

## LESSON NINE 19-20

### ISRAEL'S CONFLICT WITH AMMON THE CONQUEST OF THE PHILISTINES

#### 11. VICTORY OVER AMMON AND SYRIA (19:1-19)

##### INTRODUCTION

The conflict with the Ammonites was one of the most critical in which David was ever involved. During this encounter David sinned with Bathsheba and opened the door to numerous troubles which plagued him until he died. He was a great king, but he failed God in this Bathsheba incident.

##### TEXT

Chapter 19:1. And it came to pass after this, that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his stead. 2. And David said, "I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, because his father showed kindness to me. So David sent messengers to comfort him concerning his father." And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon to Hanun, to comfort him. 3. But the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun, "Thinkest thou that David doth honor thy father, in that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Are not his servants come unto thee to search, and to overthrow, and to spy out the land?" 4. So Hanun took David's servants, and shaved them, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away. 5. Then there went certain persons, and told David how the men were served. And he sent to meet them; for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, "Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return."

6. And when the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the children of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia, and out of Aram-maacah, and out of Zobah. 7. So they hired them thirty and two thousand chariots, and the king of Maacah and his people, who

came and encamped before Medeba. And the children of Ammon gathered themselves together from their cities, and came to battle. 8. And when David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men. 9. And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the gate of the city: and the kings that were come were by themselves in the field.

10. Now when Joab saw that the battle was set against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians. 11. And the rest of the people he committed into the hand of Abishai his brother; and they put themselves in array against the children of Ammon. 12. 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 help thee. 13. Be of good courage, and let us play the man for our people, and for the cities of our God: and Jehovah do that which seemeth him good." 14. So Joab and the people that were with him drew nigh before the Syrians unto the battle; and they fled before him. 15. And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, they likewise fled before Abishai his brother, and entered into the city. Then Joab came to Jerusalem.

16. And when the Syrians saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they sent messengers, and drew forth the Syrians that were beyond the River, with Shophach the captain of the host of Hadarezer at their head. 17. And it was told David; and he gathered all Israel together, and passed over the Jordan, and came upon them, and set the battle in array against them. So when David had put the battle in array against the Syrians, they fought with him. 18. And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew of the Syrians the men of seven thousand chariots, and forty thousand footmen, and killed Shophach the captain of the host. 19. And when the servants of Hadarezer saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they made peace with David, and served him: neither would the Syrians help the children of Ammon any more.

## 12. WARS WITH RABBAH AND THE PHILISTINES (20:1-8)

Chapter 20:1. And it came to pass, at the time of the return

of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that Joab led forth the army, and wasted the country of the children of Ammon, and came and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried at Jerusalem. And Joab smote Rabbah, and overthrew it. 2. And David took the crown of their king from off his head, and found it to weigh a talent of gold, and there were precious stones in it; and it was set upon David's head: and he brought forth the spoil of the city, exceeding much. 3. And he brought forth the people that were therein, and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes. And thus did David unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. And David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

4. And it came to pass after this, that there arose war at Gezer with the Philistines: then Sibbecai the Hushathite slew Sippai, of the sons of the giant; and they were subdued. 5. And there was again war with the Philistines; and Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. 6. And there was again war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot; and he also was born unto the giant. 7. And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea David's brother slew him. 8. These were born unto the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

#### PARAPHASE

Chapter 19:1. When King Nahash of Ammon died, his son Hanun became the new king. 2, 3. Then David declared, "I am going to show friendship to Hanun because of all the kind things his father did for me." So David sent a message of sympathy to Hanun for the death of his father. But when David's ambassadors arrived, King Hanun's counselors warned him, "Don't fool yourself that David has sent these men to honor your father! They are here to spy out the land so that they can come in and conquer it!" 4. So King Hanun insulted King David's ambassadors by shaving their beards and cutting their robes off at the middle to expose their buttocks; then he

sent them back to David in shame. 5. When David heard what had happened, he sent a message to his embarrassed emissaries, telling them to stay at Jericho until their beards had grown out again.

6. When King Hanun realized his mistake he sent \$2,000,000 to enlist mercenary troops, chariots, and cavalry from Mesopotamia, Aram-maacah, and Zobah. 7. He hired thirty-two thousand chariots, as well as the support of the king of Maacah and his entire army. These forces camped at Medeba where they were joined by the troops King Hanun had recruited from his cities. 8. When David learned of this, he sent Joab and the mightiest warriors of Israel. 9. The army of Ammon went out to meet them and began the battle at the gates of the city of Medeba. Meanwhile, the mercenary forces were out in the field.

10. When Joab realized that the enemy forces were both in front and behind him, he divided his army and sent one group to engage the Syrians. 11. The other group, under the command of his brother Abishai, moved against the Ammonites. 12. "If the Syrians are too strong for me, come and help me," Joab told his brother; "and if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I'll come and help you. 13. Be courageous and let us act like men to save our people and the cities of our God. And may the Lord do what is best." 14. So Joab and his troops attacked the Syrians, and the Syrians turned and fled. 15. When the Ammonites, under attack by Abishai's troops, saw that the Syrians were retreating, they fled into the city. Then Joab returned to Jerusalem.

16. After their defeat, the Syrians summoned additional troops from east of the Euphrates River, led personally by Shophach, King Hadadezer's commander-in-chief. 17, 18. When this news reached David, he mobilized all Israel, crossed the Jordan River, and engaged the enemy troops in battle. But the Syrians again fled from David, and he killed seven thousand of their troops. He also killed Shophach, the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army. 19. Then King Hadadezer's troops surrendered to King David and became his subjects. And never

again did the Syrians aid the Ammonites in their battles.

Chapter 20:1. The following spring (spring was the season when wars usually began) Joab led the Israeli army in successful attacks against the cities and villages of the people of Ammon. After destroying them, he laid siege to Rabbah and conquered it. Meanwhile, David had stayed in Jerusalem. 2. When David arrived on the scene, he removed the crown from the head of King Milcom of Rabbah and placed it upon his own head. It was made of gold inlaid with gems and weighed seventy-five pounds! David also took great amounts of plunder from the city. 3. He drove the people from the city and set them to work with saws, iron picks, and axes, as was his custom with all the conquered Ammonite peoples. Then David and all his army returned to Jerusalem.

4. The next war was against the Philistines again, at Gezer. But Sibbecai, a man from Hushath, killed one of the sons of the giant, Sippai, and so the Philistines surrendered. 5. During another war with the Philistines, Elhanan (the son of Jair) killed Lahmi, the brother of Goliath the giant; the handle of his spear was like a weaver's beam! 6, 7. During another battle, at Gath, a giant with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot (his father was also a giant) defied and taunted Israel; but he was killed by David's nephew Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimea. 8. These giants were descendants of the giants of Gath, and they were killed by David and his soldiers.

#### COMMENTARY

Among the military campaigns of David none was more important and none involved more tragic personal consequences than the war with Ammon and Syria. The parallel account of this conflict is in II Samuel 10:1-19. The first five verses in the present chapter describe the Ammonite insult to David's ambassadors and to Israel. When Saul was king of Israel the Ammonite king was named Nahash. "Nahash" means serpent. The serpent was regarded as symbolic of wisdom and craftiness. Nahash and the Ammonites held the Gileadite people in subjection in the days preceding the reign of Saul. When the

Jabesh-gileadites were told to present themselves so the Ammonites could gouge out their right eyes (I Samuel 11:1-11), an urgent message was sent to Saul. The newly appointed Hebrew king organized his army and delivered the Jabesh-gileadites. For this service the people of Jabesh-gilead were always grateful to Saul. Some fifty or sixty years elapsed between this incident and the one presently being considered. This "Nahash" may be the same person to whom reference is made in I Samuel, chapter 11, or he may be the son of the king of Ammon in Saul's day. Some nations used class names for their kings. "Agag" was such a name among the Amalekites. "Pharaoh" was used in this manner in Egypt. "Nahash" could have been used the same way among the Ammonites.

Upon the death of Nahash, as a friendly gesture, David sent representatives to express Israel's sympathy. In time past Nahash had been kindly disposed toward David. We do not have a record of any special kindnesses, but David felt obligated to the neighboring nation. Hanun, son of Nahash, ruled in his father's place. We have no reason to question David's motives, but Hanun's counselors suspected that David's men came as spies. Because of David's conquests, the Ammonites knew that they would have to challenge Israel if they maintained their territory. Hanun accepted his counselors' advice and used this occasion to show Ammon's disdain for Israel. A servant was not permitted to grow a beard. David's representatives were shaved. The ambassadors were further humiliated in that their robes were cut off so as to expose the men's secret parts. Then they were sent on their way and were made a public spectacle. When David learned what had happened, he advised his representatives to stay at Jericho until their beards were grown. Then they would most likely return to Jerusalem.

The Ammonites did not have to wait for David to declare war against them. In their shameful treatment of David's men war had already been declared. Hanun's people did not suppose that by their own power they could contest Israel's claim to their territory. They hurriedly made arrangements to call for help of mercenaries. Mesopotamia was the territory in the

vicinity of Haran between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers. Aram-maacah was a region in the vicinity of Mt. Hermon. Zobah lay in the district beyond Damascus. Out of these places soldiers were brought in. The Ammonites paid a very high price for their services (1000 talents of silver, or perhaps as much as \$1,500,000). In addition to these great armies there were thirty two thousand chariots. This powerful expeditionary force set itself in battle order at Medeba. Medeba lay about twenty miles south-west of Rabbah, the capitol city of the Ammonites. With the mercenaries on the scene, the Ammonites organized their own forces and the combined armies presented a very serious threat to David and Israel. At this juncture David ordered Joab, the captain of his host, to call the army of Israel for the conflict.

Joab was a seasoned veteran. He knew the dangers involved if Israel's army should be encompassed and cut off by the enemy. He was also aware of fact that the hired soldiers were more dangerous than the Ammonites. He, personally, took "the choice men of Israel" and engaged the mercenaries in battle. Joab assigned the rest of Israel's army to Abishai, whose responsibility was to engage the Ammonites in battle. If Abishai could hold the Ammonites, and if Joab could rout the hired soldiers, Israel would win the battle. If either Hebrew captain experienced trouble, the other would come to his aid. It was a very wise battle plan. Before the battle was joined, Joab charged all of Israel's soldiers to "play the man for our people and for the cities of our God". A similar battle-cry is recorded in I Samuel 4:9 when the Philistine officers charged their warriors to "quit themselves like men" and fight. Paul, in I Corinthians 16:13, used this battle-charge again when he said, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong". The word "quit" in this context meant to equip oneself, to concentrate one's energies for the task at hand. Joab's thought was that the Hebrew soldiers should do their very best and leave the outcome to Jehovah. Joab, with Jehovah's help, was able to scatter and put to flight all of the soldiers hired by Hanun. When their help was dispersed, the Ammonites retreated into the walled

city of Rabbah. Joab then reported to David in Jerusalem.

David understood that in order to take advantage of this initial success he would need to maintain pressure on the enemy. Shopach (Shobach) came on the scene as the captain of the Syrians who were beyond the River (the Euphrates). The mercenaries who had been turned back by Joab sent runners to their allies in Mesopotamia requesting help. The enemy regrouped. In the meantime, David personally led the Hebrew army to war with the Syrians. Somewhere beyond the Jordan River, probably in northeastern Palestine, the battle was joined. Forty thousand enemy soldiers fell. The captain, Shopach, was killed. Seven thousand warriors who drove chariots were put to death. Those who remained surrendered. Never again were the Ammonites able to secure aid from the Syrians. Through these events David annexed the territory of Ammon, consolidated his holdings in Syria, and laid undisputed claim on lands reaching all the way to the Euphrates River.

While the Syrians and their allies had been vanquished, the Ammonites had taken refuge behind the walls of Rabbah, their main city. Chapter twenty, verses 1-3, describes the completion of the conquest of Ammon. At this time the Ammonites finally paid the price for humiliating David's ambassadors and for challenging Israel to war. By the time David's army had won the conflict with the Syrians, the winter season was rapidly approaching. A token siege likely was set around Rabbah. David returned to Jerusalem and the rest of his army would take up winter quarters in appointed places. The winter passed. When spring came, Joab was sent to tighten the siege at Rabbah and maintain it until the city fell. The terrors troubling people in a besieged city almost defy description. The Book of Lamentations describe this hopeless situation in the siege of Jerusalem. There was no traffic in or out of the city. When food and water were exhausted, the only alternative was to fall to the enemy. Usually, this meant death for the helpless victims. Joab set such a siege at Rabbah. In the meantime David "tarried at Jerusalem" (verse 1). At this point in the Book of II Samuel two chapters (eleven and twelve) are given to the account of

David's sin with Bathsheba.<sup>1</sup> It is a matter of curious interest that the chronicler omits this incident in David's life. David's sin could not be hidden. Perhaps the historian was permitted by the Holy Spirit to omit this painful account because it was fully treated in the record in II Samuel. Here in the Book of Chronicles David moves from one victory to another. This Bathsheba affair would certainly break the continuity of this account. If David had gone with the army on this occasion as he had when the Syrians were ruined, history might have been written differently. The fact is, "he tarried at Jerusalem". He sinned with Bathsheba. He dealt deceitfully with Uriah. Uriah carried his own death warrant to Joab, his commander. Many other Hebrew soldiers died so Joab could guarantee Uriah's death. David was caught in the web of his sin and in many ways, his life was never the same again. The flood-gates of lust, revenge, grief, and heart-break were opened. David lived in turmoil from that time until the day he died. "He tarried at Jerusalem". Perhaps duties of state kept him there. Had he been somewhere else, he might have fallen in the same sin or in some greater sin. The fact remains, he was tempted and he sinned against God. (See Psalm 51).

While these things were taking place in Jerusalem, Joab was doing his work well at Rabbah. One day the Ammonites reached their extremity. An urgent message came to David. He must hurry to Rabbah if the city is to fall to him. Otherwise, it will fall to Joab. Hanun, king of Ammon, had a great crown which was symbolic of his office. It was composed of a talent of gold. The value of the gold talent may be estimated at thirty to fifty thousand dollars. The crown probably weighed about one hundred pounds. It may well have adorned the head of the Ammonites' chief god, Molech. The crown was decorated with precious stones. Strong men would hold this crown over David's head. The spoil of the city was laid at his feet. The Ammonites in Rabbah became prisoners of war, many of whom were mercilessly mutilated by David and his warriors. This was regarded as divine retribution for the antagonistic actions and

<sup>1</sup>Spence, H. D. M., *The Pulpit Commentary, I Chronicles*, p. 316.

military rebellion of these descendants of Lot.

The paragraph in verses four through eight reminds the Bible student of the parallel section in II Samuel 21:18-22. The historian simply recalls some matters both courageous and curious in connection with Israel's military engagements. The name "Gob" in II Samuel 21:18 is not identified. The Septuagint versions uses "Gath" in this place. Gath was in Philistia some twenty miles due east of Ashkelon which was situated very near the coast of the Great Sea. Gezer was about twenty miles north of Gath on the border of the tribe of Ephraim. Sibbecai is listed among David's warriors in I Chronicles 11:29. Sippai, the giant, is elsewhere called Saph. This was certainly an important encounter which resulted in the defeat of the Philistines. Bible students have given considerable attention to verse 5 in the passage under consideration. The parallel to this in II Samuel 21:19 says that "Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim the Bethlehemite slew Goliath the Gittite". The record here says that Elhanan slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite. Another warrior named Elhanan is mentioned in I Chronicles 11:26. He cannot be identified with the man now under consideration. It is possible that the "Lahmi" here may well be accounted for by the "Bethlehem" in the reference in II Samuel. Since Goliath was such a champion of the Philistine cause, it would be no strange circumstance if others among the giants bore that name. The reference to these men of giant stature proves information concerning this remnant of the Anakim (long necked men) among the Philistines. An ordinary man would not have been able to handle the giant's spear. "The weaver's beam" refers to a wooden bar about ten inches in circumference used to anchor the threads on a loom. The head of the spear carried by the Goliath who fell before David weighed about twenty pounds. Among the oddities Israel encountered was the giant who had six digits on each hand and foot. Even so, he was not equal to the warrior in David's ranks who cut him down in Gath. The defiance of Israel sealed Goliath's doom when he challenged David in the vale of Elah. In like manner, Jonathan, David's

nephew, took up the challenge on this later occasion. It is possible that the giant with the abnormal number of fingers and toes was the father of other giant sons. Just as Caleb in his day was at his best when warring with the Anakim at Hebron, so this kind of opposition proved the real courage of David and his men.

## SUMMARY QUESTIONS

### LESSON NINE 19-20

276. Who was Hanash? Name his son.
277. Why did David send some men to Ammon and how were they received?
278. Explain the action of the Ammonites.
279. Why mention the matter of shaving?
280. Locate and name the place where David's men were told to wait.
281. What does the term "odious" mean?
282. From what sources did the Ammonites get military aid?
283. Carefully locate Medeba.
284. Who among David's men had the chief military responsibility?
285. In what difficult circumstances did the Hebrew commander find himself?
286. Who was Abishai?
287. Which particular sector of the enemy lines was Abishai to attack?
288. Explain the value of the words in 19:13.
289. What happened in the battle?
290. As a result of the battle what did the Syrians do?
291. After this initial battle what did the Syrians do?
292. Who was Shopach?
293. In the second conflict who led the armies of Israel?
294. How many men did the Syrians lose?
295. What does the record say about future relations between Ammon and Syria?

296. Explain the reference to "the return of the year".
297. Who now leads Israel's army?
298. Carefully locate Rabbah.
299. What is the weight of a talent of gold?
300. How was the crown decorated?
301. How were the Ammonites punished?
302. Where was Gezer located?
303. Who was Lahmi?
304. How large is a weaver's beam?
305. Describe the giant at Gath.
306. Who is the Jonathan of 20:7?