

1st Samuel

Lesson 17

(a) Saul Hears the Message (11:4-5)

The message of the elders of Jabesh did not go to Saul; instead, the message was sent to every tribal capital in the Promised Land to ask for help. In doing so, the messengers presented their message in Gibeah, which happened to be the home of the newly elected King Saul. Verse 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. 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.” (11:4-5)

Notice that the messengers did not tell Saul; they told the people of Gibeah their message. Saul heard it after the fact when he saw the people crying in sadness for the people of Jabesh.

(b) Saul’s Anger Burns (11:6)

When the message was not sent to Saul directly as the new king, the Spirit of God made Saul’s anger burned within him. It was a righteous anger. Verse 6.

“Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when he heard these words, and he became very angry.” (11:6)

May we make an interesting observance at this time in the Scripture. This verse uses the wording *“The Spirit of God.”* It is only the sixth time this exact wording has been used in the full text of all the Scripture that comes before this story. It was first used in Genesis 1:2 to tell us that *“the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the earth.”* It was then used in Exodus 31:3 and 35:21 to tell us *“the Spirit of God”* filled Bezalel with wisdom in craftsmanship to create the articles for the Tabernacle complex. It was used in Numbers 24:2 to tell us that *“the Spirit of God”* came upon Balaam and caused him to bless Israel instead of curse Israel. It was used in 1st Samuel 10:10 to tell us that the *“Spirit of God”* came upon King Saul, and he began to prophesy. In this sixth time, the Almighty, Spirit of God, came upon King Saul to make him angry for what was happening in his kingdom.

(c) Saul’s Message Sent (11:7a)

What did Saul do in his anger? He took a page out of the book of Judges. He used a strategy that had worked well in the Nation of Israel in the past. Here we come to Saul’s message sent. Verse 7a.

“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.’” (11:7a)

A similar message was sent in Judges 19:29 with the concubine’s body. Here, a more normal sacrifice was with an ox rather than a dead human body. We must wonder if Saul used the oxen he had just finished plowing with in the field (11:5). If so, and probably so, Saul was angry enough to hamper his plowing ability with his favorite oxen to make his point as the new king. Saul’s threat was included with the messengers to prove that he was serious about helping the people of Jabesh-gilead. This gesture by Saul to rescue Jabesh will be returned by the people of Jabesh when they walk all night to rescue the dead body of Saul from the Philistines forty years in the future in chapter 31. But for now, Saul had part of his nation to save.

(d) Saul’s Message Heard (11:7b-8)

Saul’s message was heard by the people of Israel. Verse 7b.

“Then the dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one man.⁸ He numbered them in Bezek; and the sons of Israel were 300,000, and the men of Judah 30,000.” (11:7b-8)

Notice! It was not the dread of Saul’s warning that caused the people to come out *“as one man.”* It was the *“dread of the LORD.”* The people of the nation of Israel were wise enough to know that the LORD was to be feared. Their ancestors expressed that fear when they heard the voice of the LORD for the first time at Mount Sinai when the LORD spoke the Ten Commandments from the

mountain where everyone in the camp could hear. Through the four hundred years, they and their ancestors had seen and heard the mighty power of the LORD and feared Him greatly. In a more minor way, these same people who felt the “*dread of the LORD*” at this time had just shortly before experienced the selecting of Saul as their king at Mizpah with Samuel. No wonder they came out “*as one man.*”

The warriors of Israel met together at Bezer. If you will remember, Bezer was a Levitical city in the tribal area of Rueben, just south of the land of Gilead, which covered some of the lands in the tribal area of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. In Bezer, the men were 300,000 from eleven tribes of Israel and 30,000 from the premier tribe of Judah, 330,000 men in all. It was an incredible army of men.

(e) Saul’s Plan Delivered (11:9)

With the troops in Bezer, Saul’s plan was delivered to the men of Jabesh. Verse 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.*” (11:9)

The hot of the day, especially when there is no cloud cover, arrives between 3:00 – 4:00 each afternoon. What this verse is telling us is, by 3:00 – 4:00 PM, the battle with Ammonites will be over, and the town’s people of Jabesh-gilead will be delivered. It was welcome news to the elders of the town.

(f) Saul’s Plan Enacted (11:10-11)

But Saul’s message and plan must have been more than just telling the elders the time of their deliverance. Saul’s plan must have included a task for the Jabesh men to do on the following day. We come to Saul’s plan enacted. Verse 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.”*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.*” (11:10-11)

We rarely think about the timing of events, such as in the case of this passage, but it would reasonably be edifying to consider the topic. From the time of creation until today, we are about 6,300 years into the 7,000-year plan for the coming of the LORD. Using the time markers from Genesis through 1st Samuel, this Saul became king about 3,100 years after the creation of Adam. What are we to make of this? Here is the point. Saul became king about halfway in the time that man has been on earth since the creation until the year 2022 AD. During those 3,100 years, the art of war had developed dramatically worldwide. Here in these verses, Saul divided the company of warriors into three groups and attacked from three directions simultaneously. This act of war was not new. For example, Gideon had used it back in Judges. It was used by the Israelites when they were bringing judgment on the godless Benjamites at Gibeah (Judges 22). You will remember in that judgment against the Benjamites; men were used to draw the people out of the city so the city people could be destroyed. That same tactic was used by Joshua to win the battle to capture and conquer the city of Ai. The point in all of this is to say, Saul, in some way, knew at least some of the successful tactics of the art of war. He used them to defeat the Ammonites in this passage. As a side point in this passage, Josephus tells us that Nahash the Ammonite died with his men in this battle led by Saul.

(3) A Call for the Subversive (11:12-13)

With the victory in Saul’s hand, he was most definitely the new king of Israel. If you will remember, when Saul was chosen and anointed by the people and Samuel at Mizpah, some

worthless men did not want to follow him. With Saul's victory, the supporters of Saul made a call for the subversive men of Saul. Verse 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.'"¹³ But Saul said, 'Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has accomplished deliverance in Israel.' (11:12-13)

Rightly, Saul, the victorious new king of Israel, would have nothing to do with putting to death the countrymen who were skeptical of him at first. It was a wise move, as we will see.

g) The Renewal of Saul as King (11:14-15)

With Saul's victory, Samuel saw an opportunity to unite the kingdom of Israel, especially because Saul did not allow the subversive men to be killed. So, Samuel called for the renewal of Saul as King in Gilgal. Verse 14.

"Then Samuel said to the people, 'Come and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there.'¹⁴ 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.' (11:14-15)

Gilgal was where Saul met with Samuel after Saul had spent time in Gibeath on the hill of God with the other prophets. But in the storyline, that meeting was not recorded by Samuel, at least not in this current storyline. If you will remember, when we were expecting Saul to go and wait seven days for Samuel to arrive, Samuel changed the storyline to tell us about the meeting he called at Mizpah to present Saul as the new king of Israel through a series of casting lots. Saul was there, not in Gilgal as expected. In the next part of the previous storyline, Saul is plowing in his fields in Gibeath when word comes that the Jebesh-gilead's needed help from the men of the Nation of Israel. Saul stepped up to act as the king, the protector of all the people, gathered the forces of Israel, and defeated the enemy of the people of Jabesh-gilead. Now, with the victory in hand, the people of Israel were with Saul at Bezer, and they acknowledged that Saul was the rightful king. Guess what? Samuel was there too. Had Saul never met with Samuel at Gilgal in the first place? What can be the answer to all this confusion? We will address the answer to that confusion later in this book in chapter 13.

Chapter 12

3. The Story of the Confirmation of Saul by the Nation

a) The Meeting for the Confirmation of Saul

(1) The Witness of Samuel's Integrity (12:1-5)

The warriors of Israel have moved from Bezer to Gilgal. What was so special about Gilgal? If you will remember, when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River for the first time under the leadership of Joshua, they camped in an open area just east, in the eyeshot of Jericho. It was from that campsite that Israel set the Tabernacle complex and entered into its first battles with Jericho and Ai. Later, the Tabernacle complex was moved with the people to Shechem for a while and then permanently sat at Shiloh where it still was at this point in the story of Saul and will continue to be for about twenty-seven years until it is captured by the Philistines, then returned to Israel and stored at Kiriath-jeriam. Being the first camp of Israel on the west side of the Jordan River, Gilgal held a special place in the people's hearts. The name Gilgal means *rolling*. It was given this name because it was at that location that the LORD said to Israel, *"Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you."* *So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.* (Joshua 5:9)

By the time of this story in Samuel and Saul's life, the campsite had been populated and stood as an important city in the history of Israel. Samuel often made the circuit to judge the people. He would leave his home in Ramah, travel north to Bethel, then to Gilgal, and finally to Mizpah before

he returned home in Ramah. When Samuel consecrated Saul at Ramah, Samuel sent Saul to wait for him at Gilgal. No doubt, Samuel was about to make the circuit of the four cities – Ramah to Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah. Samuel probably had Saul go to Gibeah and then to Gilgal, where he was to wait for seven days until Samuel arrived. No doubt, Samuel visited Bethel first and met Saul at Gilgal before holding the meeting at Mizpah to present Saul to the nation. For some reason, Samuel did not record that meeting at Gilgal.

From the warrior camp at Bezer, Gilgal was the perfect place to hold a meeting with Samuel. It was where it all started with Joshua after crossing the Jordan River. From Bezer, most of the warriors would need to cross the Jordan River to go home, and the four fords that were available at the Jordan River were near Gilgal. Each of the three companies of warriors could divide up, and all arrive at Gilgal about the same time.

With that as the introduction between chapters 11 and 12, we come to Samuel's message at Gilgal to the people about the story of the confirmation of Saul by the nation. To begin the message, he starts with what we will call the witness of Samuel's integrity. Chapter 12, verse 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. 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. 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.' ⁴ They said, 'You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.' 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.'" (12:1-5)

Samuel stated his case and asked the people for an answer. Their answer was, "You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand." Samuel then held their feet to the fire by telling them that if they ever changed their mind about their answer, the LORD had witnessed their response and would keep them to it. Then they replied that the LORD was the witness, and they knew it. Samuel had established his integrity in the nation for as long as he had been serving amid the nation.