

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 7**

**FIRST SAMUEL
CHAPTER 11**

INTRODUCTION

The children of Israel had demanded a king to rule over them like all the other nations. While God acceded to their request in His permissive will, He would choose the king. In this lesson, we continue to observe the unseen providential hand of God working in the affairs of men. Samuel proceeded to install Saul as the first king of Israel. An opportunity arose for Saul to prove himself. We also witness the enabling power of the Holy Spirit in using Saul to fulfil God's will.

In the matter of making Saul the king, not everything went smoothly. There was some opposition. However, this is true in almost everything done under the sun.

COMMENTARY

**Adversities are God's
Opportunities—vv. 1-4**

We observe a sudden shift of focus to Nahash (name means "serpent"), a leader of the Ammonites, and to Jabesh-gilead which is a small Israeli city in the north and about three kilometres east of the river Jordan. This demonstrates that God was in

control of not only the lives of His people, the Israelites, but also the enemies of Israel.

The Ammonites were related to Israel – they were the descendants of Ben Ammi, the younger of the two sons of Lot. Recall that Lot was a nephew of Abraham. Thus the Ammonites were near relatives of the children of Israel. The LORD prohibited the Israelites from invading the land of the Ammonites (Deuteronomy 2:19). But later the Ammonites joined the Moabites to hire Baalam to curse Israel. The LORD was displeased with this act of hostility and banished them from the congregation of the LORD forever (Deuteronomy 23: 3-6).

The Ammonites were terribly aggressive towards Israel. The text recorded that Nahash intended to invade Jabesh-gilead. The inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead sought to make peace with him but Nahash demanded that their right eyes be gouged out. This was inhuman and cruel. It would disable the warriors because the left eye was generally behind a warrior's shield in battle. Another reason why Nahash demanded this condition was to humiliate the nation of Israel (11:2b). The inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead requested for a week before giving them an answer hoping for deliverance. Accordingly, they sent messengers to all the coasts of Israel seeking for help to save them from Nahash.

Jabesh-gilead was in dire straits. To surrender or die! If they surrender, they would be blinded and made impotent as warriors. What a dilemma! Man's darkest hour is God's brightest moment.

The Newly Installed king begins His Rescue!—vv. 5-11

The messengers came to Gibeah where Saul lived. They told the people of their plight and the inhabitants of Gibeah wept in concern. There was a good reason for their feelings towards Jabesh-gilead. During the Benjamite War (Judges 20-21), the Israelites took an oath that none of their daughters would be given to Benjamites in marriage (Judges 21:1, 7, 18). However, 400 young virgins from Jabesh-gilead were captured and transported to Shiloh for the male Benjamites to take as wives (Judges 21:14, 15, 19-21).

In the midst of the weeping, Saul came back from the fields with his herds. He inquired for the meaning of the weeping. The people told him of the dreadful news.

The Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard the news and kindled his anger. He took an ox and cut it into pieces, and sent them throughout Israel. Saul's intention was to rally all Israel to come to the help of Jabesh-gilead. Those who refused to help would have their oxen suffer the same fate. This method of getting attention was once used by a Levite in Ephraim who dissected his concubine's corpse and sent the parts to the various tribes of Israel (Judges 19-21). In the message to all the tribes of Israel, Saul added Samuel's name. This showed that Saul desired Samuel to accompany him when he led Israel to battle against Nahash. At the same time, it strengthened his appeal to the people of Israel to rally to the support of the people in Jabesh-gilead. The response of the

people of Israel can be summarized in one statement, "the fear of the LORD was on the people, and they came out with one consent" (11:7). Israel was united with one voice. This threat posed by Nahash provided the opportunity to unite all Israel.

The Israelite warriors assembled at Bezek. There were 300,000 men from Israel and 30,000 men from Judah. This separate numbering of the people of Israel underscores the hidden "rift" that might have already existed in those days. Judah must have been seen as "a loner tribe" in the midst of a united Israel.

Bezek was a well chosen place to gather the warriors because it was on the west bank of Jordan directly opposite Jabesh-gilead. The distance between them was about 16 kilometres. They told the messengers who came from Jabesh-gilead to return with the good news that all Israel would be united to provide them military aid. With this assurance, the people of Jabesh-gilead replied in the following manner to the Ammonites: "Tomorrow, we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you" (11:10). This was a 'clever reply' to the enemy. It did not reveal precisely what they intend to do. It gave the impression that the people of Jabesh-gilead would surrender and the Ammonites, could do as they please.

The next day was the decisive day. Saul divided his warriors into three companies so as to surround the enemy. He sprang a surprise attack at dawn. It caught the Ammonites unawares. A battle ensued until mid-day.

Many of the Ammonites were killed and the rest were scattered so that there were no two Ammonites together! It was a resounding victory for the Israelites and the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead.

The Public Affirmation of Saul's kingship—vv. 12-15

This resounding victory resulted in the recognition of Saul as the right man to rule Israel. The people spoke to Samuel to bring out those who had earlier questioned the suitability of Saul to be their king so that they might be put to death. But Saul forbade such an act on that auspicious day. He displayed graciousness and he attributed the victory to the LORD. Do you agree that Saul's "graciousness" was commendable? Or do you think that Saul should have put the worthless men to death as they had insulted God and not Saul? If it had been a personal injury, then the forgiveness would be justified but was what happened in chapter 10 a personal matter?

Then Samuel told the people to go to Gilgal. Gilgal was the place where the Israelites first set foot on Canaanite soil. It was at Gilgal that the children of Israel acknowledged the LORD'S power to lead them across Jordan River on dry land, just as He had done at the Red Sea. Having crossed Jordan, it was at Gilgal that the LORD commanded Joshua to circumcise the men. This act was in keeping with the covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants. It symbolized that the children of Israel belonged to the LORD — they are His chosen people. So it was significant that Samuel had chosen this place to

crown Saul king of Israel. Samuel said: "Let us renew the kingdom there" (11:14b). This was a reminder to Israel that they belonged to the kingdom of God.

The people went to Gilgal and they made Saul king before the LORD. The ceremony involved the worship of the LORD by the sacrifices of peace offerings. This confirmed Saul as their king, and the people made a commitment to their new king. There was great rejoicing.

PRACTICAL VALUE

God was still in control. The king of Israel must be different from the other nations. He must not be like the other Ancient Near Eastern kings who were despotic and held absolute power. Samuel drew the ordinances of the constitution of the kingdom thus limiting the power of the king. Israel's king was to be a constitutional monarchy with limits to his divine powers.

We observe that the events which happened during this time—the emergence of Saul the first king, the opportunity that arose which led to the unification of the people—promised a better future for Israel if they continued to obey God. Chapter 11 ended with a note of great rejoicing for Saul and the whole nation of Israel. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 11:1-15.

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 11:1-15.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 11:1-15; Luke 4:8; John 10:10.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 11:1-15; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:15-18.

Friday: 1 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 100:1-5.

Analysis

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 11:1-4	
1 Samuel 11:5-11	
1 Samuel 11:12-15	

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that the believer's adversity is God's opportunity? If so, why do we complain so much when adversities come? How do you prevent complaints from arising?

2. Was it right for Saul to threaten his people into submission with these words, "He who is not coming out after Saul and after Samuel--thus it is done to his oxen"?

3. Does this phrase, "the Spirit of God doth prosper over Saul" imply salvation?

4. Was this phrase a lie, "Tomorrow, we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you"?

5. Should Saul have put to death the worthless men who went against his appointment as Israel's first king?
