

Saul Defeats the Ammonites When They Attacked Jabesh Gilead

1 Samuel 11

"Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you."

² And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, "On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may put out all your right eyes, and bring reproach on all Israel."

³ Then the elders of Jabesh said to him, "Hold off for seven days, that we may send messengers to all the territory of Israel. And then, if there is no one to save us, we will come out to you."

⁴ So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the news in the hearing of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵ Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; and Saul said, "What troubles the people, that they weep?" And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh. ⁶ Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused. ⁷ So he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done to his oxen."

And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent. ⁸ When he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. ⁹ And they said to the messengers who came, "Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh Gilead: 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have help.'" Then the messengers came and reported it to the men of Jabesh, and they were glad. ¹⁰ Therefore the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do with us whatever seems good to you."

¹¹ So it was, on the next day, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and killed Ammonites until the heat of the day. And it happened that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

¹² Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is he who 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 salvation in Israel."

¹⁴ Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there." ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they made sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."

Background Notes

Jabesh Gilead was located in what is today the country of Jordan, about twenty miles south of the Sea of Galilee on the eastern side of the Jordan River. It was in the territory of the half tribe of Manasseh that had settled east of the Jordan River. The Ammonites were enemies who were located southeast of Jabesh Gilead.

Don't confuse the Ammonites and the Amorites! Both were enemies of Israel, but they were not the same people. The Ammonites descended from Lot. During the time of the Judges, the Ammonites had tried to take the entire area of Gilead away from Israel. Jephthah, the judge at that time, told the Ammonites that they didn't have a legal right to Gilead, and he went out to battle and defeated them. You can read this account in Judges 11.

The Ammonites made a comeback, and they laid siege to Gilead. In that day, if you were under siege, you fought back, surrendered, or starved to death. The men of Jabesh Gilead decided to surrender and submit. Nahash said they could surrender on one condition: they must have their right eyes gouged out! Why would Nahash say that? In ancient warfare, if you were right handed (like most people), you held your sword in your right hand and your shield in your left hand to cover your body and your left eye. You were helpless as a warrior if you didn't have your right eye, so the men of Jabesh Gilead would be helpless and could never revolt against the Ammonites. This would be a reproach in Israel.

The men of Jabesh Gilead asked for seven days to make a decision, and Nahash agreed. Why would Nahash agree to give them seven days, during which time they might possibly muster up some help? He likely reasoned that another seven days of



siege would only make the Jabesh Gileadites more likely to surrender. Another possibility is that he wanted to see if Israel had any military strength at all, and then possibly defeat all of Israel if they came to help.

Well, Nahash didn't count on Saul, the new king of Israel from the small tribe of Benjamin. Saul was able to muster 30,000 men from Judah and 300,000 men from the rest of Israel! (By the way, the fact that Judah and Israel are distinguished from each other in verse 8 indicates that this part of 1 Samuel, at least, was written by inspiration after the time of King Solomon when the United Kingdom of Israel split into the two kingdoms - the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.) Saul certainly motivated the people by telling them if they didn't come to Bezek, ready to go to battle, that their oxen would be cut to pieces (as he vividly demonstrated). Oxen were very valuable commodities in that culture, so the people responded. Under the mighty power of the Spirit of God, Saul and his men crossed the Jordan River and attacked the Ammonites in the pre-dawn hours. They fought them until the end of the day, and defeated them.

Then Samuel gathered all Israel together at Gilgal, and there they recognized and confirmed that the Lord had made Saul the king of all Israel. Saul showed grace to those men who had despised him (1 Samuel 10). Saul let them live, and he said, *"Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has accomplished salvation in Israel."*

One more background note. Why was Saul so motivated to go to the aid of Jabesh Gilead? Was it just to do a good job as the new king? Possibly it was something more. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, and the tribe of Benjamin had almost been wiped out in civil war during the time of the Judges. 400 unmarried women from Jabesh Gilead were given in marriage to the men of Benjamin who survived the civil war, and it is possible that Saul's lineage included one of those women. You can read about this possibility in Judges 20 and 21.



Doctrinal Points

1. The enemy will attack God's people where they are vulnerable.

Why was Jabesh Gilead vulnerable to enemy attack from the Ammonites? Why was this entire area vulnerable to the enemy during the days of the Judges? Why was this area vulnerable, in later years, to attacks by the Syrians, and the Assyrians, and the Babylonians? Answer: the problem goes all the way back to when Israel came into the land at the time of the Conquest. Remember back in Numbers 32, at the time of the conquest of Canaan, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh wanted to settle on the east side of the Jordan, so they said to Moses, "*Do not make us cross this Jordan!*"

God wanted **all** His people to cross the Jordan and live together in the heart of the Promised Land for unity and security, but the 2½ tribes "twisted God's arm" and in essence they said, "But we want to stay here on the east side of the Jordan. We like it over because the grass is good for our livestock!" Well, God allowed the 2½ tribes to have their wish to live on the east side of the Jordan. This is an instance where God's people settled for **God's permissive will**, instead of following **God's perfect will**. Any time believers take this option and settle for God's permissive will in their lives, there will be sad consequences – then and today! And that's the bottom-line answer as to why Jabesh Gilead was vulnerable. Read 1 Chronicles 5:26 to see how the 2½ tribes were vulnerable to attack by the Assyrians in later years.

The enemy will attack God's people where they're vulnerable today as well. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" And this includes Christians, because this warning is given to **believers!** Are you vulnerable? Be vigilant in areas of vulnerability, because that's where Satan will attack. Maybe you're like the 2½ tribes. Maybe you've settled for God's permissive will in some area of your life, and are thus you're more vulnerable to attack. How about in the area of materialism? How about in the area of sex? How about in the area of fear? Be careful! The enemy will attack God's people where they are vulnerable.



2. The enemy will blind God's people if they compromise.

In our background notes we saw why the enemy wanted to gouge out the right eyes of the Jabesh Gileadites, and I think that there's a spiritual lesson for us as well. Jabesh Gilead was weak, vulnerable, and about to compromise and surrender and submit to the enemy. Surrender would have made them ineffective in battle --because of a major loss of vision!

Do you see the obvious spiritual picture and lesson here? Why are so many of God's people ineffective in spiritual battle? Why are they so blind as to spiritual realities and the truth of God's Word? Most likely it is because they have compromised in their walk of faith in some area of their lives. Most likely they have capitulated and surrendered to the opposition in some way.

Anything less than full commitment to the Lord will lead to blindness in some area of your Christian life.

The good news is that the men of Jabesh Gilead didn't give in to the enemy, in spite of the siege and the odds against them. They held firm, and God sent a great victory. You may be under tremendous pressure from the opposition right now, and maybe you're vulnerable because of past unbelief and compromise to sin. The enemy knows where you're vulnerable, and he will attack you in that area. You're being pressured and tempted and lured to compromise, and it may look like you have nowhere to turn. Don't give in! Don't compromise! Hold firm! Wait for the Lord to send help and victory. It may not be immediate, but victory will come. Don't compromise with the enemy, because the enemy will blind God's people if they compromise.

Practical Application

Let's be angry for God's sake!

When King Saul heard about the threat of the Ammonites, he was angry! *"Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused"* (v6). This was good and righteous anger. It was anger under the power of the Spirit of God. Normally, anger is a sin, but being angry for the sake of righteousness is not sin. Ephesians 4:26 says, "Be



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angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath."

However, we must be careful about righteous anger, because even righteous anger can turn into sin if it is not handled in the right way. But we **should** be angry when we see open and flagrant sin. We **should** be angry when we see God and His Word mocked and slandered. We **should** be angry when we see our country departing from truth and moral standards of decency. And we should take action as well, just as King Saul did. Let's be angry for God's sake!