

1 SAMUEL 11 - THE KINGDOM AT WAR?

Study 12

THE ARROGANCE THE WORLD SHOWS

The wind has changed in Israel. The nation now has hope, motivated by a new king, especially displayed in Saul's first military victory. A key theme in this passage is 'salvation,' with the word appearing three times ('save' / 'salvation').

Almost immediately, Saul is confronted with a crisis. Trouble is brewing east of the Jordan. The king of the Ammonites, Nahash, has besieged Jabesh-Gilead. The men of Jabesh-Gilead asked for a treaty (11:1). Nahash agreed, on the condition that he could scoop out all their right eyes. This would make the men unfit for military service, and would therefore be forced to live as servants. However, Nahash's actions were motivated by more than creating disabled slaves. He took delight in humiliating the Israelites (2b).

This is the arrogance the world has for God's people. Ralph Davis writes'

“Nahash may become historical furniture, but the “Ammonite mind,” that is, to maim, destroy, and strangle God's people, is always with us.”

The world may be bent against God's people, but we have a caring friend in our troubles. Jesus says “You are my friends if you do what I command you (John 15:14). What a difference those words make! We can face the worst the world has to offer with Christ our friend who leads the way.

READ 1 Samuel 11:2-4

QUESTIONS

1. What features of this passage stand out to you?
2. What other examples can you think of either Biblically or historically, that display the 'Ammonite mind?' That is, opposition to God's people.

THE DIFFERENCE THE SPIRIT MAKES

Messengers are sent from Jabesh-gilead, and find Saul in Gibeah. Saul is not busy setting up his new administration centre, but busy plowing a field. When Saul came in from the field and

heard the news “the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul” (6a). The Holy Spirit made the difference. Saul summoned a militia, confronted Nahash’s camp and defeated the enemy.

The point that is being emphasised is that Saul’s success came about only through the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit equips his people for service. The word “rushed” is often used in the book of Judges to describe the Holy Spirit coming upon Israel’s leaders. Through this empowerment, Saul is able to competently wage war.

The Spirit also makes a difference in bringing light out of darkness. Salvation comes from Gibeah, a surprising fact for an Israelite of the time. In Judges 19-21, worthless men do unspeakable things to a concubine throughout the night, until in the morning she finds relief through death. There is no sorrow or repentance in Gibeah. The tribe is so rebellious that a civil war results. Now in 1 Samuel 11, this place of former evil has become the source of salvation. That is the difference the Holy Spirit makes.

The point is clear, salvation came not because Israel had a new king, but because the King had the Holy Spirit. This is the Old Testament way of saying “apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5).”

READ 1 Samuel 11:5-11

QUESTIONS

1. What features of this passage stand out to you?
2. In what ways are you aware that the Holy Spirit has equipped you for service?
3. Sometimes churches and Christians rely on their own efforts and not the Holy Spirit, how can we avoid this danger?
4. What parallels are there to the Physical battle against the Ammonites and our spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12)?

THE DIFFERENCE THE SPIRIT MAKES

After the victory over Nahash, Samuel calls Israel to assemble at Gilgal. Samuel's agenda was to "renew the kingdom." But what would this involve? Would this simply mean to reaffirm Saul's kingship? Perhaps it's better to see that Saul wanted Israel to reaffirm its faith in God. Gilgal was significant as the place that Joshua renewed the covenant after crossing into the promised land (Josh 24).

In verse 15 we read "The people sacrificed peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."

This is a good picture of the people of God. There is joy when God's people have good leaders, who are approved and supported by the congregation, and continue to delight in the grace of God.

READ 1 Samuel 11:12-15

QUESTIONS

1. What features of this passage stand out to you?
2. What keeps us from renewing our commitment to God after times of disobedience?