

David's Declining Years: Adonijah Plots to take Over the Throne

1 Kings 1:1-31

1 Kings 1:1-4 - *"Now King David was old, advanced in years; and they put covers on him, but he could not get warm. Therefore his servants said to him, 'Let a young woman, a virgin, be sought for our lord the king, and let her stand before the king, and let her care for him; and let her lie in your bosom, that our lord the king may be warm.' So they sought for a lovely young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The young woman was very lovely; and she cared for the king, and served him; but the king did not know her."*

Background Notes

The author of 1 Kings was probably Ezra, Ezekiel, or Jeremiah. Jewish tradition holds that Jeremiah was the author. The purpose of 1 Kings was to tell the facts of Israel's history, as well as teach the lessons of Israel's history.

The first four verses reveal that King David had become old and frail. David would have been about 70 years old at this time. He probably had circulation problems, and thus was unable to maintain his body temperature. So Abishag, a beautiful young woman, was obtained for the king's harem. She was assigned to care for David and keep him warm.

Verse 4 says that the king did not "know" Abishag; that is, he did not "know" her sexually. She was considered to be his wife or concubine (as we'll see in chapter 2), but this statement emphasized that David had lost his strength and virility.

By the way, this is a good place to point out that when we interpret the Bible, we must let the narrative passages be subject to the didactic passages. This means that lessons we glean from Bible stories must be subject to the direct teaching Bible passages. In this chapter, for example, was the Bible teaching that if a man is older and has circulation problems, he should find a new, young and beautiful wife to keep him warm? No! This chapter is telling us what did happen – it is not teaching us what should happen! We should only draw lessons and principles from Bible stories or biblical narrative if those lessons or principles are backed up by straight teaching passages of Scripture.

What lessons we can draw from this account? We'll look at two Doctrinal or Teaching Points, capturing each one with a well-known quotation.

Doctrinal Points

1. “Spare the rod and spoil the child.”

1 Kings 1:5-10 - *“Then 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. (And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, ‘Why have you done so?’ He was also very good-looking. His mother had borne him after Absalom.) Then he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest, and they followed and helped Adonijah. But Zadok the priest, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and the mighty men who belonged to David were not with Adonijah. And Adonijah sacrificed sheep and oxen and fattened cattle by the stone of Zohelath, which is by En Rogel; he also invited all his brothers, the king’s sons, and all the men of Judah, the king’s servants. But he did not invite Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, the mighty men, or Solomon his brother.”*

The principle, “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” comes straight from Proverbs 13:24: *“He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him properly or early.”* That truth is taught in verse 6: *“And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, ‘Why have you done so?’”* Verse 6 is the inspired author’s comment on why Adonijah, the son of David, had the audacity and undisciplined ambition as to usurp the royal throne and become king over Israel.

David was a good king and a great king - but he was not the greatest father. Do you remember that David did not discipline his son Absalom, even when Absalom killed Amnon, another of David’s sons? Lack of parental discipline eventually led to Absalom’s attempt to snatch the throne of Israel from his father.

And once again with Adonijah, David never at any time disciplined him, or rebuked him for any wrongdoing! No wonder Adonijah felt free to do his own thing! He exalted himself; he made an elaborate display of himself, and said, “I will be king.” And with his good looks and charisma, Adonijah was able to get Joab, David’s general, Abiathar the priest, and a number of others to support him in his self-coronation.

How was it possible that this unchecked selfish ambition developed in Adonijah? Answer – Adonijah was never disciplined. “Spare the rod and spoil the child” is still true today Children must be disciplined - whether by spanking, or time out, or loss of privileges. If there is no discipline for bad behavior, there will be bad fall-out in the future. Many parents have learned too late that if you spare the rod, you spoil the child.

2. “Ask, and you shall receive.”

1 Kings 1:11-31 - *“So Nathan spoke to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, ‘Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king, and David our lord does not know it? Come, please, let me now give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go immediately to King David and say to him, ‘Did you not, my lord, O king, swear to your maidservant, saying, ‘Assuredly your son Solomon shall reign after me, and he shall sit on*

my throne“? Why then has Adonijah become king?’ Then, while you are still talking there with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words.

So Bathsheba went into the chamber to the king. (Now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was serving the king). And Bathsheba bowed and did homage to the king. Then the king said, “What is your wish?” Then she said to him, “My lord, you swore by the LORD your God to your maidservant, saying, ‘Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.’ So now, look! Adonijah has become king; and now, my lord the king, you do not know about it. He has sacrificed oxen and 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 as for you, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, that you should tell them who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise it will happen, when my lord the king rests with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted as offenders.

And just then, while Bathsheba was still talking with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in. So they told the king, saying, “Here is Nathan the prophet.” And when he came in before the king, he bowed down before the king with his face to the ground. And Nathan said, “My lord, O king, have you said, ‘Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne’? For he has gone down today, and has sacrificed oxen and fattened cattle and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king’s sons, and the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest; and look! They are eating and drinking before him; and they say, ‘Long live King Adonijah!’ But he has not invited me—me your servant—nor Zadok the priest, nor Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, nor your servant Solomon. Has this thing been done by my lord the king, and you have not told your servant who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?”

Then King David answered and said, “Call Bathsheba to me.” So she came into the king’s presence and stood before the king. And the king took an oath and said, “As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life from every distress, just as I swore to you by the LORD God of Israel, saying, ‘Assuredly Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,’ so I certainly will do this day.” Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the earth, and paid homage to the king, and said, “Let my lord King David live forever!”

The principle, “Ask and you shall receive” comes right from our Lord’s words in Matthew 7:7 - “Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.” This truth is taught in the actions of Nathan, the prophet and Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother.

Adonijah and his supporters had sacrificed numerous oxen, sheep and cattle, and were holding a great feast. Everyone was proclaiming, “Long live King Adonijah!” While this celebration was going on, Nathan and Bathsheba came up with a plan to remind David of the vow he had made that Solomon would succeed him as king. When David heard that Adonijah had proclaimed himself king, he immediately called in Bathsheba and granted her request. He declared that Solomon would be the next king.

This is a wonderful picture of the words of our Lord Jesus, *“Ask and you shall receive.”*

- a. As king, David is a picture or “type” of Christ our King. As David’s wife shared her desires and request with her husband, so we Christians, the Church, the Body and Bride of Christ, can share our requests and desires with the Lord (Philippians 4:6).
- b. Bathsheba’s request was based on what David had already vowed - that Solomon would be the next king.

When we come to the Lord our King with our requests, the requests should be based on His revealed Word. In fact, the promise of *“Ask and you shall receive”* is based on the assumption that we are asking in line with the Word of God. James 4:3 says, *“You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”* But if our requests are based on the Word of God, then the Lord will answer – every time, and in His time. *“Ask and you shall receive.”*

Practical Application

Are you a Joab or a Benaiah?

Joab and Benaiah were military men who served David. Both these men had performed mighty deeds for their king. Joab courageously climbed up the water shaft to enter and conquer the city of Jerusalem, that was held by the Jebusites! But now Joab had abandoned his loyalty to King David, and had changed his allegiance to Adonijah.

Joab operated on the principle of “What’s in it for me?” Joab reasoned that David was on his way out. Since it looked like the popular Adonijah would be the next king, why not jump on his bandwagon early? Forget about loyalty to old and frail King David!

Are you a Joab? Or do you stay loyal to Jesus when it’s not popular to be a Christian? Are you loyal to the Lord on the college campus, or where you work?

Benaiah served King David as *“a valiant fighter, who performed great exploits.”* (You can read about his mighty deeds in 2 Samuel 23.) Even when General Joab switched his allegiance to the usurper, Benaiah remained loyal and faithful to King David (v8). When the going got tough and it looked like Adonijah would be the next king, Benaiah never waived. His allegiance remained with David, who was still the rightful king.

What about us? Do we remain loyal to the Lord who is our King – even when times are tough? When the crowd and the culture are moving in the opposite direction, where is our allegiance? Are you a Joab or a Benaiah?