

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: Saul's First Victory and Samuel's Charge

1 Samuel 11:1–12:25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson carries the class through Saul's finest hour and Samuel's solemn farewell. In chapter 11, help the class feel the cruelty of Nahash's ultimatum, the rightness of Saul's Spirit-stirred anger, the God-given victory, and especially Saul's gracious refusal to take revenge while giving God the glory (11:13). This is Saul at his best, and it is important that the class see the genuine promise of his beginning, so that the warning to come, that those who begin well can still fall away, lands with full weight. Underscore that true strength for God's work comes from God, not from ourselves.

In chapter 12, lead the class through Samuel's farewell charge. He clears his name, rehearses God's faithfulness in Israel's history, confronts the sin of demanding a king while still pointing the people forward in hope, and then sets the great either-or before them: fear the Lord and serve Him in truth, or do wickedly and be swept away, both people and king (12:24–25). Draw out Samuel's beautiful pledge that he will not sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for them (12:23) as a model of intercessory faithfulness. Handle the doctrine in church-of-Christ fashion: obedience genuinely matters, and one who begins under God's blessing can still depart from Him (Hebrews 3:12–14), which directly refutes any once-saved-always-saved assumption.

Drive the application home personally and warmly. Press mercy toward critics, the discipline of giving God the glory, the value of remembering His past faithfulness, and above all the lifelong call to fear and serve the Lord in truth with all the heart. Lay the groundwork for the central theme of the whole study, that how we finish matters as much as how we begin.

Question 1

Student Question:

Nahash the Ammonite demanded the right to thrust out every right eye of Jabesh-gilead (11:1–3). What does this opening crisis reveal about the cruelty of the enemies of God's people and the kind of darkness into which God sends deliverance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The lesson opens in cruelty: “Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabeshgilead.” When the townspeople sue for peace, Nahash answers, “On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel” (11:1–2). He does not merely want surrender; he wants to maim and humiliate, to brand the whole nation with the disgrace of a defenseless town.

This is the face of the enemies of God's people across Scripture, not content with opposition but bent on shame, bondage, and destruction. The right eye was the eye a soldier used to aim past his shield; to put it out was to render a man permanently helpless. Nahash wanted Israel weak, disgraced, and watching.

Into exactly this kind of darkness God loves to send deliverance. The deeper the cruelty and the more hopeless the situation, the more clearly His salvation shines. The messengers of Jabesh wept through the towns of Israel because, humanly, they had nowhere to turn. That is often the very moment God acts.

For our instruction (Romans 15:4), we are reminded that evil is real and often merciless, and that God is not absent from the darkest crises. The believer learns to look for God's deliverance precisely where the situation looks most hopeless, for our true enemy, who comes to steal and kill and destroy (John 10:10), is overcome by a stronger Savior.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The enemies of God's people often aim at shame and destruction, not mere opposition (11:1-2).
- Cruelty and hopelessness are the very settings into which God sends deliverance.
- Evil is real and sometimes merciless; Scripture does not pretend otherwise.
- God is present even in the darkest crisis.
- Believers learn to look for God's salvation where situations seem most hopeless.

Discussion Prompts

- Where does the cruelty of evil show itself most clearly in our world today?
- How does it encourage you that God sends deliverance into the darkest situations?
- Why are we tempted to think God is absent when a crisis feels hopeless?

Question 2

Student Question:

When Saul heard of Jabesh-gilead's plight, his anger was kindled to act (11:6). When have you felt rightly stirred to act on behalf of the helpless, and where might God be calling you to that now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When the news reaches Saul, something kindles in him: "And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly" (11:6). This is not petty temper; it is righteous indignation, the holy anger that rises in a good heart at the sight of the helpless being abused. It moves Saul not to brood but to act, to rally the nation to rescue.

There is a kind of anger that is right and even necessary. Jesus looked on hard hearts “with anger, being grieved” (Mark 3:5) and drove the money changers from the temple. Anger that defends the vulnerable and burns against injustice, when it is governed and aimed rightly, is the engine of much good. The danger is not anger itself but selfish, uncontrolled anger.

Most of us are more practiced at being angry over slights to ourselves than over wrongs done to the weak. Saul's anger here points outward, toward the threatened town, not inward toward his own wounded pride. That is the kind of stirring God can use.

The application presses us to ask what stirs us. Are we moved by the plight of the helpless, the unborn, the abused, the poor, the lonely, the lost, or only by inconveniences to ourselves? God may be calling us, as He called Saul, to let righteous concern become decisive action on someone else's behalf.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- There is a righteous anger that rises against injustice and abuse (11:6).
- Holy indignation moves us to act for the helpless rather than to brood.
- Jesus modeled governed, rightly aimed anger (Mark 3:5).
- The danger is selfish, uncontrolled anger, not anger itself.
- We must ask whether the helpless, or only our own slights, stir us.

Discussion Prompts

- What stirs righteous concern in you, and what does that reveal about your heart?
- Where might God be calling you to act on behalf of the helpless?
- How do we keep anger righteous rather than selfish and uncontrolled?

Question 3

Student Question:

The Spirit of God came upon Saul and he won a great victory (11:6–11). What does this teach about the source of true strength for the work God gives, and how is that different from relying on ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The victory itself is decisive: Saul musters the people, marches through the night, and “it came to pass on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies... and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day” (11:11). Jabesh-gilead is saved. But the text is careful to tell us where the power came from: “the Spirit of God came upon Saul” (11:6) before the muster ever began. The strength was God's, channeled through a willing man.

This is the steady witness of Scripture about the work God gives His people. The judges, the prophets, the apostles, all accomplished what they did not by native ability but by God's

enabling. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). The instrument matters, but the strength is the Lord's.

We must read the Spirit's coming upon Saul as an Old Covenant empowering for a specific task, not as the indwelling promised to baptized believers under the New Covenant (Acts 2:38). Still, the principle holds for our instruction: God supplies the power for the work He assigns. We are not meant to serve in our own strength.

This is liberating and humbling at once. Liberating, because the task God gives is never matched to our resources alone but to His. Humbling, because the glory belongs to Him, not to us. The believer learns to step into God-given work depending wholly on God-given strength, not on self-confidence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True strength for God's work comes from God, not from ourselves (11:6).
- The Spirit's coming on Saul was Old Covenant empowering for a task, not New Covenant indwelling (Acts 2:38).
- God supplies the power for the work He assigns (Zechariah 4:6).
- Serving in our own strength misplaces both the source and the glory.
- We step into God-given work depending on God-given strength.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to rely on your own strength rather than God's?
- How does it change a task to know the strength for it comes from God?
- Why is depending on God both humbling and freeing?

Question 4

Student Question:

After the victory, Saul refused to let his earlier critics be killed (11:12–13). What in your own heart needs to grow toward this kind of restraint and mercy toward those who have wronged you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Flushed with victory, the people turn vengeful: “Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death” (11:12). They remember the sons of Belial who had despised Saul, and they want blood. It would have been easy, even satisfying, for Saul to nod and let it happen. Instead he refuses: “There shall not a man be put to death this day” (11:13).

This is one of Saul's finest moments. He has both the power and the popular support to destroy his critics, and he declines. In the flush of triumph, when revenge would be applauded, he

chooses restraint and mercy. He lets the insult go. The man who was despised refuses to despise in return.

This is the very posture the New Testament commands: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves... Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him... Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:19–21). The instinct to repay those who have wronged us is strong, especially when we have the upper hand. Grace toward critics is rarely convenient.

The lesson presses each of us to examine the grudges we nurse. Who has despised or wronged us, and what would it look like to refuse revenge, to let it go, to extend mercy even when we could justly retaliate? Saul's restraint here is a window into the heart God desires in His people, and it makes his later cruelty toward David all the more tragic.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saul refused revenge on his critics in the hour of triumph (11:13).
- Restraint and mercy toward those who wrong us reflect God's own heart.
- The New Testament commands us not to avenge but to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19–21).
- Grace toward critics is hardest, and most telling, when we have the upper hand.
- Nursing grudges contradicts the mercy God calls us to extend.

Discussion Prompts

- Who have you been tempted to repay, and what would mercy look like instead?
- Why is restraint hardest when we have the power to retaliate?
- How does extending mercy to critics reflect the heart of God?

Question 5

Student Question:

Saul declared, “to day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel” (11:13), giving God the credit. Why is giving God the glory the mark of a healthy leader, and how do we guard against quietly taking credit ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Saul's refusal of revenge comes wrapped in a confession: “There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel” (11:13). He does not say, today I won a great victory. He points past himself to God. The mercy he extends and the glory he gives are bound together; because he knows the salvation was the Lord's, he has no appetite for personal vengeance.

This is a hallmark of a healthy leader and a healthy heart, the reflex to give God the credit. Pride hungers to be seen as the hero; humility delights to say, the Lord did this. Saul, at his best, has that reflex. It is the same spirit in which Joseph, Daniel, and the apostles deflected praise to God.

The danger of taking credit is subtle and constant. Moses warned Israel that prosperity would tempt them to say, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth,” forgetting the Lord who gave them everything (Deuteronomy 8:17–18). Success is precisely when we are most tempted to quietly steal God's glory.

We guard against it by cultivating the habit of acknowledgment, naming God's hand out loud, thanking Him publicly and privately, refusing to let praise settle on us that belongs to Him. A leader, a parent, a worker who consistently points credit upward keeps both the glory and the heart in their right place.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saul gave God the glory for the victory rather than claiming it himself (11:13).
- Giving God the credit is a mark of a healthy heart and leader.
- Pride hungers for praise; humility delights to credit God.
- Success is precisely when we are most tempted to steal God's glory (Deuteronomy 8:17–18).
- Guarding against this requires the deliberate habit of acknowledging God.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to quietly take credit that belongs to God?
- Why does success make stealing God's glory especially tempting?
- What habits help you keep pointing the credit upward?

Question 6

Student Question:

Samuel called the people to renew the kingdom at Gilgal with sacrifice and rejoicing (11:14–15). What place should remembering and celebrating God's deliverances have in your own walk and in the church's life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the deliverance, Samuel gathers the nation: “Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there... and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices... and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly” (11:14–15). They do not simply move on to the next thing. They stop, worship, sacrifice, and rejoice together over what God has done.

Remembering and celebrating God's deliverances is woven through the life of God's people. Israel kept feasts to recall the exodus; David danced before the ark; the church gathers each

Lord's Day to remember the greatest deliverance of all in the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26). Joy and remembrance are not optional extras; they fortify faith.

We are quick to ask God for help and slow to celebrate when He gives it. The nine lepers who never returned to thank Jesus are a sobering picture (Luke 17:17–18). A heart that forgets to rejoice over past mercies grows dull and ungrateful, and easily slides into grumbling when the next trial comes.

For the church and for the individual, building in deliberate times of thanksgiving and celebration, recounting what God has done, singing of it, marking it, is spiritual wisdom. It strengthens us for the road ahead by reminding us how faithful the God of the road behind us has been.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's people stop to worship and rejoice over His deliverances (11:14–15).
- Remembrance and celebration are woven through the life of God's people.
- The church remembers the greatest deliverance in the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7).
- We are quick to ask and slow to give thanks (Luke 17:17–18).
- Deliberate celebration of God's works fortifies faith for what lies ahead.

Discussion Prompts

- How well do you celebrate God's answered prayers, or do you just move on?
- What place does grateful remembrance have in your walk and in the church?
- Why does forgetting to rejoice over past mercies make us prone to grumbling?

Question 7

Student Question:

In his farewell, Samuel cleared his name and rehearsed God's faithful dealings with Israel (12:1–13). What does his review of history teach us about remembering God's past faithfulness when facing present uncertainty?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now the aged Samuel steps forward to give his farewell. He first clears his own name: “Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded?” and the people testify he has wronged no one (12:3–4). Then he rehearses the long history of God's faithfulness, how the Lord delivered Israel again and again from the days of Moses through the judges (12:6–13). Before charging them about the future, he grounds them in the past.

This is wise pastoral method. Samuel does not lecture about present duty in a vacuum; he first reminds the people who God has been. Memory is the soil in which faithfulness grows. A people

who recall how reliably God has delivered them are far better prepared to trust and obey Him in present uncertainty.

Scripture constantly summons us to remember. “Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee” (Deuteronomy 8:2). The psalms rehearse God's mighty acts to steady frightened hearts. When the future is uncertain, the surest footing is the remembered faithfulness of God in the past.

For us, this means that recalling God's track record, in Scripture and in our own lives, is not nostalgia but fuel for present trust. The God who parted the sea, who delivered Israel through the judges, who raised Jesus from the dead, is the God who holds your unknown tomorrow. Reviewing His faithfulness arms the heart for whatever comes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Samuel cleared his name and rehearsed God's faithful history with Israel (12:3–13).
- Remembering God's past faithfulness prepares us to trust Him in present uncertainty.
- Scripture constantly summons God's people to remember (Deuteronomy 8:2).
- Memory is the soil in which present faithfulness grows.
- Reviewing God's track record is fuel for present trust, not mere nostalgia.

Discussion Prompts

- How does remembering God's past faithfulness steady you for an uncertain future?
- What are some of God's faithful dealings you can rehearse from your own life?
- Why is memory so important to ongoing obedience?

Question 8

Student Question:

Samuel sent thunder and rain in harvest as a sign, and the people feared greatly and confessed their sin (12:16–19). When has God used something to awaken in you a fresh, holy fear of Him, and why do we need it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

To seal his charge, Samuel calls on God for a sign in the dry season: “Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain... So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel” (12:17–18). Out-of-season thunder in the harvest was unmistakably the hand of God, and it awakened in the people a profound, holy fear. They cried, “We have sinned” (12:19).

God sometimes does something that pierces our casualness and restores a right sense of who He is. The fear of the Lord here is not cringing terror but reverent awe, the recognition that we

stand before the living God whose power and holiness are not to be trifled with. It is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10), and we lose it to our peril.

We live in a casual age, and casualness can creep into our walk with God until He becomes small in our eyes, a comfortable helper rather than the Holy One. We need our reverence renewed, sometimes through Scripture, sometimes through a sobering providence, sometimes through worship that lifts our eyes again to His majesty.

Notice that this fresh fear led the people not to despair but to confession and a renewed desire to be right with God. Healthy fear of the Lord does not drive us from Him but toward Him, humbled and honest. We need it because it keeps obedience from collapsing into mere habit and keeps God in His rightful place in our hearts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God sent thunder in harvest to awaken holy fear in the people (12:17–18).
- The fear of the Lord is reverent awe, the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).
- A casual age tempts us to make God small and familiar.
- Healthy fear drives us toward God in confession, not away in despair.
- Reverence keeps obedience from collapsing into mere habit.

Discussion Prompts

- When has God renewed in you a fresh, holy sense of His greatness?
- How can we recover reverence in a casual, familiar age?
- Why does healthy fear of the Lord draw us toward Him rather than away?

Question 9

Student Question:

Samuel charged, “only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart,” yet warned, “if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king” (12:24–25). What does this teach about how much obedience matters, and that even those who begin well can fall away?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Samuel's charge reaches its solemn climax in two verses that frame the rest of the book. On one side, an earnest call: “Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you” (12:24). On the other, a stark warning: “But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king” (12:25). Obedience is set before them as life, persistent wickedness as ruin, and no one, not even the king, is exempt.

This is the heaviest doctrinal note of the lesson. Obedience matters. It is not enough to have begun well, to have a king, a covenant, a history of deliverance. The people and their king must

keep fearing and serving the Lord, or they will be swept away. Privilege does not cancel responsibility; it heightens it.

And here the church-of-Christ conviction stands plainly against the error of once-saved-always-saved. Israel's place among God's people did not guarantee their safety if they turned to wickedness. So too the New Testament warns the believer: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God... if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:12–14). One who begins in grace can still fall away. We must continue.

This lays the groundwork for the entire study of Saul, and indeed of the kings. The bright beginning of chapter 11 makes the warning of chapter 12 all the more pointed. Saul started well; he did not finish well. The lesson for every reader is sobering and clear: how we continue and how we finish matters as much as how we begin. Therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in truth, all your days.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Obedience genuinely matters; persistent wickedness brings ruin (12:24–25).
- Neither the people nor the king were exempt from the call to faithfulness.
- Privilege heightens rather than cancels responsibility.
- One who begins in grace can still fall away (Hebrews 3:12–14), refuting once-saved-always-saved.
- How we continue and finish matters as much as how we begin.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Samuel insist that even the king is not exempt from this warning?
- How does this passage confront the idea that a believer can never fall away?
- What does it mean for you to fear and serve the Lord in truth all your days?

Question 10

Student Question:

Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this lesson, whether toward courage for the helpless, mercy toward critics, or a renewed resolve to fear and serve the Lord in truth all your days.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Tucked into Samuel's farewell is one of the most beautiful pledges in the Old Testament: "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (12:23). Even as he rebukes the people for demanding a king, Samuel commits himself to keep

interceding for them. He counts the failure to pray for others as itself a sin. This is the heart of a true servant of God, and it points us straight to Christ.

For Jesus is the great Intercessor who “ever liveth to make intercession” for His people (Hebrews 7:25). Where Samuel was a faithful shadow, Christ is the substance, the King who, unlike Saul, never fails, and the Priest who prays for us without ceasing. Every good thing glimpsed in this lesson, the deliverer who saves the helpless, the leader who shows mercy and gives God glory, the intercessor who will not stop praying, finds its fullness in Him.

So this passage forms us in several directions at once. It calls us to courage on behalf of the helpless, like Saul rallying to Jabesh. It calls us to mercy toward those who wrong us, like Saul sparing his critics. It calls us to renewed reverence and to the lifelong resolve, only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth. And it sobers us with the truth that beginning well is not enough; we must hold fast to the end (Hebrews 3:14).

Consider honestly where Jesus is at work in you through this lesson. Is He growing your courage for the vulnerable? Your mercy toward a critic? Your habit of giving Him the glory? Your reverence and resolve to keep serving Him faithfully? Name one specific way, and bring it before the Lord. The goal is not to admire Saul's bright start or merely to hear Samuel's charge, but to become, by Christ's forming work in us, people who fear and serve the Lord in truth, all the way home.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Samuel counted failing to pray for the people as sin against the Lord (12:23).
- Christ is the great Intercessor who ever lives to pray for His people (Hebrews 7:25).
- Every good thing in this lesson finds its fullness in Jesus.
- The passage forms us toward courage, mercy, glory-giving, reverence, and endurance.
- The goal is to fear and serve the Lord in truth all the way to the end.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Samuel's refusal to stop praying point you to Christ our Intercessor?
- Which is Jesus growing in you, courage, mercy, glory-giving, or reverence?
- Name one specific way Christ is forming you through this lesson.