

Solomon and his brothers – Lessons in Living 2

Last week we were introduced to Solomon as the son of David and Bathsheba, a blessing of God after the shameful start of their relationship. We saw that, even though he was born into a royal family, they weren't immune to the ravages of sin in their lives, and needed God's grace and forgiveness. We also saw that, even though David's marriage to Bathsheba was problematic from the start, God loved Solomon and gave him the nickname Jedidiah. Today we're looking a bit more at his family, and how that plays into him being crowned king after David's death.

We start in 1 Chr 3, a list of David's children. "These are the sons of David who were born to him in Hebron: the firstborn, Amnon, by Ahinoam the Jezreelite; the second, Daniel, by Abigail the Carmelite, the third, Absalom, whose mother was Maacah, the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur; the fourth, Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah, by Abital; the sixth, Ithream, by his wife Eglah, six were born to him in Hebron, where he reigned for seven years and six months. And he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem. These were born to him in Jerusalem: Shimea, Shobab, Nathan and Solomon, four by Bath-shua, the daughter of Ammiel; then Ibhaz, Elishama, Eliphelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet, nine. All these were David's sons, besides the sons of the concubines, and Tamar was their sister."

What's the first thing that strikes you about this paragraph? Seven wives, plus concubines. God had said, back in Deut 17:17, that Israel's kings were not to acquire many wives, because they would turn the king's heart away from God. We also find 19 sons listed, and Solomon was far from the eldest; his mother was also not David's first wife, so how did this young man end up on the throne?

Part of the answer lies in something that is recorded right after the birth of Solomon, in 2 Sam 13. David's firstborn son, Amnon, lusted after his half-sister Tamar and raped her. Afterward her brother Absalom found out what happened, and determined to get his revenge. Two years later, he arranged for all of David's sons to join him at a sheepshearing, and ordered his servants to watch Amnon until he was tipsy, then kill him. After Amnon was killed, Absalom fled to his grandfather Talmi, king of Geshur (modern Lebanon) and remained in exile for three years. At the end of that time, David brought him back to Jerusalem, but would not allow Absalom into his presence. After two years, Absalom determined to take the throne from his father David (ch. 15). For four years, he set himself in a prominent gateway and endeared himself to the people by acting as a judge in personal matters. When he felt the time was right, he arranged for the people to proclaim him king at Hebron. This conspiracy was so strong that David felt compelled to leave the city, running from Absalom and his followers. A battle soon ensued between David's army and Absalom's army, and Absalom was killed. Thus two of David's eldest sons were dead.

The next part is found in 1 Kings 1, when David is an old man. His fourth-eldest son, 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. His 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." Adonijah's self-proclaimed celebration occurred at En-rogel, just south of the city at the junction of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys. Interestingly, v. 9 says he sacrificed animals by the Serpent's Stone, or Stone of Zoheleth, a rocky outcrop that was possibly a Canaanite shrine. Now, what do you see as a red flag in this section? 1) He exalted himself – Prov 29:23 says "One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor." Jesus said in Mt 23:12 "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles

himself will be exalted.” 2) David never disciplined him – he was spoiled, which led to his selfish pride. Again Prov 29 speaks to this, (vs. 15,17) “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother. ...Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.” Perhaps this was the issue with all of David’s elder children – he didn’t discipline them, and they brought shame on him. Going back to our text in 1 Kgs 1, it is noteworthy in v. 9-10 that Adonijah “invited all his brothers, the king’s sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother.” It seems he knew who would support his self-styled coup and who would not.

Nathan the prophet then advised Bathsheba (v. 13) “Go in at once to King David, and say to him, ‘Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying, “Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne”? Why then is Adonijah king?’ Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words.” David responded in v. 29-30, “As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, ‘Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,’ even so will I do this day.” David then called for Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the leader of his special guard, and ordered them to take his own mule, and have Solomon ride on it to the Gihon spring, where they were to anoint him king over Israel. Benaiah answered, “Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, say so. As the Lord has been with my lord the king, even so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David.” (v. 36-37)

When the people of Jerusalem saw the official procession and heard the trumpet and proclamation, they cried out, “Long live King Solomon! And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.” It seems the people recognized God’s hand in Solomon being anointed king, despite the counter-proclamation happening at En-Rogel, just a few hundred yards away. Gihon Spring was associated with David’s reign, because he fortified the access to the water, and it was just below the place where the Tabernacle was set up – the future site of the Temple. Solomon’s anointing pointed to God’s authority, while Adonijah’s celebration had the scent of rebellion against God and His order.

So we’ve had a nice story about dueling coronations, and the intrigues of the royal family. What spiritual lesson are we supposed to draw from it? First of all, we saw earlier some of the consequences of disobeying God’s clear commands. David violated God’s will, setting up a long chain of sad events, including the deaths of his own children. God gives us instructions for our good, not just to be arbitrary and controlling. Whether we are looking at David multiplying wives, or committing adultery and murder, or the failure to discipline his children, God had given clear instructions to the contrary, which would have prevented these outcomes. This is why we need to obey His Word. Secondly, we again see God’s grace and forgiveness at work. Even though David sinned, and dealt with turmoil in its wake, God still loved him and was willing to guide him. Solomon, though coming from questionable beginnings, was loved by God and chosen to be king. Third, God was sovereign over the situation, able to overcome challengers like Adonijah, who wanted to impose his will on the kingdom, and able to protect His own plan, even to how the people responded to these dueling coronations – leaving one and acclaiming the other.