

DAVID AND DEALING WITH POWER

1 KINGS 1:-2:10

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

We are in the thick of the election season right now. We are being bombarded with political appeals from all directions. We get multiple calls on our landline every day from various campaigns. Television and radio and social media all have election ads. Yard signs are planted all around. To add further excitement to the mix on the national scene a Supreme Court justice died and the possibility of a new justice being appointed has further stirred the pot.

Political science was one of my college majors. We studied the works of a scholar by the name of Hans Morgenthau who argued, “...**all politics is a struggle for power.**” (p. 28, *Politics among Nations*) He further defined power in this way: “**Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man.**” (p. 9)

Life at times may seem like a struggle for power. From an early age we consciously or unconsciously try to control our parents and our siblings and friends. As adults we try to control our kids and our mate. We try to control students and customers and employees and patients. We also try to control ourselves and our passions.

Then there is also God, who stakes a claim upon us. We human beings have this inner desire to be in control of our own lives. But then we get thrown these curve balls. We run into a flu pandemic. We encounter a personal health problem or a work crisis or a relationship difficulty or a financial challenge, and suddenly our control over life seems limited. Also there is death that looms on the horizon. All of these factors point us toward the realization that our control is limited and that God may have some right to power over us.

We have reached the end of our study of the life of David. We have seen that David has reached the height of political power. But we have also seen that it is primarily as a result of the working of God and

sometimes in spite of the missteps of David. As we see his earthly life come to a conclusion, we see him dealing with power--- the challenges to that power, his own failures in the use of power, the proper establishment of power, and the transfer of power. We shall see what lessons his involvement with power have to teach us.

I.

(PROJECTOR ON--- I. DAVID AND THE CHALLENGE TO POWER) In the first 37 verses of 1 Kings #1 we encounter DAVID AND THE CHALLENGE TO POWER. (This can be found on p. 279 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs.) In vv. 1-4 of #1 we find the challenge to power that comes from PHYSICAL DECLINE. (I. DAVID AND... A. PHYSICAL DECLINE)

In v. 1 we read, **“Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm.”** From other passages we learn that he was approaching age 70, which was the year of his death. We may not regard that as being very old, especially when we consider other Biblical heroes like Moses who only really went to work for the Lord at age 80. But David had experienced a difficult life. He was a warrior who had been in many battles. He had much stress that came from serving as a king for 40 years. He had divisions in his family. He had lived as an exile in the wilderness when he was fleeing from King Saul. He had survived rebellions. Now he apparently had some kind of circulation problem which made him feel cold.

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.”** In other words, he did not have sexual relations with her, probably because of his health condition and advancing age.

Ancient historians speak of using servants and nurses to keep older people warm in this fashion. In this case a king gets to have a beautiful young woman serve in this capacity. We are told that she was from Shunem, which was a town in northern Israel. It is not clear exactly what her status was in the household. Perhaps she became part of the king’s harem.

We have noted in the story of David that he and his son Absalom and also Adonijah were said to be handsome. There is a certain power and appeal that can be useful in terms of physical attributes for

those in power. Sometimes it can help to get them into power. So also it should be noted that physical beauty is a source of power and control for women. It can be a blessing and a curse. Physical beauty can detract from other resources that a woman might have. In this case it is hard to know how life turned out for this Shunammite woman. Her beauty got her into this inner circle of government. But was she ever able to have a normal family life. If you read further in 1 Kings, you will find out that David's son Adonijah tried to claim her as wife, but he was killed for that. We don't know what happened to Abishag.

It is obvious here that David is in physical decline. Aging and physical decline are always a challenge for us. If we live long enough, we often become dependent upon others for care. At some point we have to give up driving. We may have difficulty in moving around. Some of us get dementia. The encouragement for us Christians is the promise of God that someday we will have resurrection bodies. We will have renewed physical bodies that don't wear out and that don't limit us.

B.

In vv. 5-37 of #1 we deal with the challenge to power that comes from REBELLION. (I. DAVID AND... A. PHYSICAL... B. REBELLION) According to v. 5, **"Now 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."**

In 2 Samuel #3 vv. 2-5 there is a listing of the sons of David. His oldest son Amnon was killed by Absalom. Number two son Chileab apparently died before reaching adulthood. Number three son Absalom was killed in the rebellion against his father. Adonijah is number four son. He seems to follow in the footsteps of his older brother Absalom. He gets a chariot and fifty runners like Absalom did. He promotes himself toward being king without the approval of his father and without any direction from God.

In the account of David's life in 1 Chronicles we are told that God gave specific direction to David about his successor. (1 CHRONICLES 22:9) In #22 v. 9 & 10 God tells David, **"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. (1 CHRONICLES 22:10) 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."** So Adonijah is, in effect, rebelling and seeking to take away power that rightly belongs to God, to his father, and to Solomon. His name means "YHWH is Lord." But Adonijah is not demonstrating that in his life.

Verse 6: (PROJECTOR OFF) **“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.”**

There are three reasons for Adonijah’s rebellion which are suggested here. First, his father had never displeased him. That is not such a good thing. If parents are going to do a proper job of disciplining their kids, they have to displease them at times. Parents need to exercise control over their kids so that they will develop self-discipline and so that they will develop respect for legitimate authority. Children especially learn about God from fathers. When they hear reference to “our Father who art in heaven,” their natural basis of comparison is their earthly fathers.

Second, our author notes that Adonijah was a very handsome man. Similar descriptions were made of both David and Absalom. These physical attributes can be helpful in obtaining power, but they can also lead to pride and stunted character growth. The third reason for rebellion is the line of succession. By ancient custom Adonijah was next in line to the throne after Absalom.

We read in vv. 7 & 8, **“He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him. 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.”** The top power brokers in the country are taking sides. General Joab, who has a mixed record and who has crossed David several times, sides with Adonijah. So, too, does Abiathar, the priest who survived the massacre of priests at the town of Nob and fled to David. He has perhaps seen the other chief priest, Zadok, grow in his influence and connections with David. The other leaders side with David and Solomon.

Verse 9: **“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...”** “En,” or “ein,” means “spring” in Hebrew. (PROJECTOR ON--- EN-ROGEL MAP) En-rogel was a few hundred yards south of the walled city of Jerusalem. Adonijah hopes to win the support of his other brothers. Probably they all saw that Solomon was favored by David. Perhaps they held the adulterous connection of his mother Bathsheba with David against him.

Thus we see in v. 10: **“...but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother.”** Adonijah realized that Solomon was his rival and that these other leaders were inclined toward Solomon.

Verses 11 & 12: **“Then Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, ‘Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it? Now therefore come, let me give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon.’”**

Typically a rival to the throne and his immediate family would be killed.

The prophet Nathan continues in vv. 13-16, **“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.’** So Bathsheba went to the king in his chamber (now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was attending to the king). Bathsheba bowed and paid homage to the king, and the king said, **‘What do you desire?’** What do you suppose was Bathsheba’s reaction to seeing this beautiful young girl hanging out with her husband David?

Verses 17-21: **“She said to him, ‘My lord, you swore to your servant by the Lord your God, saying, ‘Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.’ And now, behold, Adonijah is king, although you, my lord the king, do not know it. He has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of the army, but Solomon your servant he has not invited. And now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king sleeps with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders.”** Obviously David has not made it widely known about who should succeed him.

Verses 22-33: **“While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet came in. And they told the king, ‘Here is Nathan the prophet.’ And when he came in before the king, he bowed before the king, with his face to the ground. And Nathan said, ‘My lord the king, have you said, ‘Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne’? For he has gone down this day and has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest. And behold, they are eating and drinking before him, and saying, ‘Long live King Adonijah!’ But me, your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he has not invited. Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not told your servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?’**

“Then King David answered, ‘Call Bathsheba to me.’ So she came into the king's presence and stood before the king. And the king swore, saying, ‘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.’ Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and paid homage to the king and said, ‘May my lord King David live forever!’

“King David said, ‘Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada.’ So they came before the king. And the king said to them, ‘Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon.’” The mule was the animal of choice of royalty at this time.

Gihon (PROJECTOR ON--- EN-ROGEL MAP) was a half mile or so north of En-rogel and just to the east of the walls of the city of Jerusalem. It was at a slightly higher altitude than En-rogel and visible to the rebels who were gathered at that spring. Gihon was the primary source of water for Jerusalem. En-rogel was chosen as a meeting place by Adonijah probably because he might avoid attention there from the supporters of David and Solomon. Perhaps David chose Gihon because it would be visible to those gathered in En-rogel, and what happened there would also catch the attention of the residents of Jerusalem.

Verses 31-37: **“Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and paid homage to the king and said, ‘May my lord King David live forever!’**

“King David said, ‘Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada.’ So they came before the king. And the king said to them, ‘Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel. Then blow the trumpet and say, “Long live King Solomon!” You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, for he shall be king in my place. And I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.’ And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, ‘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.” Most of the scholars think that Solomon ruled together with his father until the death of David. Such was a common arrangement among the kings of the Ancient Near East.

The Bible recognizes and authorizes certain positions of power in life. The Bible makes it clear that God is to be recognized as the primary authority over all of us. The first of the Ten Commandments is that we

shall have no other gods before us. In addition, the Bible recognizes and establishes certain positions of power in civil government, in the family and marriage, in the workplace, and in the church. A problem comes when we seek power not delegated to us. We should also notice that God has this habit of picking people and bringing people into positions of power which are unexpected. We see him pick youngest sons like David. We see him pick smallest nations like Abraham and his descendants. We see him pick fishermen from Galilee to be the disciples of Jesus. We see him pick a farm boy like Billy Graham with a limited theological education to become the most influential evangelist of our generation. There is hope for all of us in this that we do not have to come from great and wonderful backgrounds in order to be useful to the Lord.

II.

In vv. 38-53 of #1 we come to DAVID AND THE PROPER ESTABLISHMENT OF POWER. (II. DAVID AND THE PROPER...) According to vv. 38-40, **“So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule and brought him to Gihon. There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, ‘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.”** Benaiah was head of this unit of Cherethites and Pelethites who were primarily Philistines and other Gentiles. They originally gathered around David when he was a refugee from King David. They seem to have served as a kind of palace guard.

This anointing of Solomon marks the beginning of a new era. This is truly the establishment of the dynasty of David. The promise of God described in 2 Samuel #7 was that descendants of David would serve as the kings of Israel. Solomon was directly chosen by God to begin this dynasty. Here he has the backing of the high priest and the prophet Nathan.

Verse 41: **“Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, ‘What does this uproar in the city mean?’”** Gihon was not very far away. So it was hard not to hear and see the commotion that was going on surrounding the anointing of Solomon.

Verses 42-48: **“While he was still speaking, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came. And Adonijah said, ‘Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news.’ Jonathan answered Adonijah, ‘No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king, and the king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites. And they had him ride on the king's mule. And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet**

have anointed him king at Gihon, and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard. Solomon sits on the royal throne. Moreover, the king's servants came to congratulate our lord King David, saying, "May your God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours, and make his throne greater than your throne." And the king bowed himself on the bed. And the king also said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it." Thus comes a reversal of fortune to Adonijah and his supporters.

Verses 49-50: **"Then all the guests of Adonijah trembled and rose, and each went his own way. And Adonijah feared Solomon. So he arose and went and took hold of the horns of the altar."** The normal expectation in this situation was that a rival to the throne, and a rebel, such as Adonijah would be killed by the successful king who took power.

Probably the altar in view here was an altar in the tabernacle in Jerusalem. The horns were protrusions on the four corners of the altar. Perhaps animals offered for sacrifice were tied to these horns. In Exodus #27 v. 2 (EXODUS 27:2) God told Moses how to make these horns for the altar for the tabernacle: **"And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze."**

The tradition and practice throughout the Ancient Near East was that an altar to a god was not only a place of animal sacrifice but also a place of appeal for mercy, a place where worshipers could claim help and protection from that god. An indirect reference is made to this understanding when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. (EXODUS 21:14) In Exodus #21 v. 14 God says, **"But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die."**

The story continues in vv. 51 & 52: **"Then it was told Solomon, 'Behold, Adonijah fears King Solomon, for behold, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.'" (PROJECTOR OFF) And Solomon said, 'If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die.'" To be a worthy man for Adonijah means that he will give up any claim that he has made to the throne. He must be supportive of David's kingship and he must not engage in any kind of rebellious activity.**

Verse 53: **“So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and paid homage to King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, ‘Go to your house.’”** If this was a total reconciliation, we would expect Solomon to end his charge with **“Go to your house in peace.”** He doesn’t do that here. Indeed there will be trouble from Adonijah later on.

We finally see in this next phase of the kingdom of God the proper establishment of power. The right person is put on the throne according to God’s direction. There is always a danger when we see people striving to obtain power in the wrong way, when they seem to be motivated by self-interest, and when they seem to use inappropriate means to obtain control.

Lord Acton was an English Catholic historian who served in the House of Commons for a few years. He made the famous statement: **“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”** He argued that Christianity serves as a corrective and safeguard against this misuse of power. He said that it creates an invisible bond of duty that yokes every citizen. It gives a reason to deny self-interest, to obey laws that are bothersome, and to sacrifice for the common good.

It was a recognition of this danger of power that prompted our Founding Fathers to create a system of checks and balances in our national government. Such it is that power was split up among the executive, judicial, and legislative branches.

III.

We come then to #2 vv. 1-12 and DAVID AND THE TRANSFER OF POWER. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. DAVID AND THE TRANSFER OF POWER) According to v. 1, **“When David’s time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son...”** This command from David to Solomon involves a spiritual charge to follow God in vv. 2-4. It involves practical matters in vv. 5-12.

David says in v. 2, **“I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man...”** Literally David says, “I am walking the way of all the earth.” Life is indeed a journey. At the end of earthly life is death. It is not the ultimate end for us. But the realization of this limited time prompts David’s charge.

He tells Solomon to be strong and to show himself to be a man. This is similar to the charge that Moses gave to Joshua. Three times in Joshua #1 Moses tells Joshua, "Be strong and courageous." Such is what is necessary in godly leadership.

David continues in v. 3, **"...and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn..."** This priority is foundational to the godly exercise of power.

Notice also the use of the verb "walk." This is a common metaphor used throughout the Bible to describe the proper life of the believer. Life with God is not a sprint or a dash. It is a walk. Walking in God's way was necessary for Solomon's successful exercise of power.

According to David in v. 4 walking with God and keeping His statutes is necessary **"that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'"** The reference is to the Davidic covenant outlined in #7.

The promise of God was that David's descendants would inherit the right of rulership over Israel forever. This was an eternal throne over an eternal kingdom. But for any one descendant of David sitting on the throne of Israel to enjoy the blessing of God, it was necessary to walk with God in the way required.

David had a better relationship with Solomon than with his other sons. He spent time with him and groomed him for leadership. We find evidence of that in the Book of Proverbs, which Solomon is credited with writing and editing. In Proverbs #4 vv. 3-6 (PROVERBS 4:3-4) Solomon writes, **"When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, 'Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. (PROVERBS 4:5-6) Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you.'"**

Back in vv. 5 & 6 in our passage David moves to a discussion of practical matters: **"Moreover, you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed, avenging in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist"**

and on the sandals on his feet. Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace.” (PROJECTOR OFF)

Now Joab has sided with Adonijah in this revolt against David and Solomon. It seems like David has been negligent in not dealing with Joab before now and in leaving him to Solomon. David does recognize the danger to Solomon. Joab is not to be trusted.

Verse 7: **“But deal loyally with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from Absalom your brother.”** It is good to remember those who have been kind and loyal to us. It is good to remember their descendants. To eat at the king’s table implies more than just coming over for meals. It is equivalent to the offer of a pension or a stipend.

Verses 8 & 9: **“And there is also with you Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, saying, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ Now therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.”** Shimei is the guy who cursed David as he was fleeing Jerusalem in the rebellion led by Absalom. Although he later repented, David does not trust him. Solomon is warned to keep an eye on him.

Finally, we read in vv. 10-12, **“Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years. He reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.”** If this was indeed a co-regency, it was probably not very long before David passed away.

Thus ends the reign of the most famous king in Israel’s history. It is done with the proper transfer of power according to God’s will.

All of us have leadership positions of some sort, whether it is in the home or with friends or at school or at work or at church. There is typically some amount of power that comes with that position. We are intended to use that power to serve other people and to serve God. Editor Andy Crouch writes, **“All our**

uses of power, ultimately, will either reflect or distort the image of the true King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We are meant to imitate [Him]... (*Christianity Today*, October 2013)

We also have the promise of divine power that comes as a result of our decision to trust in Jesus. In Acts #1 v. 8 Jesus told His followers, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

The foundational use of power which is given to us from God is to serve as witnesses. We are responsible to tell others what we know about the God of the Bible and to demonstrate it by our lives.

One other thing which we need to keep in mind and which should also give us hope for the future is that we can look forward to ruling with Christ in the kingdom which He will one day establish upon this earth. In Revelation #20 v. 4 (REVELATION 20:4) we find this assurance: **“They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”** In the words of the Apostle Paul: “Maranatha! O Lord, come soon!”