

**INTRO:** You ever watch someone make a bad decision and wish you could stop them, only to realize that they're going to do what they want against your best counsel? That's what it's like to read 1Sam 10:17-11:15, page 232 in the pew bible.

**1S 10:17-19.** *“Now Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah. And he said to the people of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.’ But today you have rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses, and you have said to him, ‘Set a king over us.’ Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your clans.”*”

This is an ominous call to worship. God rehearses their **covenant history** together. He has been faithful to his role as the great saving king, the Suzerain. He brought them out, delivered them from Egypt and everyone else. “I did all this for you,” he says. And what thanks does he get? “Today you have rejected your God.” That is both Samuel’s and God’s interpretation of what Israel is doing here. Samuel wants them to realize what they’re doing here by installing a king. This is neither positive nor neutral. It is nothing less than an attempt to abandon the Sinai covenant with God altogether. God had given them zero reason for discontent and every reason to praise and thank him for his faithfulness and power on their behalf. He had made them his special people, privileged to represent Him and rely on Him.

But they don’t want to be different from the nations. They said point blank in chapter 8 that they want a king like the nations, who will make them just like all the other nations (1S 8:5, 20). God hears that as a rejection of the exact blessing he gave them in the Sinai covenant of Ex 19:6. They don’t want to be God’s treasured possession among all peoples. They don’t want to be to him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6). They don’t want God to differentiate them from the world. They want God to assimilate them back into the world. Maybe they don’t realize the full implications; but God’s interprets it that way, and God’s omniscience informs His hermeneutic of the human heart. So here, in 1S 10:17, today is the day. This is the congregational meeting where that request is on the agenda. God’s going to give them what they want, and he leaves them in no doubt that what they want is neither right nor wise, much less grateful. But they’re gonna own it before him. “Come here, all of you” God says to them through Samuel. If you’re gonna do the wrong thing, I’m at least going to make you do it the right way.

**1S 10:20-24.** *“Then Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its clans, and the clan of the Matrites was taken by lot; and Saul the son of Kish was taken by lot. But when they sought him, he could not be found. So they inquired again of the Lord, ‘Is there a man still to come?’ and the Lord said, ‘Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage.’ Then they ran and took him from there. And when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. And Samuel said to all the people, ‘Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people.’ And all the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’”*

The right way to do this, is to let God do it for them. God actually leads this meeting and chooses for them the person who will serve as the wrong kind of king. Casting lots will clarify that the new king will be God’s choice, even if God disapproves of the people’s desire for him. So Samuel casts lots. And the lot narrows it down from tribe, to clan, to family, to individual. It’s Kish’s son, Saul. But as the lot narrows it down, people may be remembering their own national history, because up til now, the only other time in Israel’s history that an individual has to be discovered by lot, is Achan in Josh 7, and the reason was

judgment for theft.<sup>1</sup> But at least Achan attended the members' meeting. Here, they call Saul's name; but "*when they sought him, he could not be found.*" Now isn't that something. What was the last thing in Saul's story that couldn't be found? Donkeys (9:3-5).<sup>2</sup> Saul is like a donkey—wandering, stubborn, and lost. So they ask God again, "Who are we missing? Anybody else running late to the meeting?" That question will be asked of Jesse when Samuel goes to anoint the next king. You got any other sons? And the only one left will be the youngest who's out faithfully shepherding the sheep (16:11). But what's Saul doing here? The Lord himself has to tell the congregation, "*Behold—check this out, behold your king, your royal highness—he has hidden himself among the baggage.*" I don't know if the Lord ever acts like he's rolling his eyes at his people, but that "behold" feels loaded with sarcasm. Go check baggage claim—he's riding the conveyor belt down there on carousel 6 hoping no one finds him.

Of course, this isn't the first time a royal man has hidden himself. Adam and Eve had hidden themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."<sup>3</sup> And as God had to go looking for Adam after he went AWOL, so here, God has to run down Saul...among the suitcases. The story of Saul's ascension to the throne is told as another fall narrative. So, why is Saul hiding? What's he hiding from? Responsibility. If Saul wants to be king, he has a funny way of showing it.<sup>4</sup> And this hiding interprets his silence to his uncle in v.16. Saul has neither the character nor the courage of a king. David will come out of the woodwork, on his own, to confront Goliath. Saul has to be hauled out from behind the luggage.

But he's tall! And his height makes his hiding even more awkward. I mean, if Saul were like, 5'2, it'd look brilliant. He'd be like a grease man on a smash and grab job. But Saul is head and shoulders above everybody else, so picturing him hiding among handbags is kind of comical—knees up to his chin.... But when he stands up? Nobody like him in all Israel. Cream of the crop. Here is the great man. And the congregation is unanimous. "*Long live the king!*" No secret ballot. No abstentions, reservations, objections, or even questions. Just a loud, unison, rhythmic chant. "All in."<sup>5</sup>

**1S 10:25-27** "*Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them on a book and laid it up before the Lord. Then Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his home. Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched. But some worthless fellows said, 'How can this man save us?' And they despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace.*" Samuel now announces how the king will relate to the people, maybe integrating that with Dt 17. He writes out the official copy and puts it either in the ark or at least in the sanctuary for safe keeping. The meeting ends, and everybody goes home...including Saul himself. But Samuel had told Saul to go wait for him seven days at Gilgal, not Gibeah. Why's Saul going home? It's hard to tell, but it looks like he heads home for the same reason he hides out. He doesn't want the job.

Even so, God moves in the hearts of some great men to follow Saul back to Gibeah to be either his muscle or his cabinet, or maybe both. Saul is God's man for the moment, and they know it. Meanwhile, there's division in the camp, a hairline fracture developing with some skeptics. While everyone was chanting

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<sup>1</sup> I'm indebted to David Firth for noting that the only other times the lot is cast to reveal a person, it's for Achan's theft in Josh 7 and Jonathan's breach of Saul's vow in 1S 14 (AOC 130, 131). In this same association of casting lots with Achan, Bergen sees confirmation that "Saul's selection was a divine judgment against Israel" (NAC, 132).

<sup>2</sup> Glad to see this observation confirmed by Davis (FOTB 105, 108) and Firth (AOTC 132). Baldwin, Bergen, Brueggemann, and Tsumura overlook it.

<sup>3</sup> It's the same verb, *hava*, in Gen 3:8 (hitp), 10 (also in *nifil* as 1S 10:22). Hiding here may also be a conquest reversal of the 5 hiding kings in Josh 10:16-17. Bergen aptly says "Saul's vacancy at his own coronation suitably foreshadows a reign that would vacate responsibilities associated with the exercise of godly rule" (NAC, 132).

<sup>4</sup> So also Baldwin TOTC 101 "He did not want to be king." Tsumura says "it apparently was not because he was a shy and reserved person" but "probably for fear of accepting a new and responsible position in the crucial phase of the covenant people's history (NICOT 298). Brueggemann notes "Saul clearly is not an eager candidate for the throne" since "he had to be sought out" (INT 79).

<sup>5</sup> They're as all in with Saul as they were when the said in Exod 24 "All that the Lord has commanded we will do."

long live the king, a few were looking at each other like, “This guy? he tried to ditch behind a duffel bag!” But the narrator sides against them because the story calls them “*worthless fellows*.” Saul’s critics are not treated like heroes or prophets here. In fact, Saul appears to have the moral high ground. Saul has the valiant men. The worthless guys snub him, and Saul keeps his cool. All this, even while we know that Israel is rejecting God in favor of Saul. So it’s hard to make heads or tails of this. Saul represents Israel’s rejection of God, yet Saul’s supporters seems like the good guys, and Saul’s skeptics are cast as the bad guys. There’s a ton of tension here. Who’s on the right side of history? Isn’t Saul bad? Yet it is all consistent with God’s promise that Saul would be the one to save Israel...and Saul is about to go to work; but he takes some convincing. Meanwhile, chapter 11 will answer the skeptics question, “how can this man save us?” That’s a set-up for 1Sam 11. How can this man save us? Watch this...

**1S 11:1-4** “*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.’ 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.’ 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.’ When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people, and all the people wept aloud.*” This is not how Israel’s conquest of Canaan was supposed to go. This is a conquest reversal. Instead of Israel dictating terms to the Ammonites, the Ammonites are dictating terms to Israelites, and the terms are not good—lose your eye or prepare to die. I don’t know about you, but I don’t like either one of those options. That’s barbaric, but also smart. Some of the better scholars notice that you can farm with one eye easier than you can fight.<sup>6</sup> You can’t aim without your dominant eye. Yet Nahash’s stated reason is to bring disgrace on Israel. He wants to humiliate them. So the men of Jabesh say, give us week to pray about it, and if there is no one to save us—chapter 10:27 how can this man save us; 9:16 he will save my people—then we’ll surrender. Here again, it’s like a movie. The last scene faded to black with “how can this man save us?” Now we hear “If there’s no one to save us, you can have one eyeball from each of us.” Those men from Jabesh send messengers to Gibeah, where Saul is living, and when the townsfolk hear the news, they all start crying together. Then in the very next verse.

**1S 11:5-7.** “*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. And the **Spirit of God rushed upon Saul** when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. 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.* Saul’s just been appointed king, but he’s back to farming. What’s up with that? Is he still hiding from his new role?<sup>7</sup> You start to wonder whether Saul would ever do anything good if the Spirit of God didn’t rush on him. He’s kinda like Samson that way. To his credit, Saul gets angry here because others are mistreated, not because people are slighting him personally. He’s not angry at the worthless men who questioned his leadership. He’s angry at how Israel is getting threatened by enemies. So it’s a good start. But the only reason he gets this angry about this issue is the Spirit of God rushed upon him. And what he does is a little barbaric. He cuts up his own oxen—basically his way of making a living—and he sends the limbs through all the tribes

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<sup>6</sup> “The removal of the most prized eye...would preserve the Israelites’ capacity to perform agricultural tasks (and thus generate taxable revenue), yet it would drastically reduce their ability to wage war by taking away their depth perception and reducing their field of vision” (R.D. Bergen, NAC 135); so also D. Firth. Tsumura sharpens the point, “Instead of ‘cutting’ a treaty with sacrificial animals, he would ‘cut’ it with their eyes” (NICOT, 305).

<sup>7</sup> Firth asks the same question, “Is his return to farming indicating that he is still not taking on his assigned role? (AOTC, 137). Bergen wonders if “Saul’s farming activity may be intended as a further hint of the biblical writer’s negative evaluation of Sul. Previously Saul had been portrayed as an incompetent shepherd...; now he is portrayed as a farmer, a link that connects him with Cain (Gen 4:2)” (NAC, 136 n.39).

of Israel with a little note attached that says if you don't follow me and Samuel into war against the Ammonites, I'm coming for your oxen...and maybe for you.<sup>8</sup> It's kind of leadership by threat. But the result is good, "*the dread of the Lord fell upon the people and they came out as one man.*" Fear of the Lord, not fear of Saul; and solidarity against Israel's enemies. So maybe Saul goes a little overboard with the oxen bit, but it gets the job done, so what's not to like?

Well, actually, there is something not to like about this. This is exactly what the Levite did with his concubine's corpse in Judges 19:29 after the Benjaminite men of Gibeah assaulted her and left her for dead. And remember, Saul himself is a Benjaminite from Gibeah. Saul's life is starting to track a little too close for comfort with Gibeah as New Gomorrah. These are dark associations for Saul to be evoking.<sup>9</sup>

**1S 11:8-11.** *When he mustered them at Bezek, the people of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. 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. 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.' And the next day Saul put the people into 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."* So remember the progression. "How can this man save us? ...If there is no one to save us....You shall have salvation." Saul comes through in the clutch. He gathers the army near the city of Jabesh-Gilead. He organizes a pre-dawn attack on the Ammonites by dividing his forces, probably so they can attack from three sides, and with the element of surprise, it's all over by lunch, just like Saul promised, against the doubts of the scoundrels...but also just as God had always done for Israel without a king. God had always saved them. Remember 10:18? *I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.*" God did that. God never needed to use an Israelite king to save Israel before. He just saved Israel from the Philistines in chapter 7 without any human help at all.<sup>10</sup> Does he really need Saul now? Does Israel really need Saul, when they already have God?

**1S 11:12-15.** *"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.' But Saul said, 'Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel.' Then Samuel said to the people, 'Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom.' 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."* Saul's victory confirms the popular sentiment in favor of his kingship, so much so that a movement rises to execute his critics. "See? We were right to want a king...and the haters were wrong. Where'd they slink off to? Time for mob justice." Yet Saul is gracious again. Nobody's going to the gallows today. Saul is even humble. He says "*today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel.*" Saul doesn't take credit to himself. He credits God. This is a surprisingly good start to an episode that God says is Israel rejecting Him as their king. So everybody heads to Gilgal for the coronation ceremony. They

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<sup>8</sup> "Since all Israelites were obliged to come and help any Israelite in time of military need, *whoever is not coming out* will be cursed. As R.P Gordon notes, 'the threat was directed not so much at the individual's property as at the individual himself.'...The expression *to his oxen* in fact means 'even to himself!'" (Tsumura, NICOT 308, 309).

<sup>9</sup> Baldwin goes so far as to say that "Saul consciously imitated" the Levite's dismemberment method from Judges 19 (TOTC, 104).

<sup>10</sup> "The selection of Mizpah [for Saul's inauguration] is significant since it was during the assembly at Mizpah in ch.7 that Yahweh ensured the Philistines were decisively defeated, indicating that a king was not strictly needed...The negative connotations apparent from Mizpah's choice as the site for this gathering become explicit in Samuel's speech in vv.18-19a....Their oppressors were peoples with kings, the model Israel was seeking to apply for itself. Hence Samuel concludes that the act of attending the assembly to appoint their own king shows the people are again rejecting Yahweh, since he is always their savior. The critical remarks directed at the elders in ch.8 are now directed to the people as a whole as they attend this gathering..." (Firth, AOTC, 131).

make peace offerings, they all rejoice greatly. Everyone's patting each other on the back. And the kingdom prospered, there was peace in Israel, everyone lived happily ever after under their own vine and their own fig tree. Roll credits.... But in the back of our minds, we're thinking, something's not right. We're waiting for the other shoe to drop. It's a win, we see the smiles; but they're still rejecting God.

**POINT: God overrules humanity's rejection of Him to save His chosen people by His chosen Christ.**

In our passage, God overruled Israel's rejection of Him in order to save them by the king of his choosing, Saul. If they were going to insist on having a bad kind of king, then God would pick which one it would be. And then God uses that king, bad as he ends up being, to save Israel from her enemies. Friend look at how patient God is. Look how wise a ruler, how sovereign a king, how kind and tender a father He is to Israel. But Israel's rejection of God is a miniature model of humanity's rejection of God. This is what we all do, both as individuals and together as a race. We did it in Adam, and we do it still today. We think we need and want someone else or something else to rule and save us, to protect and defend us—a false hope, our own sin, the spirit of the age, a relationship with another person.... What's more, we think we should be able to serve our own chosen king without God taking it as a rejecting Him. Yet God does not think about it like that. When we trust something or someone else to save us more than we trust God, we are violating the first commandment—no other gods before me. God says that our love for the spirit of the world, the appetites of my heart, the pleasures of sin—those all represent a rejection of Him. Those sins and misplaced loyalties are not just innocent hobbies. They are a dagger to God's heart. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot serve God and man, God and money, God and self. Yet God chooses to save His people anyway, because He is faithful, merciful, patient, and compassionate. He saved them even through a Saul. Then he provided them a David, and eventually He sent great David's greater son, Jesus.

Now before we get too far, we should address a potential objection that might come up if you're a non-Christian listening to this, otherwise you might get stuck on this, and we don't want you to get stuck.

**Common grace for the world is coming to an end (11:11).** What you witnessed here in chapter 11 is a conquest. God went to war, through Saul, against a whole people group, and defeated them. This is the kind of text that many people point to and say, "How could God possibly be good, and yet do something so obviously bad? How can God just wipe people out like that? That's not good. I don't want to worship a God who did that. I wouldn't do that if I were God, and if I know not to do that, and God does do that, then I'm a better person than God is! Therefore, I reject the God of the Bible." Let's look at that. How are we supposed to understand this kind of war in the OT? What do we do with this?

These conquest narratives in the OT books—Joshua, Judges, Samuel—are temporary suspensions of God's common grace to people in the past. Here's what that means. These judgments assume that God created all people everywhere, and so all people are accountable to His law. And they show that God retains the right to judge people, even when they say they don't believe in Him. That's in fact why He judges them, precisely because they reject Him as Creator and King. All humanity is living on borrowed time—God's time—because we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It's not just Israel that has rejected God. We've all rejected God's love and rebelled against his law. We don't like the idea that we did not create or invent ourselves, because if God created us, then we are accountable to Him. In fact, these narratives show us exactly the truth we're trying to avoid—that God is not the one who owes us an account of Himself; we owe Him an account of ourselves. And here, in 1Sam 11, he called the Ammonites to account. His time for them to repent of rejecting Him ran out; so His judgment fell.

But these OT histories don't just describe the past. They warn us about the future, that one day, God's common grace that we all enjoy from His hand—time, creation, family, friends, food, laughter, life—common grace will come to an end. And if you do not have God's special grace in His special Savior Christ Jesus, you will have no grace at all. You will have judgment. Now that is hard reality. But that is also why God warns you against it ahead of time. He didn't have to warn you. God is not a pushover. He is a just and righteous judge. And he is willing to save you from the judgment you deserve for your sins and for your rejection of Him. But you must repent. That is the only reason the world keeps turning, because God keeps waiting for more sinners to repent. None of these OT conquest accounts justify any religious violence today. They simply warn that one day, God Himself will end this time of common grace that we all enjoy, to judge all sinners, and he will only save those who trust in the blood and righteousness of his chosen king, Christ Jesus, as the only One God has provided to take God's judgment in their place, for their sins, and to rise again to share his eternal life with them and to reconcile them to God. If you want to have that new life, that new relationship with God in Christ, we'd love to talk and pray with you about that. And if you want to know more about why God reveals these hard things in the Bible, read G.K. Beale's little booklet, *The Morality of God in the O.T.*

**We cannot serve the church's future by forgetting God's saving history with us (10:17-19).** When God called Israel together to himself at Mizpah in chapter 10, he started by rehearsing his own saving history with them from Egypt onward. I was so encouraged when one of you reminded me this week of a sweet quote from John Flavel. "There is not such a pleasant history for you to read in all the world as the history of your own lives, if you would sit down and record from the beginning hitherto what God has been to you, and done for you; what evidences and out-breakings of his mercy, faithfulness, and love there have been in all the conditions you have passed through."<sup>11</sup> Oh Christian, look back on your own life. You have just as much reason as any other Christian to sing. "With mercy and with judgment my web of time he wove, and always dewes of sorrow were lustered with his love. I'll bless the hand that guided, I'll bless the heart that planned, where glory, glory dwelleth, in Immanuel's land."

This is also as true of church history and all human history as it is of 1&2 Samuel and of our own personal history in Christ. The history of the whole world is neither mostly nor merely the record of man's oppression, as in Marxist thought.<sup>12</sup> History is the record of God's sovereign faithfulness, mercy, and judgment, all coming to fruition in the death, resurrection, ascension, and return of Jesus Christ. And this is why Christians think history is to be recorded, remembered, and revisited; not revised, rejected, or removed. In fact, by the time we get to the end of the Bible in Rev 5, we discover that Jesus alone can unlock the scroll of God's purposes for human history. To forget our past is to forfeit our future. And so we must keep on preaching Christ. Dear saints, we must never tire of hearing of our Good King Jesus. And so we must preach Jesus, even from texts like 1Sam 10.

**Jesus doesn't hide God's saving goodness from us—He reveals and embodies it (Ps 40:7-10).** Saul hid himself and God's plan from God's people. Not Jesus. Jesus reveals Himself as God's saving plan for the world. "*Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.*" But Jesus reveals himself most clearly, not in his teaching

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<sup>11</sup> John Flavel, *Mystery of Providence* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust [Puritan Paperback ed.]) p.118. Samuel Gottstein, member of GCBC, texted me this quote as a personal encouragement at 12:44 on Friday December 11, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).  
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or in his miracles, but in his death on the cross. **John 12:31** “*Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.” Jesus did not hide himself from the responsibility and suffering of the cross. He revealed Himself, as God’s salvation, on the cross. It was there that Jesus drew all men to himself. It was there that Jesus did battle royal with the enemies of sin, death, and hell. It was at the cross that Jesus proved himself King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It was there that He waged war against all that attacks our souls.

Nahash threatened to disgrace and shame God’s people by cutting out their right eyes, but Saul delivered God’s people from that threat and disgrace. Jesus went further. He didn’t just disarm our physical enemies. Jesus disarmed the rulers and authorities of sin and spiritual darkness and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in His death for our sins and in His resurrection for our justification (Col 2:15). The shame our sins had brought on us, Jesus turned back on their own heads by enduring the cross and despising its shame (Heb 12:2). As God covered the shame of Adam and Eve with the skins of sacrificed animals, He has now covered our shame over our sins with the blood of His Son Christ Jesus. The world still threatens to shame the church today.<sup>13</sup> It aims to discredit our witness, destroy our worldview, deny our message, and disparage our savior. But they did it to Jesus before they did it to us.

**Godly men should not hide from public responsibility; they should take it.** Samuel told Saul he’d be king, and that he should go to Gilgal and wait for further instructions. What does Saul do? He hides from his responsibility, doesn’t even show up to the members’ meeting (!!), and instead of going to Gilgal like Samuel said, he goes back to the family farm. Brother, don’t be a Saul. This church needs you to attend, serve, love, pray, be holy, make disciples, and give. Brother, your own habits and behaviors are setting an example for good or ill whether you like it or not. Make sure the example you’re setting is one you want everyone else to follow. Take responsibility. Don’t be afraid to be a public man. Serve and lead God’s people, don’t hide from that (10:22). Work and pray and live toward being qualified as a deacon or as an elder. If you’re a Christian man, why would you not aim for that honor? Make yourself available. Don’t hide behind the baggage when it comes time to serve or lead. At the same time...

**Churches should not be too eager to appoint men for leadership in the church.** Unqualified leaders can appear qualified at first. **1T 5:24** “*I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure...The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later.*” Saul appears good here at the beginning. He makes a good impression. He looks like the obvious pick—young, tall, handsome, rich, impressive, influential—he is just the sort of man that our churches today might like to put front and center. He even has mercy on his opponents. He will be a leader for the whole nation, not just those who voted for him. He knows how to rally the troops. He knows how to beat the enemy. He proves himself in battle. But ***Saul is a man whose sins appear later.*** Here at the outset, he plays his cards close to the vest—just close enough so that no one suspects anything inappropriate about him. But to one who knows God’s word, and the history of God’s people, there is reason to be concerned about Saul. Friends, if we want to be good judges of character, then we had better know our Bibles. When we do, we will realize that...

**Success does not imply blessing, and spiritual power does not imply God’s pleasure (11:12-15).** Saul achieved. He succeeded in saving God’s people by God’s Spirit. But this opening episode is indicative of the rest of his reign. It’s an outward success, and Saul will reign for 40 years. But in the end, God rejected

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<sup>13</sup> I owe this observation and application wholly to Dale Ralph Davis, FOTB 117.  
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not only Saul's successes, but Saul himself. Just because someone is successful doesn't mean they enjoy God's approval. Saul's whole biography is marked by success without blessing. Don't let that be you.

**God is so wise and powerful that he can work righteous salvation even through unqualified leaders (11:6-11).** Saul is the Lord's anointed; at the same time, Saul will prove to have "only the appearance of godliness, while denying its power" (2Tim 3:5). He is not the kind of person we should appoint. He is the kind of person we should avoid (2T 3:5c "Avoid such people"). And God uses him to save Israel from the Ammonites. God has been using bad people to do good things for millennia. Don't act surprised when he does it today.

## CONCLUSION

God's saving mercy is always contrary to our merit (11:11). Think about the way our passage reads. God's people reject God's rule by asking for a different kind of king that they know he disapproves; God gives them the kind of king they ask for; then God uses that king, unqualified as he is, to save his rebel people from their enemies. Israel did not deserve to be saved here. And neither do we, because **God overrules our rejection of Him to save His chosen people by His chosen Christ.** Christian, if he's done this for you, he can do it for others. This is a message worth sharing. What's stopping you?