

Send Him Victorious

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[0 : 0 0] that page at page 221 and the end of chapter 10 and the beginning of all of chapter 11. And let's pray. God, your word is powerful and is there from you for us to make us wise for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bring about that purpose in our lives, we pray, that we may trust in Jesus, our King and Saviour. We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Well, if you went to look for the Queen, you wouldn't go looking in a council house.

You'd look for her in a palace, I imagine. There is a novel by Sue Townsend, a sort of comic novel that sees the Queen, I think, abdicating and living in a council house in England in a fairly squalid sort of existence.

But it's amusing because it's so unlikely. The Queen, or any Queen, or any King for that matter, lives in a palace. And that's where you'd expect to find a King or Queen.

The other day, as you do, I was having a drink with the Governor General. And I had a quick chat to him and shook his hand. This is true. And it wasn't in a council house. He lives in a very grand, well, it's not a palace.

[1 : 1 1] I'm not really sure what you call it, apart from a government house in Canberra. A very grand place and beautiful views out across Lake Burley Griffin. And a very nice, ornate place that we're able to walk through the downstairs and have a look around, chat to the Governor General, have a drink.

It's not a council house. You don't expect to find him in a squalid sort of place. The person who's the sort of Australian head of Australia lives in a very grand place, fit for a sort of King or Queen, or at least the Queen's representative in the country.

Well, last week we saw that Saul became the King of Israel. It's a bit strange because after he became King last week, he doesn't go and take up residence in a grand palace. There wasn't one.

Israel didn't really quite know what to do with kings at this stage. He went back to the farm. He went back to work as a farmer, in fact. Bit of a strange thing for the King to do. You'd think he'd sort of go and find a goldsmith to make a crown and find a milliner to make a great big hat or cloak or whatever.

No, he just goes back to the farm. And admittedly, a few warriors go with him. So he's sort of got his little entourage, the sort of beginnings of a civil service, I suppose. But there's no palace.

[2 : 2 1] There's no aide de camp to look after him and make sure that you don't go and sort of into the wrong places of the palace. He goes back to work in the fields. After all, Israel didn't really know what to do with a king and what they were going to do in their spare time.

And the point of having a king back in chapter 8 we saw a few weeks ago was that kings would win wars. But what would a king do if there wasn't a war? Well, go back to the farm and do some farm work.

And in fact, people seem to object to the fact that Saul was a king. Even though he was, you know, on the outside a sort of strong-looking man, there were people that you saw at the end of last week's passage who said in verse 27, how can this man save us?

They didn't really think all that much of Saul as the king. They despised him, or the middle of verse 27 says. They brought him no present, but he held his peace.

How can this man save us? Well, a month later, the opportunity arose in effect. Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites.

[3 : 36] Let me explain that the Ammonites lived across the Jordan in what is modern-day Jordan. Ammonites is from where we get the name of the capital of Jordan today, Amman. The Gadites and the Reubenites are Israelites, two of the tribes of Israel, whose tribal land was across the Jordan, in land conquered in the time of Moses.

This man, Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, a very pleasant chap, he would gouge out the right eye of each of them. He was clearly a rugby player. And he would not grant Israel a deliverer, that is, one to rescue them or save them.

No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan, whose right eye, Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were 7,000 men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-Gilead.

Gilead was the area across the Jordan that Moses had conquered. And the town of Jabesh-Gilead seemed to be one of its main towns. We're not exactly sure where it is in that area today.

No one's quite certain about any archaeological ruins or whatever. But the area of Gilead is known. And this was the one town that seems to have held out against Nahash, the king of the Ammonites.

[4 : 56] Why he gouged the eyes out is, literally cut out their eye, is possibly to weaken their threat as warriors against him. That is, if you've only got one eye, you're much less likely to be able to shoot an arrow accurately and in opposition and so on.

And we're told in verse 1, about a month later, that is, after Saul has gone back to his farm, 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. Besieging a city was the standard way to try and conquer it.

Often cities in those days would have a wall around them. And even though there'd be people from the city who'd live in the fields and operate farms and look after animals, when the city was under threat, they'd all come inside the city, they'd close the gates and they'd be inside the walls of the city for protection.

To besiege a city was the standard way to bring it to its end, in effect. In the end, you cut off the water supply, often, and the food supply. And in the end, people would give out.

[6 : 04] It's a slightly long way of going about a victory, but it's the standard way to subdue a town. And the people recognize this and they say, make a treaty or a covenant with us and we will serve you.

That is the idea being, okay, we give in. We'll serve you. We'll be your slaves or servants, in effect. Spare our lives. Making a treaty with you will be, okay, you protect us and we will serve you.

That's the deal, in effect, that Jabesh Gilead, the town, is wanting to do with Nahash. But Nahash is not satisfied with this. It's clear that he's won a very quick victory.

But in verse 2, he says, on this condition, I will make a treaty with you, namely, that I gouge out everyone's right eye. He likes gouging out the eyes and he's a bit worried, perhaps, that Jabesh Gilead would remain sort of two-eyed and therefore able to rise up against him.

And thus, I will put disgrace upon all Israel, not just on Jabesh Gilead, not just the area of the Gadites and the Reubenites across the Jordan, but in fact, on all Israel.

- [7 : 10] He's going to bring humiliation and shame on the whole nation. How do they respond? The elders of Jabesh said to him, give us seven days respite that we may send messengers throughout all the territory of Israel.
- Then, if there is no one to save us, we'll give ourselves up to you. Well, so smug is he that Nahash accepts their request. He thinks no one will save them.
- We're far too strong. It's an arrogance, in effect, in that he allows or concedes this request for them to find a saviour. But, of course, the other thing is he wants to bring shame on all of Israel, so he thinks, okay, I'll do that even more comprehensively by them trying to scour all of Israel to find a saviour, and I'll still win.
- And it'll be an even bigger victory and more shame on Israel. That's his confidence. Notice the emphasis on, in verse 3, when they say, if there is no one to save us.
- And remember how chapter 10, verse 27, quoted the words of those who despised the new king Saul. Can this man save us? Same word.
- [8 : 23] So that for the person who's reading this story for the first time, we already know the connection. They're looking for someone to save us. People earlier have said, how can this man Saul save us?
- The test for the new king has arrived. The messengers come to Gibeah, in verse 4, 40 miles away, roughly speaking, across the Jordan, back into Israel's main homeland territory.
- We know that Jabesh Gilead and Gibeah were closely related, in a sense. Back in the book of Judges, the book before this one, the people of Gibeah marry many of the people from Jabesh Gilead.
- I won't go through the whole exercise or the event that led to that, but there's clearly strong connections between them. We're not long after the end of the period of Judges, the book of Judges.
- So Gibeah is an understandable first place to come to. Notice that it's already called Gibeah of Saul. It's in the tribe of Benjamin and often called Gibeah of Benjamin, but here it's already Gibeah of Saul.
- [9 : 32] That is, the writer is wanting to emphasize already that Saul is the key figure, humanly speaking, in all of this. They reported the matter in the hearing of the people, and all the people wept aloud.
- Saul, the man who would be king, he's out on the farm. He's doing his farming job. Verse 5 tells us he was coming from the field behind the oxen. That's his job.
- It's what you would do with oxen if you were shepherding ox or oxen. You'd come behind them. If they were sheep, he'd be in front of them. Different ways of leading different animals. But he's coming behind the oxen, and in verse 5 he asks, what is the matter with the people that they are weeping?
- And so, they tell him. Now when you tell a joke, usually the punchline of the joke is at the end. That's what makes a joke work.
- If you tell the punchline at the beginning, like I usually stuff up jokes with and forget the sort of narrative leading up to the punchline, the whole joke falls flat. So for a joke to work, the punchline, the key line, comes at the end.
- [10 : 40] Same often in stories. Often near the end of the story is the sort of the climax of a story. But in ancient Hebrew, though both of those things would be true, they had a way of writing a story that actually had the key line in the middle.
- That's a bit of a puzzle in a way that they do this so often because when you get to the middle of a story, you don't necessarily know that you're at the middle of the story. That is, you know you're at the end because it then finishes.

But there's a sense in which you need to get more or less to the end of a story to know where the middle was, if you understand. Now in this story, the key is in the middle. But in a sense, the story unfolds after the middle in a reverse pattern of the first half.

So you begin to see the links back and you begin to recognise the turning point. My imagination is that the centre point being the key offers in a sense a little degree of subtlety in understanding the story.

That it's only as you go through the second half that bit by bit you realise what the centre point was. It doesn't necessarily stand out when you actually get to it for the first time. But as the story's second half evolves, you begin to look back and recognise the key of the story.

[11 : 58] So it is here. The centre verse is verse 6. Let me first explain why this verse is the centre.

The story begins with the threat of Nahash the Ammonites and it ends with the defeat of Nahash, king of the Ammonites. In verse 3, the next step in, we get the Jabesh Gileadites saying, we're going to give ourselves over to you, to Nahash.

In verse 10, the same thing. They say, we will give ourselves over to you. In verse 4, we're working into the centre, the messengers from Jabesh Gilead go out.

In verse 9, the messengers come to Jabesh Gilead. In verse 4, it led to weeping. In verse 9, it's rejoicing. The two verses parallel each other but in contrast.

And then in verse 5, Saul asks a question and in verses 7 and 8, on the other side of the centre, Saul also speaks and in both sections there's a little response to what he says.

[13 : 19] My point is that the outer layers and then working their way in, they balance each other. They have links with each other and that shows us the centre point which is verse 6.

The Spirit of God coming upon Saul in power when he heard these words. Now the point of that is to direct us to the power of victory.

That is, we already know that the victory comes because we heard the reading just a few minutes ago. Where does the source of victory come? The Spirit of God coming in power on Saul.

Literally God's powerful Spirit rushing on Saul. It's quite a, almost a violent, urgent word that's being used. Not all that typical. In the book of Judges the Spirit of God comes upon many of the judges.

The only one it rushes upon is Samson. There's actually several links in this story with themes, words and ideas from the book of Judges and not least from the story of Samson.

[14 : 22] Which ought to actually sound alarm bells because of the moral sort of compromise of the character of Samson. I think it's one of the ways in which the first book of Samuel is showing us that Saul is actually a compromised king even now before we get to his failures in the chapters that follow.

Notice that the effect of the Spirit of God coming with power on Saul is to kindle him in anger. Probably not anger that the people are weeping more probably anger that the people of Israel are threatened by an enemy.

In fact an enemy that's already won significant victory across the Jordan. It's also not the first time that God's Spirit has come upon Saul because we saw that back in chapter 10 verse 10 as well.

At the time that in effect he's being anointed as king in verse 10 of chapter 10 when they were going from there to Gibeah a band of prophets met Saul and the Spirit of God possessed him and he fell into a prophetic frenzy along with them.

So as a result Saul rallies the troops. In verse 7 he took a yoke of oxen that is probably two oxen put together by a wooden yoke and he cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by messengers.

[15 : 43] Imagine that you're in a town of Israel and all of a sudden a messenger arrives with the ear of an ox or the toe or the foot or the ankle or something like that. A bit bizarre a bit bloody a bit messy and probably by the time they get to you a bit smelly as well.

And the words that these messengers say that comes from Saul whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel so shall it be done to his oxen.

In effect it's a threat. It's saying if you don't come and support us in the army then your animals we're going to chop them up. And so verse 7 ends then the dread of the Lord fell upon the people and they came out as one.

This cutting of the oxen has probably got a bit of a play on words with other things. Making a treaty back in chapter 2 verse 2 is literally to cut a treaty that's how you make a treaty and when you have a treaty between two groups you would cut up an animal as a way of saying well if we don't keep the terms of this treaty then in effect what happens to this animal will be what happens to us.

And remember of course that Nahash the king of the Ammonites he wanted to gouge literally cut out the eyes. Here the ox is being cut up as a threat to the people.

[17 : 06] They come in verse 8 to Bezek a town that's unknown today but presumably closer to the Jordan River and from Israel there were 300,000 and from Judah 70,000 that's a very large army 370,000 that have gathered together a huge army in effect and then in verse 9 the messengers who had come from Jabesh Gilead they are then told thus shall you say to the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead tomorrow by the time the sun is hot you shall have deliverance same word to do with saving that we've already seen in verse 3 and back in chapter 10 verse 27 and when the messengers came and told the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead they rejoiced in contrast to the initial message that was weeping when the messengers went from Jabesh Gilead to Gibeah and it led to the people weeping now the messengers go back and the result is rejoicing a sort of contrast balance if you like of those verses now the key issue in this chapter as it is in this whole section of 1 Samuel is to do with who rules and with a sharper focus here on who saves remember

Israel wanted a king like the nations that is to save them in battle in effect to defeat enemies their request made the mistake of centuries in effect of peoples of all nations who keep looking to humans to rescue them to save them to bring them political or social liberation or whatever it's very easy for people to put too much trust in human rulers human governments human institutions and this chapter along with these chapters as a whole is in varying degrees of clarity and subtlety wanting to make it very clear to us it's not a human being who saves it's God and even when there is a human king whom God has brought about his anointing verse six has made it very clear in the center of this story that it is the power of God's spirit that enables Saul to save so in verse six as I say how do we know that how can we prove that how can we see that it's all very well to say it but what do we look for well at the end of the chapter there's victory but that in itself is not necessarily sufficient evidence to say that's

God's spirit I does does it mean that somehow God's spirit had actually stirred up one captain and coach and enabled them to predict in effect successfully their victory see what's going on here is not just that victory comes but a prophecy before the event the prophecy is verse nine tomorrow by the time the sun is hot you shall have deliverance people often do make predictions that come true for example the football captains before the grand final but they're only 50% right that is one captain is right and one captain is wrong one team is right and one team is wrong when they say we're going to win one of them is wrong one is right typical in scripture when

God says when God does something significant he says in advance and in detail what he will do and God's success rate of prediction is 100% every single thing that God says he'll do he does unlike our human prophecies so to speak moreover God in fact draws attention to the fact that it's he who's brought victory by using unlikely ways and unlikely means now at one level Saul is a king like the nations and he is a strong character but on the other hand there are people who despise him how can this man save us is what they said back at the end of chapter 10 that contributes to showing us that the victory belongs to God and not just to Saul that is it's not just the fact that there's victory at the end we could think oh

Saul is very powerful he's a great king we actually want to place our trust in Saul the story is told to show us firstly that the spirit of God comes on Saul but then it's a prediction in detail that comes true which all makes it even clearer that the actual power of victory is God's and not Saul's now notice when the messengers come to Jabesh so the people of Jabesh they go in verse 10 to Nahash the king of the Ammonites and all the Ammonites with him and they say tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you and you may do to us whatever seems good to you now the words of giving ourselves up to you are literally they are saying we will come out to you it's slightly ambiguous are they going to come out to you in surrender that's probably the implication but the ambiguity also says allows for the fact we will come out to you and defeat you next day verse 11

[23 : 03] Saul put the people in three companies at the morning watch probably between 2am and 6am they came into the camp and they cut down the Ammonites until the heat of the day and the victory was comprehensive those who survived so that no two of them were left together exactly what was predicted comes true so that the victory doesn't actually belong to Saul so much as it belongs to God and the whole way in which the events unfold with the prediction and its fulfillment is how God so often works in the Bible that's why we can be certain that the events happen are God's hand and not just a human strength not just a sort of chance event now the salvation that Saul wins over these Ammonites is temporary they come on the scene later on eventually but the whole story anticipates a greater rescue deliverance salvation same word from greater enemies from a greater king all of this is if you like a prototype it's a little model you know when you make a paper or an airfix type model of a ship or a plane or something like that it's just a model to show us what reality is like the reality is a greater king a greater salvation over a greater enemy but that saviour king is a more unlikely saviour king someone who looks weak and despised is like

Saul was despised is despised because people thought he wasn't worth looking on and looking at and again the events of that greater salvation are even more fully predicted even hundreds of years before in ways that show when the event occurs this is not just a coincidence that we're not being gullible by saying this is God at work but rather there's no other conclusion but the fact that salvation that saviour that king over those enemies is very much the hand of God at work again a prediction that's 100% fulfilled in the king and saviour Jesus Christ now this whole theme continues in the aftermath of the victory after the defeat of the Ammonites the people of Israel say to Saul who is it that said shall Saul reign over us now the language of that question is a question of despising shall

Saul reign over us we don't want him to reign over us it's the exact sense of back in verse 27 how can this man save us that's in effect what they're quoting in effect these verses are the outer layer of the whole story verse 27 27 27 27 12 11 how can this man save us and the people are saying well who was it who said that clearly they're wrong that's what's behind it they were fools for saying that and they need to be punished is what they're saying give them to us so that we may put them to death but Saul said no one shall be put to death this day now why does he say that we might say that Saul is just being humble in victory we might say that he's just being magnanimous and saying well look it's okay we've won let's celebrate today let's not worry about those who doubted me a few month before now the reason why Saul says no no no we're not going to put them to death he actually gives us at the end of verse 13 no one shall be put to death this day for that is because this is the reason today the

Lord has brought deliverance to Israel now think about the significance of that oh yeah I mean it's obvious in the story that it's the Lord who's brought victory by his powerful spirit rushing on Saul but actually it's a little bit more than that too the people said how can this in effect they were right that's the point Saul in effect knows that this man Saul can't save he only saves because the power of God rushed upon him so the people were right this man by himself he can't save it's God who saves that's why they're not put to death because in effect they were right they were probably wrong to despise Saul but they were right in their estimation it is God who saves that's the point victory comes from

God and that's added to in the last verses Samuel said to the people come let us go to Gil Gal an Israelite city back across the Jordan in the promised land and there renew the kingship so all the people went to Gil and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gil Gal there they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the Lord and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly the emphasis there is on the Lord it's in the presence of the Lord or before the Lord twice in those two verses that expression gets mentioned they offer a sacrifice of well-being a peace offering in effect a fellowship offering a celebration of they offer a sacrifice because it's God who brought them a victory and notice too the subtle language at the end of verse 14 there they go to renew the kingship now Saul was made king in the previous passage last week we saw that they're not renewing in fact

[28 : 59] Saul's kingship or Saul as king particularly I mean they made Saul king in a sense in verse 15 but the language is perhaps deliberately ambiguous renew the kingship whose kingship merely Saul's or is it in fact implying a greater king God's kingship what they're really doing I think is renewing their allegiance ultimately to God because it is God who saves and God's people in effect are always to be renewing their allegiance to God as their king as we're exhorted in the New Testament things like seek his kingdom seek first God's kingdom repent because the kingdom of God is near an allegiance that's practiced in obedience service of the king all this passage whilst telling us of real events is actually pointing the way to far more significant events a far greater saviour and a far greater king over far greater enemies who saves

God and supremely so in his saviour son Jesus Christ who rules God and supremely so in his son the king Jesus Christ and over greater enemies than Ammonites over death over evil over Satan ruled naked on a cross hung up to die having left a heavenly palace for our sakes an unlikely saviour and unlikely king weak and despised as he hung on that cross all the more showing us that it is

God who saves and does so powerfully Amen Amen