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Adonijah Sets Himself Up as King

First Kings 1: 1-27

Adonijah sets himself up as king DIG: Who were the major players in the power struggle for succession to David's throne? What is David's condition? To what is an aging king vulnerable? Who arranges for Abishag to wait on David? Is the monarchy of Isra'el hereditary? What are the pros and cons of making Adonijah king? Is he a champion schemer or an anxious heir? Why did Nathan oppose Adonijah and his plan? Why does Nathan approach Bathsheba? What's the risk of getting involved? What are Nathan and Bathsheba concerned about? What might happen to them if Adonijah came to power? What would happen to Zadok and Benaiah? How is Nathan's plan supposed to sway the king? How did Nathan's speech compare with Bathsheba's? Which do you admire, and why? How as Bathsheba's influence seen in the place at that time?

REFLECT: In what ways do you feel more vulnerable now than ten years ago? What bothers you about aging? How competitive are you? Would you run over people in order to win? Walk over them? Ask them to step aside? What ambitions have you yet to fulfill? On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your need to control. Do you try to control things directly, or do you sway people indirectly? Do you have a brother or sister who can't stand you? What happened? Is reconciliation possible? Desirable? In what ways do you need to "set your eyes upon your King" for direction at this point in your life? What will you do for the kingdom of God? Which side will you take when people exalt themselves and try to tear down His Kingdom? What will you do to make a Kingdom difference for the coming generation?

David's health began to fail him in 971 BC

When King David was very old, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him. The rabbis teach that this coldness was inflicted upon David by God as a punishment for his having cut off a piece of Sha'ul's robe (First Samuel 24:5). So his attendants said to him, "Let us

look for a young virgin to serve the king and take care of him. She can lie beside him so that our lord the king may keep warm.” Then they searched throughout Isra’el for a beautiful young woman and found Abishag, the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The woman was very beautiful; she took care of the king and waited on him, but the king had no sexual relations with her (First Kings 1:1-4). The woman chosen to minister to **David** had the status of a concubine, though in fact **she** served **David** as a nurse and nothing more.

Now Adonijah, David’s fourth son, whose mother was Haggith, cherished the thought of **his** right to succeed **David** as **king** and **put himself forward**, brazenly declaring: **I will be king. His father** had spoiled **him** and **he** was, in fact, the oldest living **son**. **He** seems to have learned nothing from **his** failed brother **Absalom**, for like **him**, **he** asserted **himself** without reckoning with the still formidable power of **David** to make or break **his** ambitious sons. Like **Absalom**, **he** even looked dashing, like a **king**. More than that, **Adonijah** felt that **he** *deserved the throne*. **So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him.** As a side note, **David, had never** disciplined **him** as a boy by asking, **“Why do you behave as you do?”** **Adonijah** was merely allowed to do whatever **he** wanted to do, so **he** assumed **himself** to be **his father’s** favorite and presumptive heir (**First Kings 1:5-6**). If **he** won the support of **his** siblings, the government leaders, the priests and the army, **he** could pull off a coup and become the next **king**.

Adonijah was cunning enough to get the support of both the army and the priesthood by enlisting **Joab** the general and **Abiathar the priest**. Both of these men had served **David** for years and had stood by **him** during **his** most difficult trials, but now they were turning against **him** and rebelling against **the LORD**.⁵⁰² **They gave him their full support (First Kings 1:7). But Zadok who was the High Priest** at that time, **Benaiah**, one of **David’s** mighty men (**to see link click [Ej - David’s Mighty Warriors](#)**), **Nathan** the prophet, and **Shim’i** and **Rei**, two unknowns of **David’s** special guard, **did not join Adonijah (First Kings 1:8)**.

Now **David** had already publicly proclaimed the selection of **Solomon** to the throne when **he** announced the building of **the Temple (First Chronicles 22 and 28)**. Nevertheless, **Adonijah** had arranged a coronation feast on the eve of **his** planned proclamation as **David’s** successor. **He sacrificed** (Hebrew: *zaback*, used to indicate the solemnity of the occasion) **sheep, cattle and fattened calves at the**

Stone of Zoheleth (the meaning is *the serpent's stone, a winding stair hewn in the rock of the Mount of Olives*) near En Rogel, which is located slightly southwest of **Jerusalem**, where the Hinnom and Kidron valleys intersect. It was somewhat secluded and thus ideally suited for **Adonijah's** secret gathering of forces before taking public action.⁵⁰³

The participation of **Joab** and **Abiathar** in the ritual sacrifice and coronation lent an aura of legitimacy to the occasion (**Absalom** had begun **his** coup in a similar fashion). **Adonijah invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah.** Maybe all **his** guests thought that **David** had actually laid **his** hands on **Adonijah** and named **him king.** **But he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the special guard or his brother Solomon,** so it was pretty obvious that **Adonijah** had named **himself king** without any authority from either **David** or **YHVH (First Kings 1:9-10).**

Then **Nathan** became aware of the plot, **he** acted immediately. **He** was tactful and thoughtful, just as **he** had been when **he** reprimanded **David** for **his** sin against **Bathsheba** and **Uriah.** **The prophet** probably sought a secret meeting with **Bathsheba** somewhere in the palace. Though we haven't heard about **Bathsheba** since the birth of **Solomon,** it would be a mistake to think **she** was just a pretty face. Like **Esther** before **her,** this courageous woman saved **Isra'el** from disaster at a critical hour. If **Adonijah** succeeded in gaining the throne, both **she** and **Nathan** would have been killed. But the fact that **Nathan** turned to **Bathsheba** suggested that **he** knew **she** was a woman of influence.

Nathan asked her, "Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king, and our lord David knows nothing about it? Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Nathan sent Bathsheba in to see the king first. Her status as favored wife would ensure a quick hearing, and immediate action was indeed necessary: Go in to King David and say: My lord the king, did you not swear to me your servant, 'Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne?' This oath is mentioned here for the first time. David probably took it after the promise God made to him that Solomon would succeed him as king. Furthermore, **he** advised **her** to ask: **When then has Adonijah become king? While you are still there talking to the king, I will come in and confirm my word to what you have said" (First Kings 1:11-14).** The plan was set.

So because David was old and feeble, Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his bedroom where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him. Bathsheba approached **David** with deference and humility **bowing** down, **prostrating herself** to give **him** honor. But **she** also approached **him** forthrightly, bluntly telling **the king** what **he** needed to hear.⁵⁰⁴ **“What is it that you want?” the king asked. Bathsheba** got to the point: **My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by ADONAI your God, “Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne.” But now Adonijah has** actually proclaimed **himself king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it.** Nor did **he** know who was and who wasn’t on **Adonijah’s** “guest list.” **He has sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and has invited all the king’s sons, Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army, but he has not invited Solomon your servant.** The validity of **Solomon’s** claim to **the throne** was not in question here. Both **Nathan** and **Bathsheba** knew **David’s** feelings in the matter. The danger was that **Adonijah** would succeed to **the throne** through **David’s** inaction. So **the queen** pressed the issue: **My lord the king, the eyes of all Isra’el are on you, to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise, as soon as my lord the king is laid to rest with his ancestors, my son Solomon and I will be treated as criminals (First Kings 1:15-21). Bathsheba’s** warning reflected reality. The omission of **Solomon** from the “guest list” was a sure sign that **she** and **her son** would be marked for death if **Adonijah** succeeded.⁵⁰⁵

While she was speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived at the palace. **And the king was told, “Nathan the prophet is here.” So he went before the king in bed and bowed with his face to the ground (First Kings 1:22-23).** At that point **Bathsheba** apparently left **the bedroom** and was not present when **Nathan** spoke to **the king**.

Nathan said: **Have you, my lord the king, declared that Adonijah shall be king after you, and that he will sit on your throne? Today he has gone down from Jerusalem to En Rogel and sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep. He has invited all the king’s sons, the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest, but Benaiah and your servant Solomon he did not invite. Is this something my lord the king has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him (First Kings 1:24-27)? Nathan corroborated and supplemented Bathsheba’s appeal. The point of the prophet’s skillful, and**

not too ingenuous appeal lies in the insinuation that, to judge from all appearances, David must have been acting behind the backs of his confidential advisors. Nathan pretended to be surprised (because he knew it wasn't true) that the king would do such a thing, yet he supposedly couldn't imagine any other explanation of Adonijah's behavior.

It's very likely that **Nathan's** recitation of these facts brought **David's** memory back to the terrible days of Absalom's rebellion, but **he** didn't want the nation to experience another civil war. **Solomon** was **a man of peace (First Chronicles 22:9)**. Reared in the palace, **he** had no experience of war as did **his father**; and if there was another civil war, how could **he** build **the Temple**?⁵⁰⁶ If only one person had come to warn **him**, perhaps **David** would have doubted the accuracy of the report **he** was given. But **Bathsheba** and **Nathan** came one right after the other, and with **two witnesses** – the biblical number for establishing any criminal matter in a court of law (**Deuteronomy 19:15**) – **the king** was fully persuaded. Now that **he** knew the truth, **he** needed to act like a **king**.⁵⁰⁷ And there are times which call for us to take immediate action – to not act would be sinful for then it would allow sin to happen.