

**1 Samuel 11** Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead, and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you.”<sup>2</sup> But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, “On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.”<sup>3</sup> The elders of Jabesh said to him, “Give us seven days’ respite that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you.”<sup>4</sup> When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people, and all the people wept aloud.

<sup>5</sup> Now, behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen. And Saul said, “What is wrong with the people, that they are weeping?” So they told him the news of the men of Jabesh.<sup>6</sup> And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled.<sup>7</sup> He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, “Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!” Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man.<sup>8</sup> When he mustered them at Bezek, the people of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand.<sup>9</sup> And they said to the messengers who had come, “Thus shall you say to the men of Jabesh-gilead: ‘Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have salvation.’” When the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, they were glad.

**NB** See p4 for the rest of the chapter

What is it about superhero films that makes them such a draw? Humanity, in its nature, is drawn to the concept of deliverance. Everyone knows that there are problems in this world, and we all wonder whether there is a way out of them. Superhero films offer us this possibility in two ways. They give us a moment of deliverance in escapism as we sit and watch the story, and as that story unfolds, we see the deliverance that comes.

We are transported to a world where deliverance happens, not just through the powers of the superhero but also through a philosophical message underpinning the movie, such as, for example, if we all work together, we can overcome the evil with which we are faced.

Superhero movies target this significant desire of the human condition, but the reality is that when we leave these movies, this form of deliverance falls significantly short. Superheroes are not real obviously but also none of the possible ways of deliverance they propose will actually work! The problems in this world are too complex and too pervasive.

- 1) Where can true deliverance be found?** Of course, the only true deliverance can be found in Jesus, but what makes the deliverance offered through Christ different from all the others suggested by the world around us? This passage in 1 Samuel, as it speaks of what deliverance looked like for Israel thousands of years ago, ultimately points to what deliverance through Jesus looks like for us today.

We will see their problem, their saviour and their response and in turn we will see ours.

- 2) A pervasive problem (vv1-3 above).** Jabesh-Gilead was under siege, and the proposed treaty would lead to a gruesome consequence, ensuring a forced submission and fear in the community. It would bring disgrace to all Israel, which was Nahash’s mission. He wanted to humiliate Israel, and the gouging out of eyes would leave every town wondering if it would be their turn next. Nahash was truly the bad guy in this situation!

However, this problem was only the surface problem for Israel. It was not the real problem.

### Israel was broken

From **Judges 19** to the end of the book (please read in your Bible), we find the constant refrain ‘**In those days Israel had no King**’. In their hearts, they had already rejected God as their King. Sin was rife in Israel and the people all did whatever they saw fit.

- The men of Gibeah of Benjamin (where Saul is from) attempted to rape a Levite – a priest of God
- Having failed, instead they rape, abuse and murder the Levite’s concubine, leaving her dead on the floor

- The Levite responded by cutting her up and sending one part of her to each of the tribes of Israel
- Without instruction from God, Israel then declared war on one of their own tribes, Benjamin, in an attempt to purge the evil.
- They won the war and set fire to all the towns of Benjamin.
- Without instruction from God, Israel swore an oath that their daughters would not marry Benjaminites, an oath which put them in danger of losing one of their tribes out of anger.
- Without instruction from God, they swore another oath that anyone who failed to join with them in battle would be put to death.
- They then made some loopholes in their oaths, so that Benjamin could survive, but this led to more killing, and the abduction of 200 virgin girls so that Benjamin would survive. This happened in Jabesh-Gilead, the location of this chapter in 1 Samuel.
- The Benjaminites then abducted some girls from Shiloh because Jabesh did not have enough.

This was evil upon evil. Israel was a complete mess. Jabesh-Gilead was an easy target. The tribe of Benjamin was trying to apply a plaster to a gaping wound, and Gibeah (where Saul was from) was now equated with Sodom and Gomorrah.

This was a complicated situation, apparently unfixable. On a day-to-day level, there were broken families and relationships rife with resentment. All Israel was doing as they saw fit. They encountered issues and made more problems by trying to fix everything themselves. Yet these were not the real problems.

**The real issue was that they had rejected God as their King.**

God was showing them that they were lost without him. They were sinful and depraved.

- That is our problem too. It is a description our hearts, when we are left to our own devices.

We all face issues and problems on a daily basis. Some can seem impossible to deal with. We need to understand that **the root cause is sin**. We are tempted to treat the symptoms, thinking that perhaps a little more money would help or perhaps that someone else should behave differently to sort a problem out. We underplay the real problem.

- We don't recognise that our sin is something worse than any surface issues that we might face.
- When we encounter problems, we need to see whatever is happening to us in the context of sin.

Only then will we realise that we need our true deliverer, which is what happens with Israel.

**3) A Super Saviour**

Saul had been crowned as the first King of Israel and his primary duty was to lead his people back to God. When he heard what was going on, he was immediately equipped by God, in a 'superhero' moment. (**v6** above). This equipping of Saul by God harks back to God's earlier actions in the book of Judges:

- God equipped Saul as he had previously equipped Samson
- Bezek (**v8**) was the place of the first victory in the period of Judges
- Saul was led by the Spirit to divide the army into three squads, reflecting Gideon and his division of the armies
- Saul is called Saviour multiple times, connecting him to Othniel and Ehud

This is an epic story, but it is not a superhero story. Saul was a real person, empowered by a real God so the context is important. Saul was a Benjaminite from Gibeah, a place of darkness and sinfulness – the stain of Israel.

Earlier, some had wondered "How can this man save us?" (**1 Sam 10:27**). **The answer is by the Spirit of God**. God, by his authority was taking someone who was just a shy, hesitant farmer and making him a super Judge.

**That is what our God can do. That is what our God does.**

In God's power, Saul did more than just deal with the surface issue (**v7** above). He sent pieces of his oxen to all the tribes of Israel, just as the Levite had done with his concubine. In so doing, he called the nation to unite and fight for Jabesh-Gilead and for Israel's honour.

**Saul, emboldened by the Spirit, united the nation in a reverent fear of the Lord.**

- 4) Out of darkness and division comes unity and light.** It is the Lord, through his Spirit, who is dealing not only with the surface problem but also with the underlying issues. Through his chosen King, Saul, whom he has exalted ( **1 Samuel 2:7** see p4), God is uniting his people again under his headship.

When we think about our problems, we need to first see them in the context of sin, and be humbled by our part in that. Then we need to give them over to our King Jesus, who, raised by the Father, has delivered us from the power of sin.

- Our problems will not stop in an instant, and may not stop at all, but we can rest in the knowledge that these problems are in his control, not ours, and there is a reason for them.

It might be that they are exposing an area of sin in our life that we need to deal with. When you think about a recent problem in your life, did you see God at work in you through it? You might not have seen him at work at the time, but perhaps only when you look back now, though it may not ever be apparent to you in this life how God has used a particular joy or sorrow to draw you close to himself.

**All the time, he is moulding us more into his likeness, transforming us from the inside out.**

**That is what our God does.**

- 5) A required response (v14 see p4).** We need to respond to his work. When we contemplate the immeasurable reality of what Jesus has done **for** us and is now doing **in** us in our every day situations, there is a required response that will stay with us for the rest of our life.

Samuel invited Israel to Gilgal to renew the Kingdom. This was not Saul's kingdom, but God's kingdom, with his established King who draws his people to their God. This was not a random choice. It was at Gilgal where Israel renewed their relationship as God's people after entering the Promised Land. Renewal of the kingdom required Israel to pledge allegiance to their God, to repent of their sin and, through the peace offering, to be a people at peace, resting and celebrating their God.

We are called every day to the same response. Over and over again, we try to fix things ourselves instead of relying on God and giving him control. We need to

- acknowledge our utter helplessness in the face of our sin and accept that we have been sinful in the way we handle the problems in our life
- repent and turn everything we are and do over to our King, pledging allegiance to him and laying our all at his feet.

Then we can draw near to him again, and, like the Israelites here, praise his name in a great celebration (**v15** see p4). You may be facing emotional, physical, or mental health problems at the moment. Perhaps there is a problem at school or work or you are concerned about issues in our society. You might just be wondering how you are going to manage all you need to do in the coming week.

**Take time to bring your problem to the feet of King Jesus, who loves it when we turn to him. He is not begrudging.**

**No problem is too small, too big or too complex for him to work out in a way that is beyond anything you can imagine.**

**1 Samuel 11 (cont)** <sup>10</sup> Therefore the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you." <sup>11</sup> And the next day Saul put the people in three companies. And they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

<sup>12</sup> Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death." <sup>13</sup> But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel."

<sup>14</sup> Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom." <sup>15</sup> So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

**1 Samuel 2:7** The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.