

The book of 1 Kings starts off in the middle of a story. It is the story of Israel and in particular the story of the kings of Israel. Israel is not just any kingdom, although it is a kingdom, it is a kingdom that is simultaneously the people of God in community. 1 Samuel tells the story of the rise of the monarchy, 2 Samuel tells the story David's rise to the throne and his reign. 1 Kings opens with the death of David and then moves on to start the story of his dynasty.

Like the books of Samuel the books of Kings are not simple history. They are a proclamation of what God is doing. We are not given a well balanced history but a history that concentrates on the events that show where the king and nation deviated from the law of God. It is a history that gives a rationale for the demise of this once strong and proud nation.

For instance one of Israel's most powerful kings was a man called Omri. Yet Kings only devotes 6 verses to him (16:23-28). His son, Ahab who was not nearly so powerful, has over 6 chapters given to him because in Ahab's life we have clear illustrations of the sort of behaviour that led to the eventual collapse of the kingdom.

The chapter opens with David a weak old man. David had come to the throne about 1010 BC and died about 970 BC.

David had taken over from Saul not because he was his son, but because he was the better man. Israel had always looked for men upon whom the Spirit of God was manifestly obvious to appoint as leaders. When in the wilderness it was obvious that the management and leadership of the community was beyond the capacity of one man it was decided that 70 others would work alongside Moses. The sign that these men were the sort of men that Israel would have as leaders was the fact that they were men filled with the Spirit of God (Num 11:14-17). And after they arrived in their promised land leaders were appointed upon their obvious God given giftedness. Look at each of the Judges, this was the reason they were given authority. Saul was the same, it was obvious to everyone that he was the sort of man they wanted when he led the campaign to rescue the city of Jabesh (1 Sam 11:1-15). And it was the same with David, it was on the day that he took on Goliath (1 Sam 17:45) that people saw that he was a man worthy of leadership. By the way what was it that the church in Jerusalem looked for in the men they appointed as deacons? Men who were known to be full of the Spirit (Acts 6:3).

Now we would have thought that it would be the same when David died. There would be a hunt for someone who was obviously gifted and was obviously full of God's spirit. But with David those days had come to an end. When he was a young man God had made a promise to David that the old order was over and that one of his sons would take over from him. God has said, "When your days are over... I will raise up your offspring to succeed you..." (2 Sam 7:12).

When David was about 50 he had an affair with the wife of one of his soldiers. As a result of which the young woman fell pregnant. While she was pregnant with the king's child her husband died in battle and the child died after living just one week. In seeking to make amends for the awful distress he had brought into the young widow's life he married her so making her a part of the royal family. She fell pregnant again and her baby boy was named Solomon. David swore an oath that this child would and not his older brothers would have the throne after him. We are told that the Lord loved this baby (2 Sam 12:24-25). That is not to say that the Lord does not love all babies but it is to say that the Lord had singled this child out for a purpose and that purpose was to rule his people.

As Jacob had decided on Joseph to lead the clan after him, even though he was not the eldest, so David marks Solomon out to lead after him even though he too is not the eldest.

David is now bed ridden and incapable of ruling, there is a power vacuum and a crisis is developing because David's eldest son is keen to have his father's role.

The picture of his inability to keep warm is simply a picture of his impending death. By the way David would have been 70. Not an age that we would consider particularly old. His younger years as a warrior have obviously taken their toll.

By the way notice the way the bible will not let us hide from the reality that we are all getting old and are all heading for the grave. What is happening to David is not a strange thing. We too will grow old and feeble.

Instead of being told that the king no longer had vigour and drive and energy we are given this little picture of his inability to respond sexually to the most beautiful girl in the kingdom. This is probably not the way we would make that point! But it was a custom in some cultures to retire a chief when he lost the ability to be sexually active.

Nevertheless the keeping of an old person warm via the heat of a younger person's body was a known medical practice.

Although we would see Abishag's job as distasteful it was in fact an exalted position. To be the one chosen to be in the king's presence in this way was a great honour. She is a Shunammite that is she is from Shunem. Shunem was a village in Galilee about 11 kilometres to the east of Nazareth.

Adonijah was the oldest of David's surviving sons, he was in fact his fourth born son and at this point 35 years old (2 Sam 3:4). We know of the deaths of Amnon and Absalom and we can assume this third son died as a child.

We are told that Adonijah is good looking. But so was Absalom and so was Saul and both were disasters. Eliam too was good looking and he was rejected by God (2 Sam 14:25 & 1 Sam 9:2 & 1 Sam 10:23 & 16:6).

Brigid of Ireland was born in 451 and lived to be 75. She was an Irish Christian nun and founder of several convents. According to tradition her parents were a pagan chieftain and a Christian mother who had been baptized by Saint Patrick.

She became a Christian when 17. Despite her father's opposition she was determined to enter religious life. Numerous stories testify to her piety. She was also unbelievably beautiful and hence had lots of offers of marriage. She felt her attractiveness was a hindrance in serving God and so she prayed 'O Lord, take away my beauty, then I can serve you alone'.

The only beauty Brigid wanted was the beauty of a sweet and rich personality.

The people of God are not those who put a premium on physical looks. They know that beauty is only skin deep. They know that to judge someone by their looks is to make a terrible mistake. Adonijah may have thought his looks an attribute and there were those who looked to him as the new king who no doubt thought his looks added to his stature but they were grievously mistaken.

Adonijah is pictured as everything that David is not. David is feeble while Adonijah is vigorous.

He is so confident of his strength that he has no hesitation in putting himself forward as king. "I will be king". Note the chariots, instruments of war. Note the guard of honour, fifty men running ahead, a bit like an American president's inauguration parade with the Secret Service personnel running alongside the limousine. Here is the sort of man that one can have confidence in. Or is he?

Adonijah may have been strong and good looking. But is this what we want in a leader of God's people? In 1 Tim 3 we have the qualifications for leaders for God's people. Note the attributes we are to look for; "above reproach" "self controlled" "temperate" "respectable" "gentle" "not a lover of money" "not quarrelsome". See where the emphasis is. It is not on skill and giftedness but goodness and character. I believe it was Albert Einstein who said character is better than education.

When people are hungry for power be scared. Leadership is all about serving. Adonijah was not about to start serving Solomon his younger brother. Adonijah was not particularly interested in who God may want to lead his people. He is only interested in what he wants. Joseph's elder brothers were not interested in who God wanted to lead their clan they were only interested in what they wanted.

Adonijah seeks to form a coalition of powerful figures who all have something to gain from having Adonijah on the throne. These are all men who have been senior men in David's bureaucracy from early days. In particular we have Abiathar the priest and Joab the army commander the two most powerful positions in the kingdom.

He knows without powerful allies he cannot pull this off. With Joab on board Adonijah has access to the army. And he thinks that if he has enough allies he can have whatever he likes.

Joab was younger than David but was much older than Adonijah he was also a member of the royal family in that his mother was David's sister. Back when Absalom had launched a coup Joab over reacted and murdered him and David never forgave him. Although still the commander of the army David had elevated Benaiah to the role of chief of his body guard. This body guard was large and made up of the military elite. It was nothing less than the cream of the army. Most of the army was what we would call a "citizen army" that is ordinary citizens called up as needed. The body guard was a standing army. This body guard is staffed by foreign mercenaries, Kerethites and Pelethites.

The high priest was a position of extreme influence. Abiathar along with a man called Zadok had been the two leading priests through David's reign. But for reason we do not know about Zadok was David's favourite.

So Joab and Benaiah two soldiers who had been close comrades are now going to be on opposite sides of a fight and it is the same too with the two priests who had also worked together for nearly 40 years.

Abiathar and Joab should have been much more concerned for the well being of the nation than they were for their own careers. They had forgotten that the purpose of their lives was not to seek self fulfilment but to play their part in building up God's people.

With these two powerful men on board Adonijah called together all the royal family, albeit minus Solomon. So there are people left out. This is not open. This is being set up secret. Always be very careful of anything that needs to be done in secret.

Nathan sees something amiss and goes into action. And this we must not gloss over. It would have been easy for him to think to himself this is not my problem, or someone else will sort this out or who cares who is king. But he does not. He loves the people of God and he is going to do all he can to make sure Adonijah does not get into power. He has discerned evil in the camp and now sets out to resist it. Nathan loved God's people and is willing to bare any cost to see

them protected from people like Adonijah. We do not know much about Nathan other than the fact that he was of such a rank that he felt able to confront David 20 years ago over his performance with Bathsheba.

In the paper the other day (The Australian 10/10/09) was an article by Emma Tom what is called "slacktivism". The word is made up of slack and active. It is used of folk who want to do good and be active but not if they have to move a muscle or invest any time or money. Website like FreeRice have been established for such folk. If you click on FreeRice and answer a simple question 10 grains of rice are sent to the starving millions of the world. The more times you click on this site the more grains of rice are to the malnourished. Now this site is quite popular because it means you can do some good without it costing you anything at all. You can have that nice, "what a good chap am I" feeling without having to put yourself out in the slightest.

But slacktivism will not prosper the people of God. If Nathan had been into slacktivism Adonijah would have got control of the land and who knows what damage he would have done.

Nathan knew of the oath that David had taken concerning Solomon and he is determined to make sure that David keeps his word. Nathan was a brave man. By raising the matter of the oath in public he had made himself an enemy of Adonijah. If Adonijah wins Nathan would be a dead man.

There is someone else who must have heard of what Adonijah was doing that day; Solomon. Now Solomon had been promised the throne. He knew that promise was a promise of God. So does he think that the promise of God is about to fail or does he think, goodness knows how but the promise of God cannot fail and in spite of what Adonijah is doing I will still be king?

Moved by the information that Nathan and Bathsheba bring him David assures Nathan and Bathsheba that his vow will be kept. And so he immediately moves to install Solomon and thus undermine Adonijah permanently. The word is given for the Priest, Zadok, and Benaiah with the troops to move immediately to enthrone Solomon.

Solomon is put upon David's royal mule. A very clear signal that royal authority has been turned over to him. Mules were reserved for the royal family. Since the law forbade cross breeding (Lev 19:19) mules had to be imported and were very expensive.

Solomon's coronation takes place at Gihon which is just outside the city and is in fact the spring from which Jerusalem draws its water. The place was only about 1 km from where Adonijah's coronation was taking place.

By the way city that David captured and made its base was very small. During his reign he enlarged it and Solomon was to very significantly enlarge it. At the time of David's death the city was covered no more than 12 acres and the population was not much more than 1200.

Although rushed this is a much more open and public affair than Adonijah's. The city's citizens are all invited to join the celebrations and they do and with great excitement. Music is played and the crowds join in with dancing. And when Solomon is proclaimed king it is not in front of a select group it is in front of "all Israel".

The noise of the party is heard down the valley at Adonijah's show and of course everyone wants to know what was going on.

Abiathar's son a man by the name of Jonathan made his way down to where his father was in order to let him know that he was now in a very precarious position. Abiathar had aligned himself with a man who had failed in a coup.

How on earth did they think this was going to finish? They knew what they were doing was wrong. And if you know what you are doing is wrong this you can know, it will finish in disaster.

Those around Adonijah scatter as quickly as they can. They were only there for what they could get out of it. They were not going to stand with Adonijah to the end. Their plan was based upon having Adonijah in place before David realised what day it was. But the old lion had roared and they knew they were finished.

The throne was never Solomon's by right it was his by gift, God had promised it to him while he was still a baby. The point is he did not somehow deserve it. And he knows that he is not up to the task. As we shall see upon becoming king the first thing he asks of God is for wisdom to do the job. Adonijah may have thought he was up to the task but the man God gives the job to is a 20 year old who knows he is not.

Adonijah would not even have the young Solomon at his table. But in the end the promise of God stands and Adonijah has to come and bow before the man that God said would be king. And there are so many who will not have Jesus in their lives but that does not change the fact that one day they will bow before him.

Important End Note.

- This sermon has come straight from the pulpit – it has yet to be proof read.
- Please note that sermons are not essays.
- The first thing to be said is that an essay will have footnotes. There are no footnotes in sermons.
- The second thing to be said is that the sermon is crafted to enter the ear gate whereas the essay has been crafted to enter the eye gate. This means that this sermon was never originally designed to be read it was prepared to be listened to.
- Although there are no footnotes it is freely admitted that information has been drawn from a plethora of sources. I make no claim that all the thoughts in my sermons are original. Working with a text that has been studied for well over 2000 years an original thought would be quite something! The bibliography has been my main, but by no means the only, source. In the sermon you may find bits and pieces from current affairs and gems I have picked up in conversations and from the dozen and one magazine articles and books that I have been dipping into not to mention the various websites that I have glanced at. Please be assured that the lack of acknowledging is not an attempt to hide my sources or to deny credit to those whom it may belong.

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