

## SAUL FIGHTS AND WINS HIS FIRST BATTLE

1 Samuel 11:1-15 (Key verse 15)

*So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.*

In today's passage, Saul fights and wins his first battle as king of Israel. This was truly an amazing event; that again reveals the wonderful work of God in Saul. I sincerely pray that through today's passage, each one of you have hope to grow as a servant of God. Amen.

Look at verse 1a. Not long after Saul's first coronation, Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged an Israelite town called Jabesh Gilead. Do anyone of you know what the word, "besieged" mean? Yes.....It means that Nahash with a large army surrounded Jabesh Gilead in order to capture it or force the people to surrender. It was to overcome attacks exactly like this, that the Israelites in chapter 8 already, said to Samuel to appoint a king to lead [them].... go out before them and fight their battles"(8:20) Then where was Saul, when this happened? What was he doing? Surely, he was already preparing for war, right!? Surprisingly not! Saul was on his farm in the fields, completely unaware of the attack. Then what about the Israelites in Jabesh Gilead? Some of them must have been at Saul's first coronation, or at least heard about it.....And therefore immediately, after they saw the Ammonites approaching..... sent word to Saul to come and rescue them? Right?..... Again..... surprisingly not!!! Instead, all the men (not just a few but ALL the men) said to Nahash, "Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you." Why!!?? Why did they not call on Saul to come and rescue them? Why were they so quick to compromise and surrender to their enemy, if they had a king to fight their battles? It was because, despite Saul's coronation, neither he nor the Israelites accepted his kingship! They behaved as if it never happened! It seems Nahash, also did not pay much attention to Saul's coronation.

Look at verse 2. Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I will make a treaty with you only on the condition..... that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you. How painful this would be! And how cruel. Why would Nahash want to do this to the men in Jabesh Gilead? Look again at verse 2...It was because he hated all of them and wanted to bring disgrace...not only them.....but humiliate and degrade all Israel..... by making them look weak while glorifying himself. At this point, the elders of Jabesh stepped in. Look at verse 3. They said to Nahash, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you." Again, this is surprising, right? Either the elders did not know about King Saul.....or they were part of troublemakers who believed..... Saul could never save them..... Or perhaps for political reasons.....they did not think Saul would be willing to come and rescue them. Either way, Saul was not on their minds.....and he was not regarded or accepted as their legitimate king..... who would certainly come to rescue them! Yet, out of desperation.....to save their right eyes and even their lives, they requested seven days just to.... See..... if anyone in Israel would perhaps be willing and able to come and rescue them.....And Nahash agreed!!! He

was so confident of Israel's disunity and figured they would never find anyone to save them. Indeed, it was as if the coronation in the previous chapter.....never happened!!

Look at verse 4. (Read) One would have expected, that the messengers would go straight to their king.....and that he would be the first person to hear the news! But no.....the messengers first went throughout Israel looking for a saviour! And then finally when [they] came to Gibeah of Saul, they did not look for Saul but simply reported Nahash's terms to the people. Now, we would assume that at least, the people of King Saul's hometown, must have comforted the messengers, saying: *"Don't worry! We have king in Israel. He will go out before us and fight the evil Nahash."* And then ran off to call Saul....But again, to our big surprise, they did not do any of this. Instead, they all.....helplessly.....wept aloud.....Why did they not call Saul?! Why did Saul.....after returning from the fields..... have to ask: "What is wrong with the people? Why are they weeping?" It was because, neither Saul nor the people accepted his kingship. It was as if his coronation never happened!

Look at verse 5b-6. Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said. When Saul heard their words.....the Spirit of God came..... powerfully..... upon him..... and he burned with God's Holy anger.....anger at Nahash for threatening his people. Then what did Saul do? He started to mobilise an army by sending a vivid and compelling message to all the men in Israel! Look at verse 7-8. Saul took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." .....Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out together as one. When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered three hundred thousand and the men of Judah thirty thousand. They were all ready and confident to follow Saul into battle. So much so that they told the messengers who had come, "Say to the men of Jabesh Gilead, 'By the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you WILL BE [not maybe] but [WILL BE] delivered.'" What a turnaround in the mood of the people in Israel! What a turnaround in the whole situation.....from people weeping loudly.....from Saul simply working in the fields..... and from people not even thinking about Saul as king..... to suddenly have 330 000 men standing behind Saul.....ready to charge into battle.....and rescue the people of Jabesh Gilead. Indeed, this was the result of God's Spirit working powerfully in Saul and the fighting men of Israel!

Look at verse 9b. When the messengers went and reported this to the men of Jabesh, they were elated. The NLT reads, there was great joy throughout the town when that message arrived! Because they discovered that Saul truly was their king and had now come, with a mighty army, to rescue them from Nahash the Ammonite. Look at verse 11. The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions..... THEN.....during the last watch of the night.....(that is just before sunrise when the Ammonites were in deep sleep) they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and.....ruthlessly and mercilessly slaughtered them the whole morning.....The remnant of the Ammonite army was so badly scattered that no two of them were left together. (NLT) The Israelite's victory over the Ammonites was emphatic! Because God's Spirit who worked powerfully and practically in Saul and his men. This victory completely transformed the national mood in Israel.....and suddenly all the people unified behind Saul. That is why, at this moment Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship." (14)

Let's read today's key verse together, verse 15. So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration. Here the author emphasizes.....ALL the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king. During the first coronation at Mizpah, not everyone accepted Saul as king.....can you remember what some troublemakers (scoundrels/rebels) said. Yes, they said: How can this fellow save us?" They despised him and brought him no gifts. (10:27) Also, as we have seen in today's passage, after the coronation, and before the battle against Nahash, the people of Jabesh Gilead and even the people of Saul's home town in Gibeah, did not recognise Saul as their king. In fact, they behaved as if they did not have a king.....as if God never chose and appoint Saul to deliver them from their enemies. But now, after they practically experienced, the powerful working of God through Saul, the public opinion about King Saul.....was unanimous.....and **all the people**.....were now ready and eager to embrace Saul with open hearts.....They all acknowledge that the LORD did indeed chose and appoint Saul as their king.....just as they requested.....for him to deliver them from their enemies.....So this time, during the second coronation, when they made Saul king they consciously did so in the presence of the LORD! Then, they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD. This was very different from what they did at Mizpah. Can you remember what they did during the first coronation? Yes, the best they could do was to shout "Long live the king!" (10:24). Then Samuel dismissed the people, each to his own home. But now, after they practically experienced how God worked so powerfully through Saul to deliver them from Nahash, the people sacrificed fellowship offerings to thank God for appointing Saul as their king.....and to thank him for using Saul to rescue them from their enemies.

Look again at verse 15...and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration. Can you remember how Saul behaved at the first coronation? Yes, he hid among the baggage.....until people ran and brought him out. Yet, now after personally experiencing God's power of deliverance, Saul held a great celebration with all the Israelites! Indeed, this time, Saul and all the Israelites were filled with joy.

We can learn so many things from this passage. However, I want to focus only on how God's love and gracious hand transformed Saul as His anointed king. As we all know, Saul was not confident to lead Israel as king. Yet if we again consider, how he cut up those oxen and confidently declared that this is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel" we stand amazed. What a radical transformation.....from hiding among the luggage to acting so decisively.....and with authority. Here we can see how the Lord continued to equip and transform Saul.....until he could come out of hiding.....to stand confidently as king..... and then boldly lead the people of Israel into battle! With the excellent military strategy from God, Saul was then able to slaughter Nahash the Ammonite until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together. (v11). It wasn't a half-half victory. It was complete deliverance!

We can also see how the spirit of the LORD gradually opened Saul's spiritual eyes to see and acknowledge the work of God. After the battle, when people said to Samuel, "Who was it that asked, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring these men to us and we will put them to death." Saul wisely answered. Look at verse 13. "No one shall be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel." Saul clearly knew and acknowledged, that it was not him.....but the LORD who has rescued

Israel. Also, Saul understood the heart of God, to not kill anyone who did not support him from the beginning.....This is not bad for a guy who a few months earlier had no spiritual discernment of God's work or presence in his life. Then how did this come about? It was all because of God's Spirit gradually working in Saul's heart.....and then coming upon him in power.....to raise him as a king and then equip him for service.

Then what about us? Many of you are still very young in the faith. You feel inadequate to serve 1-1 bible study.....prepare conference messages.....while others are hesitant to make a commitment to God's ministry as a campus shepherd. Even though the LORD has changed your heart over the years, like Saul, you just want to hide among the luggage. And people must run and get you to take your place before the LORD and His people. If this is how you feel, there is no need to worry. It is very normal. You won't believe it, but all servants of God start out like that. I know I did, and shepherdess Sarah did.....and I am sure shp Khomo and shepherd Donald also did! However, through the gracious work of God's Spirit, the LORD gradually strengthened us, just like Saul, until we could fight our first battle of service.....then a second.....then a third.....and with each time we could grow stronger in the faith.....more confident in God.....and definitely more certain of our calling as servants of God. This is the beauty of being a child of God. He is the one who calls us.....He is the one who changes our hearts with His Spirit.....He is the one who empowers us to fight His battles.....and He is the one who gives us the victory! Amen!

Then what should we do? (And with this I will conclude) Our Easter Conference is around the corner. It will be a great opportunity for each one of us.....individually and collectively as a ministry..... to practically experience the power of God. This time, Brothers Trevor and Saehan.....will deliver the conference messages. Indeed, they are nervous and unsure whether they can make it. However, they need not worry.....because it was God who called them.....and it was God who changed their hearts over many years of bible study and serving.....Also, God will empower them with His Spirit to prepare and serve His words during our Easter conference! Then God will give them the victory, just as with Saul. Amen! And not only Trevor and Saehan, but also each one of us.....in every fellowship. And not only during the conference.....but beyond.....as His Spirit raises us as a young ministry.....into a spiritual vessel He can use to fight His battles on our campus.....in this generation. Like the Israelites, only when we experience God practically will our hearts naturally be filled with joy and thanksgiving towards Him. We can experience God at home, at work, in our studies and more vividly.....in serving His work of raising disciples through 1-1 bible studies. This is where our true joy and fulfilment lies. We only need to wait on the LORD.....respond to His Spirit's work in us.....and trust the LORD in everything we do.

I sincerely pray that through today's passage, each one of you have hope to grow as a servant of God. I also sincerely pray, that each one of you may grow in gratitude and joy towards the LORD, as you taste His goodness.....His glory.....and His love.....in every victory He gives you in your life. Amen.