

The Life of David

David in His Old Age

1 Kings 1:1-10

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David in His Old Age

Scripture

Last week, we concluded our study of 2 Samuel but not of “The Life of David.” The first one and a half chapters of 1 Kings tells us about the sunset of David’s life.

Let’s read about David in his old age in 1Kings 1:1-10:

¹Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. ²Therefore his servants said to him, “Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms, that my lord the king may be warm.” ³So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. ⁴The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not.

⁵Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, “I will be king.” And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. ⁶His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?” He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom. ⁷He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him. ⁸But Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and Shimei and Rei and David’s mighty men were not with Adonijah.

⁹Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the Serpent’s Stone, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king’s sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, ¹⁰but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother. (1 Kings

1:1-10)

Introduction

A year ago, on March 6, 2020, three senior members of the Saudi royal family, including King Salman's brother and two nephews, were arrested. The three were accused of treason for plotting to overthrow the king. Newspaper reports suggested that the arrests were ordered by the king's favorite son and de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who was seeking to consolidate power. There have also been reports that King Salman is growing quite feeble, which is why his son has been so prominent in squashing any opposition to the throne.¹

When kings and other leaders become old and feeble, there is often a grab for power. People jockey their way into a position to become the next king or ruler. And sometimes it can get ugly.

This is exactly what we learn about as King David came to the end of his life. One of his sons made a grab for power. David's son, Adonijah, wanted to become the next king over all Israel. He wanted to be preeminent. We are going to examine today's text from the perspective of Adonijah.

As we engage with today's narrative, let's keep in mind that we sometimes struggle with preeminence. It may be with our spouses, or with our parents, or with our colleagues, or even with our neighbors. This text has something to teach each one of us.

Lesson

First Kings 1:1-10 shows us what happens when we wrongly desire preeminence.

Let's use the following outline:

¹ See <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/625769-coup-plot-suspected-saudi-arabia-arrests-king-s-brother-two-princes>.

1. We Notice the Diminishment of Others (1:1-4)
2. We Exalt Ourselves (1:5, 6b-10)
3. We Pursue Our Own Pleasure (1:6a)

I. We Notice the Diminishment of Others (1:1-4)

First, when we wrongly desire preeminence, we notice the diminishment of others.

Verse 1 begins with these words, **“Now King David....”** The first thing I want to note is that 1 Kings is a continuation of 2 Samuel. We know that because of the word **“Now.”** In Hebrew, it is a conjunction that is called a “waw connective.” It is often used in narrative portions of Scripture to tie all the parts together.

The second thing I want to note is that the narrative begins with the words **“King David.”** I did not realize how significant the issue of kingship was until I read the commentary by John Olley on this passage. He writes:

That the focus of chapter 1 is on kingship is shown by the designation of key characters. Not only is *King* the first word but David is always *King David* (nine times), *the king* (thirty nine times) and only once *our lord David* (v. 11). The first instance of simply *David* is in 2:1, after the issue of succession is resolved. Alongside are references to Adonijah seeking to become *king* (six times), the promise that Solomon is to be *king* (four times) and statement that he has become *king* (seven times), or the question as to which is to be *king* (vv. 20, 27). The seventy instances of the noun *king* or the related verb is the most in any chapter in the Bible. The narrative has movement as various questions arise. Will David act as king in his last days, and if so, how? What will happen because Adonijah wants to be king? What about Solomon?²

The next thing I want to note is that the text says, **“Now**

² John W. Olley, *The Message of Kings: God Is Present*, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 39.

King David was old and advanced in years” (1:1a). David’s reign as king lasted forty years, from about 1010 – 970 BC. He was about thirty years old when he became king. And so he was about seventy years old when he died. We may not think that is very old but David had lived a very full and hard life, particularly as a warrior. His body was worn out and it showed. He was a pale shadow of his former fit and virile self. He was constantly cold, most likely because of decreased blood circulation in his body. Verse 1b goes on to say, **“And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm.”**

David’s servants tried to help. They knew that the additional pajamas and blankets were not doing the trick. So they proposed a remedy that was apparently recommended in ancient medical text books.³ We read in verses 2-4:

Therefore his servants said to him, “Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms, that my lord the king may be warm.” So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not.

The author of 1 Kings wanted his readers to know that David was diminished. He was coming to the end of his life. He was old and advanced in years. He could not get warm. Even beautiful Miss Israel was of little help to King David.

We are told of David’s frailty and decline and diminishment because it was also noted by David’s son, Adonijah, as we shall see in the next verse. He noticed his father’s diminishment as king.

³ Howard Vos cites Galen, among others; see *1, 2 Kings*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 34.

When we wrongly desire preeminence, we notice the diminishment of others. Then we are tempted to think about how that may be used to our advantage.

Many years ago, I recall an elderly saint being moved out of her home into a retirement community. Admittedly, it was a nice retirement community, but she felt helpless because one of her children had taken responsibility for her care. Some of her other children accused the sibling of taking care of their mother so that he could take advantage of the inheritance money that would be left to the children. I don't know what really was going on in the family. But it did highlight for me the reality that frailty may lead others to take advantage of those who are diminished.

II. We Exalt Ourselves (1:5, 6b-10)

Second, when we wrongly desire preeminence, we exalt ourselves.

In verse 5a, we read, **“Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, ‘I will be king.’ ”** Adonijah was the fourth son of David (2 Samuel 3:2-5). His mother was Haggith. More importantly, he was the oldest surviving son. David's first son, Amnon, had been killed by David's third son, Absalom, following the rape of his sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:23-29). Absalom died later in a revolt against his father David (2 Samuel 18:9-17). David's second son was Chileab, but we never hear anything about him, and so it is supposed that he must have died young.

As David's oldest surviving son, Adonijah may have believed that he would become the next king over all Israel. “But,” as Olley notes, “in the ancient Near East ‘primogeniture is not always the rule.... In some cultures, brothers had priority over sons. In others it was up to the king to designate his successor, and in some cases the subjects had to consent.’ ”⁴

⁴ John W. Olley, *The Message of Kings: God Is Present*, ed., 42.

We remember that David himself was not the oldest son. In fact, he was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons (1 Samuel 16:1-13). But David was the one chosen by God to be king over all Israel.

We are told in the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 22 that Solomon was God's choice to succeed David as king over all Israel. Listen to what is stated in 1 Chronicles 22:7-10:

David said to Solomon, "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house [that is, a temple] to the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth. Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.' "

Did Adonijah know that God had chosen Solomon to succeed David? Probably. Nevertheless, knowing of his father's diminishment, Adonijah sought to take advantage of the situation and exalt himself. Adonijah did several things to exalt himself.

First, he exalted himself by what he did. Verse 5b says, **"And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him."** This is reminiscent of what his brother Absalom did when he revolted against his father and tried to crown himself as king over Israel (2 Samuel 15:1). Adonijah believed that it was important that he portray the right image of a king. So, he had this entourage go before him in order to let people know that he was now the exalted king over Israel.

Second, he exalted himself by the people he knew. Verse 7 says, **"He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him."** Joab was David's Commanding General. He was ruthless to anyone who

opposed David. The reason he may have supported Adonijah is that he preferred him rather than Solomon as David's successor. Abiathar was not the high priest but he may have wanted to become the high priest, and he may have believed that Adonijah would grant him the high priesthood. Adonijah knew that having these two leaders on his side – one military and one religious – would go a long way to exalt his status in the eyes of the people.

And third, he exalted himself by his religious zeal. Verse 9 says, **“Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the Serpent’s Stone, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king’s sons, and all the royal officials of Judah.”** Now, the Serpent’s Stone was not the right place to offer sacrifices. Nevertheless, he was able to show off his religious zeal, while at the same time throwing a royal feast for a large group of people. A meal in ancient times was extremely important to strengthen fellowship and build relationships.

Adonijah exalted himself by what he did, by the people he knew, and by his religious zeal. He wanted to promote the right image to the people.

But there were problems with Adonijah’s exaltation. He brought Joab and Abiathar into his inner circle. However, he did not consult with the people who really did matter. Verse 8 says, **“But Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and Shimei and Rei and David’s mighty men were not with Adonijah.”** Zadok was the priest in charge of religion in Israel. Nathan was God’s prophet. And Adonijah certainly did not consult with his father, King David. The men who served by God’s appointment as prophet, priest, and king were not consulted by Adonijah. And that was a problem for Adonijah.

We sometimes do the same thing when we have a plan, don’t we. We consult with people who will tell us what we want to hear. But we don’t consult with people who are attentive to God’s word.

We also exalt ourselves when we take credit for the success of a project.

We exalt ourselves when we wear the latest fashion.

We exalt ourselves when we make sure that others know that we are moving in the right circles.

We exalt ourselves when our children get into the right colleges.

We exalt ourselves when we let others know how hard we work.

Friends, when we wrongly desire preeminence, we exalt ourselves.

III. We Pursue Our Own Pleasure (1:6a)

And third, when we wrongly desire preeminence, we pursue our own pleasure.

In the middle of this narrative is a very important note about David's relationship with his son Adonijah. We read in verse 6a, **“His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’ ”** Commentator Philip Ryken says, “This is a terrible indictment of David for his failure in fatherly discipline. It also happens to be one of the most important comments made anywhere in the Bible on the subject of raising children.”⁵

We know that David had a “hands off” relationship with his children. Amnon molested his sister Tamar, and David did nothing. Absalom murdered his brother Amnon, and David did nothing. Absalom rebelled against his father and staged a coup, and David was forced to do something, but even then he did not want anything to happen to Absalom.

⁵ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Iain M. Duguid, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 13.

Adonijah apparently grew up and was thoroughly indulged as a child. He pursued his own pleasure. Whatever he wanted, he got. David never at any time displeased Adonijah by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?”

Children, you need to remember that your parents must hold you accountable for your actions. You want to pursue your own pleasure. But it may not be best for you.

I am not talking about your parents being abusive toward you. But, it is right for them to ask you questions about why are doing what you are doing. As a rule, parents want the best for you. Sometimes they indulge you. But that never pays off in the long-term.

Parents, do you love your children enough to displease them? The Bible warns fathers not to provoke their children to anger (cf. Ephesians 6:4), which is sometimes a temptation for fathers. Nevertheless, proper discipline will displease your children, which is the point of 1 Kings 1:6. And let us also keep in mind Hebrews 12:11, which states, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the account of David in his old age in 1 Kings 1:1-10, let us submit to God’s will for our lives.

Adonijah wanted to be king. He wrongly desired preeminence. He noticed the diminishment of his father and sought to take advantage of it. He then exalted himself by what he did, by the people he knew, and by his religious zeal. He also pursued his own pleasure, which he had done from childhood.

Adonijah had forgotten or had ignored the truth that David did not put himself on the throne. David was king over all Israel because God had chosen him to be his king on earth. Adonijah

sought preeminence for himself when God had not chosen him as the next king over Israel. As we learned from 1 Chronicles 22:7-10, God had chosen Solomon to succeed David as king over Israel.

When I was a young Christian and a student at the University of Cape Town, I remember using gospel tracts to share the gospel. One tract had an illustration of a throne and a stick figure on the throne. Below the throne at the feet of the stick figure was a crown. The crown represented Jesus. And the stick figure represented me. The point of that illustration was that I was the king sitting on the throne of my life, and Jesus was subservient to me. However, in order to be saved, I needed to get off the throne so that Jesus could properly sit on the throne, and I was the one who needed to submit to Jesus and sit at his feet.

There is a sense in which that is what was happening with Adonijah. He was not the rightful next king. He was to be subservient to God's choice of next king, who was Solomon. Adonijah should have submitted to God's will for his life.

In the same way, you and I need to submit to God's will for our lives. The king who is now sitting on David's throne is his Greater Son, Jesus. He is the king who will rule forever and ever.

If you are not a Christian and have never submitted to Jesus as king over your life, do so now. He is a good and kind king, the best of all kings. He loves and protects all those who belong to him. But he will punish those who rebel against him and do not submit to him. You submit to Jesus by repenting of all your sin and believing that he is your only Savior and Lord.

If you are a Christian, ask Jesus to show you areas of your life where you may wrongly desire preeminence. When he shows you areas of wrongful preeminence in your life, then you may also turn to him in repentance and believe that he has paid the penalty even for that sin of yours. Amen.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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