - But now Saul has the high ground so to speak
 - He has won a great military victory
 - And the manner of the assembly and the outcome testify to the Lord’s working in Saul
 - So the people aren’t just pleased with the victory, but they realize the Lord is at work in this man
 - So this the right moment for Saul to consolidate power knowing he has the support of all the people
 - Yet when they suggest the dissenters be put to death, Saul stops them
 - Once again, Saul’s heart seems to be in the right place
 - He remarks that this is a victory won by the Lord for His people
 - And therefore this is not the right time for vengeance
 - We all celebrate this victory

- Saul's magnanimous gesture is a face-saving way for his enemies to rethink their opposition
 - Saul isn't unwilling to challenge his opposition
 - He is simply giving them a chance to pledge their allegiance
 - This is a far more effective strategy to consolidating power
 - It's far better to consolidate without bloodshed than by bloodshed
- Therefore, Saul calls for the people to join him in a second coronation, one absent dissenting voices
 - This is the opportunity for those who previous opposed Saul to change their minds publicly
 - When the coronation happens, these men will be among those bowing to the king
 - And with that gesture, Saul puts an end to an opposition
 - This also appears to have been a moment when the nation recommitted itself to the covenant of Moses
 - They offer peace sacrifices to the Lord
 - This seems to indicate that they are reconciling with the Lord to the terms of that covenant
 - All of this is an artful and wise way for Saul to shore up his position as king in the land
 - And Samuel is recording these details to reflect Saul's strong starting point in his role
 - The Lord anointed Saul and empowered him for service
 - And he's doing well, showing patience, mercy and fortitude
 - But this is only a start
 - This is the first of three times that Saul and Samuel will meet at Gilgal
 - The second time will be a turning point in Saul's reign as king when he turns from good to bad

- And the third will bring Saul's reign to an end
- For the past three chapters, we've been talking about the rise of a king in Israel
 - In chapter 8 the people asked for a king and Samuel responded
 - Specifically, he warned the people that asking for a king would result in bad things happening
 - But then the story moves forward to the selection of Saul
 - And eventually in chapter 11 we see his success on the battlefield
 - And all the while he seems humble and reasonable
 - What happened to the problems?
 - Well they are coming, but Samuel first wants to emphasize the good start any man can produce
 - In fact, to reinforce Saul's good start, Samuel tells the same story twice
 - In the next three chapters we again hear a warning from Samuel
 - Followed by Saul's adventures and success in battle with a humble heart
 - But then the pattern will begin to change
- Let's look at the beginning of that second pattern, starting with Samuel issuing yet another warning to the people about following a king

1Sam. 12:1 Then Samuel said to all Israel, "Behold, I have listened to your voice in all that you said to me and I have appointed a king over you.

1Sam. 12:2 "Now, here is the king walking before you, but I am old and gray, and behold my sons are with you. And I have walked before you from my youth even to this day.

1Sam. 12:3 "Here I am; bear witness against me before the Lord and His anointed. Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? I will restore it to you."

1Sam. 12:4 They said, "You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand."

1Sam. 12:5 He said to them, "The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day that you have found nothing in my hand." And they said, "He is witness."

- Samuel's second warning is beginning to sound a little personal, as if Samuel has been personally wounded by their rejection
 - But in reality he's simply making a point about the state of their hearts
 - He reminds them that when he was in charge as judge, he had done nothing wrong in his service to the people
 - And the people confirm his assertion in v.4
 - And Samuel goes an extra step and asks for anyone to testify to the contrary before God whether Samuel has defrauded anyone
 - Now we remember that Samuel's sons were a problem in these ways, and it was Samuel himself that recorded his son's exploits in this book
 - But Samuel also wants the record to reflect that he was not a bad judge
 - And furthermore, the call for a king was not the result of his mismanagement of the people
 - Though they pointed to his sons as a cause, in reality it was simply their own desires leading them there
 - He also says I'm old and I've served you my whole life
 - We also know this is true as earlier chapters told us
 - Samuel was working in the tabernacle from an early age
 - But nevertheless, it was the people who came to him and demanded a king
 - He didn't suggest it; rather, he listened to their voice
 - So the rise of a king in Israel could never have been said to be a result of Samuel's errors
 - He hadn't been unfaithful to his role in service to the people
 - They brought it upon themselves
- So with that out of the way, Samuel proceeds to testify that their rejection of the Lord was also wholly unjustified

[1Sam. 12:6](#) Then Samuel said to the people, “It is the Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt.

[1Sam. 12:7](#) “So now, take your stand, that I may plead with you before the Lord concerning all the righteous acts of the Lord which He did for you and your fathers.

[1Sam. 12:8](#) “When Jacob went into Egypt and your fathers cried out to the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron who brought your fathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place.

[1Sam. 12:9](#) “But they forgot the Lord their God, so He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them.

[1Sam. 12:10](#) “They cried out to the Lord and said, ‘We have sinned because we have forsaken the Lord and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; but now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve You.’

[1Sam. 12:11](#) “Then the Lord sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security.

[1Sam. 12:12](#) “When you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ although the Lord your God was your king.

- Samuel’s testimony before the people is of the Lord’s faithfulness in the face of the people’s repeated unfaithfulness
 - The Lord promised to bring Israel out of Egypt, which He did
 - The Lord sent a deliverer to the people
 - And kept His word spoken to Abraham centuries earlier
 - In v.9 Samuel says that when the people entered the land, they sinned against Him by entering into idolatry
 - He’s summarizing the entire book of Judges in a few verses
 - The cycle of sin and rebellion was repeated throughout the years of the judges
 - Yet each time the people cried out for relief, the Lord responded with mercy for the people
 - Repeatedly, the Lord sent judges to rescue the people, men like Gideon, Jephthah and lastly Samuel

- And now the people found Nahash coming against them and though before they cried to God for deliverance this time they cried for a king to save them
 - Here is the the turning point Samuel wants to emphasize
 - The people have long been unfaithful to the Lord
 - And He has routinely responded with discipline through the oppression of Israel's enemies
 - And this pattern was exactly what the Lord promised to do when He set forth the terms of the Mosaic Covenant with the people
 - And He has also been faithful to secure the victory when the people asked
 - But this time they didn't ask the Lord
- Now we know the Lord worked through Saul just as He had the judges
 - But Samuel's point is how the hearts of the people are changing, not how the Lord is changing
 - The Lord has and will remain faithful
 - But the people are moving steadily away from a reliance on the Lord
 - And the central problem with seeking a king is the way it puts further distance between the people and their dependence on the Lord
 - This still happens for us today
 - The more we become self-dependent or at least imagine ourselves to be self-sufficient, the more we forget how utterly dependent we truly are on the Lord
 - This is the nature of sinful flesh...we imagine ourselves to be little gods at all times, in control of everything
 - The people of Israel were willing to turn to a human king over an all-power God because our flesh is always more attracted to fleshly things
 - Spiritual solutions generally take a backseat to something of the world

- And now that the people have a king, they will turn to him before seeking the Lord
- Now the irony is that the Lord is still on the throne and ruling, even though a king
 - But our awareness of Him has been diminished
 - And our flesh begins to overrule our spirit
 - That's Samuel's concern and his warning for the people as he watches them seek after and celebrate Saul's victory
 - Even though in the past the Lord has been faithful to provide these victories once the people's heart has turned back to Him
- Samuel makes this very point next

[1Sam. 12:13](#) "Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, the Lord has set a king over you.

[1Sam. 12:14](#) "If you will fear the Lord and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the Lord, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God.

[1Sam. 12:15](#) "If you will not listen to the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the command of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers.

- Samuel says this gate swings both ways
 - Even though you have selected a king over you, both you and your king must continue to seek and serve the Lord just as was expected in the time of Judges
 - If you do these things, then both the people and the king will prosper according to the terms of the covenant
 - If you fail to obey the Lord, then everyone will suffer
 - In other words, having a king doesn't change the covenant or the people's requirement to know, follow and obey the Lord
- And then Samuel gives the people a sign from the Lord to confirm his words and the people respond

[1Sam. 12:16](#) “Even now, take your stand and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes.

[1Sam. 12:17](#) “Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call to the Lord, that He may send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the Lord by asking for yourselves a king.”

[1Sam. 12:18](#) So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.

[1Sam. 12:19](#) Then all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil by asking for ourselves a king.”

[1Sam. 12:20](#) Samuel said to the people, “Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.

[1Sam. 12:21](#) “You must not turn aside, for then you would go after futile things which can not profit or deliver, because they are futile.

[1Sam. 12:22](#) “For the Lord will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.

[1Sam. 12:23](#) “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way.

[1Sam. 12:24](#) “Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.

[1Sam. 12:25](#) “But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away.”

- Samuel proves that his words are spoken under the inspiration of the Spirit by use of a supernatural sign
 - This sign was performed in order to validate the word of the prophet before the people
 - And they certainly get the point
 - The fear of the Lord returns for the people, leading them to confess their sin and pledge obedience
 - These are nice words, but Samuel knows they are empty unless backed by action
 - So Samuel repeats that they cannot place their trust in fruitless things
 - The Lord is here to stay and His relationship with His people will not come to an end
 - They cannot escape accountability to the covenant He established with them

- Furthermore, Samuel will continue in his role to guide and pray for the people even as they have asked for a king
- The ultimate course for this people is to fear the Lord, serve Him in truth and consider the great things the Lord has done for His people
 - I recommend you circle v.24 in your Bible
 - Meditate on Samuel's counsel
 - If you want to remain in the pleasure of the Lord, repeat these three spiritual disciplines and watch how it impacts your obedience
 - First, Samuel says fear the Lord
 - We've already spoken on the spiritual value of maintaining a healthy fear of the Lord's judgment and the consequences of not pleasing Him
 - Never let go of that perspective and you will be in a good position to choose right over wrong
 - Your flesh will be disciplined by your fear
 - And you will see yourself becoming more Christ-like as the Spirit uses that fear to motivate your good behavior
 - Secondly, serve the Lord in truth
 - Samuel joins two principles into one
 - Serving the Lord means devoting your life's purpose to the purposes of God and His glory and His kingdom
 - Make your life about that outcome and do so informed by the truth of Scripture
 - Studying and understanding God's word is essential to uncovering God's purposes in your life and in your ministry
 - So study the word to know God's will and then seek to serve that will in your goals and priorities of life
 - Finally, Samuel consider the great things the Lord has done for you, beginning with your salvation

- Make regular observance of all His provision, mercy, kindness and love for you
- Talk to your family and friends about all the Lord has done and is doing to care for you and grow you in Christ
- Keep these things on the front of your mind, and you will be less tempted to stray after worldly offers for the same
- Just as Israel should have remembered the Lord's faithfulness to them, instead of thinking about what earthly kings could give them
- This is a great antidote to our flesh's desire for the next big thing instead of resting in the Lord
- With these reminders, Samuel ends with a final warning
 - If they do wicked things, expect the Lord to bring a judgment upon the people
 - And no earthly king will be able to save them or stop the judgment
 - The Lord remains on His throne