

The Ammonites and the Syrians are Defeated

Call to Worship: Psalm 66:1-4

1st Scripture: 1 Kings 12:1-19

2nd Scripture: 2 Samuel 10

Hymn #81- *A Mighty Fortress*

Hymn #772- *Deliver Me From Evil*

Hymn #490- *Onward Christian Soldiers*

Introduction:

Last time, we beheld a glorious picture of the "chesed" of God (the "kindness; covenant faithfulness" of God) toward unworthy sinners, reflected in the "chesed" (the "kindness"), which David had shown Mephibosheth, Jonathan's crippled son. This morning, David will seek to convey another act of "chesed" ("kindness") to Hanun, the king of Ammon, whose father, Nahash, the former king, had just died. Nahash and David were friends, and Nahash had shown David "chesed," during the course of his reign. And so, David wanted to return the favor to Hanun, Nahash's son, beginning by sending some of his servants to the other side of the Jordan River, to comfort Hanun, during his time of loss and grieving. However, sadly, at the counsel of unwise men, Hanun rejected this kindness, and provoked an all out war with David, viewing David's motives with great suspicion of evil intent. And yet, by this very means, God will ultimately cause, both the Ammonites and the Syrians, to suffer defeat at the hands of his servant David, leading the kings, who once served the king of Syria, to now become servants of David.

I. A War Erupts with the Ammonites

And so, as the servants of David arrive at Ammon, seeking to extend comfort and encouragement to King Hanun, the princes of the land, foolishly provoke suspicion in the heart of Hanun, accusing David of having ulterior motives for sending the men. Notice again, their words to the king, found in verse 3, "Do you think that David really honors your father because he has sent comforters to you? Has David not rather sent his servants to you to search the city, to spy it out, and to overthrow it?"

Heeding the counsel then, of the princes, Hanun takes David's ambassadors and utterly shames them. He shaves off half of their beards and then cuts off their garments, from the waist down, exposing their private regions, before sending them away. In the east, great dignity was attached to the beard (all men had them), and so, shaving *half* off like this, was all the more, a

great insult to these men. And what was done to their clothing, speaks for itself, in most cultures.

Needless to say, the offense was great, both, toward these ambassadors, and toward King David, whom they represented. Especially in the face of such kindness, the insult was doubly offensive! And in verse 5, we indeed find, that the men were greatly ashamed (humiliated), such that they could not even go back to Jerusalem to face their families and friends. And so, when David had found out about what had happened, he sent messengers to the men, who were at Jericho, just on the west side of the Jordan River, now in Israelite territory. And David, no doubt furious at Hanun, encouraged the men to wait at Jericho, until their beards should grow back, so that they could return to Jerusalem with their dignity intact.

Following this, it becomes very clear to the people of Ammon that David is furiously repulsed by their actions, and so, they make preparations to war against Israel. They wind up hiring twenty thousand Syrian soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zoba, one thousand soldiers from the king of Maacah, and another twelve thousand soldiers from Ish-Tob. All in all then, apart from their own army, they had hired an additional thirty-three thousand men, with the obvious intention of over powering and defeating the army of Israel.

And so, David sends Joab out, with all the army of the mighty men, so as to meet the Ammonites for battle. And this is one of those places, where Joab shines brightly, as a wise and talented military leader, even showing some sense of a confidence in God (yes, the unregenerate and lost can actually do even that, at times). While out in the battlefield, it becomes clear that he is facing two armies, the army of the Syrians and the army of the Ammonites, one in front of him, and the other behind him. The Ammonites stood at the entrance of the gate to their city (probably Rabbah or Medeba), while the hired Syrians stood at a distance, out in the field, with the army of Israel, sandwiched between the two. And so, Joab wisely divides the army of Israel up, into two battalions, as it were, one to face the Syrians, and the other, the Ammonites. He will lead the one battalion, made up of some of the mightiest men, to war against the greater Syrian army, while his brother, Abishai, will lead the other, to face the lesser, Ammonite army. And very clearly, being outnumbered, either could come to the other's aid, if they were pushed back from the army which they were facing. Joab's wise, and God-honoring words, given in verse 12, give you both, the very real sense that they were greatly outnumbered, and, at the very least, a

generic sense, in which, Joab was affirming their dependence upon God for the outcome, of what would naturally be an impossible situation.

He states to Abishai, "Be of good courage, and let us be strong for our people and for the cities of our God. And may the Lord do what is good in His sight." Again, here we have Joab on one of his "up-swings," perhaps at his best, in a life marred by insubordination, cold-blooded murder and merciless hatred. The soldier in him was powerful, and even useful, when it pointed in the right and proper direction, but there was no compassion, love or mercy, to offer the good and just balance, required in a true man of God. Needless to say, here, he is to be commended. He stands bold and courageous, against great odds, fighting for a good cause, while entrusting the results to God. "Let us fight with great courage, and with all of our might, and may the Lord do what is good in His sight. May the Lord do what He deems best, with our most diligent efforts, for the sake of our people, and for the cities of God!"

And so, what then are the results of the battle?

II. The Ammonites and the Syrians are Defeated

"So Joab and the people who were with him drew near for the battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him" (vs. 13).

And so, God here gives Joab and his men, the victory against the great Syrian army, such that the Syrians flee for their lives in defeat. And then, upon seeing the Syrians fleeing (from a distance), the Ammonites, who are battling against Abishai and his men, quickly flee themselves, retreating back into the city. And Joab returns to Jerusalem, awaiting a more ideal time to lay siege to the city, within which the Ammonites had retreated (the weather probably did not presently permit a siege, which generally takes much time and resources---see 11:1). [Note: This will happen in the next chapter, setting the stage for David's great sin with Bathsheba]

However, the embarrassed and defeated Syrians, regroup, and replenish their army, with the intent of going back to war against Israel. In verse 16, we are told, "Then Hadadezer sent and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the River, and they came to Helam. And Shobach the commander of Hadadezer's army went before them."

But this time, David leads the army of Israel out to the battle. In verse 17, we are told, "When it was told David, he gathered all Israel, crossed over the Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in battle array against David and fought with him." And, of

course, the Lord gives David a great victory against the mighty Syrians, such that the Syrians were afraid to ever help the Ammonites again, and several kings, who once served the Syrians, now made peace with Israel, and served them.

Notice, in verses 18-19, we are told, "Then the Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen of the Syrians, and struck Shobach the commander of their army, who died there. And when all the kings who were servants to Hadadezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them. So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon anymore." Clearly, the Syrians had suffered a huge defeat, at the hands of David and the army of Israel!

III. Conclusive Thoughts and Applications

1) Consider brethren, how our words can greatly affect the lives of those whom we would seek to counsel. Counseling/advice is a good thing, but I wonder, how often do we pray, before spilling forth words that may greatly affect precious lives, for good or for bad? Let us never adopt the mindset that assumes that advice is a small matter, and of little importance. [Ex: Rehoboam, from our first Scripture reading]

Here, Hanun, a new and young king, receives the kingdom of his father, only to throw it away because of the foolish counsel he had received from young, foolish princes. Did these princes consider for a moment the potential consequences of their counsel to Hanun, concerning the comforters, which David had sent? Did they know that they would provoke an all out war, where many thousands would be killed? Indeed, the great infection, affected Syria, Ammon and Israel...all for what? For a foolish suspicion of David's motives, in sending ambassadors to comfort Hanun. And what of Hanun? Were there no older and wiser men, with whom he could have discoursed concerning the matter, before moving forward to greatly shame David and David's men, who were there, with good and righteous intentions? Even if they had some inkling of a right to be suspicious, was there not a wiser way to go about handling this matter? Oh brethren, what a joy it is to know that we can trust in a sovereign God, so that we can avoid such disasters, when we are unsure of a thing.

But again, let us be cautious with our words, brethren; slow to speak, quick to listen; dedicated to a pattern of regular prayer, confessing our desperate need of God's wisdom and grace, to guide us through this difficult path of life. How often has our understanding been

marred, or the product of a reasoning that has misinterpreted (or failed to deal rightly with) the facts. So often, counsel/advice is shot around so quickly and prayerlessly, regarding major decisions in life, and we fail to recognize the great damage we can cause, with a few words, passed on to a friend, who trusts and respects us. How many marriages have crumbled because of poor, ungodly, worldly advice/counsel? How many jobs have been unnecessarily lost, families divided, friendships ruined, lives permanently changed and damaged for the worse, because of careless, bad counsel, spoken out of unsanctified, prayerless lips (even by Christians)? Indeed, counsel can do a lot of good or a lot of harm. And so, let us always remind ourselves that words often hurt, far more than "sticks and stones."

2) Consider again, the fact that Joab, who at times, will cause the stomach to sour in disgust because of his ungodly, self-motivated actions, yet, had his positive qualities. When it came to the art of war, Joab was often wise, bold and successful, even expressing some sense of a confidence in God. Joab risked his life in this text, for the sake of his people, and the cities of God. His words clearly prove that he was greatly outnumbered, and under normal circumstances, without any hope of defeating the Syrians and the Ammonites. "And may the Lord do what is good in His sight." Joab clearly risked his life here, and left the results to God. And, of course, God gave him the victory, especially for the sake of David and Israel.

I say all of this, brethren, to say that all people bear the image of God, and though that image is grossly marred because of sin, we yet see the traces of God, even in the unconverted. And that being the case, there is a place to commend, honor, and recognize this blessed, God preserved quality in the lost. We see it in godless artists, writers, doctors, philosophers, some world leaders, war heroes, athletes, inventors, people with morals...etc. And there is a place to appeal to that reality, in the lives of unbelievers, calling them to repentance and faith in the God, whom they reflect (in some capacity), and yet, do not know. Obviously, like Joab, this reflection may be "one directional," but it is a glimmer of sorts, nonetheless. One of the commendations I would give some Roman Catholics, is that they do have a deep concern for the unborn. And I believe there is a level of sincerity to their concern. They do value life. And we can learn from them, in this respect. Now, we must bring all such qualities into the central context of submission to Christ, and none of these things carry the assurance of salvation, but they are commendable, nonetheless. The broader spectrum of Joab's life, would confirm that he was not a true believer; he lacked the true consistency of a believer, but at times, he did manifest

glimmers of common grace, and this is one of those times. [Ex: Matthew McConaughey thanks God at the Oscars]

3) Consider again, the mysterious ways, in which God uses the sins of men, to bring out His promises. As a consequence of the sin of Hanun, God fulfills His promise, given to Abraham and reiterated to Joshua:

Genesis 15:18- "On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates--"

Joshua 1:4- "From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory."

As I have said in the past, God's promise to Abraham and Israel, concerning the land of Canaan, met its greatest fulfillment, during the reign of David. And here, David is able to secure land, all the way up to the Euphrates River, in accordance with this promise. But note again, the unusual way in which the Lord fulfills His promise. Who would have thought, it would have begun with David seeking to show "chesed" ("kindness") to the king of Ammon? That righteous and considerate action, on the part of David, led to the shaming of David's ambassadors, by the king of Ammon, which led to an all out war with Ammon, where Hanun hired help from the Syrians (up north), leading to a large scale war with the Syrians (after Joab had defeated them, the first time), which led to David gaining territory and servitude from the kings up north. And all of this, fulfills an ancient promise, on the part of God, to Israel, through Abraham. These events were in the mind of God, when He made and reiterated that promise! Brethren, who can fathom the infinite mind of God? Who can track His path and His ways, and the unfolding of His glorious will? Indeed, His ways are past finding out, are they not? If you connect the dots of God's fulfilled promises, brethren, throughout all of history, including those that are yet to be fulfilled, you would have a map with connected dots all over the place, and the path would be beyond untraceable, the whole way through! And all of this shouts aloud, "Behold your God! Who can know the mind of God? What could ever stop Him from accomplishing every iota of His perfect and eternal will!" In other words, brethren, even the way in which God fulfills His Word, is an additional display of the glory and splendor of His Being! It is a magnificent display

of the bigness and the greatness of God! And it provokes; indeed, it ought to provoke worship!
[Consider the cross, and that which God has accomplished by means of it!]

4) Lastly, brethren, as you ponder the utter shame and humiliation, which David's ambassadors had suffered, at the hands of those, whom they sought to offer comfort and goodness, consider two things:

a- Remind yourself again of the glory of our Christ, who, for our sakes, suffered great humiliation and shame. John tells us that, "He went to His own, but His own did not receive Him." Our Lord was rejected and murdered by His own people, and yet, He was also rejected and murdered, and became the object of God's wrath, because of our sins! Who would take the shame of another, so freely? And more so, who would take the shame of his own enemies, so freely, so that they might be highly exalted among angels! The shame that our Lord suffered, brethren, for us, made the ambassadors of David, in their humiliation, look like kings, in comparison. For, they put on new clothing. They were able to avoid being seen by their own people. They regrew their beards. But our Lord, was stripped of His clothing and nailed to a cross, before all; He was marred beyond recognition, and He bore the wrath of God in His own body...but all of that, for us, brethren! And now, we have the peace of God in this life, and the certain expectation of glory beyond the grave! And this guarantee is for all, who truly believe in Christ! He was rejected by His own, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His Name!" Oh, what a glorious hope for all sinners, who put their trust in Him, and in Him alone!

b- Brethren, many Christians have suffered, and many yet will suffer, humiliation for the sake of Christ! But, see here in David, that his ambassadors were soon vindicated by their king. He did not ignore their shame or consider it a light matter. In fact, the offense was directed toward him, was it not? And David avenged them! And brethren, we are the apple of our blessed Savior's eye. If we are touched or harmed or humiliated for the sake of the Gospel, those who dare harm us, harm the apple of His eye! And He will, therefore, avenge His people! We identify with Him, in our suffering, and He most certainly identifies with us! Know that He is always with us, and in due time, every wrong will be righted! He will avenge His own!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25