

99–VICTORY FOR KING SAUL

(1 Samuel 11–12)

In the days when Saul had newly been anointed king of Israel, the Ammonites, under the leadership of Nahash, invaded the land of Jabesh-gilead, which lay east of the Jordan. The people of Jabesh feared for their lives, and in their distress they went to Nahash and petitioned for peace. “Make a covenant with us that you will spare our lives,” they urged, “and we will be your servants.”

Nahash, however, wanted more than service. He wanted to humiliate Israel. “We will agree to your request on one condition,” said Nahash. “We will save your lives and take you as servants if you will allow us to thrust out all of your right eyes as an insult and reproach upon Israel.”

Though the people of Jabesh felt vulnerable and wanted to avoid war at all costs, the sight of their right eyes seemed a very high price to pay for peace. They answered Nahash: “Give us seven days to see if there is any man in Israel who will save us. If not, we will surrender and submit ourselves to your terms.”

The people of Jabesh immediately sent messengers to Gibeah to find Saul, their new king. Because Saul was in the field tending his flocks, the messengers told their plight to the people of Gibeah. And when the people of Gibeah heard it, they lifted their voices and wept. When Saul returned from the field, he saw the people weeping and asked why. Then, as he listened carefully to the disturbing news, the Spirit of God moved upon him and his anger was kindled. Taking a yoke of oxen, Saul cut them into pieces, and sent messengers to carry the pieces throughout Israel and to say, “Whatever man does not come forth after Saul and Samuel to go against the Ammonites, it shall be done to him as to this ox.”

The people of Israel responded to King Saul’s request as one. They rejoiced to have a king who would lead them into battle. Some 330,000 men came forward to take up arms in defense of their brethren. “Tell the men of Jabesh-gilead,” they said, “that by the time the sun is hot tomorrow they shall have our help.”

The men of Jabesh-gilead rejoiced when they received this news. Planning a little subtlety of their own, they sent a message to Nahash. “We will come out to you tomorrow,” the message said, “and you may do to us as it seems good to you.”

And so it was that the next morning Saul, with the prophet Samuel at his side, came over Jordan with three companies of men and battled the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those Ammonites who were not

killed were scattered so that no two of them were left standing together.

With the Ammonites soundly defeated, the people of Israel said to Samuel, “Where are those men now who objected to Saul being king? Bring them to us that we may put them to death.”

But Saul heard their plotting and intervened. “No man of Israel shall be put to death today,” he said, “for Jehovah has wrought salvation in Israel.”

Samuel, seeing this as an opportunity to strengthen the unity of Israel, said, “Come! Let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom.” So all the people went with Samuel to Gilgal where they joined in anointing Saul their king. They also made sacrifices of peace offerings to Jehovah and held a great celebration. All Israel rejoiced because they now had a king to lead them into battle.

And Samuel said to the people, “If you will serve Jehovah, obey his voice, and not rebel against his commandments, then shall both you and your king continue to follow Jehovah. But stand now and see the great thing that Jehovah will do before your eyes. I will call upon Jehovah and he shall send thunder and rain that you may see the great wickedness you have done in asking for a king.” Although Samuel had come to love Saul, he was still offended because Israel had demanded a king.

When Samuel called to Jehovah and Jehovah sent thunder and rain according to Samuel’s promise, all the people became fearful because of the great storm. They pleaded with Samuel, “Pray for us that we do not die, for surely we have added this evil of asking for a king to our many sins.”

“Fear not,” Samuel answered them. “Though you have done this wickedness, you have not turned aside from following Jehovah. If you will now turn from vain things and serve him with all your hearts, he will not forsake you. He is pleased to make you his people.”

Samuel continued: “I will teach you the good and right way and will not cease to pray for you. And all that Jehovah asks is for you to fear him, to serve him in truth with all your hearts, and to remember all that he has done for you. If, however, you still choose to do wickedly, both you and your king shall be consumed.”