**They made Saul king**  5/6/22 dkm

Read: 1Samuel 11, Matthew 6:19-34

Text: 1Samuel 11

Psalms: 85:4-13, 72:1-9, 2:6-12, 72old

Joshua led the people of God into the land of Canaan. After his death ‘the Lord raised up judges to deliver them out of the hands of those who plundered them’ (Judg 2:16). ‘God gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet’, and when Samuel got old the people asked for a king, ‘so God gave them Saul, son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years’ (Acts 13:20,21). Note how the apostle Paul refers to people and time periods as he preached the gospel in Pisidian Antioch.

The Bible is not just a collection of stories and wise sayings. It is a history of God and his creation, including human beings. This history centres upon a people group chosen by God, a group through whom he would make known his will, his law, and his grace to the whole world. Stories and wise sayings are there, but do try to understand the ‘big story’ of the Bible with its timeline. The history of the Bible is your history if you are one of God’s chosen children.

In asking for a king, the people of Israel were rejecting God as their King. But God, in his grace, told his prophet Samuel to make them a king- that was in chapter 8. In chapter 9 we saw the Lord sending Saul to meet Samuel, and Samuel secretly anointing Saul as king. In chapter 10 we saw lots being drawn in a public choosing of Saul as king, and the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’ But after this, Saul went back home to look after the farm. Just when will we see Saul become king? Samuel had no doubts, but Saul was a bit reticent, and there were some rebels who resented him being chosen as their king.

The Lord was granting this people a king, but this king would not be like ‘all the nations’. The Lord would choose this man, and this man would be accountable to the Lord. Moreover, he would be empowered by the Lord for the task given him. Saul had already experienced the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him, by which he prophesied (10:6). He would experience another empowering by the Spirit of God before being installed as king. This is the story of chapter 11. Our subheadings are: ‘Siege of Jabesh Gilead’, ‘Spirit of God upon Saul’, ‘Slaughter of the enemy’ and, ‘Saul acknowledges the Lord’.

**1. Siege of Jabesh Gilead**

In giving his people the land of Canaan, the Lord left the surrounding nations so that through them he might test Israel (Judg 2:22). When these nations attacked Israel and they cried out to the Lord, he sent them judges to deliver them. These nations were a bit like Paul’s thorn in the flesh. Has the Lord allowed you to suffer in some way to test you and keep you faithful to him?

The Philistines were always threatening Israel but nations from the east, including the Ammonites, threatened them also (Judg 3:13). The Ammonites were descendants of Lot; they lived on the fringes of the desert east of the Jordan River. Jabesh Gilead was a fortified town in the territory of Gad, between the Jordan and the Ammonites, in the broader region of Gilead. A man called Nahash, meaning ‘serpent’ in Hebrew, was leader of the Ammonites. While the Philistines pressed Israel from the west, Nahash decided to attack from the east. He may have been on a brutal rampage for some time, gouging out the right eye of everyone he captured. An introductory verse to this chapter found in the Dead Sea Scrolls tells us this, and that seven thousand men escaped to the fortified city of Jabesh Gilead.

Our chapter begins with Israelites held up in Jabesh Gilead, ready to make a treaty with the attacking Ammonites. If both sides agreed to them becoming vassals of the Ammonites, bloodshed could be avoided. But the condition set by Nahash was the brutal gouging out of the right eyes of the Israelites (11:2). The Israelites were horrified, as we are. Such brutality had not ceased. Were we not shocked when Muslim militants started cutting of the hands of their prisoners? The brutality of Nahash the serpent was aimed at humiliating the Israelites and mocking their God. It would also have meant these men could no longer use a bow and arrow or even a sword. With their left eyes covered by their shield, they could not see to shoot or fight.

Nahash demonstrated arrogance typical of those who hate God’s people. The atheist Richard Dawkins is most arrogant, but thankfully only with his words. We do however see God’s people being brutally treated in many countries today- Nahash has his children! And Jesus has his children: ‘If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you’ (John 15:18).

Horrified by the demand of Nahash, the elders among those hold up in Jabesh asked for time, for seven days, to consider their options (11:3). Their option was to call for help from fellow Israelites, but there was little hope of such help, as they and Nahash knew. Nahash was so confident of his positon that he agreed to this request- all in the province of God of course. He allowed them to send messengers to all the tribes of Israel.

We read of these messengers coming to Gibeah of Saul in the territory of Benjamin. There was a relationship between these two places going back to the time when Gibeah was destroyed in a civil war (Judg 21). But the reason Gibeah features in this story is because this was the city of Saul, the man chosen by the Lord to be king. He had not as yet taken up his kingly duties. Saul was still looking after donkeys and oxen, but this was about to change.

**2. Spirit of God comes upon Saul**

When the messengers from Jabesh Gilead came to Gibeah with news of the Ammonite siege, and their brutal demands, there was a huge outcry. As Saul came home from his fields he heard weeping and wailing and asked what was going on, and they told him (11:5). When he heard that the Ammonites were threatening his fellow Israelites, Saul was filled with indignation and anger. It was anger inspired by the Lord and divine indignation. The Spirit of the Lord suddenly came upon Saul, stirring this anger (11:6).

In his anger, Saul took a yoke of oxen from the herd in front of him and slaughtered them. He cut the oxen into pieces which he sent to all the territories or tribes of Israel. The last time this was done it was by a Levite with the body of his wife after she was brutally raped and murdered in Gibeah (Judg 19:29). Ironically, Saul was from the tribe that protected these perverted murderers. A man from Benjamin, rather than a Levite, was now calling Israel together to deal with another depraved group of people.

Pieces of Saul’s oxen arrived at towns throughout Israel with the message, ‘Come and join Samuel and Saul at Bezek in order to deliver our besieged brothers in Jabesh Gilead, or your oxen will end up like Saul’s’. The Lord blessed the angry response of Saul. The fear of the Lord fell upon everyone and they came as one to Samuel and Saul at Bezek. Bezek was just across the river from Jabesh Gilead. When the troops were counted there was three hundred thousand. Just why the count of those from Judah is given separately is not clear; this was years before the division in Israel (11:8).

The elders in Jabesh Gilead had asked for just seven days in which to seek help, so Saul had to act quickly. After seven days they promised to ‘come out to you’, to the Ammonites (11:3). With fighting men gathered within striking distance of Jabesh, the messengers who came were sent back to the besieged city with a most encouraging message. They were overjoyed to hear that help was on its way and would reach them by noon the next day (11:9). The men of Jabesh reported back to the Ammonites but did not tell them that help was on its way. They simply told them that the next day they would come out of their city into the hands of the Ammonites (11:10). It was assumed that they would be surrendering but they did not actually say this. They would be coming out to fight against their enemy, with the help of three hundred thousand fellow Israelites led by Saul.

Before moving on, let me quote a reflection by one commentator: “Israel cannot afford to miss the point; salvation came not because Israel had a king but because the king had Yahweh’s Spirit; it is not the institution of kingship but the power of the Spirit that brings deliverance. Nor can the church afford to miss this point. It is simply Christ’s OT way of saying, ‘without me you can do nothing’ (John 15:5b)”. On the homepage of our church website you will read that our church is not an organisation or institution but an organism in which every member is valued and has a part to play. This is because every believer has been given the Holy Spirit and is called to serve in the power of the Spirit, under the headship of Christ.

**3. Slaughter of the enemy**

There is not much to say under this subheading because the battle was brief and decisive. Saul had probably heard about Gideon and his defeat of the Midianites. Gideon had just three hundred men, whom he divided into three units to attack just before midnight (Judg 7:16). Saul had three hundred thousand men whom he divided into three units and attacked just before dawn (11:11). The defeat of the enemy was so complete that any who survived the slaughter did so alone: ‘No two of them were left together’ (11:11). We presume that the men held up in Jabesh came out as they promised, but to fight rather than have their right eye gouged out!

**4. Saul acknowledges the Lord**

Israel’s king-elect had proven himself an able and valiant leader, the leader the nation desired, as Samuel told him (9:20). This was the final step in the Lord, through Samuel, establishing Saul as the first king of Israel- almost the final step! Samuel would gather the people at Gilgal and ‘renew the kingdom there’ (11:14). God’s prophet had previously led the people of God in covenant renewal at Mizpah, where they saw the Lord deliver them from the Philistines (7:5). He gathered them again at Mizpah to witness the Lord choose them a king (10:17). He now gathered them at Gilgal, a town not far from Jericho, a town filled with history from the days of the conquest.

The wilderness generation was circumcised at Gilgal and had their first Passover here after entering Canaan. Gilgal was Joshua’s base of operations. Its significance continued with this covenant renewal by Samuel, and the confirmation of Saul as king, in the presence of the Lord (11:15). Saul would not be returning to his farm after this event. It would, in fact, be a renewal of kingship, God’s kingship over his people, with the man Saul as his earthly representative.

After Saul led in delivering the people hold up in Jabesh Gilead, some remembered those who despised Saul when he was publically chosen as king (10:27). If Saul had acted like the kings of other nations he would have put these rebels to death at this time. This is what the people expected but Saul was not a king like others. He would not exact vengeance on this day of victory. Saul openly acknowledged the hand of Yahweh in the delivery of the people that day. ‘Today the Lord has accomplished salvation in Israel’ (11:13). The victory belonged to the Lord, and here at Gilgal, Samuel made sacrifices before the Lord by way of thanksgiving for His mighty deliverance (11:15). What sacrifices are you making by way of thanking the Lord for your salvation in Jesus Christ? Surely you want to be singing his praises here in his house!

At Gilgal they also made Saul king (11:15). This was the final step in Saul becoming king. It had been a long process in which the Lord, through his prophet, was involved from beginning to end. And this would not be the end of the Lord’s involvement because this king was to listen to the voice of the Lord through his prophet. This king was to obey the law of the Lord and lead God’s people in the power of the Holy Spirit given to him for this purpose. If you think you are king of your own life, of your family, or of your church, remember the conditions of kingship placed upon the king of Israel. Do we not need regular checks on our allegiance to Christ our king, starting with Matthew 6:33?