

1 Samuel 11

The Ammonites were nomads from the desert area east of the Jordan. The modern capital of Jordan, Amman, takes its name from them. They often harassed the Israelites in the book of Judges and seem to delight in humiliating their opponents. Nahash's grotesque threat here is echoed in a milder form by his son in 2 Samuel 10, when he cuts off the robes of David's envoys along with half their beards, a disgrace to the Jews.

Saul is understandably outraged. He slices up a yoke of oxen and sends the pieces around to assemble the nation for war. A similar macabre signal was given in Judges in the case of the Levite's concubine. Who could refuse such a call to arms? The Israelites descend on the Ammonites and rescue their brothers.

Questions for study and discussion:

1. Why do you think Nahash allows the men of Jabesh to send for help?
2. What does weeping signify in verse 4? When should we weep for our brothers and sisters?
3. How does verse 8 foreshadow the eventual division of Israel?

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Nahash's arrogance is truly intolerable and Saul's response is appropriately rewarded with victory. But it is somewhat odd that this battle is Saul's first action as king. The countryside around is riddled with Philistine garrisons, ignored by Saul as he peacefully plows his field. God had told the Israelites to rid the land of the Philistines and had promised victory over them. The Ammonites dwelt outside the assigned territory of Israel. God did not command conquest over them (although self defense was certainly justified).

There may be a lesson for the people of God in this. Do we sometimes react to some current event with outrage and anger but fail to deal with ongoing problems in our midst?

4. As far as we know, does Saul personally lead the charge against the Ammonites? What happens when David stays in Jerusalem and lets others go to battle?
5. Where in this chapter do we see faith leading to salvation?
6. Where do we see mercy? What is the reason behind it?
7. Does Saul as a new king get off to a good start?

