

**Part 10**  
**SERVING THE LORD**  
**1 Samuel 11& 12**

One of the reasons Israel asked for a king was so the nation could unite behind one leader and have a better opportunity to face their enemies. The Lord condescended to reach down to their level of unbelief, and He gave them a king who looked like a natural warrior. How sad it is that God's people trusted a man of clay whom they could admire, and yet they would not trust the Lord who throughout the nation's history had proven Himself powerful on their behalf. In His grace, God gave Saul an opportunity to prove himself and consolidate his authority.

**The challenge (vv. 1–3).** The Ammonites were descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot (Gen. 19:30–38), and therefore related to the Jewish people. The dangers posed by Nahash ("snake") and his army had helped to motivate the Jews to ask for a king, and now Nahash was encamped around Jabesh Gilead, a city about fifty miles from Saul's home.

Rather than engage in a long and costly siege, Nahash offered to negotiate with the people in the city and let them live. All he demanded was that they submit to the humiliating and crippling punishment of having their right eyes gouged out. Archers and swordsmen would be handicapped in battle, and everybody would be humiliated and marked as defeated prisoners of war. Without having to kill anybody, Nahash could subdue the city, take its wealth, and enslave the people.

**The conquest (vv. 4–11).** It's strange that the messengers from Jabesh Gilead didn't hasten to contact Samuel and Saul first of all. Samuel their prophet had prayed and God gave victory over the Philistines, and Saul their new king had the nucleus of an army. It would take time for the Jews to get accustomed to the new form of government.

When the news came, Saul was plowing in the field with the oxen. The Jews were noted for their loud and passionate expressions of grief, and when Saul heard the people weeping, he asked the cause. No sooner did the king understand the situation than he experienced an endowment of the Spirit of God, and his own spirit was filled with righteous indignation that such a thing should happen in Israel.

Instantly Saul moved into action and in a dramatic way sent the message to the men of Israel that they were needed for battle. He also identified himself with Samuel when he issued the call to arms, for he and Samuel were working together. The Lord worked on Saul's behalf by putting fear in the hearts of the people so that 330,000 men gathered for battle. Saul mustered the army at Bezek, about twenty miles from Jabesh Gilead, and then sent a message to the city that help was coming the next day before mid-morning. Shrewdly, the citizens told the Ammonites that they would surrender the next day, and this gave Nahash the kind of false confidence that threw the army off guard.

Saul may have known the story of Gideon and his defeat of the Midianites, because, like Gideon, he divided his army into three parts and attacked at night. The morning watch was from two to six a.m., so he caught the enemy by surprise and completely routed them. Saul succeeded because he was empowered by the Spirit of God who both used Saul's natural gifts and gave him the wisdom and strength he needed.

Being at the head of an inexperienced army of 330,000 men wouldn't be an easy task, but God gave the victory. **The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God can't keep us and use us.** When Saul was chosen king, he was given authority from God and from the

nation, but when he won this great victory, he gained stature before the people. It takes both to be an effective leader.

The difficulties began later when Saul's pride inflated his authority and began to destroy his character and his stature. David was humbled by his success, but Saul became more and more proud and abusive.

We admire Saul for not using the victory as a means of getting rid of his enemies but for giving glory to the Lord (1 Sam. 11:13; Lev. 19:18; Rom. 12:17). Effective leaders use their authority to honor God and build up their people, but ineffective leaders use the people to build up their authority. Later on, Saul began to do that, and it led to his failure.

**Samuel seized the opportunity and called the nation together to give thanks to the Lord and to affirm the king and the kingdom.** They met at Gilgal, near the Jordan River, a place that had solemn associations for the Jews (Josh. 4:19—5:11; 10:8–15). At the Mizpah assembly, they had accepted God's king, but at Gilgal they confirmed Saul as king before the Lord (1 Sam. 12:1). Our modern word would be "coronation."

The peace offerings were part of a covenant ceremony in which the people sacrificed to God and then had a meal of some of the portions of the animals they gave to God. It was clear to everybody that the king and the nation had entered into a renewed covenant relationship with the Lord and were responsible to obey Him.

Samuel had anointed Saul privately (10:1) and then presented him to the people (vv. 17–27), and now Samuel led the nation in an act of dedication to the Lord. It was a time of spiritual revival and national rejoicing. Saul had passed his first test, but it wouldn't be long before he would fail in a much simpler test and lose his kingdom. Andrew Bonar used to say: "We must be as watchful after the victory as before the battle." Saul won his first battle, but he would lose the victory.

**Question:** Samuel knew that the nation would never succeed if the people didn't put the Lord first. What makes it hard – for Christian -- to put the Lord first?

## **Reviewing and Rebuking**

### **Read 1 Samuel 12 -- 13**

Saul and the people rejoiced greatly over the deliverance of Jabesh Gilead from the Ammonites, and Saul was careful to give the glory to the Lord (1 Sam. 11:13). Samuel saw the victory as a great opportunity to "renew the kingdom" (v. 14) and remind the people that Jehovah God was still their King. The fact that Saul had led the army in a great victory would tempt the Israelites to put their faith in their new king, and Samuel wanted them to know that their future success rested in trusting Jehovah alone. The king was only God's servant for the people, and both king and people had to obey God's covenant.

In his farewell message, Samuel defended his own ministry (vv. 1–5), reviewed God's mercies to Israel (vv. 6–11), and admonished the people to fear the Lord and obey the covenant (vv. 12–25). Samuel mentions the Lord at least thirty times in this message, because his heart's desire was to see the people return to the Lord and honor His covenant.

## **A LEADER'S INTEGRITY (12:1–5)**

In asking for a king, the people had rejected the kingship of Jehovah and the leadership of Samuel, the last of the judges (7:6, 15–17). It must have been painful for Samuel to conduct this last meeting

as their leader and transfer the civil authority to Saul. No doubt he had hoped that one of his sons would succeed him, but they weren't even considered (8:1–3).

The twelve tribes had been governed by judges for nearly 500 years, but times had changed and the people wanted a king. Before leaving office as **judge**, Samuel had to set the record straight and bear witness that his hands were clean and the people could find no fault in him.

To many of the people at that assembly, Samuel had “always been there.” Some of them had known him when he was a child and youth at Shiloh, learning to serve as a **priest**, and others remembered when he had begun to **proclaim the Word of the Lord** (3:20). He had walked before them almost all of his life, and now he stood before them “old and gray-headed” and challenged them to accuse him of using his authority to benefit himself. “Here I am” (12:3) makes us think of Samuel’s responses the night the Lord called him (3:4–6, 8, 16). In the East, it was expected that civil officials would use their offices to make money, but Samuel hadn’t taken that route. He obeyed the law of Moses and kept his hands clean (Ex. 20:17; 22:1–4, 9; 23:8; Lev. 19:13; Deut. 16:19; 24:14).

With such a godly example before them, we wonder why his sons took bribes. Like Jesus, Samuel stood before the people and asked, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46 NKJV). The people heard what Samuel said and bore witness that he had spoken the truth.

Samuel was a man of integrity; Saul would turn out to be a man of hypocrisy and duplicity.

When the assembly gave their vote of confidence to Samuel the **prophet**, called the Lord and the new king to bear witness to what they had said. If the people ever changed their mind, they would have to deal with God and His appointed king!

It’s a wonderful thing to get to the closing years of life and be able to review your life and ministry and not be afraid or ashamed. May we all be able to say to our Lord, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4 NKJV).

### **A NATION’S INIQUITY (12:6–25)**

Having affirmed Samuel’s credibility, the people now had to accept his analysis of the situation. He reviewed Israel’s history from Moses to his own day and emphasized what the Lord in His grace had done for them.

### **Thank the Lord (vv. 6–11).**

It was God, not the people, who appointed Moses and Aaron (v. 6) and who enabled them to do the mighty works they did for the people of Israel. Samuel wasn’t afraid to point out Israel’s sins and then challenge them to devote themselves to the Lord and to His covenant.

It’s often been said that the one thing we learn from history is that we don’t learn from history, and Samuel didn’t want his people to make that mistake.

But this was more than a lecture on history; it was also a court trial.

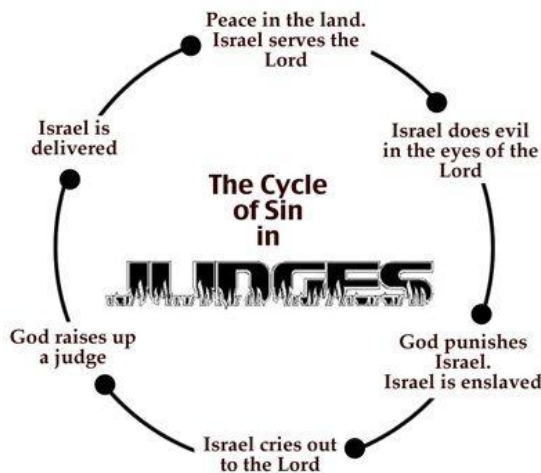
Samuel’s words in verse 7 have a judicial flavor: “Stand still” carries the idea of “Stand up, court is in session!” and “reason” means “to decide a case of litigation.” Samuel was going to prove to the people that the Lord had been righteous and faithful in all His dealings with Israel, but that the Jews had been faithless and disobedient.

The Lord had covenanted with no other nation on earth except Israel, and Israel’s obedience to that covenant made possible their enjoyment of God’s promised blessings. These blessings included

living in the Promised Land, being protected from their enemies, and having fruitful fields, flocks and herds, and families. If they failed to obey, the Lord would discipline them and take away their blessings. (See Deut. 28–30 and Lev. 26.) **Every Jew knew this, but not every Jew really understood it.**

Israel in Egypt cried out to the Lord for help, and He sent them Moses and Aaron (1 Sam. 12:8). God delivered His people and took them to Canaan and gave them victory over the inhabitants of the land. But once they were in the land, they compromised their faith and joined in worshiping the false gods of their neighbors; so God had to discipline them (vv. 9–11).

Now we are in the Book of Judges with its seven cycles of disobedience, discipline, and deliverance (Judg. 2:10–23).



Samuel’s point is that God always provided a leader when one was needed, and the nation wouldn’t have needed a judge if the people had been faithful to God.

In 1 Samuel 12:11, Jerubbaal (“let Baal contend [for himself]”) is Gideon, and Bedan is probably Barak. Samuel included himself, for he was the last of the judges (7:15).

**Fear the Lord (1 Sam. 12:12–19).**

**Question:** How should Israel have responded to this kind of national history?

**Answer:** They should have expressed gratitude to the Lord and trusted Him for His continued care. They should have confessed their sin of unbelief and trusted Him alone.

But what did they do? No sooner did the Ammonites attack than the Jews asked for a king and exchanged the rule of the Lord their King for the leadership of a mere man! God gave them what they asked for, but Israel lost something in the transaction.

**However, all was not lost.** God is never taken by surprise and He would not desert His people for His name’s sake. If the people would fear the Lord and follow Him, He would continue to care for them and use their king to direct and protect them.

Then Samuel demonstrated the awesome power of the Lord by “praying up a storm” during the dry season of wheat harvest (mid-May to mid-June). This miracle reminds us of the signs Moses and Aaron did in Egypt.

Samuel was proving to the people that God could do anything for them if they trusted Him and obeyed, but that a mere king was helpless apart from the Lord. When the Jews begged Samuel for deliverance, they sounded like Pharaoh confessing his sin and begging Moses for relief (Ex, 8:8; 9:27–28; 10:16–17), and their repentance was probably just as insincere.

**Obey the Lord (1 Sam. 12:20–25).** Samuel moved from “Fear” to “Fear not” as he encouraged the people to accept the situation their unbelief created and make the most of it.

How many times in our own lives do we get what we asked for and then wish we didn’t have it!

The Lord would not reject or forsake His people because of His holy covenant and His great faithfulness. God's purpose was to use Israel to bring glory to His name, and He would fulfill that purpose.

The Jewish people knew the terms of the covenant: if they obeyed, the Lord would bless them; if they disobeyed, He would chasten them. Either way, He would be faithful to His Word; the major issue was whether Israel would be faithful. They had made a mistake, but God would help them if they feared and obeyed Him.

Samuel made it clear that, no matter what they decided, he would obey the Lord. Part of his obedience would be faithfully praying for the people and teaching them the Word of God. The Word of God and prayer always go together (Acts 6:4; John 15:7; Eph. 6:17–18). Samuel's heart was broken, but as a faithful servant of the Lord, he interceded for the people and sought to lead them in the right way.

For God's people not to pray is to sin against the Lord, yet if there's one thing lacking in our churches today, it is prayer, particularly prayer for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–4).

When we consider the great things God has done for us, how could we do other than fear Him, thank Him, and serve Him in truth all the days of our lives? God's covenant with His people Israel was still in force: if they obeyed, He would bless; if they disobeyed, He would chasten. "Yet if you persist in doing evil," warned Samuel, "both you and your king will be swept away" (1 Sam. 12:25). Samuel may have been referring especially to the warning given by Moses in Deut. 28:36, *written into the covenant centuries before Israel had a king*: "The Lord will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers" (NIV). Unfortunately, Israel did disobey the terms of the covenant and God had to send them in exile to Babylon.

From time to time, churches and other Christian ministries face new situations and decide they must make organizational changes. Each ministry needs a Samuel to remind them of the spiritual principles that never change: the character of God, the Word of God, the necessity of faith, and the importance of obedience.

Methods are many, principles are few;

Methods always change, principles never do.

As the old Youth for Christ slogan expressed it, "Geared to the times but anchored to the Rock." Some changes are inevitable and necessary, but they need not destroy the work of God.