

# 1 Kings 1-2

## Background

### **Background and purpose:**

The book of 1 Kings is part of what the Hebrews understood as the "Former Prophets." These are the historical-prophetic books from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings. Their purpose is to demonstrate to Israel the reason that they went into captivity in Babylon, which was primarily their abandonment of worship of God and the adoption of Canaanite gods like Baal. We tend to read them like we would modern history, but they are a carefully edited group of writings to demonstrate the hand of God on his people and their sin and resistance to his commands which led to their punishment. In the book of Kings we see the rise of the "Prophet" as one who stands in opposition to the king and the people to speak the words of God and call them back to faithfulness through repentance. 1 Kings begins with the death of David and the struggle for succession as Solomon takes the throne.

## Chapter 1

### **The Succession of King David:**

David is old, and he is dying. It is clear from the opening story that his physical strength and manhood, things for which David was famous, have left him. He has also left some unfinished business, namely the issue of succession. Here is a leader who has overstayed his effectiveness. He did not make critical decisions and this caused instability and eventually the need for others to step in and take control to avoid disaster. It is important for us to learn from the failure of David. This beautiful young girl, Abishag from the Galilee area, is important to illustrate David's weakness and becomes a part of the future story.

The powerful people in Jerusalem split into two camps. The first camp support Adonijah who is David's 4<sup>th</sup> son and the legal heir according to the right of the oldest son. He is supported by Joab who has been David's military commander since the early days before becoming king in Jerusalem. He is also supported by Abiathar who was the priest who fled with David during his persecution by king Saul. They represent "the old guard." Arrayed on the other side are "the newcomers," figures who appear in the story after David becomes king of all Israel and reigns from Jerusalem. First is Zadok the priest, then Nathan the prophet and Benaiah who is the captain of David's personal guard. They back Solomon as the son of David who should take the throne because of an oath that David had sworn to Bathsheba, his mother.

The rest of the narrative chronicles the political intrigue that takes place as the two factions try to secure the right of succession as King David is dying. Adonijah assumes his right and plans to take it by force much like Absalom, David's oldest son, did when he rose up in rebellion against his father. The text tells the bloody story of political struggle, ambition, murder, and power as Solomon rises to establish his throne as the second Davidic king. It does not, however, condone the means by which the transition takes place or the behavior of the different factions. What is clear is that the will of God is accomplished. Solomon was to be the king and in spite of all of the

human failures and evil intentions, God's will was accomplished. Many things happen in the world through human sin, pride and abuse but God's will is accomplished as he is sovereign over all of what takes place.

David's dynasty is not just a normal line of kings. He represents the kingdom of God and this makes his family line special. It is interesting to compare David-Solomon with Isaac-Jacob. Saul is the first king and Jonathan, his oldest son should have been the next king, but God divinely elects David to be the successor. Now, as we just read, Adonijah should have been king as the oldest but God divinely elects Solomon to be the next king. After that point things go on to a normal succession of father to oldest son. The same happened with the patriarchs when God started the people of God. Abraham's oldest son, Ishmael, was the rightful heir, but God divinely elected Isaac to be the heir. Isaac had two sons and Esau was the rightful heir but God divinely elected Jacob to be the one through whom the promise was carried forward. Then normal family succession continued after that in the development of the tribes. Esau and Jacob struggled in human deception and violence in that transition just as Adonijah and Solomon struggle in human maneuvering and violence in their transition. What does this tell us? In both of these key points, the beginning of the nation and the beginning of the monarchy – God demonstrates that he is the one determining who will carry forward his promise, not the normal conventions of human culture.

Another important connection between this passage and the New Testament is the anointing of Solomon and its connection with Jesus. If the ceremony of Solomon serves as a model or even a type of Christ then there are two important events in Jesus' life that need to be examined. The first is his baptism where Jesus is taken to water and anointed by the prophet (John the Baptist) to be king. Later in Jesus' ministry he will enter Jerusalem in a parade of popular rejoicing along the same path, up from the Kidron Valley where the Gihon Spring is located, and into the Temple where he should be enthroned – more significant than the palace where Solomon was enthroned. The parallels between the two "sons of David" are important for understanding the cultural and theological significance of the events of Jesus' life. It is probably also important to remember that Solomon was the result of the union between David and Bathsheba. She was his wife – but he gained her illegitimately by killing her husband. The fact that Solomon is chosen by God against the normal conventions of succession, prefigures our own salvation as we are not worthy to be the sons and heirs of the promise, but because of the grace and mercy of God we have been given the place of honor as his sons and daughters.

## **Chapter 2: The Establishment of Solomon's Throne**

What is the significance of Adonijah's request to marry Abishag, the young woman brought in to sleep with David to keep him warm? To us it seems like no big deal. She was a beautiful young woman, she had no power or political influence... what was the issue. I believe that it goes back to the story of Absalom's rebellion. One of the first things Absalom did when he ran his father out of Jerusalem was to set up a tent on the roof of the palace and have sex with his father's concubines. This was to demonstrate his place now as the king. It seems that in making this request, Adonijah is still trying to conspire to wrestle the throne away from his brother, whom he sees as the unrightful king. Solomon reacts to this as if it is evidence of treason and deals with the conspirators harshly to show his power and to eliminate future threats and challenges to his rule – insuring internal peace during his reign. Again, the Bible does not condone this brutality but simply demonstrates how Solomon becomes the successor to David. We see that he is a human king and as God warned, with human kings comes violence and the abuse of power.