

David and Hanun of the Ammonites



2 Samuel 10:1-19

Near the end of Chapter 8 the writer sums up David's reign at this point with the statement, *"David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people"* (v.15). In our homework we studied a number of character traits modeled by David, but originated in the character of God. We are left with something of a picture of how Christ, the King of Kings will reign in eternity. Continuing with the theme on character traits, we will take a look at three traits illustrated by David that give us a glimpse into the heart of the Lord. Today's lesson is an example of the Lord's compassion for us and his zeal to protect and defend us. David's dealings with Hanun, the Ammonites and the Arameans become an example of the Lord's dealings with those precious to him. Before we proceed with today's scripture passage let's spend a few minutes looking at the background for our lesson today.

Back in chapter 8 we saw that David had been subduing the nations around him, bringing those nations under control of Israel. Genesis 15:18-21 says, *"On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates-- the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites and Jebusites."* This is God's promise to Abraham that the land that would belong to Israel would stretch from the Nile to the south, up to the land of the Hittites, which is what we call Asia Minor or Turkey with Damascus as its capitol, all the way to the Euphrates River to the east.¹ This is the land David had been conquering. In 8:5-6 we read that the Aramean King Hedorhazael became subject to David, paying him tribute in gold, silver and bronze. And in 8:12 we read that David had also subdued the Ammonites. This land, not only included in God's covenant with Israel, but was also a source of wealth in the tributes paid by the

¹ The Hittites, who were the warlike element of this confederation of tribes. They inhabited the whole region between the Euphrates and Damascus, their chief cities being Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Kadesh, now Tell Neby Mendeh, in the Orontes valley, about six miles south of the Lake of Homs. These Hittites seem to have risen to great power as a nation, as for a long time they were formidable rivals of the Egyptian and Assyrian empires. In the book of Joshua they always appear as the dominant race to the north of Galilee.—Easton's Illustrated Dictionary

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vassaldoms, as well as a source of wealth from control over trade routes that crossed this region.

Our lesson today focuses on Hanun of the Ammonites in what appears to be a rebellion against David where Hanun employs the Arameans as mercenaries. The original treaty between the Ammonites and David was established under the previous King of the Ammonites, Nahash, establishing Ammon as a vassal to the Isrealites. When Nahash dies, David sends envoys to express sympathy for the dead King. David had said in verse 2, "*I will show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me.*" Just as David showed sympathy, generosity and compassion to Mephibosheth the only living relation to Saul, David here attempts to do the same for Hanun at the death of his Father. His sympathy is extended to Israelites and non-Israelites. No doubt David was also sending his envoys to renew the treaty that had been issued by his father.

David was attuned to suffering. He had experienced it. He grieved over the death of Jonathan, and even Saul. He was also acquainted with the loneliness of grief, especially because of his station as King. He had no peers, no one with which to share or console his grief. David wrote in Psalm 69:20:

*Scorn has broken my heart
and has left me helpless;
I looked for sympathy, but there was none,
for comforters, but I found none.*

This depth of sympathy in David is a reflection of the Lord's own heart. In several psalm's we see the compassion and sympathy the Lord has for his people. Psalm 103:13 shows the Lord's compassion is like that of a father to his child:

*As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;*

Psalm 116:5, 15 says the Lord is full of compassion, and we are precious to him in the death of a loved one. He feels our loss and is sympathetic and compassionate:

*The LORD is gracious and righteous;
our God is full of compassion....
Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.*

And Psalm 145:9 reveals that his compassion on all he has made:

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*The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.*

David could understand the grief experienced by Hanun. And wanting to extend kindness because of the kindness shown him by Haman's father David reached out in sympathy. Sadly, due to deceitful advice and inexperience on the part of the new Ammonite King, Hanun takes this opportunity to not only defy David but to insult and humiliate David's envoys. Rather than treating the envoys with the respect and consideration due to them as the representatives of their overlord and the superior party in the covenant treaty entered in by his father, Hanun humiliated them egregiously and sent them back to David. Hanun's actions were a desecration of the men's bodies, their clothes and their mission on behalf of David. Forcibly removing and Israelite's beard was to force him to violate the Torah (Leviticus 19:27). Only in instances of specific religious rituals or profound distress were Israelite men to shave their beards. Cutting away the envoys' robes to expose their backsides also put them in violation of the Torah, as well as the sheer humiliation to men of that culture. Both actions were symbolic desecration and defiance of the Law. It was an expression of contempt on the part of the Ammonites for what was sacred and holy to Israel, their overlord. It was a calculated act of aggression and war.²

David's sympathy turned from Hanun and was redirected to his envoys. David sent messengers to meet the men, provide for them and shelter them in Jericho until they could return to Jerusalem with dignity. They would not have to face their families or David's court in Jerusalem in a disgraceful state. David gave them the time, the means and the privacy to recover from their humiliation and be restored to a place of compliance to Torah regulations. A scriptural parallel can be found in Ezekiel 16:8-14. It is God's response to the shame Israel has suffered:

"Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.

9 "I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. 10 I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. 11 I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck,¹² and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your

² New American Commentary

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ears and a beautiful crown on your head. ¹³ So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. ¹⁴ And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.

David's sympathy towards Hanun and was replaced by righteous anger at the humiliation of the envoys and the contempt directed towards the Lord in forcing them to sin against the Lord. In some respects the most frightening of David's character traits is revealed against the Ammonites who have not only spurned a true offer of sympathy and continued peace, but have done so in a way designed to cruelly humiliate innocent people. David responds with a righteous anger toward the enemy of his people and the mockers of the Lord.

When Hanun realized he had made himself a "*stench in David's nostrils*" (v. 6) the Ammonites hired the Arameans to defend them against David's army. He hired mercenaries from Beth Rehbo, Zobah, Maacah and Tob, Aramean city-states north and east of the Sea of Galilee. According to 1 Chronicles 19:6, Hanun paid 1,000 talents (approximately 75,000 pounds) of silver to the Arameans. David sent Joab and the army to subdue the Ammonites again. When the army arrives they find themselves in the unfortunate position of being between the Ammonites with their walled city and the Arameans behind them. Joab and his brother Abishai come up with a battle strategy. Joab's statement in verse 12, "*Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what is good in his sight*" reminds us that no matter what humiliating or unjust circumstance we find ourselves in, the Lord will do what is right and just. In this case, the Lord disperses the Arameans and the Ammonites hide behind their walls as they watch the Arameans flee. At this time Israel does not attack the Ammonites. Joab brings the army back to Jerusalem.

David reveals a righteous zeal to defend Israel. As Israel's shepherd and king, it was his job to protect and defend Israel. This also included standing up against the Ammonites who insulted the Lord, as well. The defiance of the Ammonites and the Arameans had to come to a swift end before they rose up and attacked Israel. If they entered Israel they would desecrate the land of the Lord, not just the people of the Lord. Their defiance is not just against David, but against the Lord as well.

David didn't just send someone to "deal with" the Ammonites and the Arameans, David got involved himself. David himself then leads the army across the Jordan into the land of the Arameans to Helam. The Arameans, a bigger force with which to contend, is

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brought down so as no longer to be a threat to Israel or an ally to the Ammonites. David and his army utterly demolish the Arameans, subjecting them to him and increasing the holdings of Israel fulfilling the Lord's promise given to Abraham in Genesis 15:18. The Lord himself will take matters into his own hands when it comes to his children. Lamentations 3:58 tells us that the Lord will take up our case and redeem from those who wrong us:

*O Lord, you took up my case;
you redeemed my life.
59 You have seen, O LORD, the wrong done to me.
Uphold my cause!*

Isaiah 35:3-4 tells us it is the Lord who physically strengthens us and emotionally encourages us:

*Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
4 say to those with fearful hearts,
"Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you."*

Moses taught the Israelites in Deuteronomy 32:35 that vengeance belongs to the Lord when we have been wronged:

*It is mine to avenge; I will repay.
In due time their foot will slip;
their day of disaster is near
and their doom rushes upon them."*

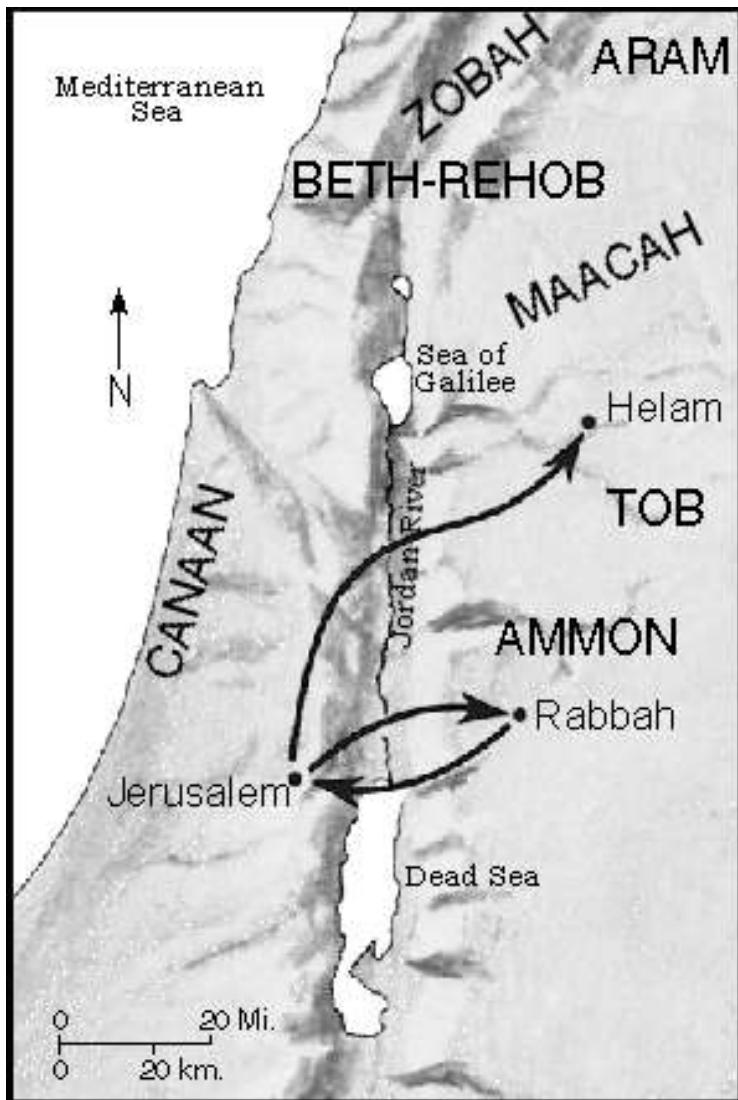
And in Matthew 18:6-7 Jesus tells us the Lord will come in vengeance against those who harm his children or cause them to sin:

*"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.
7 "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!"*

From our lesson today we see David as an example of the Lord's compassion and zeal for his treasured children, as well as his anger and judgment against those who would

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bring harm upon them. When we have been shamed or treated unjustly, the Lord himself will deal with those who would dare to hurt his children. This is a promise of the Lord that is true, not just for Israel, but for all who call upon the name of the Lord.



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