

2ND SAMUEL

Week 15, chapters 10 and 11

We ended last week by reading a substantial amount of Scripture in Psalms 44 and 60. These two Psalms are directly associated with the time period of the ferocious and dangerous 2 (or perhaps even 3) front war David was fighting against the Ammonites, the Syrians, and the Edomites. They show us the great distress and uncertainty that the leaders of Israel were feeling at that time; and they especially doubted if Yehoveh was still with them because things weren't going as well as they hoped for.

It was not so much a matter that they were losing the wars as it was that they struggled mightily to win them. The wars dragged on and on, the Israelite losses were terrible, and a durable peace seemed impossible to achieve since Israel's neighbors were bent on Israel's destruction. Some of this was (no doubt) in response to David's determination to reach the goal of the Greater Israel as envisioned by Abraham; but the bulk of the battling had more to do with a long term settling of scores and other nations' desires for expanding their own influence.

Let's re-read 2nd Samuel chapter 10.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL CHAPTER 10 all

Because the Bible is a relatively short and compact work that covers at least 50 centuries of history, then which events are recorded for posterity must be carefully selected; therefore each has a specific purpose. Why were these particular wars with the Syrians and the Ammonites chosen as important enough to be retained? Because they set the stage and lead us right into the issue of the infamous affair of David and Bathsheba, which had enormous effect on Israel's future.

The narrative begins with the death of the King of Ammon, **Nachash**, and the succession of his son **Hanun** to the throne. **Hanun** was greatly displeased with Israel's military presence so close to his borders and this led to a great insult of some Hebrew diplomats sent to him by David. Israel's conquering of Moab led **Hanun** and his war council to suspect that they were next on David's radar. We must always remember that while we often think of the societies of these ancient times as "primitive", and thus their ways as "unintelligent", in fact their motives, political reasoning and their actions are inherently the same as leaders in the modern world; the only difference, generally speaking, was not the level of intelligence but rather the available technology.

Therefore the King of Ammon's reaction that led to war is akin to the USA's reaction in the Cuban Missile Crises of the 1960's when an old enemy sought to establish a worrisome military presence a mere 90 miles offshore; much too close for comfort in modern times (and it very nearly culminated in a nuclear war).

Now the timing of this humiliation of David's emissaries can be attached to the chapter 8 narrative of the defeat of the Syrian army of Hadad-Ezer. In other words, what we read in chapter 8 about the defeat of the Syrians as led by Hadad-Ezer is the result of what we are now studying in chapter 10. I have mentioned on a number of occasions that much of the book of Samuel (and especially in matters of David and of other kings of Israel) is not in chronological order. Further (so you are not confused) although our Bibles speak of David warring with Aram, I term it the Syrian War because not all of Aram became involved (it was primarily leaders and armies from the area that later became known as Syria that are being spoken about).

The feud between Israel and Ammon, however, wasn't really about some game-changing new development that had just happened. Rather it can be traced back to a time when **Nachash** (**Hanun's** father) decided he wanted to drive the Israelites out of the Trans-Jordan. We don't know the more immediate motive that drove him to take action, but we do know that he had an immense hatred of Israel that had built up over time. His scorn probably had more to do with those 2 ½ Israelite tribes that had settled on the east side of the Jordan (the Trans-Jordan) because they were on **his** side of the River and thus presented more of a direct threat, if not simply an affront to his dignity and to his race.

1st Samuel 11 tells us about **Nachash** and it is worth reviewing because when we can understand the back story to all of these events, not only can we remember them better but we

can also see the rationale behind these many decisions.

Turn your Bibles to 1st Samuel 11.

READ 1ST SAMUEL 11:1 – 9

While this information fills in some of the why's and wherefore's of Ammon's hatred of Israel, the Dead Sea Scroll of Samuel adds this bit of data:

4QSam: "Now Nachash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nachash, King of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-Gilead".

So the residents of Jabesh-Gilead (a small city state in the Trans-Jordan) were primarily a mixed group from the tribes of Gad and Reuben; but also there were close family ties to the tribe of Benjamin and therefore Saul (from the tribe of Benjamin) felt it was his duty to rescue them from ***Nachash***.

Many years after the Jabesh-Gilead flare-up, and upon his father's death, ***Hanun*** decided to do what many new young leaders do: make their mark and establish their name by leading their nation into war against a hated enemy (obviously expecting victory).

Now David really didn't want this war with ***Hanun*** and the nation of Ammon; whether it was from a sincere sense of wanting to put aside long held animosities between the two nations or a pragmatic belief that he certainly didn't want to have to divide his army and fight on yet another front, he decided to use the occasion of ***Nachash's*** death to stretch out a hand of friendship to the new king, ***Hanun***. 2nd Samuel 10, verse 2, has David saying that he will show

grace towards **Hanun**; in Hebrew it says he wanted to show **chesed** to **Hanun**. Thus David sent a message of “comfort” to the new king by means of some Israeli diplomats. The Hebrew word usually translated as comfort is **nacham** and it is the same word that is also translated as repentance. It also carries with it the sense of regret; so “comfort” is probably a bit tame and a little off the mark. The idea is that David sent a message that essentially communicated that with the death of **Nachash** perhaps it was time for both sides to bury the hatchet and end their long-running conflict. Attending a State funeral of the supreme leader is always a good time to do such a thing because the nation and its leaders are often in a reflective mood and ready for a change.

Unfortunately **Hanun** was somewhat less cordial than David had hoped. The old animosity and distrust was too deep to overcome and so **Hanun's** royal court advised the new king that this had to be a ruse. The Israeli diplomats weren't genuine in the purpose of their visit. Rather they were spies who merely want to gain intelligence on the Ammonite capital city (which was Rabbah, modern day Amman, Jordan).

When one looks back to the brutality that David piled upon Moab (after subduing them he executed at random 2 out of every 3 captured soldiers), it's easy to understand why the King of Ammon and his counselors were wary and unconvinced of David's intentions. All one has to do to get a good mental picture of the situation is to turn on our televisions and watch the intractable situation between Israel and the Palestinians. There has been such a long history of violence, deceit, slaughter, and failed agreements that to trust one another at any level seems the height of folly rising to the suicidal.

Thus **Hanun's** reaction was almost predictable; he laid the utmost humiliation upon David's emissaries to return a clear message that he had no interest in peace. Knowing how a Hebrew's beard was more than a cultural norm, it was seen as a religious imperative for males, the Ammonites shaved off half the beards of the diplomats and then followed that up with cutting off their clothing halfway up their rear ends in order for them to be shamefully exposed for public humiliation. In some ways (to the Middle Eastern mind) this was worse than death. What it actually amounted to was a declaration of war.

When David heard of this he sent some men to meet his diplomats on their return, and told them that they ought not to return to the City of David immediately; rather they should stay in Jericho, a smallish outpost at this time, until their beards grew back. But understand: while this seems like a kind thing for David to do (and it certainly had that element in it) it was far more about David (as a king) not wanting shame to be in his personal presence and having to view it every day. Looking even upon someone else's shame was seen as shame upon the person's

eyes who saw it (especially if it were royal eyes).

Since he had essentially declared war, the King of Ammon immediately sought allies. So he sent for help from the Aramean Kingdoms that had developed in the northern Trans-Jordan and in the Beqa Valley of Lebanon. These kingdoms were called **Aram Beth-Rechov**, **Aram-Zovah**, **Maacah**, and **Tov**. Again, this group of Aramean Kingdoms is collectively called Aram in most Bibles, but I prefer to call it Syria because it helps us to understand the area these troops came from using modern place names.

These were hired troops even though very often Bible commentators will label them as mercenaries. The only issue I have with that label is that mercenaries are troops who are in it for personal gain. The reality here is that the kings of these various kingdoms sublet a portion of their national militaries to **Hanun** in return for a handsome payment. So the soldiers didn't benefit nor was it their individual choice to join the fight; they merely had their lives put on the line by their king. They were ordered to go and fight on Ammon's behalf so that their king could build up his treasury. 1Chronicles 19 explains that **Hanun** spent over ½ million pounds of silver to rent the services of these armies. At today's prices that would amount to at least \$175 million.

We next get an account of the number and kinds of troops that **Hanun** received. If we look at 1Chronicles we get a little bit different accounting, more about the kind of troops than the amount. In the end what we find is that these foreign forces consisted of large numbers of cavalry, chariots, as well as foot soldiers. And we also find that the rallying point for the various armies of the Syrians was a place called Medeba, about 2 hours southeast of Heshbon, in the territory of Reuben.

David, of course, responded. He was not about to wait to be attacked when he knew the enemy was massing, so he sent his top general **Yo'av** with the full force of Israel's military under his command to confront them. Verse 8 explains that the battle went like this: first, the national army of Ammon (**Hanun's** own army) set up defensive positions around the capital city (Rabbah) because that's where the king's palace was located. The hired Syrian troops arrayed out into the open countryside in the broad flat plains of Medeba (about 4 miles southwest of the Ammonite capital city) to form a second front; this forced Israel to divide its forces.

Now there is an important underlying fact that has growing significance in the story of David. It

is that for the first time David SENT his army to confront an enemy and did not go with it. That is he is behaving more like typical sedentary monarch of his era, who stays safely and comfortably behind in his palace while he sends his top general into harm's way. While that is the method of political leaders in most cultures (including our own) from time immemorial, that is NOT the method of leadership prescribed for God's people. The king of God's Kingdom is not to "send" or "to be served"; rather he is to "lead" and is "to serve". The King is to go with his army. This is symbolized in how God "travels" with Israel's army by means of the Ark of the Covenant (to be sure God is not inside that golden box, rather it is but an illustration of God's presence with His people). Israel's kings are to follow this example and for many years a younger David did so; but not this time.

Joab divided his army by handpicking what he felt was the best most experienced troops and personally led them against the Syrian forces near Medeba. The remainder of Israel's forces was to be led by **Yo'av's** brother, **Avishai**, and they were to go up against **Hanun's** national army just outside the walls of Rabbah. The plan was for Joab to go and battle the hired Syrian troops at the same time **Avishai** was fighting the Ammonites; and if one division of Israelis began to be defeated then the other was to come to his rescue. In other words, they'd fight on 2 fronts simultaneously, hoping to prevail in both. But if it turned out they couldn't win using divided forces, they would abandon the one front and combine forces again.

In verse 12 before heading into battle Joab encourages all of the Israeli army by reminding them that what they fight for is nothing less than the towns and villages that form the Kingdom of God on earth. This isn't about personal honor; this isn't about the hope for spoils of war. This is something that Israel, today, desperately needs to understand and take to heart as the world (and the current American administration) relentlessly pressures Israel to negotiate away many of their towns and villages to God's sworn enemies in exchange for nothing more than a promise of peace. It is hard for me to contain my pain and anger at times that my own nation would try to force such a thing upon Israel. But for perhaps the majority of the churches in America and around the world to adopt a similar stance is too bitter for words. I don't know what it will take for a Church that has been infected and polluted for so many centuries with anti-Semitic doctrines to repent and be purified from such sin. I don't know what it will take for misguided Believers to wake up and understand that we are committing the worst possible rebellion against the Lord, second only to a refusal to accept His mercy and grace of forgiveness of sins through Messiah Yeshua.

It is nearly unfathomable to me that even a major portion of Israel's political parties embrace the so-called Two State Solution, and are openly willing to give up about half of Jerusalem (including the Temple Mount) for a peace agreement with the Palestinians. The Church and the Israelis need to understand that to resist the 90% of the world that wants Israel to abandon much of the Promised Land to pagans is to fight the good fight. We are to protect the villages

and towns of Israel with all of our might. Not because the Jews who live there somehow merit it, but because this is God's Kingdom and He has declared by means of the Abrahamic Covenant that the Hebrew people are the only divinely authorized land tenants.

Even when divided the forces of Israel as led by Joab were enormous; almost immediately the hired Syrian troops abandoned their positions and fled. When the Ammonite soldiers stationed around Rabbah heard about it, they quickly retreated inside the city walls. Neither the army nor the leaders of Ammon had any confidence that they could defeat Israel, which is why when **Hanun** humiliated the Israeli diplomats (a de facto declaration of war) they quickly outsourced for temporary help to join the fight. Interestingly once the Ammonites went inside their capital city that ended the battle. **Yo'av** chose not to begin a siege of Rabbah but rather to go home to Yerushalayim. This is because (as we'll see in the next chapter) that it must have been late fall at the time of this conflict; the rainy and cold season was approaching and so siege warfare was impractical. And besides, such cowardice of their military was proof enough that Ammon was, of itself, not an imminent threat to Israel.

However the Syrians (the Arameans) seemed to have a great deal more pride than the Ammonites and so the defeated **Hadad-Ezer** called for more troops from a region beyond Syria, to the northeast of Israel, across the Euphrates River. These would have been his vassals who had no choice but to obey him, answer the call and send troops. They rallied at a place called **Heilam** (in the Trans-Jordan) and the new troops were led by a fellow named **Shovakh**.

For whatever reason David decided he would lead his forces this time, and so they marched to **Heilam** and there defeated Hadad-Ezer's coalition of Aramean armies. An exceptionally large group of chariot teams and cavalry were destroyed and thus David's victory caused Hadad-Ezer's vassals to defect and they offered their allegiance to David. The Arameans and Syrians who really only joined this fight for money (paid by **Hanun**, King of Ammon) now had no choice but to hunker down, mind their own business and use what remained of their forces simply to defend against other nations who could not help but to have noticed their weakened condition that suddenly made them a target for takeover.

Let's move on to chapter 11.

READ 2ND SAMUEL CHAPTER 11 all

Ah, yes; the infamous story of David and Bathsheba. What child in Sunday School has not heard this story and enjoyed it immensely. And yet, I think that rarely is it ever spoken in the hushed and sad tones that it ought to be. I want to summarize the nature of this narrative before we study it verse-by-verse.

Of course, it really isn't a children's story at all. The Song of Solomon is avoided and hardly studied by adults (and even less so in mixed groups) so sexually explicit is its material. But the story of David and Bathsheba is far worse; because unlike the Song of Solomon that speaks of good and proper sexual relations between husband and wife that please God, our story is about adultery and then murder to cover it up. It's a story of lust and covetousness by the anointed king that results in blood guilt.

I think a good balanced tone that captures the essence of this episode of David's life is written in the Berleburg Bible, an outstanding work created in the early 1700's. An anonymous contributor to this German publication says this: ***“We may see from this how deep a soul may fall when it turns away from God, and from the guidance of His grace. This David, who in the days of his persecution would not even resort to means that were really plausible to defend himself, was now not ashamed to resort to the greatest crimes in order to cover his sin. O God! How great is our strength when we lay hold of Thee. And how weak we become as soon as we turn away from Thee. The greatest saints would be ready for the worst of deeds if Thou shouldst leave them but for a single moment without Thy protection. Whoever reflects upon this will give up all thought of self-security and spiritual pride”.***

The bottom line then to the story of David and Bathsheba is more of a warning to every Believer than it is a history lesson, or a delightful children's tale, or an early Hebrew version of Romeo and Juliet. It demonstrates to all who worship the God of Israel that it doesn't matter that we have accepted Christ if we freely choose to decide that once saved, we now have the tools to go it alone. That once saved, we think we have the inner capacity to resist temptation by our own will, to know the truth by our own conscience, and to follow God by our own goodness. That once saved we believe that God sets aside His justice and none of it applies to us any longer. There is no greater Bible hero (aside from Messiah Himself) than David. And yet, despite every advantage of nearness and access to God, of an abundance of divine mercy and grace available to him, of a lifetime of miraculous victories that no man would have a right to expect, his evil inclination took hold and we see a man that seems to currently be more Saul than David. Nowhere is the Devil blamed for this.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, during those times that we stick close to God's Word and avail ourselves of His **chesed** and guidance, we are as if in a boat (an ark) that floats securely in waters teeming with stealthy sharks swimming out of sight, just under the calm and inviting surface. Dip a toe into the dangerous but alluring water of transgression, and we may well be left with 9 digits instead of the full complement. Leave the safety of God's ark even for a moment and disaster is waiting to swallow us. Perhaps we'll only be bloodied, scarred and left less whole than when entered those dark waters, and thus afforded another opportunity to behave more wisely. Then again we may not survive whatsoever or we might but be so damaged and crippled as to be of no further use. David jumped out of the boat and the cost was enormous and the consequences extended to his children and followed him to his grave.

Amazingly, the Rabbis of old have been so anxious to hold David up as near perfect that they excuse every heinous sin we see uncovered in this story and often turn it on its head to actually make it meritorious. Since we've read the story and we're all quite familiar with it (at least on the surface), I want to take a moment to explain to you the Rabbinical Jewish view of this sad episode rather than interrupt the flow as we're studying it.

To begin with the general Rabbinical viewpoint is that nothing David did was sin because from before the beginning of the world it was destined that David would marry Bathsheba and in time they would produce Solomon. Therefore while it may appear in the Scriptures that what David (and Bathsheba) did was awful and rebellious, in fact it was all perfectly fine with God since the end result was all that mattered.

Further that the hero of this story was not the faithful **Uriyah** (Bathsheba's husband) but rather it was David. In order to make David appear virtuous the Rabbis have decided that **Uriyah** was a phony and had a wicked intention behind everything he did. Thus whatever happened to him he deserved it and it was fully just on David's part.

When David sent him out to be killed on the battlefield, it was because **Uriyah** disrespected David by not obeying his order to go home and wash his feet, but rather chose to stick near to the king. A disobedient soldier is worthy of capital punishment by any means and so David merely imparted God's justice when he arranged for his murder is their rationale.

Another Rabbi explains that it was by divine providence that David did these terrible acts

because God's purpose was so David would repent, it would be recorded in the Scriptures (including Psalm 51), and thus all future worshippers of the God of Israel would have a model of repentance to follow. Therefore this was all to David's merit and God found no fault with him.

In another amazing case of turning the Word of God on its head, some of the ancient Sages say that in those days the common practice was for all Israelite soldiers to issue a writ of divorce to their wives before they left for battle thus allowing them to remarry if the soldier never returned. Rashi says the divorce was of course not in effect if the soldier did return; but it was retroactive to when he left if he was killed or captured. Therefore by this ruling Bathsheba was not actually married to **Uriyah** when David seduced her because **Uriyah** was eventually killed. According to some Medieval Rabbinical commentary on the Talmud called the **Tosafos**, the military wives actually WERE divorced before the soldiers left for battle, but their husbands remarried them when they returned. Thus even if **Uriyah** had returned, Bathsheba was unattached during the time of his absence and so no adultery had occurred.

So the idea is that adultery never actually happened and Uriyah's murder wasn't really murder it was justice for his insolence and insubordination. But perhaps the final insult to the Holy Word of God comes when trying to explain away the last verse of chapter 11 that says:

^{CJB} **2 Samuel 11:27** *When the mourning was over, David sent and took her home to his palace, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But ADONAI saw what David had done as evil.*

The explanation in the section of the Talmud called Shabbos 56a says that this passage doesn't mean that David had actually done evil; it just means that while David may have **intended** to do evil, his **actions** weren't judged as evil because God had intended the result all along.

While we can all laugh or heap scorn at such nonsense, we need to realize that this is nothing more than allegorical teaching gone wild. Allegorical teaching means that the author of the passage intended something entirely different from what is actually said. Allegorical teaching has been at the center of Christianity and Pastoral sermons for centuries. And just as this sort of allegory has led Judaism off into the wilderness at times, so it has led Christians into a litany of errant theology and anti-Semitism. The only cure I know of is to learn God's Word and to take it for what it says; not to twist and turn it so that it serves as a validation of some

manmade doctrine that suits us or validates an agenda.

We'll study the affair of David and Bathsheba in depth next time.