

1ST KINGS

Week 5, chapter 2 continued

At this point in 1st Kings 2, David is now “sleeping with his ancestors” and so young King Solomon was ruling without the benefit of his father’s sage and street-wise advice and council. A youthful 20 years old (approximately) Solomon must have felt a kind of loneliness and inadequacy to rule over such a large nation of people all by himself.

David had given **Shlomo** instructions on how to deal with what David thought would be the greatest threats to his throne; and those threats would come from powerful men who had also vexed David at one time or another. While the Scriptures only identify a couple of those men (Joab and **Shimei**) who are called out by name, no doubt the “enemies” list was much longer; it’s just that for some reason these are the only ones that the writer of 1st Kings chose to record (likely because their stories were developed in the Book of Samuel and so they were already known). It’s not credible that after all of David’s 40 years in office, and all the toes he had stepped upon, and the many Hebrew families who had respected members that he had killed or otherwise offended, that only two people would have wanted revenge upon David’s dynasty. So what David gave to Solomon were essentially case examples of how he thought Solomon should protect his just-beginning monarchy. And naturally he also gave the example (in the sons of **Barzillai**) of rewarding those who had been steadfast in their loyalty to the royal family.

Soon after David’s death Adonijah (David’s son through his wife **Haggit**), the one who had thrown a great banquet in honor of himself in anticipation of becoming King of Israel but had his way blocked by through the Prophet Nathan’s efforts, came calling on **Shlomo’s** mother. Bathsheba was no doubt a bit shocked to see **Adoniyah** on her doorstep, since only months earlier he was hanging onto the horns of the Altar for dear life certain that Bathsheba’s son would have him executed. Now here he appears asking her for a favor. Let’s re-read the pertinent section of this chapter.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS 2:12 – end

The startled **Bat-Sheva** asks the obvious question of **Adonijah**: “Have you come in peace (or as in the CJB as a friend)?” He answers in the affirmative and when she gives him permission to speak he foolishly blurts out that in his mind the throne ought to have gone to him, and that in fact the people of Israel expected it as well. He was probably right in his assessment since he was indeed the actual next in line for the throne. But it’s not usually a good idea to antagonize the mother of the King. Bathsheba, who was taken aback by this visit, didn’t react negatively to Adonijah’s sentiments because he concluded the matter by acknowledging that Yehoveh had given the kingdom to **Shlomo** (implying that he had come to terms with this reality).

Now the reason for such a risky approach surfaces; it was to set the stage to ask **Bat-Sheva** to go to Solomon and grant Adonijah a request. That is, Adonijah appealed to Bathsheba’s womanly compassion by seeking sympathy for his being denied his rightful place as king and then asking for but a “small favor” that would soothe his considerable emotional wound. And that favor was for permission to marry David’s former nursemaid, **Avishag**. Bathsheba assumed that **Adonijah** was seeking **Avishag** as a sort of consolation prize and so she felt the sympathy for him that he had hoped for.

David had not added **Avishag** to his harem so in some respects this virgin was still fair game; any kind of prohibition against marrying the former wife or concubine of king didn’t apply. Bathsheba obviously so no harm in it and perhaps thought that it was a way to mend a serious rift between Solomon and his half-brother; something that was dangerous for both sides. So she agrees and has an audience with **Shlomo**. She really isn’t doing Adonijah any favors; while she was taken in by his seeming innocent hope for a wife, it’s nearly unthinkable that Solomon (let alone his many advisors) would not have seen through this rather thin veil of deceit. This was a clumsy attempt to unblock what had been a closed road to the throne, but a person’s judgment can become clouded when they greatly covet something that is not theirs to own. Solomon loved his mother; but he wasn’t going to grant her request simply because of that fact.

The King stood as his mother entered the palace and had a place set to the right side of his throne for her to sit. The place of the right side was one of authority, so we have here a clear indication of the great respect and honor that **Shlomo** had for Bathsheba. Biblically speaking even a king is not allowed to disregard God’s command to honor his parents. Obviously just as David knew her visit to the palace involved something that she wanted, so did Solomon know that his mother didn’t just drop by for a visit. **Bat-Sheva** gets right to the point but

couches the request as but an insignificant one that ought not to be refused. It was not to be.

Shlomo instantly understood the motivation behind **Adonijah's** want of **Avishag**, something his mother apparently did not. Adonijah only wanted to marry **Avishag** to lay the groundwork for claiming the throne. While the inner circle of David's court knew that **Avishag** was but a special servant for David to help him through his last days, the citizens of Israel would not have seen it that way. For them she would have been a de facto wife or concubine and therefore part of David's harem. It was usual for a new king to inherit some or all of the former king's harem; but to marry the woman that to many would have seemed closest to David's heart would have been all but proof that Adonijah had a right to the throne; for others it would have indicated an outright claim to power. Such a request to marry **Avishag** could only be to divide the loyalties of the people and thus start a civil war.

In verse 22 Solomon explained to his mother that after marrying **Avishag** Adonijah's next step would be to remind everyone that he is Solomon's older brother (first in line ahead of Solomon). Next he would reaffirm **Evyatar** as the High Priest (the same one who was with David) and finally put Joab back in full charge of the military (David's former commander). That would have meant a fight to the death or perhaps even the end of Solomon's reign. David's deathbed instructions to Solomon hadn't been in vain. **Adonijah's** naïve attempt to enlist Bathsheba to help him reclaim the throne would be his last. **Shlomo** vows to impose the death penalty. Since there was no court of appeals, King Solomon immediately sent his top general, **B'nayah**, to kill Adonijah.

Christian scholars wrestle a bit more than Rabbis do over whether what Solomon ordered was right in God's eyes, or not. No doubt the Torah Law did not contemplate the notion of a king ruling over Israel, at least not in the usual way of kings. We have talked on a number of occasions about the customary protocol of a new king killing all those who he thought might have reason to make a claim to the throne and in some respects that is exactly what is happening here. While that may have been typical of kings in ancient times that hardly makes it right.

But the Rabbis well point out that Adonijah openly acknowledged (in his conversation with Bathsheba) that he was aware that Solomon was God's anointed king. Therefore this is quite similar to the rebellious attitude that Saul took regarding David. Saul was directly told by Samuel that David was God's **mashiach** (anointed one), and that God was revoking Saul's kingship. All that did was to kindle an insatiable rage within **King Sha'ul** to destroy David, and God eternally condemned him for it.

We don't know how it was that Adonijah came to know or believe that Solomon was God's chosen (Yehoveh's *mashiach*) but his own words spoken to **Bat-Sheva** betray his knowledge of that truth. We see no condemnation in the Bible for Adonijah's execution and likely this is because in God's eyes Adonijah was (like Saul) rebellious towards God in trying to reroute redemption history. Since this is not directly stated we have to rely on established Biblical principle and pattern, and some small measure of speculation, to come to this conclusion; but it all fits quite neatly and so we should probably accept this case of killing Adonijah as righteous justice and not self-serving murder.

As awkward and unsophisticated was Adonijah's attempt to usurp the throne, Solomon figured that somebody else had to have instigated it. Who else could it have been other than **Evyatar** the High Priest and **Yo'av** the military commander who had sided with **Adoniyah** and been the guests of honor at the banquet that set into motion the rapid succession of events that led to Solomon's coronation? So first **Shlomo** dealt with **Evyatar**.

Let me remind you that up to now there were two High Priests presiding over Israel: **Evyatar** and **Tzadok**. By definition this is wrong; there can no more be two authorized High Priests serving at once than two Messiahs. However David had allowed it, no doubt as a political convenience. **Evyatar** was primarily associated with the northern tribal alliance and **Tzadok** with the southern coalition. So if David had replaced him in favor of **Tzadok**, it would have been seen a direct insult to that northern tribal coalition; so he let them both serve as co-High Priests. One of them had to be illegitimate, and it was **Evyatar**. **Evyatar** was a descendant of **Eli** (he was Samuel's mentor). **Eli** was a High Priest, a good and faithful servant of God, and an immensely popular and respected figure in Israel. But he, too, was illegitimate according to Torah Law because he was of the line of **Ithamar** (a son of Aaron). When the Wilderness Tabernacle was originally consecrated into service **Ithamar** and his family was given charge over all the Levite workers who performed the Tabernacle functions such as transporting it. However it was **Eleazar** (**Ithamar's** brother) who replaced his father Aaron as High Priest and thus was established as the ONLY legitimate line of High Priests.

King Solomon banished **Evyatar** from his royal court and from the priesthood for his rebellious association with Adonijah. While this was certainly not an honest attempt on Solomon's part to cleanse the priesthood of an illegitimate High Priest in order to right a wrong, it did serve to do exactly that. **Tzadok** was now the sole High Priest, and he was the legitimate office holder according to the Torah. **Evyatar** was sent away to his own property at place called **Anathoth**. Appropriately even though **Anathoth** was a city in the territory of Benjamin it was a Levitical city and had been since the time of Joshua (Joshua 21:18).

It's amazing how we might forget ancient prophetic pronouncements, but God doesn't. Not one. Not the most obscure. The banishment of **Evyatar** was prophesied years earlier in 1Samuel 2.

READ 1ST SAMUEL 2:27 to end

Evyatar was the last of Eli's line, and now his rival (**Tzadok**) had taken over as High Priest. Eli's line of High Priests ended (his illegitimate line) and now they served any way they could within the hierarchy of Levite workers to survive. Prophecy fulfilled.

It is interesting that Solomon chose to not simply execute **Evyatar** because he was every bit as guilty of rebellion as Adonijah. Yet, Solomon honored the memory of his father in that **Evyatar**, too, suffered at King Saul's hand alongside David. **Evyatar** (now about 80 years old) had been loyal to David at great personal risk and Solomon decided that this overrode any thought of killing **Evyatar** (however just it might have been) for being disloyal to him.

But Joab was another matter. The minute **Yo'av** heard that **Shlomo** had executed **Adonijah** and banished **Evyatar** he knew his life was worth nothing so he sought refuge in the sacred precinct where the altar was located. It is hard to know for certain which altar he fled to, but very likely it was the one at Gibeon. I think this is probably the case because here in chapter 2 the verse speaks of the altar that was at the tent of Yehoveh. This designation is usually reserved for speaking about the remnants of the Wilderness Tabernacle and not the tent David had erected in the City of David to house the Ark of the Covenant. This is as opposed to chapter 1 where Adonijah fled to the altar; there is no mention of it being the altar at the tent of YHWH so it was probably the local one.

Not only that, but Joab would have wanted to put some distance between he and Solomon. No doubt by fleeing to the most holy site in Israel (Gibeon) **Yo'av** hoped that Solomon would honor the place as being a sanctuary and that would protect him. But Joab's crime was such that no sanctuary need be honored and Solomon was in no mood to spare him. David had implied that Solomon needed to find a reason to rid himself of Joab, and now the reason had presented itself. So **Shlomo** dispatched **B'nayah** to find and execute **Yo'av**. When he arrived

there was **Yo'av** holding tight to the horns of the altar; he ordered Joab to let go and leave the sacred area but Joab refused saying if you're going to kill me it has to be at the foot of the altar (hoping of course that **B'nayah** wouldn't do that).

Apparently **B'nayah** was uncertain of the legality of killing Joab as he held onto the altar at Gibeon so he returned to **Shlomo** and told him about the dilemma. In verses 31 through 33 Solomon carefully explains to the concerned **B'nayah** why it is that Joab must be executed, and why it is legal to kill him even in that sacred place. The reason is that **Yo'av** is blood guilty. He has murdered and no sanctuary is afforded a murderer. He has murdered Amasa and Abner, but was never brought to justice for these crimes. Verse 32 says that Joab's blood will be on his own head; this phrase has a very specific meaning.

The Torah does not permit sacrificial atonement to pay for some crimes. In other words whereas the sacrifice of a lamb or a goat or a bull would expiate the sins for something like stealing, or assault, or the vast majority of the listed trespasses in the Law, it would not suffice for other crimes. The entire premise of animal sacrifice is that the life of an innocent animal is substituted for the life of the person who commits a trespass (a sin) against God. However for crimes like adultery, idolatry, and murder no substitutionary sacrifice is acceptable to the Lord. Only the life (the blood) of the trespasser is accepted as the price. In Bible terms: their blood (the criminal's blood) will be on their own head. Listen to these excerpts from the Torah on the subject.

Num 35:30-31 CJB

³⁰ ***"If anyone kills someone, the murderer is to be put to death upon the testimony of witnesses; but the testimony of only one witness will not suffice to cause a person to be put to death.***

³¹ ***Also, you are not to accept a ransom in lieu of the life of a murderer condemned to death; rather, he must be put to death.***

Deut 19:8-13 CJB

⁸ *"If ADONAI your God expands your territory, as he swore to your ancestors that he would, and gives you all the land he promised to give to your ancestors-*

⁹ *provided you keep and observe all these mitzvot I am giving you today, loving ADONAI your God and always following his ways- then you are to add three more cities for yourselves, besides these three;*

¹⁰ *so that innocent blood will not be shed in the land ADONAI your God is giving you as an inheritance, and thus blood guilt be on you.*

¹¹ *"However, if someone hates his fellow member of the community, lies in wait for him, attacks him, strikes him a death blow, and then flees into one of these cities;*

¹² *then the leaders of his own town are to send and bring him back from there and hand him over to the next-of-kin avenger, to be put to death.*

¹³ *You are not to pity him. Rather, you must put an end to the shedding of innocent blood in Isra'el. Then things will go well with you.*

Murder is an especially serious crime. Unpunished murder defiles the people and the land of the community it occurs in. In fact the congregation of God (the community) is responsible to the Lord to see to it that righteous justice (accomplished in accordance with the Law of Moses) is carried out. However since the administration of Israel's government changed from the days of Moses and then of the Judges (since Saul was made king), and the government of Israel became a monarchy, then it falls upon the shoulders of the King of Israel to ensure that justice is administered according the laws of God. Thus in verse 33 Solomon says that by **B'nayah** killing Joab (even as he is holding onto the horns of the most sacred altar of sacrifice) then David, David's offspring and his house (his family, his dynasty) shall be at peace with Yehoveh. Being at peace with Yehoveh means that the blood guilt that is currently lying upon David's family for NOT executing justice upon Joab will finally be lifted.

Everything that **Shlomo** has told **B'nayah** is true; it is indeed a very good rendering (and demonstrates a good understanding) of the Torah Law. As we saw by reading the Torah passages this is not tradition; it is not Middle Eastern custom; but it is exactly as we ought to be executing righteous justice upon murderers today, in our era. Let me clear, first, that now as then not all killing is classified as murder; there is such a thing in the Bible as justifiable homicide and even lesser degrees of unjustifiable homicide that don't warrant the death penalty. But these kinds of killings are not the kind that is being dealt with here. We as a

community bear the blood guilt upon us (as a community, not as individuals) for placing murderers in jail for a time, or even for life, instead of doing what the Lord prescribes. God **commands** that their lives be forfeit as an act of godly, righteous justice and as a kind of atonement, and as a means of cleansing the land and the community from blood guilt. If at some point the murderer repents and confesses and is sincerely sorry it doesn't matter except perhaps as concerns their personal **spiritual** life with God. On earth, among men, within the community, the judicial consequences for serious crimes are not pardoned in God's eyes even if through faith in Yeshua these sins are pardoned in heaven.

Once this was satisfactorily explained to him, **B'nayah** travels back to Gibeon, finds **Yo'av** at the altar and strikes him dead. His corpse was taken to his family tomb. While some English texts call the place he was buried "the desert", in Hebrew it is **midbar** and it usually means wilderness (not necessarily desert wilderness). Joab did NOT live in the desert, nor did his family. Rather since he was part of David's family he was from Bethlehem. Rashi says that **midbar** often means unsettled land that is not cultivated; land used only for grazing animals. And this would describe the area around Bethlehem quite well in that era if Rashi is correct.

Now that **Yo'av** was dead **B'nayah** could be Commander of the Army without fear of a rival or that the army would be divided by loyalties to different commanders. And since **Evyatar** the High Priest had been stripped of his title, his duties, and sent packing to his home city of **Anathoth**, the way was clear for **Tzadok** to be the rightful and only High Priest of Israel in King Solomon's administration. These were major changes that needed to be made, even if the way it all came about wasn't exactly savory. King **Shlomo** now had a fully loyal royal court to serve him and he could begin to move forward without looking over his shoulder.

In the case of Joab, Solomon did no wrong from God's perspective in executing him. In deposing **Evyatar** Solomon did what was right in God's eyes by removing an illegitimate High Priest. But now in verse 36 comes the case of **Shimei** whom David clearly wanted Solomon to dispose of after his death. But he told Solomon that the best way to go about this was to find a suitable reason to punish him for some current rather than past offense. Thus **Shlomo** took the clever step of virtually quarantining **Shimei** inside the city of Jerusalem. This did three things: 1st, it put **Shimei** on notice that he was being carefully watched. 2nd, it removed **Shimei** from his comfortable position in his home in **Bachurim** where he could easily foment trouble with fellow members of his tribe of Benjamin. And 3rd, it put **Shimei** in a situation whereby it was almost certain that this old trouble maker was bound to make an actionable misstep.

Shimei agreed to move to Jerusalem and never again cross the Kidron Valley; essentially

Shlomo made him an offer he couldn't refuse. The idea of not crossing the Kidron was that he wouldn't go back home. Sure enough, about 3 years later, something happened; 2 of **Shimei's** slaves ran away (which means that **Shimei** had been allowed to bring his wealth and household with him). They had escaped to Philistine Gath and the elderly **Shimei** wanted them back so he ignored the deal he had made with King Solomon, rode off to Gath, retrieved his slaves and returned to Jerusalem.

One can only speculate why **Shimei** would take such a risk; but likely (as is so human) he thought that because 3 years had passed since his promise to Solomon, and that he'd been a good boy all that time, that considering the circumstances and his prompt return that Solomon would overlook his disobedience. But this is the same rash **Shimei** who thought he could get away with cursing David as he fled (even throwing rocks at him) but with a little well-timed groveling managed to keep from having his head removed from his shoulders when David returned to power. No doubt he thought he could manipulate this king in the same way.

There is an interesting twist here that actually does have some bearing on the outcome. In verse 42 Solomon asks the rhetorical question as to whether **Shimei** remembered that he had sworn an oath to Solomon not to leave Jerusalem. The twist is that when we're first told of this agreement there is no mention of it receiving religious sanction by means of it being considered a vow sworn to by both sides. We have regularly read the standard Biblical vow and oath protocol of "as Adonai lives" or "before the Lord" or something similar; and always the words vow or oath are used to make it clear that a formal vow invoking Yehoveh's name was established. We read nothing of the sort in verses 36 -38. Bottom line: I don't think there ever was a vow made. I think Solomon decided to declare their agreement a vow so that when **Shimei** broke it Solomon would have a pious and legal reason to kill him (as though what **Shimei** did was to affront God by breaking a vow in God's name and thus that was the reason for execution).

King Solomon makes this elaborate speech that is essentially like a judge ruling from the bench and explaining to the defendant the reason for his guilty verdict as well as the reason for the harsh sentence. And just as Adonijah gave away to Bathsheba the true reason for his request for **Avishag's** hand in marriage (because Adonijah felt entitled to the throne), Solomon gives away the true reason for his handing down the death sentence to **Shimei**: it was for "all the terrible things you did to David my father". He concludes his sentencing by saying that he (**Shlomo**) will be blessed and the throne of David will never end. The meaning of this is that the nation of Israel will see what Solomon did by executing **Shimei** as just and Solomon will be hailed for his decision. And even though it was always **Shimei's** grand hope that the tribe of Benjamin (his own tribe) that produced Israel's first king (Saul) would regain the throne it would not only never happen in his lifetime, it was never going to happen at all.

By all customs of that day, Solomon's order to execute **Shimei** was just. However was it just in God's eyes? I don't believe so. **Shimei** had not rebelled against either David or Solomon. He was certainly not respectful, he was a bit of a rat, and he certainly had hopes for their demise and replacement with a member of his own tribe. But Solomon's stance that **Shimei** had done something wrong that violated a commandment of God is not true. This isn't far removed from David having **Uriyah** (Bathsheba's first husband) killed.

God does not ordain the death sentence lightly because He values life. He certainly doesn't ordain death for insults among humans, or for thoughts we might have, or for traveling beyond a geographical boundary line. **Shlomo** now had blood on his hands.

We'll take up chapter 3 next time.