

Message #25

I Samuel 11:1-15

For years I subscribed to Western Horseman Magazine. I enjoyed the articles. They were informative and helpful if you owned horses. There was an interesting study done to determine whether or not it was better to keep horses on a nice flat road and flat trail or ride the horse on trails that had hills and twists and turns and difficulties. The conclusion was that horses that were raised and trained in difficult areas and mountain settings lasted 1 ½ times as long as those trained on the flats. My two mountain horses lived to be 30 years old. What that would seem to suggest is that going through things that are up and down filled with highs and lows and twists and turns and over obstacles makes for a healthier horse and produces positive long term results.

Now naturally speaking, we are people who like things smooth. We do not want any hardships and obstacles. We don't want setbacks. We don't like twists and turns and hardships. We certainly don't want war. No one in his right mind likes or wants war and hostility.

In fact, in 1961, John F. Kennedy addressed the United Nations and he famously said, "Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind." But the real truth of life and history is that war is part of life and war can produce victory or defeat.

What most people don't realize is that God is sovereign in war and sometimes war leads to many positives and blessings. That point is clear from this text.

Verse 1 begins with a conjunction "now." That conjunction immediately connects us to the beginning of Saul's kingship. **As soon as Saul had publicly been anointed king, intimidating warfare enemies surface who threatened Israel.**

There was an Ammonite who surfaced who threatened Israel. But actually this war will turn out well of Israel. In fact, God will use it to accomplish certain things seen in this very chapter. This Ammonite threat did at least three things for Israel:

- 1) It caused Israel to unite in their support of Saul and Samuel (11:7).
- 2) It forced Israel to get organized in her military defense (11:8, 11).
- 3) It caused Israel to realize and recognize that Saul was her God-ordained king (11:14-15).

All of these things happened because of a warfare threat. God, in His sovereignty, permitted threatening enemies to come up against His people to ultimately lead His people into His will. What we learn here is this:

GOD SOVEREIGNLY CONTROLS INTIMIDATING WAR THREATS THAT SURROUND HIS PEOPLE AND HE USES IT TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES FOR THE GOOD OF HIS PEOPLE.

Someone once said there is no education like adversity. When God wants to lead us and develop us so He may greatly use us and bless us, He will use warfare and intimidating things and He will permit threatening obstacles to come into our lives.

Chapter 11 comes after chapter 10, in which Saul was anointed king. Now there are four responses to Saul being anointed king:

RESPONSE #1 – The enemy threatens God’s people. 11:1-3

Saul had not been king for very long when he found himself facing a very threatening warfare situation. We may recall that he had hid in the baggage area, but there was no hiding anymore. Like it or not, he was going to have to face a major enemy.

Intimidating warfare threats are actually sovereignly controlled by God and are used to accomplish God’s purposes.

Shortly after Saul had been appointed king, enemies surfaced. There was a commander of the Ammonites, who was the Ammonite King (I Sam. 12:12), whose name was Nahash. Nahash will eventually be replaced by his son Hanun, who will treat David’s men shamefully (II Sam. 10:1-2, 4). The name Nahash means “serpent.” Nahash came to an Israelite city, Jabesh-gilead, and seized it.

This city sat in a beautiful valley and it featured rich pasture, lovely old olive trees and a healthy crop of barley. It was located about 6 miles east of the Jordan and some 18 miles south of the Sea of Galilee. It was about 50-60 miles N.E. of Gibeah, where Saul lived. This was a beautiful city and Nahash took it.

The Ammonites, along with the Moabites, were powerful and fierce tribes (Amos 1:13). Both of these groups were descendants of Lot and they were always against Israel. The Ammonites lived in the north and the Moabites lived in the south east of the Jordan. They were nothing more than hateful Arabs.

According to **verse 1**, when Nahash overtook the area, the people of Israel wanted to negotiate a peace agreement.

According to **verse 2**, Nahash said he would do it if he could put out the right eye of every Israelite. Arab terrorists are known to be barbaric and evil, no matter what the dispensation. They will cut off hands, heads, eyes and ears. This not only would be totally humiliating, but it would also mutilate and handicap the people of God.

According to **verse 3**, the elders of the city asked for seven days to think it over. They wanted to send messengers throughout Israel to see if anyone would come help them. If at the end of seven days no one came to deliver them, they would let Nahash put out their eyes.

Apparently Nahash was so arrogant and self-confident that he figured let them have a week because it won’t matter who they contact or what they do, they will never beat me. Actually God is in this matter. He is causing Nahash to let them have seven days because of what He is going to do to them.

This is bizarre. You would never expect God to be working in this kind of intimidating threat. You would never expect God to sovereignly be working out His will in a context in which people are threatening to put out your eye. God is in this. **This specific warfare threat was key to God leading His people to victory.**

Perhaps you find yourself in some physical threat enemy right now. Your health and life is threatened. Don't forget God is in this with you and He will work out His plan. This threat may be just the thing God is using in your life to lead you to a great victory.

RESPONSE #2 – God's people appeal to Saul. 11:4-5

A 50-60 mile trip to Gibeah could be made in one day if messengers did not waste any time. In the U.S. military handbook concerning horses, it was stated that those horses could travel 40 miles per day in mountainous terrain, if they were well-fed and in shape.

A marathon of 26.2 miles can be run by an average runner in about 4 hours, so even if one traveled the distance by foot, he could theoretically travel it in 16-20 hours. If a messenger traveled by donkey or horse, one could make it in 10 hours.

According to **verse 4**, messengers came to Gibeah where Saul lived and told the people what happened and when they heard it, "all" of the people wept. They do not lift up their voices in prayer nor do they lift up their voices in anger; they lift up their voices crying.

According to **verse 5**, Saul had been out in the field with the oxen. He was certainly not some lazy politician. He was out in the fields plowing with the oxen. This was a king who was not afraid to get his hands dirty. You don't expect to find your king out plowing with oxen, but that is what Saul was doing.

I knew of a minister who would not mow his yard. He thought it was too beneath him to do it. David was a shepherd; Paul was a tentmaker; Peter was a fisherman doing their work when God used them. Saul was plowing the fields.

When he came in from the field and heard everyone weeping, he wanted to know what was happening. So the people told him.

Three observations:

- 1) God is sovereignly using this threat to show that Saul is His leader.
God reveals leader through warfare.
- 2) A leader cannot do something until he knows what the issue is.
Too often enemies are protected by silence.
- 3) A leader is one who faithfully carries out his responsibilities before he is a leader.
Saul was not some prima-donna sitting at home; he was working a job in the field.

RESPONSE #3 – Saul responds and reacts to the situation led by God’s Spirit. **11:6-11**

Someone once said adversity makes men and prosperity makes monsters. Notice how **verse 6** begins, “then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily.” There are five specific responses and reactions that Saul had that are all Spirit-led:

Reaction #1 - Saul became very angry. **11:6b**

There are those who think a leader never has a right to get angry. Well that view does not square with the word of God. God’s Spirit is prompting this anger.

Reaction #2 - Saul warned and threatened the entire nation to respond to him and Samuel. **11:7**

Saul was led by the Spirit of God to warn and threaten the entire nation. He cut up oxen into pieces and then he sent pieces to all of Israel and warned if they did not come and help him and Samuel, the same would be done to them. This warning must have worked because the entire nation “feared God.” They united and came together as one man.

The fear and dread of the LORD fell on the entire nation and they become one nation under God.

There are times when the Spirit-led thing to do is to warn the people of God that they need to take a stand.

Reaction #3 - Saul systematically numbered and organized the nation. **11:8, 11**

God is using Samuel to reveal to Saul just exactly what he was to do. He numbered the men. Israel sent 300,000 men from the north and Judah sent 30,000 men from the south. Saul knew how many men he had and he divided them into three companies. This is systematic calculation and organization.

There are those who believe it is wrong to think in terms of numbers and in some respects we would agree with that. However, there is nothing wrong with calculating the numbers you have and systematically organizing the numbers.

Systematic organization is a critical part of God giving victory. Everything in the church is to be done with systematic order. God does not do His great work in chaos and lack of organization.

Reaction #4 - Saul sent messengers back to Jabesh to communicate God’s will. **11:9-10**

Saul sent messengers on ahead to inform the people in Jabesh that help was coming the next day and they would win. When the messengers heard that news, they were “glad.”

The messengers in turn went to Nahash (11:10) to spread “disinformation.” They are using this to lure him into a false sense of security so he would come out with his forces, thinking he was going to put out the right eye of the people.

In all reality, God’s people are leading the enemy into an ambush trap. This deception will lead Israel to a great victory.

Reaction #5 - Saul came and struck down the Ammonites. **11:11**

The next day Saul came and he divided the military into three companies and he struck down the Ammonites. The attack took place “at the morning watch” which means somewhere between 3AM and 6AM in the morning. They attacked them from three different directions and the attack went from early morning until the heat of the day. The Ammonites were so routed that no two could even stick together. Those who did survive ran away individually and separately like scared jack rabbits.

This entire war threat and battle was sovereignly controlled by God to give Israel a great victory and to raise up Saul as Israel’s leader.

RESPONSE #4 – Israel responds to Saul. **11:12-15**

Israel responded to this victory in three ways:

Way #1 - Israel wanted to kill all those who were non supportive of Saul. **11:12-13**

What Saul did impressed Israel. We may recall that there were some “worthless men” in Israel who didn’t like Saul and wouldn’t support Saul. Well these people now want to kill those worthless losers.

The people finally began to realize this is a leader God has given to us and we had better protect him. Saul did not let them execute anyone that day, but they were thinking right.

If any nation or organization is going to accomplish something for God, they need unity and loyalty. Those who are worthless can ruin the spiritual momentum (10:27).

Way #2 - Israel went to Gilgal to worship God. **11:14**

One of the first things Israel wanted to do after this great victory was to worship God.

Way #3 - Israel made Saul their king. **11:15**

Quite honestly, Saul was already Israel’s king, but at this point she nationally acknowledged it. It is one thing to actually be a God-appointed leader; it is another thing when the people realize it.

They offered sacrifices and peace offerings to God and they greatly rejoiced. This all happened because of war.

Without this war, none of this would have happened. John F. Kennedy is wrong. War won't put an end to mankind; God will put an end to mankind. God uses war to draw people to Himself and when people draw near to God, He gives them great victory.

Saul is one sad story. He starts out so good. He is listening to Samuel and is obeying God.

But the problem is it won't last with him. He stayed the course for a while and then he will backslide and lose everything.

God uses difficulties and twists and turns in life to draw His people close to Him so He may lead them to victory. So no matter what we face, keep our focus on Him for He is sovereign over all things.