

Adonijah Sets Himself Up as King

First Kings 1: 1-27

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 Israel 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 is 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 Israel 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 (see 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 Zohelath (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 to 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.