

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Nahash, king of the Ammonites, besieges Jabesh-gilead; and proposes to its inhabitants the most degrading conditions of peace, 1 Samuel 11:1, 1 Samuel 11:2. They apply to their brethren for help, 1 Samuel 11:3, 1 Samuel 11:4. Saul hears of their distress; takes a yoke of oxen, hews them in pieces, and sends them throughout the coasts of Israel, with the threat that all who did not come to his standard should have his cattle served in like manner; in consequence of which he is soon at the head of an army of three hundred and thirty thousand men, 1 Samuel 11:5-8. He sends to Jabesh-gilead, and promises help, 1 Samuel 11:9, 1 Samuel 11:10. Saul attacks the Ammonites next morning, and gives them a total overthrow, 1 Samuel 11:11. The people are greatly encouraged, and propose to put to death those who are opposed to Saul's government: but this he prevents, 1 Samuel 11:12, 1 Samuel 11:13. Samuel leads the people to Gilgal: they offer sacrifices, and renew the kingdom to Saul, 1 Samuel 11:14, 1 Samuel 11:15.

Verse 1

Nahash the Ammonite - In the Vulgate this chapter begins thus: *Et factum est quasi post mensem*, "And it came to pass about a month after." This addition appears also in the principal copies of the Septuagint; though it is wanting in the Complutensian edition, both in the Greek and Latin, and is not acknowledged by any of the Oriental versions. But it is in Josephus, and probably was inserted from him into some copies of the Septuagint, and thence into the Vulgate. It appears to be of very little authority.

We know little about Nahash; there was a king of this name among the Ammonites in the time of David, 2 Samuel 10:2, but probably not the same person. Nahash might have been a common name of the Ammonitish kings.

Make a covenant with us - They found they were in no condition to risk a war; and they wish to have peace, and desire to know his conditions.

Verse 2

I may thrust out all your right eyes - This cruel condition would serve at once as a badge of their slavery, and a means of incapacitating them from being effective warriors. Theodoret observes, "He who opposes his shield to the enemy with his left hand, thereby hides his left eye, and looks at his enemy with his right eye; he therefore who plucks out that right eye makes men useless in war." Josephus gives the same reason.

Verse 3

Give us seven days respite - Such promises are frequently made by besieged places: "We will surrender if not relieved in so many days;" and such conditions are generally received by the besiegers.

Verse 4

Then came the messengers to Gibeath - It does not appear that the people of Jabesh-gilead knew any thing of Saul's appointment to the kingdom, for the message is not directed to him but to the people.

The people lifted up their voices and wept - They saw no hope of deliverance, and they expected that their reproach would be laid on all Israel.

Verse 5

Saul came after the herd - He had been bred up to an agricultural life, and after his consecration he returned to it, waiting for a call of Divine providence, which he considered he had now received in the message from Jabesh-gilead.

It has often been remarked, that mighty kings and accomplished generals have been chosen from among those who were engaged in agricultural concerns. In these observations one fact is lost sight of, viz., that in ancient times agriculture was the only employment. Trade and commerce were scarcely known; therefore all descriptions of official dignities must be chosen out of this class, there being no other to choose them from. We need not wonder at these words of the poet: -

Jura dabat populis posito modo consul aratro; Pascebatque suas ipse senator oves.

"The consul, having now laid aside his plough, gives laws to the people; And the senator himself feeds his own sheep."

Ovid, *Fast. lib. i., v. 204-207.*

Verse 6

The Spirit of God came upon Saul - He felt himself strongly excited to attempt the relief of his brethren.

And his anger was kindled greatly - I believe this means no more than that his courage was greatly excited, he felt himself strong for fight, and confident of success.

Verse 7

He took a yoke of oxen - The sending the pieces of the oxen was an act similar to that of the Levite, Judges 19:29 (note), where see the note. And both customs are similar to the sending about of the bloody cross, to call the clans to battle, practiced by the ancient Highlanders of Scotland. See at the end of this chapter, 1 Samuel 11:15 (note).

Verse 8

The children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand - This was a vast army, but the Septuagint make it even more: *ἅπαντες οἱ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἦσαν ἑξακκλις χίλιοι*, Six Hundred thousand; and the men of Judah *ἄνθρωποι τοῦ Ἰούδα ἦσαν ἑπτὰ χίλιοι*, Seventy thousand. Josephus goes yet higher with the number of the Israelites: *ἠὲν* He found the number of those whom he had gathered together to be *ἑξακκλις χίλιοι*, Six Hundred thousand. Those of the tribe of Judah he makes seventy thousand, with the Septuagint. These numbers are not all right; and I suspect even the Hebrew text to be exaggerated, by the mistake or design of some ancient scribe.

Verse 10

To-morrow we will come out unto you - They concealed the information they had received of Saul's promised assistance. They did come out unto them; but it was in a different manner to what the Ammonites expected.

Verse 11

Put the people in three companies - Intending to attack the Ammonites in three different points, and to give his own men more room to act.

In the morning watch - He probably began his march in the evening, passed Jordan in the night, and reached the camp of the Ammonites by daybreak.

That two of them were not left together - This proves that the rout was complete.

Verse 12

Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign - Now, flushed with victory and proud of their leader, they wished to give him a proof of their attachment by slaying, even in cool blood, the persons who were at first averse from his being intrusted with the supreme power! The common soldier is scarcely ever inspired by his victory to acts of magnanimity; he has shed blood - he wishes to shed more!

Verse 13

There shall not a man be put to death - This was as much to Saul's credit as the lately proposed measure was to the discredit of his soldiers.

Verse 14

Renew the kingdom - The unction of Saul, in the first instance, was a very private act; and his being appointed to be king was not known to the people in general. He had now shown himself worthy to command the people; and Samuel takes advantage of this circumstance to gain the general consent in his favor. Josephus says that Saul was anointed a second time at this convocation.

Verse 15

There they made Saul king - It is likely, from these words, that Saul was anointed a second time; he was now publicly acknowledged, and there was no gainsayer. Thus far Saul acted well, and the kingdom seemed to be confirmed in his hand; but soon through imprudence he lost it.

On the custom referred to in 1 Samuel 11:7 I am favored with the following observations by a learned correspondent: -

It is considered that the authenticity of records respecting a peculiar people cannot be better illustrated, or the fidelity of the historian more clearly ascertained, than by proving that the manners and customs recorded are in unison with, or bear a resemblance to, the manners and customs of other nations of the same antiquity; or, what may be more correct, in a similar state of improvement; and the records of such rites and customs may possibly acquire an additional mark of authenticity, when the similarity is not so exact as to admit a presumption that the customs of one nation were merely copied from the other.

Sir Walter Scott, in the third canto of the Lady of the Lake, describes the rites, incantations, and

imprecations, used prior to the fiery cross being circulated, to summon the rough warriors of ancient times to the service of their chief; and in the first note of this canto he alludes to this ancient custom which, in comparatively modern times, has been used in Scotland, and proves that a similar punishment of death or destruction of the houses for disobeying the summons was inflicted by the ancient Scandinavians, as recorded by Olaus Magnus, in his history of the Goths. A custom still more in point than the one cited may be found to have existed in a more ancient nation, whose history is supposed the most, if not the only authentic narrative of deeds of ancient times, and which also records the sanguinary manners of uncultivated nations; see the preceding chapter, 1 Samuel 10:1-8 (note). The similarity of the custom is to be found in the seventh verse; with the Highlanders a goat was slain; with the Israelites, an ox. The exhibition of a cross stained with the blood of the sacrificed animal was the summons of the former, while part of the animal was the mandate of the latter. Disobedience in the one nation was punished with the death of the parties, and burning of their dwellings; in the other, the punishment was more simple, and more allusive to the sacrificed emblem, the forfeiture or destruction of their oxen. It is not difficult to judge whether the comparison be correct.

“The first verses record the sanguinary practices of ancient times, which to many appear merely as the gratification of revenge, or as proofs of victory; yet when it is considered that the right eye must chiefly aid the warrior in aiming at his adversary, whether the weapon be of ancient or modern warfare, here arises a military reason, corroborative of the truth of history, for the deprivation, and in some degree lessening the cruelty of the mutilation, which would be increased if it were caused by revenge or wantonness; though Nahash declares it to be a reproach upon all Israel.”