

2 Samuel Chapter 10

Verses 1-5

David sent out his men as a “kindness” to the son of Hanun, but the Ammonites treated them with mistrust and contempt.

In the ancient world, having one’s “beard shaved” was an extreme insult, for it was supposed to be a voluntary act reserved for times of mourning (Isa. 15:2; Jer. 41:5; Ezek. 5:1).

Prisoners of war had their “garments cut off” (Isa. 20:24).

Verses 10:1-19

See 1 Chronicles 19:1-19.

2 Samuel 10:1 "And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead."

“King of the child of Ammon”:

I.e., Nahash (see note on 1. Sam. 11:1).

The Ammonites had been in battle with David before, but once the battle was over, David forgot the hate.

We see in the verse above, the father of the children of Ammon.

As is the case in many countries, one of the sons becomes king in his stead.

In this particular instance, it is Hanun.

2 Samuel 10:2 "Then said David, I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed 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."

“Show kindness unto Hanun”:

Since Nahash was an enemy of Saul; he was viewed as a friend and supporter of David.

It was implied that David and Nahash had entered into a covenant relationship, on the basis of which David desired to communicate his continuing loyalty to Nahash’s son, Hanun.

Apparently the Ammonites had been an encouragement to “David” during his days as a fugitive from Saul, much as their neighbors across the Jordan, the Moabites (1 Sam. 22:3-5).

Certainly “Nahash” was no friend of Saul (1 Sam. 11;1-11).

We see that David tries to show them kindness.

It seems, when Saul was trying to destroy David, he had found help with this Nahash.

Since Nahash was an enemy of Saul, he helped David.

Nahash had been enemies with Saul because he wanted to put out the right eye of the people of Jabesh-gilead to have peace with them.

Saul attacked them, and was always enemies with them.

David appreciated the kindness Nahash had shown him and wanted to be friendly with his sons.

David sent some servants to tell the sons of his sorrow of their dad's death.

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?"

“The city”:

I.e., Rabbah (see note on 11:1).

It appears they did not trust the intentions of David.

They were probably jealous of the great power that David had won in war.

It seemed they did not trust David, or the servants he sent them.

2 Samuel 10:4 "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."

“David’s” kindness is met with suspicion and his “servants” with contempt.

The shaving of “one half of” the men’s “beards” was a mark of humiliation (Jer. 41:5; 48:37).

“Shaved off the one half of their beards”:

This forced shaving was considered an insult and a sign of submission (compare Isa. 7:20).

“Cut off their garments ...even to their buttocks”:

To those who wore long garments in that time, exposure of the buttocks was a shameful practice inflicted on prisoners of war (Isa. 20:4).

Perhaps this was partly the concern of Michal in regard to David’s dancing (see 6:14, 20).

This was done to disgrace them.

The Orientals wore long beards, as a symbol of their freedom.

They wore no undergarments, so this was a terribly embarrassing thing, to have half of their clothes cut off.

David had wanted peace with them, but this will bring war.

2 Samuel 10:5 "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."

“Jericho”:

The first place west of the Jordan River that would have been reached by the servants of David as they returned from Rabbah.

They sent someone on to tell David of their plight.

He knew the embarrassment it would cause them to come into camp, so he allowed them to stay at Jericho until their beards were grown out.

Verses 10:6-11

The Ammonite army was in the city ready for defense, while the Aramean mercenaries were at some distance, encamped in the fields around the city.

Joab divided his forces to deal with both (see note on 1 Sam. 11:1).

2 Samuel 10:6 "And when the children of Ammon saw that they stank before David, the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand footmen, and of king Maacah a thousand men, and of Ish-tob twelve thousand men."

The two victories (verses 6-14; 15-19), were to settle the Syrian (Aramean), problem for David and bring security to his northern boundary.

The war with the Ammonites was caused by foolishness.

David did not provoke it, but the Ammonites started it by disgracing the Israelite ambassadors.

“Beth-rehob”:

An Aramean district located southwest of Zobah (Num. 13:21; Judges 18:28).

“Zoba”:

See note on “Zobah” on 8:3.

“Maacah”:

The region north of Lake Huleh north of Galilee (Deut. 3:14; Joshua 13:11-13).

“Ish-tob”:

A city east of the Jordan River, located 45 miles northeast of Rabbah (Judges 11:3, 5).

The children of Ammon knew they had done something that David would not overlook.

There would be war.

They must have been very wealthy, because they hired soldiers to help them fight against David.

They had hired 33,000 men to fight David.

2 Samuel 10:7 "And when David heard of [it], he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men."

Of the preparation made by the Ammonites to fight with him.

"He sent Joab and all the host of the mighty men":

He sent out Joab his general and an army under his command, consisting of men of strength, valor, and courage.

Of all the host and the mighty men, as Kimchi and Ben Melech, the famous mighty men mentioned in (2 Sam. 23:8).

He did not think it advisable to wait for the Ammonites, but carried the war into their own country, and, instead of suffering them to invade his dominions, he invaded theirs.

This is speaking of the large army led by Joab.

David's troops are skilled in war, and they have become mighty warriors.

David quickly sends men to the area, where the enemy is gathering for war.

2 Samuel 10:8 "And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the entering in of the gate: and the Syrians of Zoba, and of Rehob, and Ish-tob, and Maacah, [were] by themselves in the field."

The Ammonites and their allies formed separate armies, the former taking their stand immediately before the city, the latter "by themselves" at some distance, where the ground was more favorable for the maneuvers of their chariots.

It appears from this that the hired soldiers will be at the most risk out in the field.

The Ammonites will stay back in relative safety, near the entering of the gate.

The hired soldiers have not united yet with the Ammonites.

Joab gets his troops there while they are still separated.

2 Samuel 10:9 "When Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice [men] of Israel, and put [them] in array against the Syrians:"

The keen eye of this experienced general at once took in both the advantages and the danger of this disposition of the enemy.

He threw his whole force between their two divisions, organizing his own army in two parts, one facing the Ammonites and the other the Syrians, but each capable of supporting the other in case of need.

The enemy was thus cut in two, while the Israelites formed one compact body.

He himself took command of the wing facing the Syrians with the choice troops of Israel, as having the stronger enemy to meet, while he gave the rest of the forces opposing the Ammonites into the hand of his brother Abishai.

Joab would have to divide his army up, also.

He takes his very choicest men and sets them against the Syrians, which are 33,000 in number.

2 Samuel 10:10 "And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, that he might put [them] in array against the children of Ammon."

Who was a commander under him, and a very valiant man; and thus, as his enemy had two armies, he divided his into two parts, that he might the better attack them.

"That he might put them in array against the children of Ammon":

Draw them up in a line, and then place them rank and file to meet the children of Ammon, and give them battle.

It appears from this that Joab has placed his army between the Ammonites and the Syrians.

Abishai, the brother of Joab, will face the Ammonites.

Whichever one needs help, the other can turn their troops and help.

The only thing that will save David's army is the LORD.

2 Samuel 10:11 "And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee."

Which he might perceive by Joab's forces giving way, or by some sort of a signal agreed on between them.

"Then thou shalt help me":

Detach a part of his army to his support and assistance.

"But if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee":

In the same manner.

2 Samuel 10:12 "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good."

Be of good courage ... the LORD do that which seemeth him good":

Finding himself fighting on two fronts, Joab urged the army to "be strong" and recognize that the outcome of the battle depended ultimately upon the LORD (15:26).

It was a just and necessary war forced on Israel, so they could hope for God's blessing – and they received it (verses 13-14).

Joab expressed the determination to "be strong" and "of good courage" and to trust the LORD.

These words are similar to the famous charge given to Joshua (Joshua 1:6-7).

This is the balance between action and faith that each person needs when faced with challenges.

This army of David had been in battle before.

They were brave men, who knew the fate of their nation depended upon them standing and not running away.

Notice also, that Joab calls on the help of the LORD in this battle.

Joab and Abishai were brave men, and would do their best.

2 Samuel 10:13 "And Joab drew nigh, and the people that [were] with him, unto the battle against the Syrians: and they fled before him."

The attack was begun, not against both parts of the foe at once, but Joab threw the weight of his forces against the stronger division of the enemy while Abishai watched while he held in check the Ammonites.

His tactics were completely successful.

The Syrians fled, and the Ammonites, seeing that the whole army of Israel could now be thrown upon them, retired precipitately into the city.

We are not told the size of Joab's army.

We are told here that the Syrians became afraid and ran away.

It appears that Joab and his men started advancing and that is when the Syrians ran.

2 Samuel 10:14 "And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, then fled they also before Abishai, and entered into the city. So Joab returned from the children of Ammon, and came to Jerusalem."

“So Joab returned”:

He did not attempt to siege and capture the city of Rabbah at this time because the time was unseasonable (see note on 11:1; compare 12:26-29).

They were no longer boastful when their hired soldiers ran.

They ran back into their city for safety.

The Ammonites refusal of friendship from David had greatly cost them.

They not only lost the war, but lost self-respect in the process.

2 Samuel 10:15 "And when the Syrians saw that they were smitten before Israel, they gathered themselves together."

Considered it in their minds, and conversed with one another about it, and fearing what would be the consequence of it.

They gathered themselves together":

Not only the forces got together again, that fled before Joab, but all the kings of Syria united their forces together, as appears from (2 Samuel 10:19).

Supposing that David would avenge himself on them for assisting the Ammonites against him; and therefore, judged it advisable to raise a large army, that they might be in a condition to receive him.

2 Samuel 10:16 "And Hadarezer sent, and brought out the Syrians that [were] beyond the river: and they came to Helam; and Shobach the captain of the host of Hadarezer [went] before them."

"Hadarezer": See note on 8:3.

"Helam":

The place of battle, about 7 miles north of Ish-tob

All of this seems to be a fuller explanation of the same battles we read of (in chapter 8).

Hadarezer had not entered personally in hiring out to the Ammonites to fight for them.

It does seem that when they lost the battle, however he felt obligated to restore their good name by fighting the troops of David himself.

He sent for his men to come back to him.

Shobach was the captain of his hosts.

2 Samuel 10:17 "And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and passed over Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him."

What preparations the Syrians were making to fight him, and where they were.

"He gathered all Israel together":

All the fighting men in the country.

"And passed over Jordan, and came to Helam":

Which, according to Bunting, was twenty miles from Jerusalem.

David seems to have gone himself in person to this war.

"And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him":

They formed themselves in a line of battle, and attacked him first, being eager to fight, and perhaps confident of victory, because of their numbers.

2 Samuel 10:18 "And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew [the men of] seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there."

The large number of soldiers in the campaign suggests that perhaps seven thousand charioteers were involved in the battle, as stated (in 1 Chronicles 19:18).

David leads the men himself in this.

It seems that Joab had not gone in and finished the job on the Ammonites and Syrians during their last confrontation.

There is a slight discrepancy in the numbers in this war against David.

The exact number is not that important however.

The important thing is that David and his men destroy them.

2 Samuel 10:19 "And when all the kings [that were] servants to Hadarezer saw that they were smitten before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more."

"Made peace with Israel":

All the petty kingdoms of Aram became subject to Israel and feared to aid Ammon against Israel.

There were thousands of the enemies slain in this battle led by David.

It seems Hadarezer had been over several countries before this battle, and so they had paid tribute to him.

Now that he is defeated, they made peace with Israel and became their subjects.

Then the Syrians saw how futile it was to fight against David, so they no longer help the Ammonites anymore.

2 Samuel Chapter 10 Questions

1. Who reigned in Ammon, when his father died?
2. What does David attempt to do at the death of Nahash?
3. Who did David send with greetings to Hanun?
4. Why had Saul been enemies with Nahash?
5. What did the princes of Ammon decide about David's offer of friendship?
6. What did Hanun do to David's servants?
7. Why did Orientals wear long beards?
8. What will this embarrassment bring?
9. Where did David tell his servants to tarry, until their beards grew back out?
10. What did the children of Ammon do, when they realized they stank before David?
11. How many soldiers did they hire?
12. Who did David send to lead his army?
13. Where would the children of Ammon fight?
14. Who does Joab set his very choicest army against?
15. Who led the other part of the army?
16. Where had Joab placed his men?
17. The only thing that will save David's army is the _____.
18. What were David's soldiers encouraged to do?
19. When Joab and his men came toward the Syrians, what did the Syrians do?
20. What happened to the sons of Ammon, when they saw what the Syrians did?
21. Where do we read another place of these same battles?
22. Why did Hadarezer get involved in this battle?
23. Who led the army of Israel against Hadarezer?
24. What did the other kings do, when they saw David defeat Hadarezer?
25. Why did the Syrians no longer fight against David?