

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 11

This chapter relates the distress the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead were in on account of the Ammonites, (^{<0100>}1 Samuel 11:1-3) upon which they sent messengers to Saul, whose spirit was immediately stirred up to help them, (^{<0104>}1 Samuel 11:4-6), and prepared for it, and came up soon enough for their relief, and slew their enemies, (^{<0107>}1 Samuel 11:7-11), which gained him much honour and reputation among the people, and occasioned the renewal of the kingdom to him, (^{<0112>}1 Samuel 11:12-15).

Ver. 1. *Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabeshgilead,* etc.] A month after, as in the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions, that is, a month after Saul was chosen king; so Josephus ^{f211}: this prince was preparing for war against Israel before, which they hearing of, requested they might have a king to go before them in battle, (^{<0122>}1 Samuel 12:12) but now he actually marched from his own country, and besieged Jabeshgilead, a city in the land of Gilead, from whence it had its name, and lay in the half tribe of Manasseh, on the other side Jordan, (see ^{<0208>}Judges 21:8). It lay near to the Ammonites, and was part of the country they laid claim to in the times of Jephthah, which they now renewed, and attempted to gain it by force. This Nahash was king of the Ammonites, as he is called in the Targum, and by Josephus ^{f212}, and so in the Arabic version, (see ^{<0122>}1 Samuel 12:12)

and all the men of Jabeshgilead said unto Nahash, make a covenant with us; they desired to be his allies and confederates, live in peace and friendship with him, and enjoy their religion and liberties on certain conditions they were willing to come into; and this was the sense of them all, or at least the greatest part, which showed a mean and abject spirit in them, to make no defence of themselves, but as soon as besieged to move for a capitulation. This doubtless arose from a sense of their weakness, not being able to hold it out long, and from an apprehension that their brethren the Israelites, on the other side Jordan, could give them no assistance, being in an unsettled condition, having chosen a king, and he scarcely on the throne, and the Philistines having great power over them:

and we will serve thee; not as slaves, but as tributaries; they were willing to pay a yearly tax to him.

Ver. 2. *And Nahash the Ammonite answered them*, etc.] In a very haughty and scornful manner:

on this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes; some Jewish writers go into a mystical and allegorical sense of these words, as that Nahash ordered the book of the law to be brought, which was their right eye, that he might erase out of it these words,

an Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; others understand it of the sanhedrim, which were the eyes of Israel; and others, which come a little nearer to the sense, of the slingers and archers, the desire of the eyes of Israel; and who, by having their right eyes thrust out, would be in a great measure spoiled for taking aim; for the words are to be understood literally; the intention of Nahash was to disable them for war, and that they might become quite unfit for it, as Josephus observes^{f213}; the left eye being under the shield, as it usually was in war, and the right eye plucked out, they would be as blind men: he did not choose to have both their eyes thrust out, for then they could have been of no use and service to him as slaves or tributaries:

and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel; that they did not come up to the relief of their brethren, and defend them, and signifying that they must all expect the same treatment from him.

Ver. 3. *And the elders of Jabesh said*, etc.] The magistrates and principal men of the city:

give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers to all the coasts of Israel; that is, cease from besieging them, from throwing in darts into the city, or any other missive weapons, and from attempting to break open the gates, or break down the walls of it, and storm it; such a space of time they desire, which was as little as could be granted, to go and return in, and without this it would not be a reproach to all Israel, if they were ill used by them, since they had no knowledge of their case, nor time to come up for their assistance:

and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee; and submit to be used at thy pleasure. And it seems that this was granted by

Nahash out of a bravado, and to reproach and insult all Israel, and bid them defiance; with whom he sought to quarrel, having a design upon their land, and knowing very well their condition, being awed by the Philistines; and having just chosen a king, and he an inexperienced man in the affairs of war, and had no army; nor was it likely that one could be assembled in so short a time, and come to the relief of this people, and therefore he thought himself safe enough in granting their request.

Ver. 4. *Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul*, etc.] Where he was born, and brought up, and now dwelt; and he being elected king, it brought an honour to the place; and from hence had this name, to distinguish it from the others, and this is the first time it was so called. Now the messengers from Jabesh came hither directly, because they knew that Saul, the chosen king, dwelt here, and the Benjaminites, of all the tribes, had great reason to show regard to them, since it was from thence they had four hundred wives, when they were reduced to six hundred men only, in order to raise up their tribe:

and told the tidings in the ears of the people; Saul being not at home in the city, but in the fields, they reported to them the hardships their city was under, being besieged by the Ammonites, and threatened that if not relieved in such a time, all their right eyes would be plucked out:

and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept; moved with sympathy to their brethren, and who by their intermarriage with them were nearly related to them; and who might fear they would not stop there, but having taken that place would march forward, and come to them, and use them in like manner; the thought of which was very distressing to them.

Ver. 5. *And, behold, Saul came after the herd out the field*, etc.] Where he had been to look after the and take care of them, and see what condition they were in, and followed them on their return home; for though he was elected king, he was not inaugurated, and did not take upon him any state; and being despised by some, and no provision as yet made for his support and maintenance as a king, and no business as such for him to do, Samuel still acting in his office, he returned to his father's house, and employed himself in rustic affairs, as he used to do: though some think this was casual, that he had been in the field to recreate himself, or to meditate on the affairs of government, and happened to return just as the herd came out of the field, and so followed them; thus Jarchi interprets it not of his coming after the herd, but of his coming after the fixed and usual time of

the herd's coming out of the field; but Josephus^{f214} is clear for it, that he had been about some rustic business, some part of husbandry in the field, and returned to the city; nor has it been unusual for emperors and kings, and persons in high offices among Greeks and Romans, and other nations, in times of peace, to employ themselves in husbandry; so did the judges of Israel, as Shamgar, and Gideon, and Boaz, (~~ORBI~~Judges 3:31 6:11 ~~ORBI~~Ruth 3:2) so Quinctius Cincinnatus being taken from the plough and made dictator, after he had conquered his enemies, returned to his husbandry^{f215}:

and Saul said, what aileth the people, that they weep? he supposed some evil had befallen them, and desired to know what it was, that, if it lay in his power to help them, he might:

and they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh; the message they brought, and the account they gave of the distressed case of their city.

Ver. 6. *And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings,* etc.] And filled him with pity and compassion to the inhabitants of Jabesh, and with wisdom and prudence, and set his thoughts at work to contrive ways and means for their relief, and with fortitude, courage, and resolution, to attempt their deliverance; so the Targum,

“the spirit of fortitude from the Lord dwelt on Saul:”

and his anger was kindled greatly; against Nahash the Ammonite for insulting Israel, and threatening to use the inhabitants of Jabesh in such a cruel manner.

Ver. 7. *And he took a yoke of oxen,* etc.] Of his own or his father's, which he had just followed out of the field, and for which chiefly that circumstance is mentioned:

and hewed them in pieces; as the Levite did his concubine, (~~ORBI~~Judges 19:29)

and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers; some carrying a piece one way, and some another, throughout all the tribes; for to them all the government of Saul extended, and which by this he let them know it did:

saying, whosoever cometh not after Saul and after Samuel; he names both, because he himself, though chosen king, was not inaugurated into his office, nor was Samuel put out of his; and because he knew he was

despised by some, who would not object to and refuse the authority of Samuel, and therefore if they would not follow him, they would follow Samuel; and he mentions himself first, because of his superior dignity:

so shall it be done unto his oxen; be cut to pieces as these were; he does not threaten to cut them in pieces, but their oxen, lest he should seem to exercise too much severity at his first coming to the throne:

and the fear of the Lord fell on the people; they feared, should they be disobedient, the Lord would cut them to pieces, or in some way destroy them, as well as Saul would cut their oxen to pieces; for their minds were impressed with a sense of this affair being of the Lord:

and they came out with one consent; or “as one man”, ^{f216}, as if they had consulted together; being under a divine impulse, they set out from different parts about much the same time, and met at a place of rendezvous next mentioned.

Ver. 8. *And when he numbered them at Bezek*, etc.] Which was the place appointed to meet at, the same with that in (~~1004~~Judges 1:4), (see Gill on “~~1004~~Judges 1:4”) though some take the word to be an appellative, and not the proper name of a place, and render it, “with a stone”; with which he numbered, taking a stone from each, and laying them on a heap, and then telling them ^{f217}; so Bizakion signifies little stones ^{f218} with the Greeks: or “with a fragment”; either of an earthen vessel, or of a stone, or of the branch of a tree they carried in their hands, and so the king’s servants numbered not the men, but the branches ^{f219}:

and the children of Israel were three hundred thousand men; who came together on this occasion; these were of the eight tribes and a half on this side Jordan:

and the men of Judah thirty thousand; which tribe is mentioned distinctly, because a noble and warlike tribe, which usually first went up to battle; and though the number of them at this time assembled may seem comparatively small, yet this may easily be accounted for; because they bordered upon the Philistines, who watched every opportunity to take an advantage of them, and therefore could not leave their tribe destitute, but reserved a sufficient number to guard their coasts, and yet were desirous to testify their obedience to Saul, though chosen king out of another tribe, when they might have expected from prophecy that the dominion belonged to them. Josephus ^{f220} has made a gross mistake in the numbers here, he makes the

men of Israel to be 700,000, and the men of Judah 70,000, contrary to the text, the Targum, Syriac and Arabic versions; but the Septuagint comes pretty near him, which has 600,000 of the men of Israel, 70,000 of the men of Judah.

Ver. 9. *And they said unto the messengers that came*, etc.] From Jabeshgilead, that is, Saul and Samuel said to them, as follows:

thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabeshgilead: when they returned unto them, as they were now upon the departure:

tomorrow, by that time the sun be hot; when it smites with the greatest heat, as at noon: this morrow seems not to be the next from their return home, or going from Saul, but the morrow after they were got home, and should deliver the message to those that sent them, (^{Q110}1 Samuel 11:10) and so Josephus^{f221} says, it was on the third day the assistance was promised them:

ye shall have help; Saul with his army by that time would come and raise the siege: and the messengers came and showed it to the men of Jabesh; what Saul had promised, and what a numerous army he had raised, and had now upon the march for their relief, and tomorrow would be with them:

and they were glad; it was good news and glad tidings to them; it cheered their hearts, and gave them spirit.

Ver. 10. *Therefore the men of Jabesh said*, etc.] To Nahash the Ammonite:

tomorrow we will come out unto you; meaning if they had no help, which they were well assured they should have; but this condition they expressed not, which they were not obliged to, but left him to conclude they had no hope of any, the messengers being returned, and the next being the last of the seven days' respite; and by this artifice the Ammonites were secure, and not at all upon their guard against an approaching enemy:

and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you; make shows of them, pluck out their eyes, or put them to death, or do what they would with them.

Ver. 11. *And it was so on the morrow*, etc.] After the messengers were returned, and delivered their message, and the men of Jabeshgilead had

given the Ammonites reason to expect that they would come out to them according to their agreement:

that Saul put the people into three companies; or “heads”^{f222}, under so many commanders, assigning to each their number, if equally, 110,000 in each, as Gideon divided his three hundred into three companies, one hundred in each, (^{<0716>}Judges 7:16) and Abimelech, (^{<0703>}Judges 9:43) it seems to have been their way of fighting in those days:

and they came unto the midst of the host: that is, of the Ammonites:

in the morning watch; the third and last watch of the night, by break of day, or before, however before the sun was up; so quick was Saul and his men in their march, though on foot. Bunting^{f223} computes the distance from Gibeah to Bezek forty miles, and from thence to Jabesh sixteen; it is commonly reckoned that it was about sixty miles from Gibeah to Jabesh. Josephus^{f224} says it was ten “schaeni”, each of which contained five or six miles:

and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day; that is, till noon, so that from the morning watch till noon he was making slaughter of them:

and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered; those that were not cut off by the sword of Saul were broken and dispersed, they could not stand their ground against him:

so that two of them were not left together; to flee together, but every one shifted for himself, and fled alone.

Ver. 12. *And the people said unto Samuel*, etc.] By which it seems that Samuel accompanied Saul in this expedition; though it is somewhat difficult to account for it, that a man of his years should be able to attend so quick a march that Saul made; it may be, therefore, that he might follow after him gently, and meet him quickly after the battle was fought, when the people made the following speech to him:

who is he that said, shall Saul reign over us? is such a mean inexperienced man fit to rule over us? who can bear his government, and submit to it? what can be expected from him, that he should deliver and save us out of the hands of our enemies? in this they had respect to the sons of Belial, and what they said, (^{<0727>}1 Samuel 10:27), but now it appeared he was

sufficiently qualified, and God had made him an instrument of salvation, and was a proper person to be king over them:

bring the men, that we may put them to death; so transported were they with affection to Saul, and indignation against those men.

Ver. 13. *And Saul said*, etc.] Preventing Samuel from giving an answer, being ready to forgive injuries; as it was in his power as a king, and him only, to pardon those persons that treated him in so ill a manner, and it was policy so to do, especially in the beginning of his reign; and it plainly appears that this temper did not always continue with him; though there is no reason to believe otherwise, that this was now owing to his lenity as well as his prudence:

there shall not be a man put to death this day; who by their appearance to his summons had testified their obedience, and by their courage and valour had showed their attachment to him, and to the interest of their country. Ben Gersom takes the sense to be, that it might be right after, but not on this day to put them to death; or that this was an artifice of Saul to deliver those men out of the hands of the Israelites, suggesting as if it was his intention hereafter to put them to death, though not now, for the following reason:

for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel; he does not ascribe the victory to the quick dispatch he made, to his wisdom and prudence in forming the scheme he did, and to his valour and courage, and that of his troops, but to the power and goodness of God.

Ver. 14. *Then said Samuel to the people*, etc.] Agreeing to what Saul had said, and in order to put them off from demanding the lives of the offenders, and willing to take them while they were in a good disposition:

come, and let us go to Gilgal; which was the nearest place to them, on the other side Jordan, from which they now were, and where the children of Israel first encamped when they passed over Jordan, where the tabernacle and ark first were, and an altar was built, and where meetings used to be held on certain occasions; all which might be reasons why Samuel proposed to go to this place. According to Bunting^{f225}, this place was thirty six miles from Jabeshgilead:

and renew the kingdom there; that is, recognize Saul, own and declare him king of Israel.

Ver. 15. *And all the people went to Gilgal*, etc.] Agreed to the motion, and marched along with Saul and Samuel thither:

and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal; that is, they declared him to be king there; he was inaugurated into, and invested with his office, otherwise it was God only that made him king, who only had the power of making one, (see ^{<4126>}Acts 2:36). Josephus says ^{f226} that Samuel anointed him with the holy oil; and so the Septuagint version here renders it,

“and Samuel anointed Saul there to be king;”

and it is not improbable, that as he privately anointed him, he did it publicly also; if not at the election of him, then at this time; and it is observable, that in the next chapter, and not before, he is called the Lord’s anointed. Now this was “before the Lord”; in this place; this being, as Abarbinel observes, a sanctified place, where the tabernacle and ark of God had been; and he supposes it probable that the ark was brought hither; but it was enough that the people and congregation of the Lord were here, and who, when assembled in his name, his presence was with them:

and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord; where an altar was built, and on which they offered these peace offerings by way of thanksgiving, partly for the victory obtained over the Ammonites, and partly for the renewal of the kingdom to Saul, and their unanimity in it, as well as to implore and obtain future peace and prosperity:

and there Saul, and all the people of Israel, rejoiced greatly; they in their king, and he in the good will of his people, and both in the great salvation God had wrought for them.