

1ST KINGS

Week 3, chapter 1 continued

As we continue in 1st Kings Chapter 1 let's review. David is quite elderly; his physical health is failing and his spiritual health is nearly as sickly. He has been reluctant to name a successor to the throne and this fact is causing concern throughout his Kingdom and infighting among his family. David has never been one to approach matters in a conventional way so it is anyone's guess as to who he will choose to be the next king (or if he will choose at all, instead merely dying and then letting his sons fight it out).

Sure enough one son has decided that with David's precarious health situation and apparently imminent death, that it is only logical that as the next-in-line from a traditional aspect (citing the rights of primogeniture) it is time that he put himself forth as ready to assume power. That son is Adonijah son of David's wife **Haggit**, who throws a grand banquet to celebrate his coming coronation that even includes sacrifices so as to give it the appearance of religious sanction. This is not rebellion; he has not declared himself king but rather only as the prince-in-waiting.

Now King David has become a recluse and his main concerns seem to be mere day to day survival and personal comforts. He has never paid much attention to the actions of his sons, many of whom are incorrigible due to the absence of parental guidance and discipline. So David seems to have no personal knowledge of **Adoniyah's** assumption and announcement that he shall be the next King of Israel. But Nathan, David's Prophet, could not help but notice Adonijah's public display since it happened only a few hundred yards outside the walls of the City of David.

Seeing Adonijah's intent unfold and knowing that God's choice for David's successor was Solomon, Nathan springs into action to bring the matter to David's attention so that **Shlomo** would not be bypassed. He enlists Solomon's mother Bathsheba to insist to David that he keep his promise to her that **Shlomo** assumes power after David's death. No doubt Nathan was concerned that if he were to try to go to David by himself that the king might suspect a personal bias of wanting Solomon as successor for the purpose of ensuring that his prophecy would come to pass. After all, a prophet who misses the mark in his prophetic oracles was

typically either quickly out of work or dead.

Bat-Sheva is no stranger to David's ways of thinking (and now infamous inaction) so she is easily persuaded by **Natan** to seek an audience with her husband. Nathan even tells her exactly what to say and sets up a contrived drama whereby as Bathsheba is explaining that Adonijah is about to beat Solomon to the throne Nathan will just coincidentally happen by to verify her story. Let's pick up from there today.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS 1:15 – end

Bathsheba goes to the Palace and as she enters David's room we are told that **Avishag** was in attendance. Recall that **Avishag** was a beautiful young virgin who had been brought to David in order to serve him as a sort of 24 hour per day personal nursemaid and heat source. The Scriptures have unambiguously asserted that this was not a sexual relationship nor was she a new addition to David's harem, and **Bat-Sheva's** forthright statements to David indicate that **Avishag's** presence represented neither alarm nor intrigue to her.

It is noteworthy that only a person with Bathsheba's status could have gone into David's personal chambers without being announced (this is something that even Nathan could not have done). Even so we are given a glimpse of the protocol of that era between a king and a wife (even with a wife so high on the ladder of wives as Bathsheba). She is said to have prostrated herself before David in deep respect, and that David's response to her was quite curt, asking her what she wanted. Many of the Rabbis suspect that it was Bathsheba's willingness to bow before David that indicated to him that she had a request.

Verse 17 has **Bat-Sheva** telling David that he needed to remember that he had promised to her that her son **Shlomo** would be the next king. As we discussed last time, up to this point we have seen nothing in the Scriptures that says such a thing explicitly. However this and other passages in 1Chronicles do claim that David had long ago settled on Solomon; and this was the result of a divine message from God through Natan that the Lord had chosen Solomon. So Bathsheba's case was very strong that David had made a vow to name **Shlomo** as the **nagid** (the prince in waiting), and so with that it would have been nearly impossible for another son to argue that David's intention was otherwise.

But now she hits David with the alarming news that **Adoniyah** has crowned himself as king. He has essentially even been officially coronated and anointed by **Evyatar** the High Priest, and **Yo'av** David's military commander has ratified it. This means that **Adoniyah** has usurped David and not waited until his death. By naming names Bathsheba is revealing who is aiding Adonijah (presumably as traitors), and by deduction who must be standing with Solomon. The guest list of the banquet alone makes it clear that this was no ordinary party and was meant as evidence against **Adoniyah** to prove his rebellion.

In verse 20 she beseeches David to make a personal public announcement that Solomon is to be king, implying that the only reason **Adoniyah** is making his claim is because David has been silent about it. In other words, while within a small circle in the Palace it is known that Solomon is to be the next king, from a political and popular viewpoint no such presupposition exists among the people of Israel. They are either totally in the dark or it is a forgone conclusion that as the natural next-in-line Adonijah will be king. Solomon is actually an illogical choice due to his young age (probably 18 or 19 years old) and the lurid and infamous circumstances that led to his birth in the first place.

But the reality is that **Bat-Sheva** is not telling David the truth. And this is because Nathan misunderstood what **Adoniyah** was doing and wrongly assumed that he had pronounced himself king. Bathsheba is not lying; she is just passing along incorrect information that she has received from **Natan**. Right on cue, as David is becoming alarmed although no doubt somewhat skeptical (leaders hear all kinds of things that turn out to be untrue or one-sided), Nathan arrives on the scene. As did Bathsheba, David's own Prophet bowed with his face to the ground demonstrating that even the highest officials in David's administration were required to demonstrate absolute submission whenever they appeared before him. He proceeds to ask David the same question about Solomon's right to the throne as did Bathsheba, as though he had no idea that Bathsheba had just done the same. He gives David almost identical information as did Solomon's mother and even embellishes it by saying that at the feast those in attendance were cheering and saying, "Long live King Adoniyah!" Nathan asks the question in a way that expresses wonderment that David would not have informed Nathan if David had decided against **Shlomo** and instead appointed Adonijah.

Back in verse 21 Bathsheba told David what the real effect of his doing nothing about this would be: Solomon and **Bat-Sheva** would not survive. And the reason for this is that they would be seen as **chatta** (sinners, offenders or criminals). What would be their crime? As in all situations regarding succession to the throne in that era, the one who becomes king usually executes others in his family who might be seen as a threat to his crown, whether that threat is real or imagined. And Bathsheba is quite right; no doubt she and **Shlomo** would be killed since Nathan would have little choice but to condemn **Adoniyah's** ascension. Such a condemnation would polarize the Israeli public so the most effective solution was always to eliminate the

competition.

This unpleasant prospect along with Nathan's words that **Adoniyah** had already been coronated as king was sufficient to cause David to act. I want to remind you now that from the time we hear of Adonijah's banquet until the end of this chapter, all occurred within a few hours. So the procrastinating David was essentially forced to act by the sheer surprise and seriousness of the matter that he no doubt also understood had long ranging spiritual implications.

In verse 28 it seems that Bathsheba had left upon Nathan's arrival and so now David summons her back. In front of her, Nathan, **Avishag** and probably some unnamed members of the royal court David swears an oath that Solomon is to be the next king. Finally; a long overdue official pronouncement that ends all speculation. Since a vow is an irrevocable promise David invokes the name of his god Yehoveh as the guarantor of the vow. Even more, this declaration is to have an immediate effect; TODAY Solomon shall be king. In gratitude **Bat-Sheva** responds: "Let my Lord David **chayah olam**". Most translations make these Hebrew words into "live forever" or something similar, which makes it sound like a rather hollow platitude meant to flatter. However a better translation that more captures the sense in modern terms is, "May my lord David live eternally". Bathsheba is not wishing David a long temporal or physical life; rather she is responding to David's sudden realization that his time remaining on this earth may well be measured only in hours. **Bat-Sheva** is expressing her wish for David to have a happy afterlife. And it should not go unnoticed that both Nathan and Bathsheba's speech were apparently meant to shake David out of his denial that death was at his doorstep so that he finally understood that he couldn't wait any longer to appoint a successor. Back in verse 21 Bathsheba openly speaks of the imminent time when David "sleeps with his ancestors". She is frankly discussing David's death with him; something that others probably dared not do.

But there is another element to this discussion of death and eternal life as well. God had promised David that his dynasty would go on indefinitely, and that the Lord would never replace it with another. Further its perpetuation would go on through David's son **Shlomo**. So Bathsheba is affirming to the dying David that what he has done by formally appointing Solomon as king (in accordance with God's will) is to bring about his own ongoing afterlife and eternal continuation of his dynasty. This is because it was still believed in Israel as elsewhere that a man's life essence lived on in his son. In David's case, his **kingship** would also live on in his son **Shlomo** (and in his sons after him) and thus one could say in a very real and tangible sense that David would be king forever. This was meant as a comfort to David, not as flowery but idle words.

These talks must have worked because in a burst of energy and in a sense of urgency not witnessed in some time, David issues a flurry of instructions. **Tzadok** (the other High Priest), **Natan**, and **B'nayah** the chief of David's bodyguard are told to take members of David's royal court, put **Shlomo** on David's personal mule, and then with haste proceed to the **Gichon** Springs. At the Gihon Springs Solomon is to be anointed King of Israel. Such a ceremony must take place at a source of running water because a washing of the candidate must occur in addition to being anointed with olive oil. Any and all of the cleansing ceremonies as ordained in the Torah required **mayim chayim** (living water). Living water means water that comes from a moving source. Therefore it cannot be water taken from a well or a stagnant pond. River water is preferable but 2nd best is an artesian spring. A lake is fine provided there is an inlet and an outlet (as with the Sea of Galilee). Since they were in Jerusalem there were only two nearby water sources that counted as living water; the Gihon Spring on the eastern side of the city and the spring at **Rogel** located at the southern end of the City of David just outside the walls.

The use of the Gihon for Solomon's coronation instead of the **Rogel** is obvious. The Rabbis say that both **Adoniyah's** and Solomon's ceremonies were going on at the same time. These banquets tended to last for at least a full day, sometimes more. So by using the Gihon Spring the two parties didn't have to confront one another however the news would spread rapidly to Adonijah's gathering about the other one.

Adoniyah may have made quite an impression by using the royal chariot with 50 men running in front, and also by throwing a lavish ceremonial feast with government dignitaries involved; and while provocative it was neither rebellious nor a formal declaration of kingship. But no one was permitted to ride on the king's personal mule but the king. So when the local townspeople saw Solomon riding on David's mule this was indisputable proof that he was the official King of Israel. Next the shofar was to be sounded (this was a means to alert everyone within hearing distance) and the royal court was to begin chanting, "Long live King Solomon". The locals were to take up the chant in joyful affirmation.

Tzadok took with him the special horn of olive oil from the tent where the Ark of the Covenant sat (this was not the Wilderness Tabernacle that had long ago deteriorated). This was a special consecrated olive oil, made from a formula prescribed in Exodus 30. It was this holy olive oil that was used to anoint Solomon. That **Tzadok** performed the ceremony is significant because of the two High Priests who served David at that time (**Evyatar** and **Tzadok**) only **Tzadok** was the Torah-authorized High Priest because only he was of the proper lineage. Thus with **Tzadok** doing the anointing future generations could not dispute the validity of the ceremony.

B'nayah (perhaps David's most courageous and loyal follower) throws his weight behind Solomon by publically proclaiming, "Amen! May Yehoveh, God of my lord the king, confirm it." **Amen** means 'may it be so'. Or in this sense **B'nayah** is saying 'I confirm it' and 'I hope that Yehoveh also confirms it.' Nathan's mere presence is his confirmation. And so demonstrations of joy immediately erupted, and flutes and drums and all sorts of instruments were played to the point that the very ground seemed to quake.

After this public display the entourage was to return immediately to the Palace where Solomon would sit upon the royal throne. As of that moment, Solomon is King of Israel. David is technically no longer king; but for so long as he lives David is the king-father and retains a kind of symbolic seniority. **Shlomo** will not be entirely free of David's senior authority until David is dead. But in a phrase that flashes by us some important words are added; it is that **Shlomo** will be king over Judah AND Israel. That is Solomon, like David, is to rule over all 12 tribes. This was not automatic or a given and it needed to be clarified. It would have been well within David's province (and from an earthly standpoint perhaps a wise thing to do) to install Solomon as king over Judah and **Adoniyah** as king over the northern tribes of Israel. For one thing it would have meant that one son would not have felt the necessity to kill the other. For another it would have been the easy way out of David keeping his word to Bathsheba while at the same time validating the custom that the eldest living son would inherit the throne. And finally both political factions (those who supported **Shlomo** and those who supported **Adoniyah**) would have been equally satisfied (or dissatisfied, depending on how one looks at it). Notice that this division of the tribes into these two long standing coalitions (one called Judah and the other Israel) was still memorialized in Hebrew thinking as of David's time, even though from a national sense there was indeed the one sovereign nation of Israel that included all the northern and the southern tribal territories.

Let's not forget that all during this coronation of Solomon, **Adonijah** was still partying a few hundred yards down the hill. The strange shouts and growing noise from the city above reached **Adoniyah** and his guests. **Yo'av**, David's top general, always on the alert, heard the shofar blast and wondered aloud what was going on. And at the very moment that question crossed his lips the son of the High Priest **Evyatar** arrived with news. **Adoniyah**, no doubt having his fill of fine wine, welcomed the new guest and remarked that since this is a good young man what else would he be bringing with him but good tidings?

In verse 43 the shoe falls; one can only imagine the sudden silence and ashen faces where moments ago were only giddy conversations and rosy cheeks of inebriated celebrants. "Our Lord David has made **Shlomo** king" said Jonathan. So as to make it clear that this was not a similar action to what was going on with **Adoniyah**, Jonathan explains that **Tzadok**, Nathan, and **B'nayah** were present and that Solomon was actually anointed. The city people joined in the celebration and Solomon is sitting on David's throne as he speaks. It was over in an

instant and **Adoniyah's** hopes were dashed. But worse, he was now on the wrong side of power. In fact everyone there was on the wrong side of power. The only question that mattered at this point was who would die and who would be spared.

The never-lukewarm David prostrated himself on his bed before his God and thanked Yehoveh for allowing him to see Solomon sitting on the throne before he died. What we need to see here is that only hours earlier David apparently was perfectly satisfied to let nature take its course upon his death, and have his sons fight it out for the throne. David in his self-absorption and infirmity had decided NOT to name a successor. It was only Nathan and Bathsheba's dramatic intervention that stopped him from committing yet another detestable act that surely would have led to bloody civil war.

And yet David mustered what little strength remained and used it to bow before God, even while confined to his own bed. He acknowledged that God's will had been done, even if he hadn't been anxious to do it. The other thing we see here is that although some Bible teachers and preachers use this coronation of Solomon to draw a parallel with Jacob and his favorite son Joseph, I would have to say that the two situations are nothing alike. We really find precious little fervor in David to choose Solomon. There is nothing that seems to elevate Solomon as a distinct favorite in David's eyes. There is nothing that seems to indicate that **Adoniyah** was a bad man, or that David eyed him with suspicion. Rather it is that while from a father's point of view David could not bring himself to support one son over the other, or to disappoint one son in favor of the other, Bathsheba and Nathan reminded David that **Shlomo** was God's choice just as David had once been the least likely among Jessie's household to become a king but was indeed God's choice.

This is a lesson we must all accept as followers of Messiah (and even the vastly imperfect David has demonstrated it here). There are times when choices are made for us in heaven, and our only appropriate response is to bow before God in submission. I know of no other way that a family can lose a beloved child and while still in deep mourning sing praises to God's holiness, than to humbly submit to God's sovereignty and to trust Him. I don't know how to accept a devastating illness to our spouse when they've lived a life of fruitfulness for the Lord, other than to lie prostrate before the Father and worship Him no matter how our emotions may tell us to do something else. Whether he actually felt it or not, David did what he didn't really want to do (but knew it was God's will), and he chose to see it all as blessing.

However down in the valley below, **Adoniyah's** guests fled in panic upon the news of Shlomo's coronation and left him alone to contemplate what this was bound to mean for him. They had hitched their wagon to a falling star and they didn't want to be associated with him

any longer (which tells us more about them than it does about Adonijah). Verse 50 says that **Adoniyah** saw only one hope for survival; he ran to the altar and grabbed hold of its horns. He saw this is a place of refuge, and didn't even bother to go to his father, David, to discuss the matter and seek forgiveness. Again; **Adoniyah** had NOT rebelled. He did NOT declare himself to be king, he did not try to usurp David, he merely assumed that as next in line (and with David lying on death's doorstep) that soon he would be crowned king. His crime was that he was a rival to his brother, **Shlomo**; nothing more.

The Altar had four protrusions on it, one at each corner, called horns. There is some mild disagreement among scholars over WHICH altar Adonijah ran to, but to me the answer is obvious. Some scholars such as the great Rashi point out that the national altar was still located at a Tabernacle of sorts that resided in Gibeon and so he must have fled there. But that makes no sense. There was also an altar right there in Jerusalem and there is no evidence that anyone saw one altar as more efficacious than another in those days. In fact we know from Scripture and from archeological findings that after the destruction of the Wilderness Tabernacle at Shiloh many years earlier, private altars sprung up everywhere throughout the land and they nearly all were built with horns at their corners. **Adoniyah** merely rushed up to the altar there at Jerusalem and latched on for dear life, hoping it would be honored as a place of sanctuary. I suspect it was the altar that David had built on Araunah's threshing floor at the top of Mt. Moriah. Of course just how long he hoped to stand there is debatable.

That said, the character of the asylum/refuge concept was very powerful in Middle Eastern culture in those days and all the more so when it was within the holy precinct of so sacred a place as the altar. While an altar is not specifically listed as an official place of refuge in the Torah Law in Exodus 21:14 we do read this:

^{CJB} **Exodus 21:14** *But if someone willfully kills another after deliberate planning, you are to take him even from my altar and put him to death.*

It is generally believed that the sense of this passage is that the only legitimate reason that a person can be forcefully taken from the refuge of an altar is if that person has committed premeditated homicide. And certainly Adonijah had done nothing that could even be identified in the Torah Law as a crime let alone murder. Word came to Solomon that **Adoniyah** was holed up at the altar site and refused to leave unless he was granted clemency. No doubt Solomon's first chore was to deal with his rival, **Adoniyah**, in whatever means the situation dictated. But in Adonijah's plea he acknowledged that Solomon was king and he was Solomon's servant, and sought forgiveness of his master, so his intent to recognize and

submit to **Shlomo's** authority was obvious.

King **Shlomo** responded by putting **Adoniyah** on probation. The terms were that as long as he remained loyal, no harm would come to him. When **Adoniyah** received word of this conditional pardon he came to the Palace, bowed low to Solomon and presented himself no doubt fully expecting to become a servant. Shlomo surprised him however by sending him home and not inflicting humiliation upon him.

Thus not only was this aspect of the story of Solomon's rise to power recorded for us that we might know the disposition of **Shlomo's** rival, but also to see that the first act of the new King of Israel was one of mercy and not retribution; an act of deliverance and not condemnation. We will see another king in David's dynasty do the same centuries later but on a far grander scale:

^{CJB} **John 3:17** *For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but rather so that through him, the world might be saved.*

We'll begin chapter 2 next week.

