

## 2 Samuel 10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     2 Samuel chapter 10 After this the king of the Ammonites died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. And David said, I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me.

So David sent by his servants to console him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the Ammonites. But the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanun their lord, Do you think because David has sent comforters to you that he is honouring your father?

Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it? So Hanun took David's servants and shaved off half the beard of each, and cut off their garments in the middle at their hips and sent them away.

When it was told David he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown and then return. When the Ammonites saw that they had become a stench to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-Rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah, twenty thousand foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah with one thousand men, and the men of Tob, twelve thousand men.

And when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the host of the mighty men. And the Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the gate. And the Syrians of Zobah and of Rehob, and the men of Tob and Maacah, were by themselves in the open country.

[ 1 : 2 0 ]     When Joab saw that the battle was set against him, both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the best men of Israel and arrayed them against the Syrians. The rest of his men he put in the charge of Abishai his brother, and he arrayed them against the Ammonites.

And he said, If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me. But if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our guard, and may the Lord do what seems good to him.

So Joab and the people who were with him drew near to battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. And when the Ammonites saw that the Syrians fled, they likewise fled before Abishai and entered the city.

Then Joab returned from fighting against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem. But when the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered themselves together, and Hadidiza sent and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the Euphrates.

They came to Helam, with Shobak, the commander of the army of Hadidiza, at their head. And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and crossed the Jordan and came to Helam.

[ 2 : 3 0 ]     The Syrians arrayed themselves against David and fought with him. And the Syrians fled before Israel. And David killed of the Syrians the men of 700 chariots and 40,000 horsemen, and wounded Shobak, the commander of their army, so that he died there.

And when all the kings who were servants of Hadidiza saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and became subject to them. So the Syrians were afraid to save the Ammonites any more.

We first encountered Nahash the Ammonite back in 1 Samuel chapter 11, when he besieged Jabesh Gilead. Now in 2 Samuel chapter 10, we learn that he has died to be succeeded by his son Hanun.

Presumably while David was pursued by Saul, Nahash had granted him aid, perhaps recognising an opportunity to unsettle or weaken a rival's kingdom. Perhaps he even hoped to improve relations with Israel should David rise to power.

Ammon was a kingdom to the east, across the Jordan. Back in chapter 8, we read about David's wars, including his war against Hadidiza and the Syrians. It also mentions his subduing of the Ammonites.

[ 3 : 39 ] As this chapter begins with statements implying that David was on good terms with the Ammonites prior to this point, it seems reasonable to surmise that the events of this chapter fit within the larger summary of David's victories back in chapter 8.

Peter Lighthouse suggests that this is a second phase in the war with Hadidiza. I'm not so sure. The introduction of the chapter with the words after this probably places it shortly after Mephibosheth was brought into the house of David.

It also highlights the thematic connection between David's display of loving kindness to Hanun for the sake of his father Nahash, with David's display of loving kindness to Mephibosheth for the sake of Jonathan in the preceding chapter.

It also sets us up for the contrast between their two responses. In his extension of loving kindness to Hanun, David is giving him the opportunity of being blessed for the sake of his father, of entering into a positive relationship with Israel.

However, Hanun's princes and counsellors believe that David actually desires to destroy them. This isn't an entirely unreasonable impression to reach. From a distance, David looks like someone whose enemies conveniently die, and then David sheds crocodile tears over them.

[ 4 : 51 ] Both Abner and Ish-bosheth were conveniently assassinated, and while David can blame the brutality of Joab as much as he wants, there is Joab, still the commander of David's army.

To the typical onlooker, he wouldn't seem very sincere. David's failure to deal effectively with people like Joab would naturally lead to distrust and suspicion from characters like Hanun.

While Nahash, Hanun's father, might have been very happy to support David while Saul was king, hoping to weaken Saul's kingdom, now that David is king, fighting and winning battles on various sides and establishing Israel as a strong and united kingdom and expanding its borders, it wouldn't take all that much provocation for relations with the Ammonites to take a frosty or a hostile turn.

However, David's intention throughout had been to show loving kindness. Ironically, Hanun's fears will ultimately be realised as David takes over his royal city and enslaves the Ammonites at the end of chapter 12.

But that is a situation arising not from David's initial intention, but from Hanun's provocation and his laying down of the gauntlet. Hanun humiliated David's men by shaving off half of their beards and cutting off half of their clothes so that they were exposed.

[ 6 : 05 ] This might be a mockery of mourning rituals, but it is definitely an attack upon their masculinity. Whatever the full meaning, it is a very serious provocation. David instructs them to wait at Jericho.

Presumably there was still a settlement remaining at Jericho, even after its destruction by Joshua, but it wasn't established as a fortified city again until much later. The Ammonites hired the Syrians, who were to the north of Israel, to fight for them.

When David heard of it, he sent Joab out to fight with the army. Joab came against Rabba, the Ammonite capital, with his men, presumably offering peace first, according to the commandment of the law.

However, the Syrians and the kings accompanying them, kings of small kingdoms who were presumably their vassals, came against the Israelite army to their rear. Joab split the forces between himself and Abishai, his brother.

Perhaps there is some ironic association drawn between the victory that's won by splitting the Israelite army in half and the removal of half of the messengers' beards and garments earlier in the chapter.

[ 7 : 07 ] Joab and the elite troops faced the Syrians and the other mercenaries or vassals accompanying them, while Abishai faced the Ammonites. Joab defeated the Syrians, at which point the Ammonites also fled back behind the walls of the city of Rabba.

The Syrians at this point launched an offensive in response. Which David heard of, and then sent his men up to meet them. David's men soundly repulsed the Syrians, who suffered exceedingly heavy losses.

This led to a larger shift in power in the region, as former vassals and tributaries of the Syrians abandoned them and became subject to Israel. The Syrians also became wary of intervening against Israel again after this point.

Joab doesn't press Israel's advantage against Rabba right now, though. He returns to Israel. The Israelites will besiege Rabba again in the following chapter, perhaps at a more convenient time of the year.

A question to consider. In verses 11-12, Joab makes a statement that seems quite out of character as a seeming expression of confidence in the Lord. What might we make of this?

[ 8 : 14 ]