

2 Samuel 10:1-19

This is another instance of David showing kindness to the son of someone who was close to him. But this time it turns out badly.

2 Samuel 10:1-2 - "And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. Then said David, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father shewed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father. And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon."

Nahash (whose name means "serpent") probably had shown kindness to David when he was on the run from Saul. Scripture doesn't say.

But Rashi explains: "And what was this kindness? When David was fleeing from Saul, his father, mother and brother came to him (**I Samuel. 22:4**) and he brought them before the king of Moab and said to him: Please allow my father and mother to live with you. Nevertheless he killed them excepting one that fled and escaped to the land of the sons of Ammon, to Nahash (Midrash of R. Tanhuma in p. Va'yerah).

But the young king was influenced by his advisors to distrust David's intentions.

2 Samuel 10:3 - "And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, 'Thinkest thou that David doth honor thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?'"

According to Rashi, the advisors warned the king about a prohibition in the Jewish Torah (Deuteronomy 23:3,6) against treaties with idolatrous nations - "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even to the tenth generation...Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever."

The rabbis argue that the prohibition refers only to gratuitous favors, but does not ban repaying them for a kindness. But they add that Hanun had done nothing of kindness to David, but rather it was his father.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 21:5) cites this passage to illustrate that "whoever deals mercifully with the wicked" will eventually be embarrassed and will suffer as a result of misplaced compassion.

They quote **Ecclesiastes 7:16** - "Be not righteous overmuch." and explain that "A man should not seek to go beyond, or to be more virtuous than the Law."

(Of course, to really understand the meaning of the Law we must look at Jesus, who fulfilled it in His life and teachings and sacrifice on the cross).

Who Were the Ammonites?

The first mention of the Ammonites in the Hebrew Bible is in Genesis 19:37-38. Like the Moabites, they were descended from the offspring of Lot with his younger daughter, who plotted with her sister to make Lot drunk and, in his inebriated state, have intercourse with him to become pregnant.

During the Exodus, the Israelites were prohibited by the Ammonites from passing through their lands. The Ammonites soon allied themselves with Eglon of Moab in attacking Israel.

The Ammonites maintained their claim to part of Transjordan, after it was occupied by the Israelites who obtained it from Sihon. During the days of Jephthah, the Ammonites occupied the lands east of the River Jordan and started to invade Israelite lands west of the river. Jephthah became the leader in resisting these incursions.

The Ammonite threat was what caused the unification of the tribes under Saul.

As we look into this, we see that Nahash was NOT a nice guy. If you recall, he gave the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead the choice of death (by the sword) or having their right eyes gouged out. Instead they appealed to Saul, who came and defeated Nahash. (**1 Samuel 11**).

The Ammonites worshipped the gods Milcom and Molech. Molech required child sacrifice.

Molech

The image of this idol, according to the Jews, "had seven chapels, and he was within them; and his face was the face of a calf or ox; and his hands were stretched out as a man stretches out his hands to receive anything of his friend; and they set it on fire within, for it was hollow; and everyone according to his offering went into these chapels; he that offered a fowl went into the first chapel; he that offered a sheep, into the second chapel; if a lamb, into the third; a calf, into the fourth; a bullock, into the fifth; an ox, into the sixth; but he that offered his son, they brought him into the seventh; and they put, the child before Moloch, and kindled a fire in the inside of him, until his hands were like fire; and then they took the child, and put him within its arms; and beat upon tabrets or drums, that the cry of the child might not be heard by the father" (elammedenu apud Yalkut Simeoni in Jer. vii. 31. fol. 61. 4.).

The prophet Amos says that the Ammonites "ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border" and therefore would be punished (**Amos 1:13**). The purpose was to eliminate any heirs or claims on the Israelite lands they conquered.

Spiritually Ammon stands for whoever would seek to challenge God's claim to the Promised Land, especially through attempts to deceive the children (or new, weak converts to the faith). Pharisees do this by placing expectations on them which they

can't fulfill.

- **Matthew 23:4** - "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."

2 Samuel 10:4-5 - "Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away. When they told it unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return."

To humiliate the king's servants or messengers is to humiliate the king. The same applies to King Jesus:

- **John 15:18** - "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you."

The commentator David Guzik notes that David didn't use these men as political tools to whip up anger against the Ammonites. He cared more for their own dignity and honor and allowed them to wait before returning to Jerusalem.

War

2 Samuel 10:6-7 - "And when the children of Ammon saw that they stank before David, the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Bethrehob, and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand footmen, and of king Maacah a thousand men, and of Ishtob twelve thousand men. And when David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men."

1 Chronicles 19:6 says that the Ammonites paid 1,000 talents to the Syrians.

This was a peak period of Israel's military strength. Some of the distressed, discontented debt-ridden rabble that had originally gathered around David in his fugitive years, were now known as "mighty men." This is the first mention of David's mighty men.

Some are specifically mentioned elsewhere. One of these mighty men was Adino the Eznite — famous for killing 800 men at one time (**2 Samuel 23:8**). Another was Jashobeam who killed 300 men at one time (**1 Chronicles 11:11**). Another was Benaiah who killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day and killed a huge Egyptian warrior with his own spear (**1 Chronicles 11:22-23**). (See https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/2-samuel/2-samuel-10.cfm)

Joab's exhortation is good for anyone faced with a spiritual mission: The real ongoing warfare is within ourselves, and we must courageously withstand the flaming arrows of the devil and the deceptive voices of our evil inclination.

"Be of good courage, and let us play the men (be strong or 'quit yourselves like men')

for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good."

- Compare to Paul: **1 Corinthians 16:13-14** - "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity."

"the LORD do that which seemeth him good" - Joab was ready to accept the result of the battle, no matter what, because the outcome was in God's hands.

War Resumed Later

Although Joab wins this battle, war breaks out again later, described in **2 Samuel 11-12**. The war continued for more than a year without resolution. Why? David is drawn away from the Lord by his lust for Bathsheba, resulting in adultery and murder.

This was the period of David's moral turmoil, his sin with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, his confrontation with the prophet Nathan, the death of their son and his repentance, all described in the next chapters 11-12.

In the end, David himself, finally morally restored, accompanied by the ark of God, leads the final attack on the Ammonite royal city of Rabbah. The result:

- **2 Samuel 12:30** - "And he took their king's crown from off his head, the weight (or value) whereof was a talent of gold with the precious stones: and it was set on David's head."

- **2 Samuel 12:31** - And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.

The rabbis disagree over the meaning of this verse.

Some, as in the King James, interpret it to mean David used these implements to kill or torture the Ammonites, as in **1 Chronicles 20:3** - "...cut them saws and harrows of iron and with axes" and to "put through the brick kiln" so as to experience part of the pain of what it meant to "pass their children through the fire" to Molech.

But the punishment of the Ammonite residents of the city was probably not as grisly as those rabbis and the King James translation makes it sound. It was probably more like forced labor.

The NET translation: "He removed the people who were in it and made them do hard labor with saws, iron picks, and iron axes, putting them to work at the brick kiln" (**2 Samuel 12:30-31**).

So, this would be another example of a transformation of something evil into something

useful to Israel and to God, with the treasures possibly used later in the construction of the Temple.

Next week we will look at David's moral failure with Bathsheba. The Ammonites' signature idolatrous practice - the abomination of the sacrifice of children to Molech - is eerily shadowed by David's own "sacrifice" of the child resulting from his and Bathsheba's adultery.