

1 Samuel 11

Slaying the Serpent of Acedia

Introduction

People of God, in chapter 10 Saul was both privately and publicly confirmed as Israel's first king. And now, in chapter 11, Saul is ordained and installed for service. But this is not like any ordination service you've seen. Saul's ordination is a trial by combat.

Israel had demanded a king who would go before them and fight their battles. Thus, after Saul is confirmed, he needs to prove himself worthy to task. And what greater test could there be than to face a dragon?

The chapter opens: "*Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-Gilead.*" The name *Nahash* means "serpent"—the same word used for the Serpent in Genesis 3.

In Genesis 2, God charged Adam to protect the Garden, which itself implied the presence of a threat.

Adam was also commanded to not to eat from the *Kingly Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*. Access to this tree was a probationary restriction. Before Adam could ascend the throne, he first had to prove himself faithful in battle.

This is one reason why God sent the Serpent into the Garden to begin with – to test Adam, and to see if he would fulfill his commission and protect his bride.

Had he crushed the Serpent's head in obedience, he would have acquired the wisdom to reign and gained access to the Tree of Knowledge

Adam's trial had two parts: first, he needed to guard the Garden and his bride from the Serpent. Second, he needed to wait patiently and not seize the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge before he was ready. Sadly, Adam failed both tests in one devastating act of disobedience.

This twofold test reappears in Saul's story, but unfolds in two distinct events. The first test is in chapter 11: Saul's battle against the Serpent. And the second test comes in chapter 13, when Saul faces a trial, not of war, but of patience. Will he wait for Samuel to come and offer the sacrifice before engaging the Philistines, or will he, like Adam, reach out and take what is not yet his?

Saul's ordination begins in combat, but his kingship will be determined by whether he passes the test where Adam had failed.

Gouge Out Your Right Eye

Now Nahash the Serpent laid siege to Jabesh-Gilead. Siege warfare is a slow and merciless death—an army surrounds a city, cutting off supplies, waiting for starvation to do its work. Unless a city has a well or a river running through it,

siege warfare is almost always a death sentence. The people of Jabesh-Gilead knew this, and, rather than starve, they plead for mercy. They offer to make a treaty with Nahash.

In the ancient world, a *Suzerain-Vassal* treaty was a covenant between a great king (the suzerain) and a lesser nation (the vassal). The suzerain offered protection and military aid in exchange for the vassal's tribute, loyalty, and obedience.

But Nahash has no interest in a treaty of protection. He doesn't want their tribute and taxes. The Serpent seeks their total destruction. But he will make one concession. He will engage in a treaty with them if he can first gouge out every man's right eye, bringing disgrace to all Israel.

By blinding their right eye, Nahash ensures that Jabesh-Gilead will never be able to rise up and wage war against him. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus notes that Israelite shields typically covered the left eye, leaving only the right eye for vision.

Whether this is accurate or not, the loss of depth perception and peripheral vision still would cripple them in battle. The men of Jabesh-Gilead would be rendered useless in battle, incapable of resisting Nahash's rule.

Desperate, the elders of the city request seven days to find a deliverer. And, surprisingly, Nahash agrees.

Why would he do such a thing?

Like the original Serpent, Nahash is full of Pride. He does not believe they will find a champion, despite the fact the last time the Ammonites attacked Jabesh-Gilead was during the days of Jephthah in Judges 11, and Jephthah defeated them.

Jephthah did struggle to rally help and support from other tribes in Israel, since Jabesh-Gilead is on the east side of the Jordan River, away from the other tribes of Israel. Perhaps Nahash assumes history will repeat itself, They won't find the help they need. Plus, he is more confident in his forces.

Furthermore, allowing them seven days is a convenient bargain. Siege warfare can be costly and time-consuming. If he can force Jabesh-Gilead into submission in seven days—without losing men in battle—that's an easy victory.

So, in pride, the Serpent grants the people seven days to search for a deliverer.

His pride, however, will prove to be his downfall.

The messengers first arrive at Gibeah, because that is where Israel's new king resides. And it is precisely for this reason

that Israel had demanded a king: *to go out and fight their battles.*

As Saul returns from the fields, driving his oxen, he hears the people weeping. When he asks why, he is told of Nahash's threat upon his kin Jabesh-Gilead.

And in that moment, the Spirit of God rushes upon Saul, and his anger is kindled into righteous fury.

A deliverer has been found.

Saul, the Judge

Over the next 5 verses, Saul's actions are unmistakably linked to the era of the Judges. By portraying Saul as functioning in continuity with the Judges, God is reaffirming that Israel does not need a king like the nations.

Just as He had previously raised up judges to deliver Israel from their enemies, He is now doing the same through Saul. But also, by linking Saul directly to the Judges, we get a sense that Saul's story arc is going to end in the tragic downward spiral of the book of Judges.

The Spirit Rushes Upon Saul (v. 6)

The first reference to the judges comes in v. 6. When Saul hears of Nahash's threat against Jabesh-Gilead, "*the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and his anger was greatly kindled*" (1 Sam. 11:6). This language deliberately echoes the accounts of Israel's deliverers in the book of Judges:

The Spirit rushed upon Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson.

Saul, is cast in the mold of these Spirit-empowered saviors, reinforcing the idea that Israel's true Deliverer has always been God, not a human monarch.

Cutting Up the Oxen (v. 7)

In verse 7, Saul cuts up his yoke of oxen and sends the pieces throughout Israel as a summons to battle. This act mirrors the Levite who cut up his concubine in Judges 19, issuing a nationwide call to arms against Gibeah of Benjamin for its grievous sin (Judg. 19:29).

Here, however, the judgment is reversed. Saul himself is from Gibeah of Benjamin. His leadership now signals the redemption of his tribe and city. Gibeah once epitomized Israel's moral corruption, but now are being used to rally Israel against their enemies.

The Muster at Bezek (v. 8)

Saul assembles Israel at Bezek in v. 8, recalling Judah's initial conquest of Canaan Judges 1. In that battle, they fought against Adoni-Bezek—whose name means *Lord of Lightning*—a Satanic figure who had cruelly mutilated seventy kings, cutting off their thumbs and big toes, making them beg for scraps like dogs beneath his table.

Now, centuries later, Saul musters his army at Bezek against another Satanic foe—Nahash the Ammonite—who likewise seeks to disfigure his enemies. Saul's battle is part of the ongoing war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

The Deliverance of Jabesh-Gilead (v. 9)

Saul's rescue of Jabesh-Gilead reverses another a dark chapter in Israel's history. In Judges 21, this very city was destroyed for refusing to fight against Gibeah for its sins. 400 virgins were taken from them and given as wives to the remnant of Benjamin (Judg. 21:10-14).

Now, in 1 Samuel 11, Saul the Benjamite from Gibeah calls Israel together to rescue Jabesh-Gilead, redeeming its past disgrace and restoring its honor within the covenant community.

“Do What Is Right in Your Own Eyes” (v. 10)

In v. 10, Saul assures the men of Jabesh-Gilead that salvation is coming by noon the next day. Men from Jabesh deceive the Serpent Nahash, telling him: *“Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do what is right in your own eyes.”*

This phrase, *“do what is right in your own eyes”* unmistakably recalls the closing refrain of Judges: *“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”* (Judg. 21:25). The men of Jabesh-Gilead cleverly manipulate Nahash’s expectations, lulling the Ammonites into complacency. Thinking victory is assured, they let down their guard—precisely when they should have been most vigilant.

Dividing the Army into Three Companies (v. 11)

In v. 11 we are told of the size of Saul’s army – 330,000 men – it is the largest army yet assembled in Israel’s history, second only to Israel’s war against Benjamin in Judges 20. Notably, it is ten times the size of Gideon’s initial army of 30,000, which God reduced to 300. (Judg. 7:3).

Also like Gideon before him, Saul divides his army into three companies (Judg. 7:16). This same strategy was also

employed by Abimelech in his assault on Shechem in Judg. 9.

The Morning Watch (v. 11)

And in the last connection to the Judges, Saul's forces strike during the *morning watch*—between 2 and 6 AM—when the Ammonites are least prepared. This timing evokes at least two past battles:

The first is Abimelech's surprise attack on Shechem which happened at daybreak (Judg. 9:33). The morning watch is called that because it goes until sunrise. Saul's army began their attack during this time and fought all through the morning until noon.

But there is another explicit reference to the "Morning Watch" and it is the battle of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:

*"And in the **morning watch** the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw them into a panic... And the Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.'" (Ex. 14:24-25).*

This parallel drives home the central message of Israel's whole history to this point: *Israel does not need a king*. The Lord has always been their warrior. He fought for them

against Pharaoh, against the Canaanites, against the Philistines, and now against Nahash the Ammonite.

Total Victory Over the Serpent

The victory over Nahash is absolute: *“those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together”* (1 Sam. 11:11).

The Kingdom Renewed

Though the battle was won, the heat of battle still burned in the hearts of the people. They demanded that Samuel bring forth the worthless sons of Belial—those who had scoffed at Saul at the end of chapter 10, saying, “Shall Saul reign over us?” “Bring them here that we may put them to death”, the cried.

But Saul interposed. Rather than dwelling on the evil unbelief in these men’s hearts, he chose instead to magnify the goodness of God — which is a most effective remedy against wicked men in every age. Saul declared, *“Not a man shall die this day, for today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel.”*

Then Samuel said, *“Come, let us go to Gilgal to renew the kingdom.”*

Gilgal was one of Israel's founding sites in the land of Canaan.

When Israel first entered the Promised Land under Joshua, they assembled at Gilgal (Joshua 4:19-24). Those had not been circumcised in the wilderness were then circumcised, as a sign of God's covenant promise to Abraham to give them the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey.

At Gilgal they also celebrated the Passover for the first time in Canaan, again reminding them of their deliverance from Egypt.

Thus, the renewing the kingdom at Gilgal was a spiritual and national reset. It was Israel's rebirth as His covenant people. Samuel knew that without a firm grasp of their covenantal history and identity, their faithfulness would falter.

So they gathered at Gilgal, and there they renewed the kingdom with a covenantal renewal ceremony which of course included peace offerings—a sacrificial meal signifying that God and man were reconciled.

Christ, the Serpent Slayer

One of the clearest foreshadowing's of Christ's work in this story appears when the men of Jabesh-Gilead deceived Nahash, saying, *"Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us what is right in your own eyes."* Nahash, blinded by pride, believed his victory was inevitable.

This same prideful blindness characterized Satan's plot against Christ. Believing he had orchestrated Jesus' downfall, Satan moved the rulers of this world to betray, condemn, and crucify the Son of God. But as Nahash unknowingly sealed his own defeat, so too did Satan. In the very act he thought secured his triumph, he ensured his ruin (1 Cor. 2:8). *"If the rulers of this age had understood God's wisdom, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."*

The words of the men of Jabesh-Gilead—*"Do to us whatever seems good in your eyes"*—echo the refrain in Judges. This phrase, tied to moral anarchy and idolatry, reveals the Serpent's strategy of deceiving men into destruction under the guise of personal autonomy. It was this deception that ensnared Eve in the Garden. The forbidden fruit was "good in her eyes" (Gen. 3:6).

Christ, the Second Adam, turned the tables on the Serpent. Rather than resisting Satan's scheme, He allowed it to unfold—luring the enemy into his own downfall. Just as the devil deceived Eve through what "was good in her

eyes" Christ reversed the trap: "Do what seems right in your eyes" he says to the Serpent. The result? Satan orchestrated his own defeat. In crucifying Christ, he unwittingly fulfilled God's sovereign plan of redemption, breaking his own power over mankind (Col. 2:15, Heb. 2:14).

Where Eve saw and took, Christ saw and gave—offering Himself into the hands of sinners so that through His death, He might bring life. Where Nahash sought to enslave Jabesh-Gilead by their surrender, Christ liberated His people through His own surrender. The cross was the great reversal: the Serpent's moment of apparent victory became his ultimate and eternal defeat. *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the Devil"* (1 John 3:8).

Breaking the Will

As those united to Christ, we are called to destroy the works of the Devil. But many of us **lack the will to fight**.

Nahash the Ammonite demanded that the men of Jabesh-Gilead submit to a treaty on one condition: he would gouge out their right eye, rendering them helpless to fight back, and disgraced.

This is exactly what Satan seeks to do to the Church. He doesn't just tempt us into sin—he wants to strip away our

will to stand against him, making us powerless against his kingdom of darkness, and burying us in disgrace and shame.

Acedia

"One of the Serpent's most insidious weapons today is acedia. The word comes from the Greek *akēdia*, meaning 'lack of care.' Historically, it refers to a state of spiritual sloth, apathy, or indifference. Acedia is first associated with early Christian monasticism of the Desert Fathers, and was considered one of the "eight deadly thoughts", which later were condensed into the seven deadly sins, where it's often linked to sloth.

The Desert Fathers called it the 'noonday demon' of Psalm 91, for it struck between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the desert heat forced monks to remain indoors. In those still hours, instead of prayer and labor, they sat idly, staring out their windows, longing for some distraction.

Acedia was not mere laziness; it described a condition where people felt a profound apathy, boredom, or despair toward their spiritual duties, often leading to a neglect of prayer, work, or devotion. It was an oppressive spiritual lethargy that drained them of the will to work, making prayer a burden and duty a drudgery.

Thomas Aquinas described *acedia* as a sorrow about spiritual good—a soul sickened by holiness, incapable of delighting in God or embracing its divine calling. It is a rejection of duty, a refusal to take joy in one's work. It manifests as procrastination, spiritual neglect, or a restless pursuit of trivial distractions—anything to escape the weight of real responsibility.

Acedia is not a result of physical exhaustion, but it does leave us physically exhausted, because it deadens our wills and makes us stop caring. It makes us shrug our shoulders and say, "What's the point?" It drains the "*why*" from our work, leaving us drifting along in a fog of passivity.

Sound familiar? "Today, we don't need a desert cell to feel its weight. We carry the noonday demon in our pockets, lulling ourselves into passive distraction."

How often have you found yourself mindlessly scrolling—Facebook, Instagram, X—swiping without thought? Reels, memes, cat videos—one after another—until suddenly, hours have slipped away. Not because you lacked energy, but because your will was pacified. The endless stream of distraction doesn't satisfy; it simply numbs. It is easier to scroll than to face the silence of your own thoughts, the weight of self-examination, the duty to watch and pray, or the effort required to do what must be done.

Acedia makes men passive—unwilling to stand, unwilling to fight. It whispers that action is futile, that the battle is already lost, that the culture is too far gone, that your efforts are insignificant. It disguises itself as humility, but at its core, it is faithlessness. It convinces you that your work is worthless, that God has no use for you. It makes you say, *Who am I to do this? I am a nobody. Others are more qualified. My efforts won't change anything.*

But this is not humility—it is an enchantment of the Serpent, a spell meant to blind, disarm, and disgrace God's people, keeping them from shining as the Light of the World.

Proverbs 18:9 warns, *'Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.'* Satan is the Destroyer, and acedia is one of his sharpest blades.

1. Nahash the Ammonite and Acedia

Nahash, whose name means *serpent*, sought to make a covenant with the men of Jabesh-Gilead—but on one condition: *"I will gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel."* (1 Samuel 11:2). This was not just an act of cruelty; it was a strategic move. The right eye was essential for aiming in battle, particularly with a bow or spear. By blinding them, Nahash was ensuring that they

would become defenseless, unable to fight effectively. They would be alive, but *useless*.

This is exactly what *acedia* does to the soul. It does not kill outright—it *disarms*. It blinds men to their duty, robs them of their will to fight, and convinces them that surrender is the easiest path. The men of Jabesh-Gilead were tempted to accept this mutilation because resistance seemed impossible.

Likewise, when *acedia* takes hold of a man, he is no longer a threat to the enemy. He becomes a passive, broken figure—spiritually one-eyed, unable to see clearly, unable to fight.

2. The Green Witch's Enchantment and Acedia

We see this tactic used by the Green Witch in C.S. Lewis' book *The Silver Chair*. She does not attack Puddleglum, Eustace, Jill, and Rilian with brute force. She does something far more insidious—she *bewitches* them into forgetfulness and apathy. She plays soft music, speaks in a slow, hypnotic voice, and burns an aromatic fire that lulls them into a passive state. She tells them that Aslan, Narnia, and the Overworld are all *just a dream* – mere child's play.

This is exactly what acedia does—it whispers, “*Why bother? Nothing matters. There is no higher calling. There is no battle worth fighting.*” The victims of acedia do not charge headlong into wickedness; they simply *stop caring*. They do not denounce their duties; they just *forget* them, and consider them to be insignificant.

3. The Breaking of the Spell: Puddleglum as the Anti-Acedia Figure

Puddleglum is the one who breaks the spell. He *fights acedia* in the most visceral way—he stomps his foot into the Witch’s fire, sending up the smell of burnt Marshwiggle and snuffing out the enchantment. The *shock* of pain and the *stench* of burning flesh snap them all out of their slumber. He declares that even if Narnia were a dream, he would rather live as if it were real than surrender to the Witch’s empty, hopeless world.

This is the essence of faith our faith. “*If anyone would come after me*”, Jesus says, “*let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.*”

Puddleglum’s action is reminiscent of Christ’s own battle against acedia. When faced with the agony of the cross, Christ *resisted* the temptation to save his life and turn away.

He fixed His heart on the Father's will, choosing obedience over passivity, zeal over despair, and love over comfort. In the same way, Puddleglum embraces *pain* over passivity, love for Aslan and Narnia over the Underworld, refusing to surrender to the Witch's lies.

4. The Witch as the Serpent—Acedia's Final Form

When the enchantment fails, the Witch *reveals her true form*—a great Green Serpent. And what does Prince Rilian do? He *cuts off her head*.

This is our final victory over acedia—not merely resisting it, but striking it down entirely. The only way to overcome acedia is through *decisive and difficult action*, through zeal for God's glory and gospel, and through carrying our cross in obedience to the King.

Conclusion: The Battle Against Acedia

Nahash sought to *blind* God's people. The Green Witch sought to *bewitch* them into forgetfulness. But the answer to both is the same: *faithful action*. Whether it is Saul rallying Israel to war against Nahash, or Puddleglum rousing his friends from the Witch's spell, the way to defeat acedia is through *zeal and faithfulness*.

And ultimately, this is what Christ has done. Like Rilian, He has crushed the Serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). He has triumphed over every force that seeks to blind, lull, and pacify us. And now, He calls us to war against the demon of Acedia.

So when acedia whispers, make no treaty with it. The Serpent seeks to blind and disgrace you, to rob you of your zeal and purpose. Rise up! Call upon your King to fight for you and with you. Remember Saul's victory over Nahash. Remember Puddleglum's defiance. Remember Prince Rilian's blade. But most of all, remember Christ's holy zeal that drove Him to the cross for your salvation.

Now, fight! Strike the head of the Serpent. Drive back the darkness of apathy. Seize your sword, take your stand, and press forward. Shake off the spell of passivity, cast aside the chains of indifference, and recover the will to fight.

For of all the things the church needs today, people of God, it is to recover the will and the resolve to fight the good fight of faith. May God grant us His Spirit, as He empowered our Lord Jesus—the greater Saul—to be angry at that demon Acedia, and to fight against it, to conquer it, and to behead it. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). Amen.

The Hyper-Critical Spirit: The Accuser's Work in the Church

The Serpent also weakens men's will through the hyper-critical spirit of others. The work of the Accuser tears us down rather than builds us up. Many men, blind to their own enlistment in the Serpent's ranks, nitpick and condemn others as a substitute for productivity and action. Discernment bloggers and posters pretend their ministry is opposing other Christians. Their spiritual gift is slander and libel and false accusations.

The Church does not need more faultfinders; it needs builders—men who strengthen rather than sap the resolve of their brothers. As Paul exhorted, *“Encourage one another and build one another up”* (1 Thess. 5:11). If we are to wage war against the Serpent, we must stop turning our swords on our own ranks. There is not much worse to the man who is trying to work unto the Lord only to have his brothers in the faith tear him down. The Devil barely needs to do anything, as we do just fine destroying our own will to work for the Lord.

The Perfectionist Spirit: The Fear That Paralyzes

This same spirit of discouragement manifests as the perfectionist impulse that paralyzes men before they even begin. Many good works have been abandoned simply because they have never begun, for fear they would not be good enough.

But God does not demand flawlessness—He calls for faithfulness. In the parable of the talents, the master did not expect a perfect yield—only that his servants put what they had been given to use. The wicked servant's sin was not poor performance, but inaction. *The enemy seeks to disarm men with the lie that their work is insufficient. But Christ strengthens His people with the truth that even the smallest effort, when done in faith, is mighty in His hands.*

The Effeminate Spirit: The War on Biblical Masculinity

One of the greatest assaults upon Christian men today is the deliberate feminization of their nature. In our schools, churches, workplaces, and homes, masculinity is scorned, subdued, and discouraged. Boys are told to be quiet, passive, and docile. They are taught that competitiveness is bad, that aggression is dangerous, that boldness is arrogance, that masculinity is toxic.

This poison has seeped into the Church. Sanctification is often presented as nothing more than *testosterone suppression*. Men are expected to be soft-spoken, deferential, and endlessly accommodating, while assertive and decisive men are labeled “harsh”

or “unloving.” The result? A generation of passive, hesitant, self-censoring men—men who shrink back instead of charging forward.

This is no accident. The Serpent does not want warriors in the Church—he wants soft domesticated men who will not challenge the gynocracy. But God made men to be conquerors. We are made in the image of God, and “*The LORD is a man of war*” (Ex. 15:3).

“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind.” (2 Tim. 1:7)

We are to be fearless in the face of “tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword.” Because “In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Rom. 8:35, 37)

“Be strong and courageous.” (Josh. 1:7)

“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord.” (Rom. 12:11)

“Be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15:58)

“Watch, stand fast in the faith, act like men, be strong.” (1 Cor. 16:13)

We were made to subdue, to build, to advance, to fight and take dominion. A bold, decisive man is not toxic to the kingdom of God. He is everything that is dangerous to the kingdom of Satan. And that is why Satan seeks to neutralize him.

Encourage the young men in our church. Do not emasculate your sons by comparing their behavior to your daughters. Direct their strength toward loftier and greater goals. And don’t crush their spirit’s but stoke the flames of conquest in them, that they might do great deeds for the Lord.