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The Capture of Rabbah

Second Samuel 12:26-31 and First Chronicles 20:1b-3

The capture of Rabbah DIG: Why did Joab call for David to join him in battle? What point does this story serve, inserted here in this context? Why was David so cruel to the Ammonites after he defeated them? Do you think David was fully engaged here? Or was he distracted?

REFLECT: Can you leave the glory to others, or do you need the spotlight? When does your pride get the best of you? What are you holding on to only by God's grace?

982 BC

We almost forgot **the Ammonites**. The **Ammonite** campaign had been under way since **Hanun** had refused **David's** chesed (**to see link click [Db](#) - David Defeats the Ammonites**). While the reader has been suffering with **David** and the consequences of **his** sin with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, the confrontation with Nathan, and **David's** repentance in **Psalms 51**, **Joab** had been a faithful general. **He** handled affairs of state while **the king** was too busy with **his** lust and **his** guilt. It was a hard campaign, but now was the time for victory.

Meanwhile **Joab** fought against **Rabbah** of the **Ammonites** and captured the majority of the city. **The royal citadel**, which would be the last to fall, would include the palace, and **Joab**, in **his** loyalty to **David**, he wanted to leave the honor of capturing **the city** and **its king** to **David**. **Joab** knows **he** won the battle. **He** could have claimed the victory. **He** could have set **himself** up as a rival to **David**. Perhaps **he** could have won over **David**. But more than that, **Joab** remembered Uriah and the letters and the messenger and used the evidence against **David**. None of that, however, is ever mentioned. **He** deferred. **He** allowed **David** to have the victory when **the king** surely needed it to stop the gossip at the royal court.

Joab then sent a messenger to **David**, saying, "I have fought against **Rabbah** and taken its water supply. Once **their water supply** was cut off and the fall of **the city** was

imminent. **Now muster the rest of the troops and besiege the city and capture it. Otherwise I will take the city, and it will be named after me.**” Because **Joab** would be the conqueror and it would be **his** by right of conquest. **So David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah, and attacked and captured it (Second Samuel 12:26-28).**



He took the crown from the head of their king, whose name is not mentioned despite **his** reputation **(Second Samuel 10:1-5)**. **Its weight was found to be a talent of gold,** about 66 pounds or 30 kilograms, **and it was set with precious stones, and it was placed on David’s head.** This symbolized the transfer of power over **Ammon** to the **Israelite king**. No **king** could wear a **crown** that heavy for very long, so **David’s** “coronation” was a brief official act of state, claiming **Ammon** as **his** territory.³⁵⁵ **He took a great quantity of plunder from the city and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to forced labor with saws and with iron picks and axes. David also did this to all the Ammonite towns,** setting up building projects throughout **Ammonite** territory. These would be needed in order to repair the fortifications damaged in the recent fighting, and probably also to house **his** own soldiers, whose task it would be to keep the conquered people subservient.³⁵⁶ **Then David and his entire army returned to Jerusalem (Second Samuel 12:29-31; First Chronicles 20:1b-3). The crown** was very valuable, so **David** took it along with the abundant spoil **he** found in **the city**. Most of the wealth went into **YHVH’s** treasury and was used in the building of the Temple. And so ends **David’s** last great war. **He** will now begin to suffer the long-term consequences of **his** sin when **his son Ammon** rapes **his daughter Tamar**.

The terrible failure of **David** is important to the narrator of **Samuel**. Throughout his books the writer introduces the leaders of Isra’el: Eli and sons, Samuel, Sha’ul (not to mention wannabes like Eliab and Abner). All of them are flawed in some way, Eli’s sons and Sha’ul severely so. Even **Samuel** falls short in some respects **(First Samuel 8:1-2 and 16:6-7)**, and now **David**, the covenant king. Just because **David** was **God’s** beloved and chosen **king**



Dg - The Capture of Rabbah Second Samuel 12:26-31 and First
Chronicles 20:1b-3 | 3

did not mean that **he** hung on to the kingdom by any means but by grace, for **he** was a son of death. In the books of **Samuel** ALL human leadership is flawed. Which means that the united kingdom (made up of the southern kingdom of **Judah** and the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**), if there is to be one, can only be established and maintained by grace. Therefore, the books of **Samuel** make us lift our eyes and wait for **the messianic King**.³⁵⁷