



First Chronicles - Chapter Nineteen

II 1 Chronicles 10:1-2 Chronicles 9:31 - The United Kingdom of David and Solomon (continues)

II.d 1 Chronicles 18:1-20:8 - David's Wars (continues)

Summary of Chapter Nineteen

When King Nahash of the Ammonites died David sent a diplomatic mission to the new king but he humiliated and abused David's men, believing they had come as spies. When the new king found out that he had become an enemy of David he bought in mercenaries from other lands and called on the Aramæans to help him.

David sent Joab with the Israelite army to face these two major armies. Joab's plan was to divide his army into two, one facing each opposing army, so that if one of the Israelite divisions began to fall then the other could turn and assist them. However, both prevailed and their enemies fled.

The Aramæans then reinforced their own army and came against Israel once more, but again they were defeated. They now made peace with David and would not support the Ammonites again.

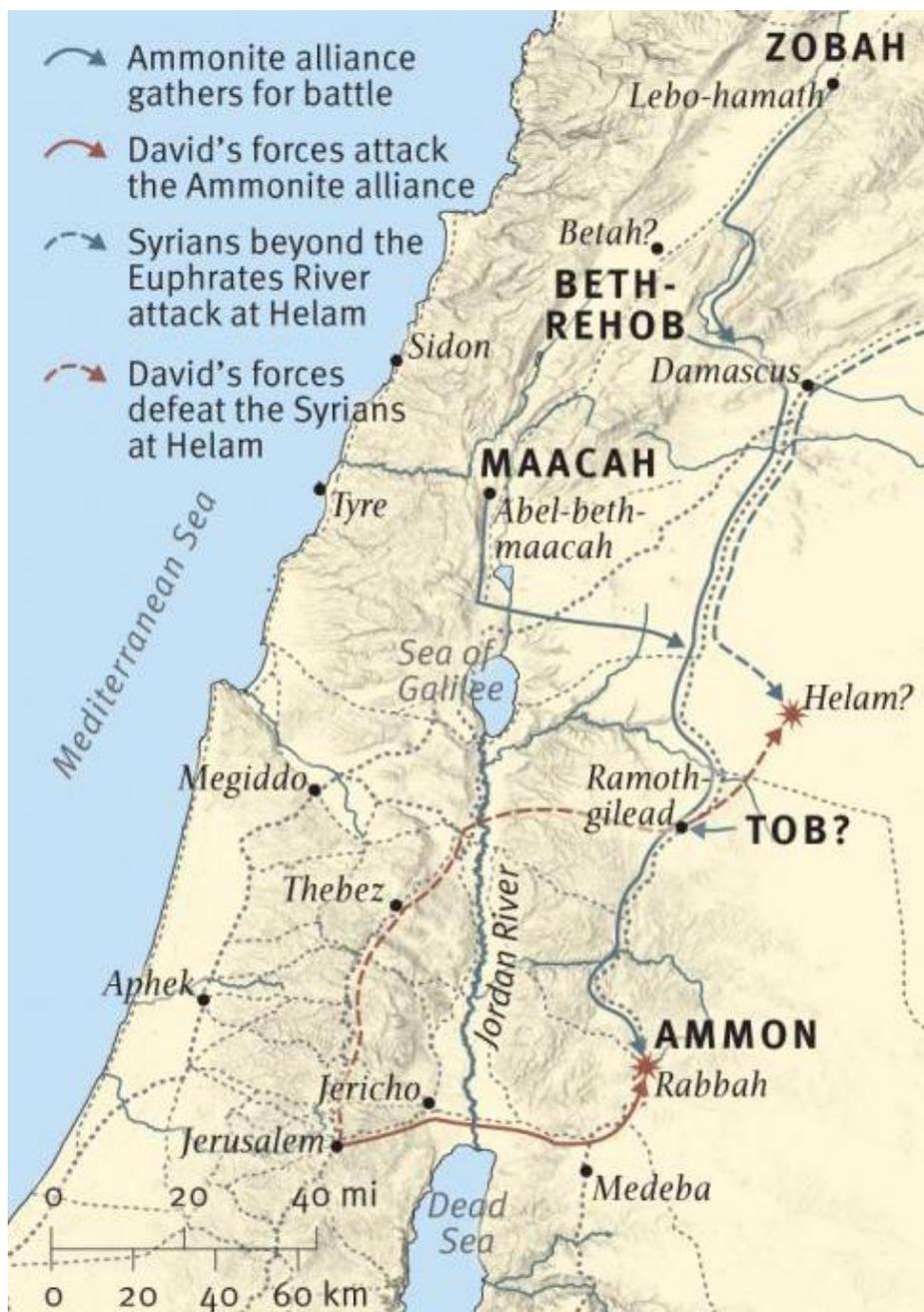
II.d.iii 1 Chronicles 19:1-19 - Defeat of the Ammonites and Aramæans

The information in this chapter comes from 2 Samuel 10:1-19, 11:1, 12:26 and 12:30-31. The chief difference is the Chronicler's omission of the sin with Bathsheba from 1 Chronicles 20:1 onwards. The Chronicler is not hiding David's sin, since it was well known, but is probably focusing on the victorious outcome of this warfare.

The Ammonites lived east of Gad and had troubled Israel in Saul's day; refer to 1 Samuel 11:1-11. David had a friendship treaty with King Nahash, but his son

Hanun, suspecting David's motives, provoked a diplomatic incident. The Aramæan states, from whom Hanun sought help, were situated farther north, from around Damascus to beyond the Euphrates.

The passage moves from the fate of David's mission of consolation (vv.1-5), to the mustering of the armies and the first battle (vv.6-15), to the comprehensive war against the Aramæans (vv.16-19), to the final conquest of Ammon in 1 Chronicles 20:1-3. The battles described in vv.1-15 seem to have preceded the decisive campaign in 1 Chronicles 18:5-8. David receives the crown of Ammon for his own house (1 Chronicles 20:2); this contributes to the implicit messianism of the book, since the line of David will produce a descendant who will rule the gentiles.



David Defeats the Ammonites and the Aramæans circa 995 BC

After purposely humiliating ambassadors sent by David, the Ammonites prepared for David's response by calling for help from the king of Maacah and from Aramæans living in Zobah and other regions north of Israel. When David's commander Joab defeated these forces, the Aramæans called for more troops from beyond the Euphrates River and attacked David at Helam. David's forces defeated them again, and the Aramæans became subject to Israel.

¹ Some time afterwards, King Nahash of the Ammonites died, and his son succeeded him. ² David said, 'I will deal loyally with Hanun son of Nahash, for his father dealt loyally with me.' So David sent messengers to console him concerning his father. When David's servants came to Hanun in the land of the Ammonites, to console him, ³ the officials of the Ammonites said to Hanun, 'Do you think, because David has sent people to console you, that he is honouring your father? Have not his servants come to you to search and to overthrow and to spy out the land?' ⁴ So Hanun seized David's servants, shaved them, cut off their garments in the middle at their hips, and sent them away; ⁵ and they departed. When David was told about the men, he sent messengers to them, for they felt greatly humiliated. The king said, 'Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return.'

1 Chronicles 19:1-5

Nahash was presumably the Nahash of 1 Samuel Chapter 11. David wants to deal loyally with Hanun because of his father Nahash, who showed loyalty to David in accordance with their treaty. While his loyalty or kindness, Hebrew *hesed*, toward Mephibosheth (2 Samuel Chapter 9) was for Jonathan's sake, this kindness is for diplomatic reasons: David wants to keep the Ammonites as peaceful neighbours. He also showed kindness towards a pagan king because he sympathised with the loss of his father.

So David sent messengers to console him concerning his father. David was not content to feel kindness towards Hanun. He took action in order to bring comfort to the grieving man.

Do you think, because David has sent people to console you, that he is honouring your father? It is hard to explain why these advisers to Hanun said this to the king of Ammon. It is possible that they genuinely suspected David, or they perhaps used this as a way to appear wise and cunning to King Hanun. It is common for liars to always suspect others of lying.

So Hanun seized David's servants, shaved them, cut off their garments in the middle at their hips, and sent them away. This was a disgraceful insult to these

ambassadors from Israel. In that culture, many men would rather die than to have their beard shaved off. This was because a clean-shaven face was the mark of a slave and free men wore beards. Cutting off a person's beard would be degrading: *<<I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting>>* (Isaiah 50:6), and it was also something one did as a sign of grief or mourning: *<<For every head is shaved and every beard cut off; on all the hands there are gashes, and on the loins sackcloth>>* (Jeremiah 48:37). Bare buttocks would bring shame and humiliation on the person: *<<so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt>>* (Isaiah 20:4). Humiliating the official envoys certainly means breaking off diplomatic relations for to insult the ambassador is to insult the king. It was just as if they had done this to David himself. The same principle is true with King Jesus and his ambassadors. Jesus reminded his disciples: *<<If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you>>* (John 15:18).

Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return. David allows his messengers to remain at Jericho so that they would not have to display their humiliation in court. David did not use these men as political tools to whip up anger against the Ammonites. He cared more for their own dignity and honour, and allowed them to wait before returning to Jerusalem.

⁶ When the Ammonites saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the Ammonites sent a thousand talents of silver to hire chariots and cavalry from Mesopotamia, from Aram-maacah and from Zobah. ⁷ They hired thirty-two thousand chariots and the king of Maacah with his army, who came and camped before Medeba. And the Ammonites were mustered from their cities and came to battle. ⁸ When David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the army of the warriors. ⁹ The Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the city, and the kings who had come were by themselves in the open country.

1 Chronicles 19:6-9

When the Ammonites saw that they had made themselves odious to David. They knew that they had done this. David did not reject the Ammonites; they made themselves repulsive to Israel.

They hired thirty-two thousand chariots and the king of Maacah with his army. This was a common practice in the ancient world. Aram or Aramæans is the normal term for Syria or the Syrians. Aramaic, the later common language for the entire

region, was the language of Syria. Examples in Scripture to support this are: <<***And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam and Mithredath and Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote to King Artaxerxes of Persia; the letter was written in Aramaic and translated***>> (Ezra 4:7), <<***Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, ‘Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall’***>> (Isaiah 36:11), and: <<***The Chaldeans said to the king (in Aramaic), ‘O king, live for ever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will reveal the interpretation’***>> (Daniel 2:4).

Mesopotamia, Aram-maacah and Zobah were Aramæan kingdoms in the northern Transjordan and Lebanon Valley. Second Samuel 10:8 refers to them as Beth-rehob, Zobah, Maacah, and Tob. For the relationship of this passage with: <<***David also struck down King Hadadezer son of Rehob of Zobah, as he went to restore his monument at the river Euphrates. David took from him one thousand seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand foot-soldiers. David hamstringed all the chariot horses, but left enough for a hundred chariots***>> (2 Samuel 8:3-4), refer to the comment made on 2 Samuel 8:3-12. Hiring armies was not uncommon, for example: <<***For the Lord had caused the Aramæan army to hear the sound of chariots and of horses, the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, ‘The king of Israel has hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to fight against us’***>> (2 Kings 7:6). The numbers of troops are mentioned according to the usual list formula; refer to the comment made on 1 Samuel 6:17-18.

When David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the army of the warriors. David’s mighty men, with an army of the warriors, set out for battle but David did not go with them as he would normally have done. Later on he would lead the army himself into battle.

It is important to understand that David was nothing without his mighty men, and they were nothing without him. He was their leader, but a leader is nothing without followers - and David had an army of the mighty men to follow him. These men did not necessarily start out as mighty men; many were the distressed, indebted, and discontent people who followed David at Adullam Cave (1 Samuel 22:1-2).

One of these mighty men was Adino the Eznite, famous for killing eight hundred men at one time in 2 Samuel 23:8. Another was Jashobeam who killed three hundred men at one time according to 1 Chronicles 11:11. Another was Benaiah who killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day and killed a huge Egyptian warrior with his own spear; refer to 1 Chronicles 11:22-23.

The Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the city. This is the city of Rabbah: <<***In the spring of the year, the time when kings***>>

go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem>> (2 Samuel 11:1), the capital of Ammon, near present day Amman in Jordan.

The kings who had come were by themselves in the open country. It was quite common for kings and army commanders to be out in the open fields for it was easier for them to get an overview of the battle and to direct their men accordingly. In this case, it would also be the location of their charioteers, a potent weapon in those days.

¹⁰ When Joab saw that the line of battle was set against him both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the picked men of Israel and arrayed them against the Aramæans; ¹¹ the rest of his troops he put in charge of his brother Abishai, and they were arrayed against the Ammonites. ¹² He said, 'If the Aramæans are too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will help you.

1 Chronicles 19:10-12

When Joab saw that the line of battle was set against him both in front and in the rear. David's army under Joab is trapped between the Aramæans and the Ammonites. In front of them were the Ammonites in battle array at the entrance of the gate leading into the city of Rabbah. Behind them were the Aramæans in the field. It was not looking good for the army of Israel.

The rest of his troops he put in charge of his brother Abishai. Abishai was a proven leader in his own right and a good man to lead part of the army: <<*Now Abishai, the brother of Joab, was chief of the Thirty. With his spear he fought against three hundred and killed them, and won a name beside the Three*>> (1 Chronicles 11:20).

If the Aramæans are too strong for me, then you shall help me. Joab had only one strategy in battle - attack. Many generals would consider withdrawal or even surrender when surrounded on all sides by the enemy, but not Joab. He called the army to courage and faith and told them to press on.

¹³ Be strong, and let us be courageous for our people and for the cities of our God; and may the Lord do what seems good to him.' ¹⁴ So Joab and the troops who were with him advanced towards the Aramæans for battle; and they fled before him. ¹⁵ When the Ammonites saw that the Aramæans fled, they likewise fled before Abishai, Joab's brother, and entered the city. Then Joab came to Jerusalem.

1 Chronicles 19:13-15

Be strong, and let us be courageous for our people and for the cities of our God; and may the Lord do what seems good to him. Joab expresses both faith in God and a resolve to fight with all his strength. Faith and human effort are not incompatible with each other. Joab is a complicated figure: as here, he can express sturdy piety: <<*But Joab said to the king, ‘May the Lord your God increase the number of the people a hundredfold, while the eyes of my lord the king can still see it! But why does my lord the king want to do this?’*>> (2 Samuel 24:3), and he can also display a chilling ruthlessness in preserving David’s and his own position: <<*Joab said, ‘I will not waste time like this with you.’ He took three spears in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the oak. And ten young men, Joab’s armour-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him*>> (2 Samuel 18:14-15). It is not surprising that David does not trust him to treat Solomon well after Joab supported Adonijah to be David’s successor: <<*He conferred with Joab son of Zeruiah and with the priest Abiathar, and they supported Adonijah*>> (1 Kings 1:7).

This is a great speech by Joab before the battle; it is his equivalent of Shakespeare’s Henry V proclamation at Agincourt: “Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more.” Joab made at least three great points:

- Be strong, and let us be courageous. Courage and strength are not matters of feeling and circumstance. They are matters of choice, especially when God makes his strength available to those who serve him. Christians can be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, as Paul confirms: <<*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power*>> (Ephesians 6:10).
- Let us be courageous for the sake of our people, and for the cities of our God. Joab called them to remember all they had to lose. If they lost this battle they would lose both their people and their cities. This was a battle that went beyond their own personal safety, and the army of the mighty men had to remember that.
- And may the Lord do what seems good to him. Joab wisely prepared for the battle to the best of his ability and worked hard for the victory. At the same time, he knew that the outcome was ultimately in God’s hands.

The Aramæans fled before him. It does not even say that Joab engaged the Aramæans in battle. This mercenary army fled before the army of the mighty men because God was with them. God had promised this kind of blessing upon an obedient Israel: <<*The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways*>> (Deuteronomy 28:7).

When the Ammonites saw that the Aramæans fled, they likewise fled before Abishai, Joab's brother, and entered the city. When the Ammonites saw the Aramæans retreating, they also retreated. They could no more stand before the army of the mighty men than the Aramæans could.

¹⁶ But when the Aramæans saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they sent messengers and brought out the Aramæans who were beyond the Euphrates, with Shophach the commander of the army of Hadadezer at their head. ¹⁷ When David was informed, he gathered all Israel together, crossed the Jordan, came to them, and drew up his forces against them. When David set the battle in array against the Aramæans, they fought with him. ¹⁸ The Aramæans fled before Israel; and David killed seven thousand Aramæan charioteers and forty thousand foot-soldiers, and also killed Shophach the commander of their army. ¹⁹ When the servants of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with David, and became subject to him. So the Aramæans were not willing to help the Ammonites any more.

1 Chronicles 19:16-19

But when the Aramæans saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they sent messengers and brought out the Aramæans who were beyond the Euphrates, with Shophach the commander of the army of Hadadezer at their head. The enemies of Israel would not quit after one defeat. They were a persistent enemy and came back to fight again.

Hadadezer of Zobah attacks again at Helam according to 2 Samuel 10:16, apparently a city in northern Transjordan, but is again defeated.

When David was informed, he gathered all Israel together. David gathered the rest of the army of Israel to prevent this army of Aramæan reinforcements from crushing the army of the mighty men. The result was glorious: the Aramæans fled before Israel.

When David set the battle in array against the Aramæans, they fought with him. This time it was David and not Joab who devised the battle plan. This was a major role for a king, to lead his army into battle: <<*But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, 'No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles'*>> (1 Samuel 8:19-20).

David killed seven thousand Aramæan charioteers. For the number seven thousand here, 2 Samuel 10:18 has seven hundred. The difference is probably due

not to a discrepancy in the original manuscripts but to a scribal error in the later transmission of the text of either book.

When the servants of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with David, and became subject to him. The battle against one of the main protagonists was at an end. Israel won the battle, received tribute from the defeated people and was able to live in peace with their northern neighbour.

So the Aramæans were not willing to help the Ammonites any more. The Aramæans were out of the way but the chapter ends with unfinished business at Rabbah. The offending Ammonites were still in their city and Joab returned to Jerusalem. In the spring King David sent Joab and the army out again to deal with Rabbah as he waited in Jerusalem. While he waited comfortably in Jerusalem he fell into sin with Bathsheba, a story neglected by the Chronicler who was focusing in God's promises to his people rather than the failings of one man.

Many know about David's sin with Bathsheba, and how it happened when David waited in Jerusalem when he should have led the battle at Rabbah. This chapter shows that God gave David a warning by showing it necessary for him to come out against the Aramæans. David tried to leave the battle in the capable hands of Joab, but his army needed him and God tried to show him that by blessing him when David did go out to battle. This chapter was God's gracious warning that David sadly wasted.