

1 Kings 2:13-46

His Kingdom Shall Know No End

For the modern reader, one of the greatest challenges of ancient literature is transporting ourselves from our day and age to that of the text. This opening story of Solomon, full of palace intrigue and violence, is certainly a good example of this difficulty. There is nothing good here for the modern reader because we have taken certain things for granted. One of the unique traditions of America is the peaceful transition of power. Throughout all of history, the crowning of kings led to the death of anyone who might rival the new monarch. It is not surprising, then, that the reign of Solomon did not begin with peace, but with violence. There is no getting around the fact that Solomon comes off as violent and even unjust.

What is happening here? The opening chapters of 1 Kings explores the death of David and the establishment of Solomon's reign. Chapter 1 is about succession whereas chapter 2 is about the security of the throne. Notice the *inclusio* of verses 12 and 46b which unveil the main purpose. This chapter chronicles how God established the kingdom of Solomon.

It all begins with the first challenge to Solomon's throne in the person of **Adonijah** (vs. 13-25) who was the oldest surviving son of David and, thus, the natural heir to the throne. He is not, however, the promised heir. Throughout Scripture, younger brothers are chosen over the older – Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, David and his brothers. Although he was not the eldest surviving son of David, Solomon was appointed heir over Adonijah, a truth he must either accept or rebel against.

Before David's death, Adonijah led a coup in order to secure for himself the throne. He then surrounded himself with dangerous men who were problems for David. Adonijah, the half-brother Solomon, wants power more than anything and is, therefore, a clear threat to his throne.

Initially, Solomon showed him mercy. So long as he behaved and recognized his rule, Solomon would spare him. Regardless, Adonijah returned later and requested to marry Abishag the Shunammite who had been one of David's concubines. This was a clear affront to Solomon's rule as such a marriage was a claim to the kingdom. Clearly, Adonijah's ambitions had not been subdued. He was back to his old tricks.

He made the request to Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, first, but Solomon wisely realized what was behind the request. Adonijah was not interested in marriage or love, but power and control. To give Abishag to Adonijah was akin to giving his older brother the kingdom. Solomon would have to be a fool to agree with this marriage. As a result, Solomon ordered his execution (vs. 23-25). Although harsh to modern ears, this was the way of power politics. To establish one's throne, one's enemies had to be subdued. Solomon showed his brother mercy, but he refused to surrender his claim to the throne.

Adonijah is a warning regarding the lust for power. When power is our aim, we will ruin relationships, run over people, and become corrupt. Adonijah was a threat to Solomon's anointed rule and Abishag's rights. Power should never be the ends. When power is the end, we will justify anything as the means.

The second challenge to Solomon's throne was **Abiathar** who had been a priest at Nob and friend of David (vs. 26-27). Abiathar was loyal to David until his death where he sided with Adonijah in his attempt to take the throne for himself. Given his influence in Jewish religion, Solomon had every right to declare him guilty of treason. Solomon initially, as he had done with Adonijah, showed him mercy. However, he forfeited his right to serve as a priest having corrupted the faith by staining it with partisan politics – a real warning to evangelicals today. Despite all of this, Solomon chose a merciful judgment. Instead of executing him, he exiled him to keep him from further polluting the proper exercise of Jewish worship.

We then meet **Joab** (vs. 28-35) whom David warned Solomon about (1 Kings 2:6). He was a violent man who supported Adonijah's attempt to take the throne from Solomon. When the king sought to address Joab, the general fled. He escaped to the altar of God which, he believed, would protect him (Exodus 21:12-14). He rightly assumed that executing him there would be sacrilegious and would have required Solomon to execute the executioner! He is essentially playing a dangerous game of Tag wherein the altar is like "Safety." His strategy, however, was unsuccessful as he was eventually executed by the command of the king.

Joab is a warning against violence. The general cared little about justice or submission to the law. Joab was a law unto himself who both lived and died by the sword. Any nation that tolerates or justifies violence is a nation that has lost its moral compass. We must guard against justifying any form of violence with the proverbial "but." Violence and murder (and no doubt Joab's hands were proverbially stained with the blood of countless victims) violate God's commands as each person is made in the image and likeness of God

The final threat to Solomon's throne was **Shimei** (vs. 36-46) who had cursed David while he was fleeing from Absalom. David had shown him kindness, but among his final wishes was for Solomon to judge Shimei for his actions (1 Kings 2:9). Solomon initially put him under house arrest. Although he was from the tribe of Benjamin (like King Saul), Solomon ordered him to stay in Jerusalem which isolated him from any of his tribal supporters. After three years, however, two of his slaves escaped forcing him to choose between loyalty and greed. He foolishly chose the latter forcing Solomon to execute justice. Interestingly, the slaves fled to Gath which was the home of Goliath. In the end, Shimei proved himself to be a greedy man in the end.

Although there are several clear warnings against human nature (greed, violence, syncretism, etc.), the main point of the passage is to demonstrate how the Lord established the kingdom of Solomon, and, therefore, the house of David. Initially, Solomon addressed internal threats including the corruption of power and religion, violence, and greed. Each threatened his peaceful rule. The problem, however, is that God's patience with Israel ran out like Solomon's patience with these men. Babylon was eventually sent as God's act of judgment against his own people. It is tragic, but necessary.

Ultimately, the only way for David's throne to be eternal is for the eternal Son of God, the Son of David, one wiser than Solomon, to establish his Kingdom. What sets Christ's Kingdom apart from the kingdoms of Solomon and David is that Jesus conquers the corruption and evil of man, not with violence and the state, but by defeating death and sin. Jesus does what Solomon could not. As we explore the reign of Solomon, let us look to Jesus who is a true and better King.