



Community Group Discussion Guide

October 6, 2024

1 Samuel 11: 1-15 | Affirming a King

MOTIVATE

⇒ ***Starter Question: What is one of your favorite games of strategy? In your mind, when someone wins this game, what does this affirm about them?***

DISCUSS

Israel was frustrated with the corruption of Samuel's sons who he appointed to be judges. Instead of trusting God to correct the situation, Israel looked to the surrounding nations and followed their example by demanding a king. With their demand, God revealed that Israel had not rejected Samuel but rather they had rejected the kingship of God. In 1 Samuel 10, Samuel first privately anointed Saul to be Israel's king, then God publicly revealed that Saul was indeed His choice. In 1 Samuel 11:1-15, God confirmed Saul's kingship by giving him his first strategic military victory.¹ (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for additional information.)

1 Samuel 11 is Saul's one shining moment in history and the high point of his career as the first king of the Israelites. He functioned like the judges of old, a charismatic leader used of Yahweh to bring salvation and peace to Israel. Gifted with the Spirit, Saul met the crisis of the moment.

⇒ ***What responsibility do we hold to ensure God will grant us more than one high point in our service to Him?***

1 Samuel 11:1-4 *"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.*

Conflicts are recorded between the Ammonites and the Israelites as early as the time of the judges. There were frequent battles between the two for the fertile land of Gilead. Sometime after Saul was anointed king, the first crisis of his leadership arose involving the Ammonites. Nahash, king of Ammon, attacked the city of Jabesh in Gilead. East of the Jordan, Jabesh-Gilead was within the tribal territorial allotment of the half-tribe of Manasseh (firstborn son of Joseph and his Egyptian wife).

⇒ ***Was there any way to know if Saul would be up to the task of handling this conflict, or if he would fail to deliver as the troublemakers of 1 Samuel 10:27 suspected?***

At first, the men of the city tried to make a treaty with Nahash, offering to become his servants. His condition to accept the treaty was a grisly one, intended to disgrace and disfigure all of Israel by leaving them "marked" by their enemy as well as leaving the Israelite military impaired in battle. In response, the elders of Jabesh asked Nahash for seven days to see if a tribe or leader would come to rescue them, agreeing to surrender to his terms if no one came to their aid.

⇒ ***Why would the men of Jabesh-Gilead seek a treaty with Nahash rather than taking this circumstance to God? What does this say about their spiritual condition?***

⇒ ***Are you inclined to seek deliverance in someone other than God? What does this say about your spiritual condition?***

¹ Bergen, R. D., & Shepherd, D. R. (1998). I & II Samuel (pp. 20–21). Holman Reference.

So confident was Nahash in his command of the situation that he allowed the residents of Jabesh to seek help from other parts of Israel's territory. In Nahash's estimation, help was unlikely to be forthcoming. Seven days was barely enough time for messengers to reach the whole land and return with aid. When word arrived in Saul's hometown of Gibeah, he was out working in the fields. At the news of Nahash's threats, the people of Gibeah wept.

⇒ ***How did Gibeah's response also speak to the spiritual condition of Israel?***

1 Samuel 11:5-7: *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.*

Only a month before, Saul had been anointed king, but at this time he was engaged in his usual pursuits of plowing with the oxen. Coming in from the field, Saul looked every bit the farmer and hardly the reigning monarch. Having been absent when the Jabesh messengers first arrived, Saul inquired about the reason for the people's weeping. Two things happened when Saul heard the words of the messengers.

First, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, moving him to action. Saul, being filled with the Spirit, clearly expressed the authority of God. Second, Saul burned with righteous anger on behalf of God's chosen people. This led Saul to butcher a pair of oxen—valuable agricultural animals—and to send the pieces throughout the people of Israel to call the Lord's army together. Saul promised the same fate for the oxen of those who refused to come and follow Saul and Samuel.

⇒ ***What changed Saul from farmer to king?***

⇒ ***What significant change has God's Spirit brought into your life?***

This occurrence is reminiscent of Judges 19–21. In that earlier tragic episode, a Levite's concubine was killed while he was spending the night in Gibeah of Benjamin. Out of desperation, the man brought the crime to the attention of the Israelite tribes by dismembering her body and sending the pieces to the tribes for a judicial decision.

Saul appears to have intentionally mimicked this method when he killed the team of oxen and sent the pieces throughout Israel as a call to arms. When the tribes joined to take action against Benjamin for the crimes against the Levite's concubine, the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead had not participated in the battles. Reprisals were swift and severe. As a result, the inhabitants of the city probably had little reason to hope that the tribes on the western side of the Jordan River would join together in order to defend them from the Ammonites.²

⇒ ***How do we reconcile the often violent episodes recorded in the Old Testament with our modern sensibilities?***

⇒ ***What was positive and negative about the way Saul motivated solidarity among the Israelites?***

The introduction of Samuel's name after that of Saul is proof that Saul even as king still recognized the authority which Samuel possessed as the prophet of Jehovah. Saul's call to arms had a chilling effect and a dread of the LORD fell on the Israelites. Saul's strong lead ensured the cooperation of all the tribes to come to the aid of the oppressed city. The support of Israel's fighting men was immediate and united.

² Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 178). Zondervan.

- ⇒ **Why did the people of Israel respond so quickly and decisively to Saul's call to battle?**
- ⇒ **Why would dread of the LORD be the people's response? Why were they in desperate need of this?**
- ⇒ **How do you define "fear of the LORD?" Why is this crucial to your relationship with Him?**

1 Samuel 11:8-11 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.

When Saul gathered his troops at Bezek, their total number was 330,000. The meaning of the distinct mention of troops from Israel and Judah is uncertain. Bezek was most likely chosen because it was within quick striking distance of Jabesh-Gilead. It was located about ten miles west of the Jordan River, north of Shechem. This distance could be traversed by an army under the cover of darkness. Since Bezek was situated in a valley surrounded by hills, the Israelites were able to meet there without the Ammonites becoming aware of what was taking place.

- ⇒ **How would Saul have known how to lead an army?**
- ⇒ **How was Saul's ability to unite the tribes and lead them against the Ammonites in defense of a cause that was in doubt be an impressive beginning for him as king?**

This battle revealed some of Saul's skill as a military strategist. After first sending encouragement to the city of Jabesh, Saul led his troops brilliantly by dividing them into three groups and placing them around the enemy camp. The Israelites attacked the unsuspecting Ammonites during the last watch of the night (from 2am to 6am). Saul's strategy worked. He broke into the camp of the Ammonites and struck them down "until the heat of the day." Saul routed them so completely that those who remained were all scattered, and there were not two Ammonite men left together. In the victory over the Ammonites, God confirmed Saul as king.

- ⇒ **How does this chapter show the importance of unity among the tribes of Israel?**
- ⇒ **In this victory over the Ammonites, how did God confirm Saul as king?**

1 Samuel 11:12-15 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.

Earlier in 1 Samuel 10:27 certain "worthless fellows" despised Saul and doubted his call as God's anointed. In light of Saul's victory over the Ammonites there was public demand for the death of these men who had questioned his ability to deliver Israel. Yet Saul will have no one put to death at this point. Saul had been chosen, proclaimed, and anointed king, and he had proven himself in action.

- ⇒ **To whom did the Israelites attribute victory?**
- ⇒ **How does Saul's mercy demonstrate his theological understanding that it was the LORD who had rescued Israel?**
- ⇒ **What does this teach us about leadership under God?**

- ⇒ **Discuss this quote as it relates to Saul as king and Jesus as King: The anointed one, whom Yahweh has publicly confirmed through victory, is the only one who has the ability to forgive crimes and abolish the demands of divine justice.**³

Following the victory Samuel, Saul, and the Israelites went to the Benjamite city of Gilgal for a great religious celebration where Saul's kingship would be reaffirmed. Gilgal was the place where the Israelites, under Joshua's leadership, first set foot on the soil of Canaan. It was an important city in Israel's early history and it appears frequently. At Gilgal, the twelve memorial stones taken from the bed of the river were set up by Joshua, after the miraculous crossing of the Jordan. Samuel made it one of the three places where he annually held circuit court, the other places being Bethel and Mizpah.

The first presentation of Saul as God's anointed was at Mizpah (1Samuel 10:24) Therefore, this event at Gilgal was a renewal ceremony acknowledging the full acceptance of Saul as Israel's king. Sacrifices were offered and a great celebration commenced.

Saul was clearly the consensus king of the nation. God had ordered the steps necessary to arrive at this point by bringing victory over an enemy that He had purposefully provoked. The simple truth of 1 Samuel 11 is that God's people need to be completely dependent on Him for resources and strength.

- ⇒ **Discuss this quote: The rest of the narrative of Saul will unfortunately illustrate what happens when those who are prepared and called by God decide they no longer need to serve under the inspiration of God.**⁴
- ⇒ **How would you apply this quote to your own life?**

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: As Israel's new king, Saul was called upon to lead the nation against the Ammonites. With God's guidance, Saul successfully amassed a large volunteer army and led Israel to an impressive victory. All of this served to reaffirm Saul's kingship under God authority and Samuel's direction.

- ⇒ **If you believe God has called you to a specific task, in what ways has He affirmed this?**
- ⇒ **Why is affirmation from Him a vital part of carrying out your task?**

2. Pray: Praise God that He is always at work on behalf of His people. Thank Him for the direction He provides you through His Spirit. Confess a tendency you might have to "get even" with those who disagree with you. Ask God to continue to allow you opportunities to serve in His kingdom.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

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³ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 179). Zondervan.

⁴ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 182). Zondervan.

