

1ST KINGS

Week 2, chapter 1

We've all spent time in school some days forcing ourselves to stay awake through classes where what we were taught was tedious and seemingly irrelevant information about the past. Our history courses were usually presented as a dry series of names of dead people, of the dates of obscure events that we could not identify with, and a list of place names that we forgot minutes after we were told. So it is our knee jerk reaction to study the ancient history of Israel as contained in the Bible with the same expectations.

As I told you last time, the Book of Kings indeed takes us through an enormous amount of Israel's history; a 450 year period from the time that David handed the throne over to Solomon until Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and took Judah captive up to Babylon. And as tempting as it will be to see and hear what we study in this book in the same way that post-Enlightenment Era Bible scholars often do (as mere secular history told with superstitious religious overtones) we must avoid it.

Rather we are studying the path of our own redemption history, told in the Book of Kings as essentially the fulfillment of Nathan's prophetic oracle to David. This oracle stated that David's would be an everlasting dynasty and that even though many of the kings it would produce would be wicked and thus punished severely for their disobedience to God, nonetheless God would not abandon David's royal descendants as He did King Saul. The Church that has done such a marvelous job of extending the truth of God's grace through Messiah to our entire globe has also tended to disregard this foundational part of our redemption history with an ambivalent attitude. I hope we can remedy that.

The first 11 chapters of the Book of 1st Kings are about King Solomon and his 40 year reign over a united, prosperous, and influential Kingdom of Israel. Let's read this 1st chapter that tells us the story of King Solomon's coronation.

READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 1 all

There are two things that need to be said as a critical backdrop for understanding this chapter: 1st is that **Adoniyah** holding himself up as king did not rise to the level of outright rebellion; rather it resulted from a misguided assumption on his part. And 2nd is that without this incident of **Adoniyah** unexpectedly holding a feast in honor of his anticipation of becoming King of Israel, David would not have been prodded to belatedly (and after much foot dragging) finally announce a successor: Solomon.

Another helpful point of reference is that unlike most other situations in the Bible whereby we move from 1 chapter to the next, or we are dealing with a Bible book that originally was one large work but is now divided into multiple books, we cannot turn the page from 2nd Samuel 24 to 1st Kings 1 and see them as connected in time. That is what we read in the opening verse of 1st Kings 1 is not a logical continuation of the final words of 2nd Samuel 24. And this is because the last 4 chapters of 2nd Samuel are a later edition to the book that acts as a kind of appendix to give us information about David's reign that was seen as important for context.

Instead, then, sequentially speaking 1st Kings 1 comes right after the end of 2nd Samuel chapter 20. That was the story of a 2nd rebellion against David (after the one led by his own son **Avishalom**), and this one by a fellow named **Sheva** who was from the northern tribes of Israel. The story ended with a brief summation of the members of David's inner circle at the time this rebellion was put down:

(2Sa 20:23-26 CJB)

23 Once again Yo'av was commander over the whole army of Isra'el, while B'nayah the son of Y'hoyada was over the K'reti and P'leti,

24 Adoram was in charge of forced labor, Y'hoshafat the son of Achilud was secretary of state,

25 Sh'va was recorder, Tzadok and Evyatar were cohanim,

26 and 'Ira the Ya'iri was David's cohen.

And now the first words of 1st Kings 1 continue from there with: ***King David grew old, the years took their toll, and he couldn't get warm even when they covered him with bedclothes.***

So what we find next is that King David is prematurely old. Whereas just before Moses died he was described as being of relatively good health and still with excellent eyesight at the age of 120 years, just before David's death he is described as old, frail and in ill health at the age of only 70. Let's recall that it might be perhaps 450 years between Moses and David so there has not been some rapid decline in life expectancy since the time of the exodus from Egypt to David's day that would account for his condition. Rather the Rabbis say that it was caused from a lifetime of stress, battle, living in extreme conditions in the desert wilderness, exposure, and fatigue. I would add to that list the consequences of the last several years of David's life as he went his own way, lived like someone who wasn't redeemed and carried terrible guilt because of it; this lifestyle took away his ***shalom*** and thus his God-given vitality. While I wouldn't want to carry the analogy too far, it is not unlike men who have spent the bulk of their lives on drugs, or as alcoholics, or in and out of prison; their faces and eyes look sunken and hollow, they are bent over and heavily wrinkled, and they are as the walking dead at a far too early stage of life. The soul-sickness of horrendous sin and guilt will do this to a man (and to a woman); even to one who has been redeemed. After all it is our spirits that have been saved for eternity, not our bodies. We all know of friends or of prominent men and women in ministry who have walked this sad road and this is often the result of disobedience, especially later in life.

This issue about an inability to get warm when one is older is hardly unique for David. It is somewhat common in seniors and in the elderly, and there are a variety of medical conditions that can cause it (that we don't need to get into). Thus the solution was seen as finding a young woman to lie next to him to help provide him with needed body heat.

Most Bibles start out in the 1st verse by saying (as in our CJB) that the years took their toll, or that David was "stricken in years", or perhaps "advanced in years". And while those are all reasonable depictions of the situation those words all miss an important nuance. In Hebrew the words are ***bo yommim*** meaning literally, "He came with days". This is of course an idiom; but it is a positive expression that explains in a positive way that a person has lived for a long time. Even more it implies having lived a meaningful life.

The reality is that one can live for many years but have few days of worthwhile

accomplishments in all that time. That is by no means news; we have several modern parables that express this notion such as: “At our death no one is going to have written on their tombstone, ‘I wish I would have spent more time at the office’”. We’ve all heard or personally known wealthy people who look back over their lives and realize that their daily focus on accumulation of riches and power had brought them precious little peace and that (in the end) they had stored up nothing but things that will ultimately have no lasting value. A great person looks back on a life full of fruitful days; a wicked person’s life consists mostly of wasted and abused days but he is full of excuses.

Time is the currency of life that God gives to every human in varying amounts; we don’t all receive the same. So the issue is not how much time we get, but how we use it. This is expressed in a wonderful way in the New Testament. I am going to read to you a familiar parable of Yeshua, but I’m going to substitute the currency of time for the currency of talents that the parable uses.

READ MATTHEW 25:14 – 30 (substitute “year” for “talent”)

How we spend that currency of time will have much to do not only with what type of welcome we receive in heaven, but also what our earthly legacy will be and whether ours is a life of true joy or merely a misspent life of regret from having sought hollow personal pleasures. A great person incorporates all of his life experiences with God into his very being; they leave their indelible mark on him and he learns from them and passes it on. Others let the events of their lives slide by, forgotten and without purpose. The words *bo yommim* tell us that on balance David’s was a purposeful and meaningful life that would have a positive lasting effect.

In verse 2 we’re told that David’s servants decided the solution to getting David some comfort by being able to feel warm was to provide him with a young virgin. And that the person they decided upon was a beautiful young lady named **Avishag**. This decision to bring this girl to David was not sexual or erotic in purpose per se. It actually concerned a standard medical practice from that era, and this is confirmed in the writings of Josephus. Briefly the idea basically follows one that is taught to this very day as an emergency treatment for hypothermia. And it is that a person who has been overly exposed to cold and their core body temperature is dangerously low (and especially if there isn’t nearby medical help) ought to snuggle closely with someone else to absorb the body heat that other person is generating. Merely putting blankets on doesn’t help as much because a blanket is only an insulator; blankets don’t produce heat. But by borrowing on the metabolism of another person, heat is generated and can be readily absorbed by another.

What is being described is that poor old David is bedridden, thus of course the girl will be lying with him. However it was also thought in that day that vitality and energy could be transferred from a healthy person to another in need of it. Thus the hope was that the sedentary and infirm David would gain energy from a youthful and vibrant younger person by means of close contact. While we can scoff at this if we choose, this idea of our bodies operating on energy that can be transmitted and transferred is central to modern Oriental medicine.

Why is it stressed that this a **beautiful** woman? First of all, beauty was seen as more than skin deep. Outward beauty was associated with grace and usually seen as a physical manifestation of one's inward condition. Second, it was customary that royalty always received the best. Therefore the king was surrounded with the best furniture, best clothing, best housing, best chariot, best food, and best women. Since beautiful was typically seen as the definition of best when it came to women (and often in cases of men, which we'll soon see), it is natural that the woman brought to attend to David was very lovely to the eye.

But this was no prostitute; she was to be a dedicated caretaker of the King. When verse 4 explains that David did not have sex with her it's not really about making sure that we don't get the wrong idea of their relationship. Rather it means that this girl was NOT a new addition to David's harem. Thus Solomon would not inherit her when his father passed. Whether concubine or wife the act of sexual consummation had to occur in order for a woman to take on that legal status. That we are explicitly told that **Avishag** did not have sex with David meant that she was neither his wife nor concubine. She was a servant, nothing more. I note this now because it will play a role in a future chapter.

Now we meet **Adoniyah** son of **Haggit**, he was the 4th son born to David. **Adoniyah** means "my lord is **Yah**" (my lord is Yehoveh). **Yah** is a shortened name for God. By birth order he was the 4th in line for the throne, however the 3 in front of him were dead. **Amnon** was killed by his half-brother **Avishalom**. **Avishalom** was killed by David's nephew Joab. And **Chileav** seems to have died very young as we're told of his birth but never again hear his name. Therefore by all custom and tradition **Adoniyah** is but a heartbeat from the throne of Israel.

Thus he did mimicked what his deceased brother Absalom had done: he rode around Jerusalem in a royal chariot with 50 bodyguards running ahead to clear traffic. This display of pomp and ceremony was supposed to let everyone know that he was the crown prince and would be king soon. Verse 8 gives us an explanation of why **Adoniyah** would behave as disrespectfully as he did towards his father; it was that David was an overly indulgent father

who never disciplined his sons. This was another negative trait of David that served to result in his sons feeling entitled and arrogant. Now it would come back to haunt David just as it did with all of his other sons. We also told that **Adoniyah** was a very handsome man (beautiful is the word) as was Absalom. This is meant in the same sense as it was for the **Avishag**. Again the idea is that outward physical beauty was thought to be reflective of good inner qualities. And of course when it comes to royalty, humans want our leaders to be first and foremost very attractive and personable.

In verse 5 **Adoniyah** is recorded as saying *ani emalek*, “I will be king”. This is important to understand because the idea is that he is announcing an expectation; he is not proclaiming that he is currently the king. And this is coming from his assumption that as next in line by birth, when David dies he indeed will assume the throne. But then we find out that there was a serious split in David’s inner circle in regards to who each faction backed to be the new king. Joab (David’s top commander) and **Evyatar** (one of the two current High Priests) were for **Adoniyah**. However the other High Priest **Tzadok**, David’s chief of the bodyguards **B’nayah** (as well as the bodyguards themselves), the Prophet **Nathan**, and two unknown folks named **Shim’i** and **Re’i** all supported Solomon for king.

Verse 9 explains that one day **Adoniyah** threw a major banquet by **Ein-Rogel** and invited all of his brothers and all of David’s servants who were of the tribe of Judah (David’s tribe). In other words, this was a large family gathering. However he did not invite **Nathan**, **B’nayah**, any of David’s bodyguard forces or his brother Solomon. What this tells us is that he was fully aware that there was an expectation from many that he would be bypassed and that Solomon would become king, so this banquet and riding around on a royal chariot was essentially a political rally to gather support. But those who came to it also were taking a great risk; this could easily become a life and death matter. Because if David chose Solomon and not **Adoniyah** it was nearly certain that Solomon would have those who were currently openly opposed to him (and for his brother) executed.

Let’s take just a moment to identify the players. **Evyatar**, one of two High Priests, was descended from the priests whom King Saul had slaughtered at Nob. **Evyatar’s** father was a survivor that David rescued and took in. However for reasons not recorded, David had added **Tzadok** as yet another High Priest. Obviously both could not be legitimate High Priests and sure enough, **Evyatar** was not of the proper High Priest line. Rather he was from the line of **Ithamar**. He was descended from **Eli** (Samuel’s mentor), but neither was **Eli** of the God-authorized line of High Priests.

Yo’av (Joab) may have been David’s nephew and his top general, but David had no use for

him. Joab was a ruthless manipulator who looked out mainly for himself. David had never forgiven him for killing Absalom after David had given **Yo'av** strict orders to go gently with Absalom.

Now on the other side of the ledger was **Tzadok**, the other High Priest. **Tzadok** was the legitimate High Priest because he was of the God-authorized line of Eleazar. Now whether or not David had brought him on board for that reason is uncertain; David didn't seem to have had (at least in recent years) much concern for Torah Law.

Nathan, of course, was the legitimate Prophet of God that was David's access to the Lord's oracle. Under what circumstance he was assigned we don't know; he just appears on the scene and is the one who chastises David over the Bathsheba affair and pronounces God's curse on David for it. But key to our story is that he's also the one who pronounced God's oracle that David's dynasty would be forever and that apparently Solomon was God's choice to succeed David.

B'nayah was a long time loyal leader of David's palace guard, and had been with him for decades. Naturally he would side with whom he perceived as David's choice of successor.

The place of this banquet was just outside the fortress walls that protected the City of David. Located about 300 meters or so down the hill at the southern corner of the city it was a public place. And just as importantly it meant that **Adoniyah** in no way did this in secret; in fact he did it right under the nose of his father. Nathan hears of it and runs to **Bat-Sheva, Shlomo's** mother, and asks if she is aware of this turn of events. But **Nathan** in some ways misinterprets what he sees; he believes that **Adoniyah** has pronounced himself king as of now. And why wouldn't he think so; the banquet is being held at a water source so that he can be immersed, and the High Priest **Evyatar** is there to anoint him with holy oil as the primary way in which Israelites kings are coronated. Even though that's not what is happening, Nathan assumes that it is (or it least he fears that it is and is taking no chances).

Why is **Nathan** in the middle of this ruckus? In fact he is the driving force to thwart **Adoniyah** and is the head of the opposition so to speak. It comes from this fact: long ago God ordained that what men consider as the customary line of succession to become king is subservient to Yehoveh's choice as king. The Lord has never been a respecter of persons and since Genesis we have watched as God shunned the physically firstborn and instead chose another to use for His purposes (even in moving His line of promise forward). Isaac was chosen instead of his

older brother Ishmael; Jacob instead of Esau; Judah instead of Reuben; and on and on it goes. And here, even though by all human traditions and genealogy **Adoniyah** ought to become the next King of Israel, the Lord has instead chosen Solomon. And the way the Lord communicates that choice is through His Prophet Nathan.

This is not an abstract principle of the Lord being the heavenly King who selects the earthly King by whatever criteria He so deems. This is actually a Torah Law (a God-principle) found in the Book of Deuteronomy.

(Deu 17:14-15 CJB)

¹⁴ "When you have entered the land ADONAI your God is giving you, have taken possession of it and are living there, you may say, 'I want to have a king over me, like all the other nations around me.'

¹⁵ In that event, you must appoint as king the one whom ADONAI your God will choose. He must be one of your kinsmen, this king you appoint over you- you are forbidden to appoint a foreigner over you who is not your kinsman.

"The one whom Adonai your God will choose....." And only in the most general sense are we ever given the reasons why the Lord selects and elects as He does. He is sovereign and we don't need to know why. Here it is less a matter of God's criteria and more a matter of whom it is who announces the new king. In reality David had several sons and thus a number of legitimate choices to succeed him, with **Adoniyah** as the most logical by reason of birth order. But as Yehoveh's earthly representative, Nathan's announcement of **Shlomo** as the king is merely the announcement to the Israelites of God's choice. So we need to see that kingly succession by birth order is a human concept, not a God-concept.

Frankly, I think **Shlomo** is the least likely of all to be king. He is the youngest of David's living sons so far as we know (the Rabbis say he is only 12 years old at this time but more likely he is in his late teens), and he is the product of a scandalous situation. I don't need to remind you that his mother is the infamous Bathsheba, whose illegitimate son she had with David died as an infant, and that Solomon was the next child to be born to Bathsheba. And even though Bathsheba and David were married when Solomon was conceived, neither Bathsheba nor

Solomon would have been very welcome in the Harem or respected by the Israelite community at large. The whole seedy thing was tainted with adultery and murder and favoritism.

Thus **Nathan** uses the power of his personality and his office to manipulate **Bat-Sheva** to go to her husband and inform him of the news that (according to Nathan) **Adoniyah** has declared himself as king (again, this is not really true). So Nathan carefully orchestrates the situation; he puts words in her mouth and tells Bathsheba precisely what to say and how to say it; and then after she speaks he will just coincidentally drop by the Palace at the right moment and confirm her words and explain to David that he must do something immediately or Solomon will lose the throne.

I want you to notice that what happens from verse 5 (the elaborate dinner banquet) to the end of the chapter (with Solomon as king and sparing **Adoniyah's** life for now), all occurs in a matter of hours such is the urgency.

In verse 13 Nathan has Bat-Sheva remind the feeble David that, ***"My lord, king, didn't you swear to your servant, "Your son Shlomo will be king after me; he will sit on my throne"? So why is Adoniyah king?"***

A good question for any Bible student to ask about now is: when did we ever hear of this promise that Solomon is to be made king? And in reality nowhere in earlier Scriptures is this ever plainly stated. The one sort of even fuzzy illusion to this occurs in 2nd Samuel 12. There it says:

(2Sa 12:24-25 CJB)

²⁴ David comforted his wife Bat-Sheva, came to her and went to bed with her; she gave birth to a son and named him Shlomo. ADONAI loved him

²⁵ and sent through Natan the prophet to have him named Y'didyah [loved by God], for ADONAI's sake.

So the idea that God gave Solomon a special divinely-ordained name (**Y'didyah**) is about the only clue we've had before this chapter in 1st Kings that Solomon was to be David's successor.

We do get a bit more information about this later on in 1Chronicles 22:7 -10 where it says:

7 "My son," said David to Shlomo, "my heart was set on building a house for the name of ADONAI my God.

8 But a message from ADONAI came to me, 'You have shed much blood and fought great wars.

You are not to build a house for my name, because you have shed so much blood on the earth in my sight.

9 But you will have a son who will be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his enemies that surround him; for his name is to be Shlomo, and during his reign I will give peace <N1> and quiet to Isra'el.

10 It is he who will build a house for my name. He will be my son and I will be his father, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Isra'el forever.'

Thus we are to understand that the source of the "message from Adonai" that Solomon would reign had to have been **Nathan** the Prophet (because he was God's official messenger to David at this time).

Let's close here for today and we'll continue with this next time.