

Study Commentary on 1 Kings

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A Study Commentary
on
1 Kings

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For Julie

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Preface

This book is the fruit of some years of reflection on the purpose and function of the telling of Israel's story (which is our story) in this particular way, when it could have been (and was, for example, in Chronicles and *Jubilees*) told in other ways. I have tried to keep comments brief and to the point, not stating the obvious and not entering into too much technical detail, but giving enough information on background and enough hints at inner-biblical connections to stimulate the inquiring reader. While aimed primarily at pastors and students, the commentary should be of benefit to the general reader who wants to understand better the character of this portion of Scripture — its literary subtlety and surprising theological richness. The application sections are by no means exhaustive, but rather suggestive, and are not intended to short-circuit the hard work of thinking through the implications of a passage, whether for yourself, for a Bible study group, or for a congregation.

John A. Davies
September 2012

Introduction

1 Kings begins a story and continues a larger story. Without detracting from the individual emphases of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, we recognize that at some level there is a literary and theological unity of this connected narrative strand, known traditionally as the Former Prophets, or by modern scholars as the Deuteronomistic History. More than this, there is now a growing recognition that we ought to see the books of Kings as the culmination of a unified Primary History (Genesis - 2 Kings), the wider story of God's dealings with the world within which the story of Israel is set. The reader who comes to 1 Kings with the tumultuous events of 2 Samuel in mind will be expecting a resolution to them, particularly the narrative concerning the succession (2 Sam. 9 - 20), and there is considerable literary and theological interaction between the two books. 1 Kings recounts what happens to the kingdom of David over the two centuries from the death of David to the time of kings Ahaziah of Israel and Jehoram of Judah. The division of Kings into two books is a later development (not necessarily without rationale), and we must regard the story of 1 Kings as leading into the traumatic Judean exile to Babylon with which 2 Kings concludes.

The book of Kings, therefore, finalized some time after the beginning of the exile (though evidently making use of earlier sources), wrestles with the question of how Judah (all that is left of Israel) came to this sorry state,

with its glorious temple in ruins and its citizens once more subject to a foreign king. This is no more than the people and their kings deserve, according to the theology outlined in the Pentateuch, particularly the book of Deuteronomy.¹ But what has become of God's eternal promises to David and his town Jerusalem, and behind these the commitment to Israel at Mt Sinai, and behind this the covenant with Abraham of blessing to and through his descendants? In fact, where do things stand with God's creational commitment to his world, of life and good and intimate fellowship with himself? Can Eden be restored? Do God's good purposes have any continuing currency in the face of the blatant apostasy of kings and people alike? The story of 1 Kings revolves in particular around two kings, Solomon and Ahab, who both inherited strong kingdoms and both bequeathed a legacy of idolatry leading to judgment. Even Israel's prophets sometimes fall considerably short of the expectations of the faithful servants of Yahweh they are meant to be. The exile of Judah, foreshadowed by the exile of the northern kingdom (itself foreshadowed in the fall of corrupt dynasties), seems the inexorable outcome. Does judgment, however, have the last word? Or is there room for hope? This commentary sees the faithfulness of God, despite the unfaithfulness of his people and their leaders, as a pervasive theme of the book of Kings. Even a resurrection of a people dead to God and his covenant life is not beyond the power and grace of Israel's God.

1.

1 Kings 1

Introduction 1:1-27

Some time has elapsed between the events of the closing chapters of 2 Samuel and the opening scene of 1 Kings. The feeble old David we meet here is a pale shadow of the heroic king we know from 2 Samuel. We need to keep in mind that this is not just a biography of David. The fate of the people of God is at stake, for, as we discover, David has still done nothing regarding his succession, and it is potentially disastrous that his subjects should find themselves without effective leadership. David is passive throughout much of this narrative — a passivity that the writer is suggesting is not entirely due to feebleness, but to culpable indecisiveness. The situation prompts other officials and family members to take steps to redress the leadership vacuum. We would be wrong, however, to read the account simply as a piece of political propaganda to bolster Solomon's claim to the throne. We look to the subtleties of character portrayal, plot and dialogue to reveal something of God's big-picture purposes and relationship with his people.

1:1. Now King David was old and advanced in years. Even when they covered him with blankets, he could not get warm.

Within the space of four verses of chapter 1, we are reminded that David is the **'king'** no fewer than six times; it is as though we need reminding. He is not

merely **'old'**, he is **'advanced in years'** (literally 'days'), a pathetic figure shivering in his bed. From 2 Samuel 5:4 we can deduce that he must be somewhere near seventy years old by this time. The same phrase **'old and advanced in years'** was used of Abraham (Gen. 24:1) immediately following his purchase of a plot of ground from one of the original inhabitants, a first instalment of the promised land, of which David's purchase of the temple site at the end of 2 Samuel (24:18-25) is the final payment.¹ It sets up a subtle introduction to an important theme of the following chapters.

1:2. So his subordinates said to him, 'A young virgin ought to be found for my lord the king, to wait on the king, and be his companion; she should lie in your embrace, so that my lord the king may be warm.'

The strategy of David's courtiers in seeking an attractive **'young virgin'** to attend to his every need, including that of sleeping partner to keep his body warm, highlights his failing prowess. The fact that we are told that she is a **'virgin'** brings into focus the sexual potential of the situation. While the word itself does not necessarily mean *virgo intacta*, it presumably does in this context. Will there be another heir to further complicate the already complicated succession that has been the subject of much of 2 Samuel? Such a woman is to **'wait on'** (literally 'stand before') him, to **'be his companion'** and to **'lie in his embrace'**. The expression to 'stand before' the king, besides its literal meaning, refers to one's loyal service (*cf.* 1:28; 12:6; 17:1). The chapter will raise the issue of who the genuinely loyal subjects of King David are. The word **'companion'** (from the root *sakan*, sometimes translated 'nurse') is more broadly 'to be of service'. The woman is to **'lie in [David's] embrace'**, words which call to mind Nathan's parable of the poor man's mistreated lamb (2 Sam. 12:3), and hence Bathsheba (to whom the parable relates), whom this **'virgin'** is now to replace.²

1:3. So they searched for an attractive girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king.

Abishag from the obscure village of Shunem in the Jezreel Valley wins the beauty contest. The point is that no effort is spared in the quest to revive the failing David's zest for life and the performance of his royal duty. The words **'brought her to the king'** raise our expectations of sexual activity (*cf.* Gen. 2:22; 24:67).

1:4. The girl was very attractive. She became the king's attendant and served him, but the king did not have sex with her.

It is not that David does not notice Abishag's beauty, for by their position, the words **'the girl was very attractive'** suggest that this is David's evaluation of his sleeping partner. The fact that David **'did not have sex with'** (literally 'know') Abishag as she snuggled up to him is not to be interpreted as a comment on David's moral restraint, but as a manifestation of the fact that David had become un-'knowing', uncaring and impotent to act with regard to all that was happening around him.

1:5. Now Adonijah son of Haggith had leadership aspirations, saying, 'I am going to be king.' He got ready for himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run ahead of him.

David's son Adonijah makes an appearance.³ The mention of his mother's name, Haggith, is in line with the writer's practice of mentioning the names of the mothers of successive Judean kings. We are expecting a narrative about succession and perhaps about the role of the women in the power play. The fact that Haggith's name occurs three times in the opening two chapters (when once might have been sufficient) may also draw attention to her name, which is probably to

be connected with the word *hag* ('festival'), so perhaps 'Party Girl', a foil for Bathsheba (see below on 1:13). The word translated '**had leadership aspirations**' is a reflexive verb from a root meaning 'lift up' (so, 'he exalted himself') or perhaps here better understood as denominative in force, formed from the cognate noun *nasi*, 'leader'. The only occurrence of the noun in the singular in 1 Kings is at 11:34, where Yahweh commits himself to uphold Solomon as the leader of a united Israel for his lifetime. The word '**saying**' could also be 'thinking' (providing Adonijah's inner motivation for what follows), though the context suggests that he did give voice to his ambitions. His '**I**' is emphatic. While Adonijah was David's fourth and now presumably eldest surviving son (there is no mention of Kileab after 2 Sam. 3:3), there is no protocol that would make him the automatic heir to David's throne, and patriarchal precedents might suggest otherwise (Gen. 25:23). There is nothing wrong with the desire to lead *per se*, though character must match desire. Adonijah gathers support and acquires some of the trappings of kingship, '**a chariot and horses ...**', and stages an event that is designed to pre-empt any possible move on Solomon's part. The word for '**chariot**' is customarily (following LXX) rendered as a plural in English versions; the word *rekeb* can be either a singular (as 1 Kings 22:35) or a collective (as 1 Kings 9:19). The context here suggests not so much a military coup as pomp and posturing, for which a single chariot for Adonijah would seem more likely; cf. Absalom's similar grandstanding in 2 Samuel 15:1, where the cognate word *merkabah* ('chariot') is more clearly singular. The word *parash* can refer either to '**horses**' or 'horsemen' ('charioteers'). While the LXX has 'horsemen', it may be a better contrast with David's mule (1:33) to read '**horses**' here, though of course in this context the one implies the other. The whole entourage with the escort of '**fifty men**' is suggestive of a military formation.

1:6. His father had never at any time corrected him by asking, 'Why are you behaving like this?' He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom.

David's lack of a firm hand on his sons is not just a comment on his declining years, but has been the pattern all along, and ironically, that of Samuel before him and Eli before him (1 Sam. 2:12, 22-25; 8:3-5). David's brilliant success at the national level has not been matched by the quality of his leadership within the family. For leadership among the people of God, there ought to be a demonstrable leadership within the home (1 Tim. 3:4; Titus 1:6; 2:5). Adonijah no doubt assumes that David, true to form, will not curb his ambitions. Adonijah may have been aware of some preference on David's part for Solomon, but perhaps believes that he can get away with his actions at this stage of David's life. The mention of Adonijah's good looks sounds a note of alarm, for that is also what we are told concerning Absalom (2 Sam. 14:25), and before him Saul (1 Sam. 9:2); for neither of these did their good looks prove to be the needed leadership qualification, for God does not look on outward appearance, but on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). The mention of Adonijah's older brother Absalom reminds us of the disastrous episode when that favoured son, beginning with similar manoeuvres involving chariot and horses and fifty men, rebelled against his father David and met an ugly death (2 Sam. 15 - 18).⁴

1:7. He had a meeting with Joab son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest, and they supported Adonijah.

For Adonijah's '**meeting**' cf. 2 Samuel 3:17. Adonijah's support group included his cousin Joab (1 Chron. 2:16), who was David's ruthless military commander, and to this point fiercely loyal to David. The other key supporter of Adonijah was Abiathar, one of the priests

of Nob who escaped and sought protection in David's service after Saul's massacre there (1 Sam. 22:20). This group is Judean (southern) in its sympathies and associated with the early period of David's reign at Hebron.

1:8. But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and David's own troops did not align themselves with Adonijah.

The mention of another group who did not support Adonijah hints that there may be another claimant to the throne. This group includes Zadok the priest, who is sometimes thought to be of Jebusite origin (though 1 Chron. 6:1-8 and Ezra 7:2-5 provide an Aaronic ancestry).⁵ He shared priestly responsibilities at David's court with Abiathar and his son Ahimelech (2 Sam. 8:17; 15:24). Benaiah son of Jehoiada was renowned for his bravery and became captain of David's bodyguard, the Kerethites (or Cherethites) and Pelethites (2 Sam. 8:18; 23:20-23). **'Nathan the prophet'** announced God's covenant with David concerning his dynasty (2 Sam. 7) and confronted David over his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah (2 Sam. 11-12). He had a role in the tutelage of Solomon (2 Sam. 12:25). Shimei is presumably the same one who as a supporter of Saul opposed David at the time of Absalom's revolt (2 Sam. 16:5-13), though he was later granted amnesty (2 Sam. 19:16-23). Rei is unknown and there are variant textual traditions at this point. Lucian reads 'Shimei and his friends' (Hebrew *re'ayu*), while Josephus has 'Shimei the friend of David' (*Antiquities* 14:4). The LXX supports reading Rei as a proper name. David's own warriors, that is, his personal bodyguard, presumably the Kerethites and Pelethites mentioned in 1:38, are a significant absence from Adonijah's support group. Several, at least, of those named are associated with

the period of David's career after he established his capital in Jerusalem as king of all Israel.

1:9. Adonijah sacrificed sheep, cattle and steers by the stone Zohemoth, which is beside En Rogel, and invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah.

A sacrifice (ritual slaughter) could mark any official celebration, including significant royal events (cf. 2 Sam. 15:7-12).⁶ This one is ambiguous in its intent. Are these coronation festivities? It seems unlikely that Adonijah would feel the need actually to have himself formally declared king at this juncture and in this manner (though that is how others will choose to interpret the events). Adonijah may have a co-regency rather than a coup against David in mind at this stage of David's life and, considering David's apparent indifference, must presume he can get away with staking a claim on this, or at least the right of succession. It is a piece of political theatre, a power play to shore up his position as the heir apparent. **'The stone Zohemoth'**, 'Serpent's Stone', is otherwise unknown in Scripture. It was probably a sacred site associated with the pre-Israelite kings of Jerusalem. The mention of this obscure place is probably because of the appropriateness of the name from the writer's point of view, if, as we shall see, Solomon is cast in the role of a new Adam (see also on 1:33). En Rogel is a spring located near the junction of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys, just south of Jerusalem, and the second most important source of water for the town. It is perhaps chosen as the venue for Adonijah's party because, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 7:347), it is within the grounds of the royal estate.

The fact that **'all the royal officials'** who are invited are from Judah draws attention to the fact that David's family are from this tribe, and the awareness of tribal

allegiances is still very much a part of the fabric of Israelite society (especially, it seems, among Adonijah and his supporters), despite the superimposition of the monarchy and the efforts of David to keep tribal rivalries in check.

1:10. But Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, the warriors and his brother Solomon he did not invite.

Adonijah, it would seem, already has an inkling of where allegiances lie in what he perceives will be the struggle for the throne. This is the first mention of Solomon since the announcement of his birth (2 Sam. 12:24). It is as though his existence has been kept under wraps for this dramatic hour. The ensuing rivalry between the two brothers is a foreshadowing of the split that will engulf the kingdom within a generation.⁷

1:11. So Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, 'Haven't you heard that Adonijah son of Haggith has become king without our lord David's knowledge?'

Is Nathan exaggerating with his assertion that **'Adonijah son of Haggith has become king'**? Or, in the confusion of the fast-moving events of the day, has he been misinformed as to what Adonijah has actually done? At the very least, his words are prophetically true to Adonijah's real intention of staking his claim to the throne; and, if not challenged, the popular support he might generate in this time of a leadership vacuum might prove fatal for any alternative plans Nathan might have unless he moves quickly. The mention of Haggith again reminds us that the position of queen mother, an influential if not official position in the court, is at stake as well as that of king.⁸ The powerful and active role Bathsheba is called upon to play is a counterpoise to the passive role she has in 2 Samuel 11 – 12. David's lack of knowledge of events echoes his lack of 'knowledge' of Abishag in 1:4.

1:12. 'Well, let me give you some advice, to save your own life and your son Solomon's.'

These are tense times, and any perception that there is a rival to the throne will almost inevitably lead to bloodshed once one of the rivals is established in power. Nathan appeals first to Bathsheba's sense of her own preservation, then that of her son, in order that she should go along with his plan.

1:13. 'Go in to King David, and say to him, "My lord the king, didn't you make a pledge to your servant, saying, "Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king and sit on my throne"? So how come Adonijah has become king?"'

The words **'go in'**, literally 'go and come', subtly serve to shift the point of view from Nathan to that of David's bedroom so that we are put into the position of David himself as he hears the news Bathsheba is to bring. The existence of such a **'pledge'** regarding Solomon is otherwise unknown. While it is possible that David had at some point, perhaps because of his love for Bathsheba, given such an undertaking, it is also possible that Nathan and Bathsheba are colluding to plant a memory in David's failing mind. Our only previous indications of Nathan's character (e.g. his being prepared to stand up to David over the murder of Uriah) may suggest that he is a man of integrity, though he is prepared now at least to contrive the timing of his arrival in David's room. It may be part of the narrative artistry of the writer to keep the situation ambiguous. Reference to David's (at least alleged) **'pledge'** plays on one possible meaning of Bathsheba's name, 'Daughter of Pledge', and so she is set in deliberate contrast to Haggith (see on 1:5). The presence of the women in the story, and their names, highlight the different destinies of their two sons. The word for **'pledge'** sounds like the word for 'seven' and this reinforces the fact that the word 'pledge' occurs seven times in the narrative

of Solomon's accession (1:13, 17, 29, 30; 2:8, 23, 42).⁹ Nathan encourages Bathsheba to give the impression that she believes David must be aware of and approving of Adonijah's actions. Israelite kings, like many other monarchs, sat on a **'throne'** or ceremonial chair as a symbol of their rule. This throne is unlike any other, in that Yahweh's rule is exercised through it (1 Chron. 29:23). The question of who will sit on David's throne is voiced seven times between 1:13 and 1:35. The penchant of the writer of Kings for sevenfold repetitions of key words suggests we are to be on the lookout for any creational theme (based on the seven-day creation story of Genesis 1 - 2). Here it is the new Adam theme: who will be the new king under God in God's realm? Observe the skilful chiasmic pattern of the sequence of subjects and prepositional phrases:

- A. Solomon ... on my throne (13)
- B. Solomon ... on my throne (17)
- C. Who? ... on the throne of my lord the king (20)
- D. Adonijah!? ... on my throne (24)
- C'. Who? ... on the throne of my lord the king (27)
- B'. Solomon ... on my throne (30)
- A'. Solomon ... on my throne (35)

Adonijah is the central figure of the pattern, but the assertion of his kingship in 1:24 is ironic, or in the form of a question (see below). This is bracketed by two interrogative **'Who?'**s and outflanked by the fourfold reference to Solomon. Solomon is obviously a key figure for the writer, who spends eleven chapters covering his accession and reign.

1:14. 'Then while you are still there speaking with the king, I will come in after you and expand on what you are saying.'

David's neglect of affairs of state requires those around him to think tactically how to get his attention. The testimony of two apparently independent trustworthy

witnesses might just do the trick. English versions have generally opted for ‘confirm’ rather than **‘expand on’** for the Hebrew piel of *male*, ‘fill’ (cf. LXX *pleroo*; Vulgate *complebo*). This is the only instance of the meaning ‘confirm’ given by BDB and KB. Nathan does in fact elaborate on the version he has advised Bathsheba to give (1:24-27). Of course, Nathan’s more extended version would also have the effect of verifying Bathsheba’s version of events.

1:15. So Bathsheba came to the king in his room. The king was very old and Abishag the Shunammite was attending the king.

We are reminded once more, and see through the eyes of Bathsheba, as she now approaches **‘the king’** in his bedroom, just how old and frail he is, and, with the mention again of Abishag the Shunammite, just how reliant on others he has become. This is not the last we hear of Abishag; see 2:17.

1:16. Bathsheba bowed and acted with deference to the king, and the king said, ‘What do you want?’

It is important that Bathsheba (and Nathan after her) display their loyalty to David, for, the way Nathan and Bathsheba present it, this situation is to take on the dimensions of rival loyalties to David or to Adonijah. Bathsheba **‘acted with deference’**; the word refers to a physical act of abasement such as bowing, kneeling or prostration in the presence of a social superior to express humility and subservience. It may involve avoiding eye contact and looking towards the ground (1:23). The king’s words, **‘What do you want?’** (Hebrew *mah-lak*, literally ‘What to you?’), sound even more curt in Hebrew, as though David cannot muster the energy for any more conversation with his wife. They also sound rather like the Hebrew for ‘queen’ (*malkah*) and for ‘your king’ (*malka*), probably a deliberate irony on

the part of the writer, as the subject matter will concern queen Bathsheba's candidate for kingship.

1:17. She said to him, 'My lord, you made a pledge to your servant by Yahweh your God, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king and sit on my throne.'

Bathsheba emphasizes her status as a loyal **'servant'** of David's. She subtly alters the message she was advised by Nathan to deliver, so she is portrayed as a character with some independence of mind. In place of Nathan's suggested more subtle approach with the question, 'Didn't you make a pledge to your servant?' (1:13), Bathsheba utters a straight assertion that David has in fact made such a commitment (**'you'** is emphatic), strengthening it with a pledge formula, **'by Yahweh your God'**. This is the first appearance of the divine name Yahweh in the book and we wonder if the name may have been taken in vain. If so, it does not augur well for the outcome of the events depicted at the outset. The **'pledge'** will be picked up by the pledge of 1:29-30.

1:18. 'Instead of this, Adonijah has become king, though you, my lord the king, do not know it.'

Bathsheba also modifies Nathan's suggested wording by not feigning the assumption of David's complicity in Adonijah's actions. She does go along with the line that Adonijah has already **'become king'**, and thus is to be seen as disloyal to David. The play on Adonijah's name in the words **'my lord'** (*'adoni*) which is used of David in this chapter fourteen times (twice seven; see on 1:13) makes the point that the rivalry (at least as Bathsheba and Nathan portray it) is between Adonijah and David. Solomon is not an active participant. It is David who must act to retrieve the situation. Bathsheba calculates that David is more likely to be roused to

action by learning that Adonijah has treated him with such disrespect in going behind his back.

1:19. 'He has sacrificed cattle, steers, and sheep in great numbers, and has invited all the king's sons, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of the army; but Solomon your servant he has not invited.'

Bathsheba again alters Nathan's suggested wording, adding '**in great numbers**' to the description of the sacrifices (though Nathan will himself echo this in 1:25), and including a list of invitees to Adonijah's feast. The mention of Joab might be calculated to stir David, for as we learn at 2:5 David has not forgiven Joab for his murder of Abner and Amasa. The only one mentioned by Bathsheba as not on the invitation list is Solomon (the name is fronted in its clause), which brings him into focus as Bathsheba's real concern.

1:20. 'So now then, my lord the king, all Israel is watching and waiting for you to tell them who is going to sit on the throne of my lord the king after him.'

Bathsheba voices what must truly have been to the fore in many an Israelite conversation: who will succeed king David? While the wishes of the reigning monarch might not necessarily be respected, and numbers of troops could well end up deciding on the succession, the word of a king as respected as David should carry considerable weight. The word '*acharey* **'after'**' occurs ten times in this chapter (verses 6, 7, 13, 14, 17, 20, 27, 30, 35, 40) as a theme word for the succession (ten is used less frequently than seven as a thematic number). David must take the initiative if there is to be a smooth transfer of rule and continuity of the blessings of his reign.

1:21. 'When my lord the king lies with his ancestors, I and my son Solomon will be offenders.'

Bathsheba gently brings the monologue around to the point. What will happen when David dies, or **'lies with his ancestors'**, a reference to death, based on the burial practice of the use of common family tombs (though David will not literally be buried with his ancestors at Bethlehem)? There is an echo of 2 Samuel 7:12, where the promise of a **'son'** to succeed David is associated with this phrase. The word **'lies'** is also here a further reminder of David's current recumbent state, the only position we see him in throughout this chapter. Even the posture of sitting on David's throne is something that another is envisaged as doing. Bathsheba and Solomon (note she puts herself first, perhaps in an appeal to such affection as David may still have for her) **'will be offenders'** (Targum: 'will be banished') if David does not take some action. She does not elaborate on why this might be, but given the times, it would not be hard to imagine a situation, were Adonijah to be established as king, where charges of treachery, with whatever basis or lack of basis, would be brought against the main rival contender for his position, and Bathsheba could well be a target also. Her words, however, have another connotation to them. The word for **'offenders'** is the word often translated 'sinners' (against God). In so speaking, Bathsheba sets up an ambiguity that the writer of Kings will exploit in his portrayal of Solomon in the subsequent chapters. If Solomon, as suggested above (1:9), is a new Adam, we have a hint that the outcome of any scrutiny he will be subjected to will not be favourable.

1:22. While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet came in.

The Hebrew particle *hinneh* that begins this verse (sometimes translated 'behold') draws attention to the sudden perceptions of those in the room, so we see Nathan's entry from their perspective. The reader, but not David, knows that this is a planned interruption.

For him it is a coincidence. Though the reader is not made aware of this at this point in the narrative, Bathsheba presumably makes her exit, without having heard a word from David in response to her news and her plea, as she needs to be summoned again in 1:28.

1:23. They told the king, 'Here is Nathan the prophet.' When he came in before the king, he showed deference to the king, with his face towards the ground.

Nathan is announced by unnamed court attendants who presumably regard the prophet as outranking Bathsheba in terms of his right to gain immediate access to the king. Like Bathsheba, he shows **'deference'**, bowing low as an indication of humility and respect for David. It is important for both Nathan and Bathsheba to convince David of their loyalty if their plan is to be effective.

1:24. Nathan said, 'My lord the king, you have apparently said, "Adonijah is going to succeed me as king, and sit on my throne."'

Nathan's words are closer to those he had prompted Bathsheba to say than those she actually said. There is an ambiguity as to whether Nathan is asking a question or making a statement (which the word **'apparently'** in the translation attempts to capture). Nathan will not know that Bathsheba has departed somewhat from the script. The **'you'** in **'you have apparently said'** is emphatic. The point of the emphasis is that it is inconceivable that anyone other than David himself could have made the awaited declaration regarding succession (and surely Adonijah would not have been so disrespectful as to proceed without such a declaration!). This prepares the way for Nathan's claim to be aggrieved that he and other loyal advisers were kept in the dark about this important matter of state (1:27).

1:25. For today he has gone down and has sacrificed cattle, steers and sheep in great numbers, and has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest, who are now eating and drinking in his presence, saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!'

The **'for'** introduces Nathan's reasoning that David must have acquiesced in Adonijah's actions, as Nathan continues to amplify and reinforce Bathsheba's account with some details of Adonijah's celebrations and the invitees. The several repetitions of the word **'today'** in the chapter contribute to the impression of rapidly moving events (1:30, 48, 51). The revellers have **'gone down'** from the palace area higher up on the hill to the spring. Rather than mention Joab (*cf.* 1:19), Nathan speaks more generally of **'the commanders of the army'**, raising the stakes as though this could be a full-scale military coup. Joab was associated with 'the commanders of the army' in 2 Samuel 24:4, an episode David would rather forget. Nathan omits to mention the fact that David's own troops have remained loyal. Without knowing it, he echoes Bathsheba's words about the **'great numbers'** of the sacrificial animals, adding to the impression that this must be a coronation celebration. The particle *hinnam* invites David to view the festivities in his mind's eye as though he were present, and so to gain a sense of immediacy and the urgency of the situation. This is what is taking place right now and calls for action before it is too late. Nathan allows himself the embellishment of the detail about the cry of **'long live King Adonijah'**. While it is possible that whoever conveyed the news to Nathan about Adonijah's actions included this detail, it is more likely that Nathan is extrapolating it from what little information can be gleaned on this day of confusion and intrigue. He would not be wrong, however, to infer that it is the intention of those who have aligned themselves with Adonijah that he should (at least eventually) become king and it

is feasible that in the festivity such words were uttered, possibly proleptically, without necessarily intending it as a coup against David. Whether Adonijah does **'live'** remains to be seen. The word **'long'** is not strictly in the Hebrew but is added because of the English idiom here and at 1:34, 39.

1:26. 'But he did not invite me, your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon.'

Nathan expands on Bathsheba's account of those excluded (she was only concerned with Solomon). Nathan mentions himself first, then **'Zadok the priest, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada'**, and finally Solomon, stressing the fact (by mentioning it with the first and last named) that these are loyal servants of the king. How could Adonijah's festivities have any legitimacy, and how could David have sanctioned them and leave out such important and devoted court officials?

1:27. 'Has this been authorised by my lord the king without letting your servants know who is to sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?'

The form of question with Hebrew *'im* rather than the more frequent interrogative *ha-* implies a somewhat stronger expected negative response, an indication of Nathan's tone of indignation: 'It surely can't be the case, can it?' It would be expected that on such an important matter as the succession, David would not act alone, but confide in such trusted court officials as Nathan.

Application 1:1-27

In a healthy church we no longer operate with a principle of heredity; nor do dying or retiring leaders ordinarily appoint their

successors. The issue of leadership among the people of God is a vital one for the future of the Christian community, as it was for Israel in David's time. When those who have responsibility to lead effectively abdicate this responsibility, the church becomes aimless and moribund. It is a good thing to aspire to the responsibilities of leadership (1 Tim. 3:1) and to be willing to take on the sacrifices and self-giving involved in such a role. On the other hand, the church does not need those who simply love to push themselves forward for their own prestige (3 John 9), yet whose giftedness may not lie directly in the qualities laid down for shepherds of God's people (Luke 22:26; 1 Tim. 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9).

While not all may be called to exercise leadership within the church, we may all potentially be called to lead at some level (in the home, in our work-places, and in our communities) and need to ensure that we fulfil our obligations faithfully and in reliance on God. This involves not allowing those under us (our children, our employees) to act irresponsibly without calling them to account.

Introduction 1:28-53

Perhaps David is not quite the senile invalid we first imagined, for the stratagem of Nathan and Bathsheba does rouse him to some action. The second half of chapter 1 resolves the issues introduced in the first half and gives effect to God's earlier commitment to David that it would be one of his offspring who would succeed him.

1:28. King David answered, 'Call Bathsheba for me.' So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king.

Nathan must make his exit at this point, as he needs to be summoned again in 1:32. Having had sufficient goading and what David regards as sufficient confirmation, for the first time in this chapter he utters more than two syllables and is ready to take some action, so that we now expect a resolution to the issue that Bathsheba has brought. While David is lying down, Bathsheba and others are standing (*cf.* comment on 1:2). The implication of Bathsheba's loyalty to David, while true enough, may have a slightly ironic edge in this instance as Bathsheba's actions on behalf of Solomon could be regarded as self-serving (as Nathan's advice in 1:12 suggested) rather than being motivated purely by her loyalty to David.

1:29-30. The king made a pledge, saying, 'As Yahweh lives, who has redeemed my life from every trouble, just as I made a pledge to you by Yahweh, Israel's God, "Solomon your son shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne instead of me," that's what I will do this day.'

David finally takes at least appropriate verbal action. The making of a **'pledge'** in the name of Yahweh adds solemnity and binding force to the commitment that follows. The designation of Yahweh as the one who redeems **'from every trouble'** calls to mind the fact that some of these troubles have been inflicted by David's own family, and Bathsheba has voiced her own fears along similar lines. The verb **'redeemed'** (*padah*) is strictly a commercial term ('ransom, buy back'), and used as a metaphor in contexts of Yahweh's deliverance of his people (Deut. 7:8; Isa. 29:22). It is used with the same noun **'trouble'**, also in connection with David, in 2 Samuel 4:9 and again in Psalm 25:22. Whatever pledge may or may not have been previously uttered regarding Solomon, Bathsheba ('Daughter of Pledge') now receives such an undertaking. David binds himself to act **'this day'** (a little stronger than 'today'; 1:25) on a pledge that he now believes, at least, he has previously given. The name Solomon, by its position, is slightly emphatic. It is Solomon, rather than anyone else, who will succeed David. Whether David has in mind an abdication in favour of Solomon today, or a pledge of succession with a period of co-regency, is left ambiguous.¹⁰ Solomon would in any case be the effective ruler. The words **'succeed me'** (literally 'come after me') and **'instead of me'** are brought into close association by their rhyme (*'acharay ... tachtay*), which, like Shakespearian rhyming couplets, can occasionally in Hebrew, as here, add a note of solemnity to a poetic verse. The Chronicler has David affirm his understanding that Solomon is God's choice (1 Chron. 28:5). The writer of Kings leaves this unstated, to be inferred from David's actions.

1:31. Then Bathsheba bowed with her face towards the ground, and acted with deference towards the king, and said, 'May my lord King David live forever!'

We now have the resolution to the unfinished scene in 1:15-21 where Bathsheba initially approaches the

king. The words used to describe her obeisance are in part those of her initial approach and in part those used of Nathan's approach, thus linking the two scenes and providing closure to both. The words **'May my lord King David live forever'** echo the (at least alleged) cry of acclamation directed at Adonijah and serve to reinforce perceptions that the rivalry is between Adonijah and his father. Bathsheba at least seems satisfied that David will do something to give effect to his pledge.

1:32. King David said, 'Call for me Zadok, the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.' So they came into the king's presence.

David seems well aware of the allegiances of those he can trust to carry out his intentions with regard to Solomon. These three men represent a formidable alliance of military and religious forces.

1:33. The king said to them, 'Take with you your lord's officials, and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon.'

The acknowledgement of Solomon must be seen to have the support of the royal court, hence the need for David's **'officials'** or 'subordinates', i.e., not the domestic servants but those responsible for various matters of state, perhaps including military personnel. The verb **'have ... ride'** is *rakab*, cognate with the word for 'chariot' in 1:5, thus 'overriding' Adonijah's exploit. Here the expressions for **'have ... ride'** and **'bring ... down'** are hiphils, or causative verbs; Solomon is portrayed as passive, having things done, in contrast with Adonijah for whom active verbs are used. Solomon's movements are made to mirror Adonijah's; like his brother, he goes down out of the town proper to a spring. Gihon is a spring on the eastern side of the hill Ophel (on which the fortified town of Jerusalem stood at this time), within earshot, though out of sight, of the spring En Rogel. It

was Jerusalem's main water supply, which probably had religious and ceremonial significance for the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Jerusalem, and this significance may have carried over to the Israelite occupation. One interpretation of Psalm 110:7 is that Judean kings drank from this water source as part of the coronation ritual. There is a close association of Gihon with the seat of Yahweh's rule in Eden (it shares a name with one of the primeval rivers) and the life-giving waters which flow from there (Gen. 2:10-13; Ezek. 47:1).¹¹ A king was widely regarded as responsible for the maintenance of life and fertility in the land, so an Edenic setting for a proclamation of kingship is appropriate.¹² We are thus subtly introduced to what will be a theological motif of the Solomon narrative: Can Eden be restored? Will Solomon be the royal seed, the new Adam, who recaptures what has been lost through the rebellion of mankind in Genesis 3? Or will it take one greater than Solomon to accomplish this?¹³ The syntax of the reference to the king's **'own mule'** draws attention to its close association with David (literally 'the mule which [belongs] to me'; it is not simply the suffixed form of the pronoun; cf. 1:8 above). For the association of royalty with mules, see 2 Samuel 13:29; 18:9; 1 Kings 10:25; 18:5. The horse was not used in Israel for riding at this time. With a deliberate substitution of animal, Zechariah sees a future king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zech. 9:9; cf. John 12:15; Matt. 21:5).

1:34. There Zadok the priest along with Nathan the prophet is to anoint him as king over Israel. Then give a blast on the horn, and proclaim, 'Long live King Solomon!'

Anointing, or smearing with oil, symbolizes designation to a particular office. It is used of priests and kings, and at least metaphorically of prophets (1 Kings 19:16). Elsewhere we learn of the anointing of Saul (1 Sam. 10:1), David (1 Sam. 16:3), Jehu (2 Kings 9:6) and Joash (2 Kings 11:12). Judges 9:15 indicates that the

Israelites were aware of the practice of anointing in other royal traditions, and we have confirmation of this in the Amarna letters and in Hittite sources.¹⁴ The verb is *mashah* which is cognate with the Aramaic word *meshiha* from which ‘messiah’ is derived. While there is no explicit reference to a future messiah in the book of Kings, the consciousness of the Davidic covenant and the continued measuring of the kings against this sets up a messianic trajectory, a hope that the kingship will see better days yet. The verb **‘anoint’** is singular, with Zadok as its primary subject, though Nathan is associated with him. Anointing is performed by both priests and prophets (1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Kings 9:6) and in Israel is seen as an indication of God’s designation of the leader. If Zadok and Nathan are seen to be acting in concert, it is more likely to be accepted that this is done at David’s behest. The following verbs **‘give a blast’** and **‘proclaim’** are plural, applying equally to Zadok and Nathan at least, and the second is fulfilled by the whole people (1:39). The **‘horn’**, or *shophar*, was a ram’s horn, played like a bugle. Such horns (sometimes translated ‘trumpets’) were used to announce the presence of royalty or deity (*cf.* Josh. 6:4; Exod. 19:16; Isa. 27:13). Ultimately, the final trumpet blast will herald the return of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). References to **‘King Solomon’** by title and name are to be found thirty-five times (a multiple of seven) in the Solomon narrative.

1:35. ‘You are to go up after him. He is to come in and sit on my throne. It is he who is to be king in my place, for he is the one I have appointed to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.’

While the words **‘you are to go up after him’** refer to the physical procession, the use of *‘acharey* (see 1:20) carries the connotation of ‘follow in loyal obedience, be subject to’. The phrases **‘it is he who’** and **‘he is the one’** endeavour to capture the emphatic use of the third person pronouns, the first one because it is

redundant, the second because it is given the focus position in contrast with normal word order. Solomon is to enter (the palace) and ceremonially take his seat on David's throne. There is now no doubt: it is Solomon, as distinct from Adonijah, that David has appointed to be king. The word **'appointed'** is often translated 'commanded'; i.e., for a brief moment we see the old David taking charge of things. The word for **'ruler'** is *nagid*, literally 'designated one'. It is the word used of the appointment of Saul at 1 Samuel 9:16 and David at 1 Samuel 13:14. The mention of Israel and Judah, with separate prepositions, sounds another ominous note early in the book (*cf.* 1:9). Elsewhere in the chapter, 'Israel' refers to a geographical entity, or ideal unity (1:3, 20, 30, 34, 48), but here the writer alerts the reader to the fact that tribal tensions, particularly the major north-south division of Israel (the ten tribes, of which Ephraim was the dominant) and Judah have not been eliminated by the monarchy. David has held together a fragile nation, becoming king of Judah before he was recognized by all of the tribes. Will Solomon and his successors be able to hold this union together? It is this issue, and the question of the identity of **'Israel'** that will occupy the story of Kings.

1:36. Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, 'Amen! May Yahweh, the God of my lord the king, so decree.'

Benaiah, whom we met in 1:8, now reappears. His approving **'amen'** probably reflects the writer's opinion. From a root signifying reliability, faithfulness or certainty, **'amen'** is used as an expression of approval and concurrence, particularly in formal and liturgical contexts.

1:37. 'As Yahweh has been with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David.'

Benaiah invokes the covenant formula **‘Yahweh ... be with ...’** which echoes God’s covenant commitment to Isaac (Gen. 26:24) and Jacob (Gen. 31:3) and is that on which Nathan’s oracle to David is premised (2 Sam. 7:9). Its ultimate realization is in the commitment of the Lord Jesus to be with his disciples for ever (Matt. 28:20). Nathan’s oracle also affirmed God’s commitment to make David’s name great, and indicated that the promises were to be extended to David’s offspring (2 Sam. 7:12). This in turn is an outworking of the promise of greatness to Abraham (Gen. 12:2) in contrast to the puny human efforts at achieving greatness seen in the tower builders (Gen. 11:4 where the word *migdol*, ‘tower’, is from the root *gadal*, ‘great’). Against this background, the blessing on Solomon concerns the greatness of his **‘throne’** (used by metonymy for ‘reign’). The invoking of a blessing — that the new king’s reign would be more illustrious than that of his predecessor — is conventional court language, and does lead us to look for significant evidence of greatness in the account of Solomon’s reign. If given its full force, the prayer points us beyond any earthly ruler to the greatest of David’s descendants (Luke 1:32).

1:38. So Zadok the priest went down, along with Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada and the Kerethites and the Pelethites, and had Solomon ride on King David’s mule and led him to Gihon.

David’s instructions of 1:33 are now put into effect. Zadok is the principal actor (the verb **‘went down’** is singular), with others associated with his action. Zadok is always mentioned first wherever he is grouped with others. Priests in general were treated with greater respect than other functionaries such as prophets. Solomon is still the object of two causative verbs **‘had ... ride’** and **‘led’**. The Kerethites were a clan, associated with the Philistines, whose territory bordered Judah

(1 Sam. 30:14; Ezek. 25:16; Zeph. 2:5). Their name suggests an origin, or (more probably) a temporary staging point, in Crete. The name Pelethites is possibly a variant form of the word for Philistines, who had a similar origin as part of the 'Sea Peoples' migration. The Kerethites and Pelethites were a mercenary force (Targum: 'archers and slingers'), loyal to David during Absalom's and Sheba's rebellions (2 Sam. 15:16-22; 20:6-7).

1:39. Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew a horn, and all the people said, 'Long live King Solomon!'

Here David's instructions of 1:34 are carried out. Zadok (who was given the primary role in anointing in 1:34) pours oil from a '**horn**', most likely a ram's horn, as Samuel had done when anointing David (1 Sam. 16:1, 13). The '**horn**', besides being a receptacle for the oil, may have symbolized strength, particularly royal strength (*cf.* Dan.7:7-8). The '**oil**' used for the anointing of priests is specified in Exodus 30:22-33 along with strict sanctions against its illegitimate use. We may surmise that the same oil (olive oil with fragrant spices) is used for royal anointings, since so much of what is laid down for the priesthood (e.g. their garments) is modelled on royal practice, and the oil is fetched '**from the tent**', i.e. presumably the '**tent**' which David had pitched in Jerusalem for the ark (2 Sam. 6:17; 1 Kings 2:28). A different '**horn**', the one envisaged in 1:34, is then blown. English translations generally obscure the fact that these two 'horns', serving different purposes, formed part of the ceremony. Together, their presence prepares the reader for Adonijah's very different association with 'horns' in 1:50-51. The word '**people**' here, and at numerous other places in Kings, may refer more in the first instance to the army without necessarily excluding civilian participation.

1:40. And all the people went up after him, playing pipes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was bursting at their noise.

While this has been a hastily arranged ceremony, **‘all the people’** could include at least a representative selection of the citizens of Jerusalem who, having been alerted to the momentous events, have gathered to witness the proceedings and who now go up to the town in procession behind Solomon, symbolizing their loyalty to the new king. They are accompanied by the playing of **‘pipes’**, that is, double-piped reed instruments (precursors of the clarinet and oboe). While pipe playing is here associated with **‘rejoicing’**, it could also have a range of associations, including mourning (1 Sam. 10:5; Isa. 5:12; 30:29; Jer. 48:36; Matt. 11:17; Luke 7:32), an irony the reader is perhaps meant to perceive, for while the account of the kingdom of Solomon is generally positive on the surface, we will observe numerous foreshadowings of the grief to come. For MT ‘playing pipes’ the LXX suggests a reading ‘dancing with dances’, but the effect is similar. The **‘earth was bursting’** at the **‘noise’** of the celebration. Modern English versions tend to soften the verb to ‘shook’ or ‘quaked’, but the word (as LXX *rhegunumi*) means ‘split open’ (Gen. 7:11; Num. 16:31; Isa. 48:21; Mic. 1:4), though doubtless here a metaphorical reference. Cosmic upheaval may accompany God’s intervention in history as an indication of the ‘earth-shattering’ significance of his actions and while **‘earth’** can have a local reference (a particular geographical region), it can also refer to the ‘world’ (Gen. 1:1) and hence may here point to the global significance of the Davidic dynasty (Ps. 2:8). Zechariah 14:4 refers to a future splitting of the earth (also to the east of the town of Jerusalem) at the coming of Yahweh in victory. The long period of uncertainty over the succession, and lack of decisive leadership, is at an end; this calls for great celebration.

1:41. Adonijah heard it, along with all the guests with him, as they finished feasting. When Joab heard the sound of the horn, he said, 'Why is the town so noisy?'

The scene shifts again to En Rogel, where Adonijah's festivities are **'finished'** in more ways than one.¹⁵ The revellers hear the **'horn'**, and a military man like Joab would be alert to the possibility of its being a call to arms. The noise emanating from the town is ambiguous as to its cause. For noisy towns, cf. Job 39:7. The word for 'town' (*qiryah*) (only found here and at 1:45 in the whole of Samuel-Kings) is not the regular word for town (*'ir*). It may evoke the word for 'summons' or 'invitation' (*qara*) (ten occurrences: verses. 9, 10, 19 [twice], 25, 26, 28, 32, 41, 49) which is a theme word of the chapter, and draw attention to the significance of this moment for the future of Jerusalem as the town which is to be the focal point of God's rule.

1:42. While he was still speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. Adonijah said, 'Join us, for you are an honourable man so your news must be good.'

The fast moving events, **'while ... still speaking'**, mirror the events in David's bedroom (1:14). Like the similarly named Nathan ('He Gave'), the arrival and message of Jonathan ('Yahweh Gave') will bring about a reversal of fortunes for one of David's sons. There is some compression of time for dramatic effect, for as 1:43-48 indicate, Jonathan has witnessed enough of Solomon's ceremony and its aftermath to take us considerably beyond the point of the horn blast. The introduction into the narrative of a lone messenger who, because of his good character, is thought to be bringing good news, calls to mind Ahimaaz (who had previously been associated with Jonathan in conveying messages to David during Absalom's revolt; 2 Sam. 15:27, 36; 17:17, 20), and who brought news to David regarding

the outcome of the battle which resulted in Absalom's death (2 Sam. 18:27). This is an ominous note for this next of David's sons, so there is irony in Adonijah's cheery and inane greeting. Though perhaps a standard greeting for a messenger (*cf.* 2 Sam. 18:27), the news will not be **'good'** for its recipient. **'Honourable'** can carry overtones of social standing and personal attributes and capabilities. For the astute reader, the shadow of Absalom looms large over the events of this chapter.

1:43. Jonathan answered Adonijah, 'Actually, our lord King David has made Solomon king.'

The messenger begins with a particle *'abal* 'actually', which is not necessarily adversative, though the context can suggest this. It is also possibly chosen because it suggests a homonym meaning 'mourn', for as Jonathan delivers the unwelcome news that **'our lord King David has made Solomon king'**, the festivities are over. Again Solomon is the object of a causative verb (*cf.* 1:33, 38) and not portrayed as an active participant in the intrigues that have placed him on the throne. This verse is a summary statement, which is then expanded with the details of verses 44-48.

1:44. The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada and the Kerethites and Pelethites, and had him ride on the king's mule.

The careful repetition of the narrative elements of 1:38, now in a secondary account of an eyewitness, serves the purpose not merely of informing Adonijah and his party, but of reinforcing for the reader the significance of the day's events. Whereas English narrative style does not usually like a lot of repetition, the technique is a standard feature of Hebrew narrative poetics. This is actually the third account we have of these events, for first we had the instructions (1:33-35), then the

narrator's account (1:38-40) and now Jonathan's account (1:43-48). We are, of course, intended to hear this account as Adonijah would have heard it, and as well to be alert to the subtle differences in the telling. News of the involvement of Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah, those whom Adonijah had failed to invite, presumably because he was aware of their leanings towards Solomon, would be a bitter blow. The fact that Solomon has been observed riding on the king's **'mule'**, which presumably David did not let out for joy rides, would confirm Adonijah's fears. He would realize that the involvement of Kerethites and Pelethites, who could be presumed only to act on David's instruction, means that he and his supporters are outnumbered and outmanoeuvred.

1:45. Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon and they have gone up from there rejoicing. The town is in an uproar. That is the noise you heard.

Adonijah now learns the nature of the **'noise'** coming from the **'town'**. It is one of popular acclamation for Solomon's kingship that is now a *fait accompli*. Gihon being closer to the town means that Solomon has had the advantage of a pre-emptive royal entry.

1:46. Solomon has seated himself on the royal throne.

The account gets worse and worse from Adonijah's point of view. The narrator had stopped short in 1:40 without telling us of the sequel to the uphill procession, though David had given further instruction in 1:35. The narrator has held back the information that **'Solomon has seated himself on the royal throne'** until this point, when it will have the most impact. Finally we have Solomon as the subject of an active verb (even if it is 'to sit'). Jonathan must have witnessed the whole of the procession, or at least as much of it as was required

to extrapolate this final consummation. The perfect form of the verb **'seated himself'** is not a sequential verb of action, but a statement of a state of affairs that now exists. Solomon sits on the **'royal throne'** (literally 'throne of the kingship'), i.e. he now occupies the office of king, at least as co-regent with David.

1:47-48. Furthermore, the king's officials came to congratulate our lord King David, 'May your God ennoble the name of Solomon more than your name, and make his throne greater than your throne.' The king bowed in worship on the bed and said something like this, 'Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who today has granted me a successor to sit on my throne and I have seen it with my own eyes.'

Similarly, the royal court's acknowledgment of Solomon's kingship has been held over until this point so that it might have more impact as we sense the hopelessness of Adonijah's cause. **'Your God'** is the *ketiv* (written form of the Hebrew text); the *qere* (oral tradition preserved in the MT) omits **'your'**. The words of congratulation, or blessing, echo those of Benaiah to David before Solomon's anointing, though they go further in speaking of Solomon's **'name'**. The blessing invoked recalls David's prayer for such blessing in 2 Samuel 7:29, and the association of **'name'** and greatness recalls Nathan's oracle in 2 Samuel 7:9, which in turn is an outworking of God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:2). The two congratulatory messages to David thus bracket the anointing, reinforcing one another and placing Solomon's kingship firmly within the framework of God's covenantal commitment to David. David then acknowledges this with a gesture of his own submission to Yahweh, as others had done to him, however this may have been effected from his bedridden state (*cf.* Gen. 47:31). The news of David's own pleasure in seeing someone (he does not name him!) on his throne is the final blow for Adonijah. The

Hebrew lacks even the word **'successor'** (though LXX has 'one of my offspring'). Whereas other monarchs may have their kingdom torn from them, David has himself lived to see the fulfilment of God's promise that one of his sons would succeed him (2 Sam. 7:12). Biblical writers do not usually qualify their quoted speech with a remark such as **'said something like this'**. This may be an indication that we are intended to picture David as being less coherent than the words that follow on this emotionally charged occasion. The prayer of thanksgiving attributes to Yahweh the outcome of the day's events. There may have been the hand of others such as Nathan as mediate causes, but what counts is God's *natan* (**'granted'**).

1:49. All of Adonijah's guests were alarmed and quickly went their separate ways.

Once they realize that their cause is lost, those who had been seen to identify with the losing side in the succession struggle are now at risk of reprisal from the newly acclaimed king and quickly disperse.

1:50. As for Adonijah, in fear of Solomon he quickly went and grabbed hold of the horns of the altar.

'Adonijah' is placed in emphatic position, as our attention focuses on him and his new-found fear of Solomon. The **'horns'** were projections on the corners of **'the altar'** (Exod. 27:2), possibly for binding the sacrificial animal (Ps. 118:27, though the meaning of this text is uncertain). Horned altars have been discovered at various archaeological sites in Israel, such as Arad and Beersheba.¹⁶ The **'altar'** was treated as a place of asylum, for seeking Yahweh's protection, though there were limits to the protection thus afforded (Exod. 21:14); cf. below Joab's similar action in seeking refuge at the altar (2:28-34). Adonijah's desperate

grabbing of the horns presents a marked contrast to Solomon's experience of horns in 1:39.

1:51. Solomon was informed, 'Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon and has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, "I want King Solomon to make a pledge to me today that he will not put his servant to death by the sword."'

The way the message is conveyed (*hinneh ... wehinneh*), it projects Solomon into the scene as though he were viewing the suppliant Adonijah. There have been several references to a **'pledge'** regarding Solomon's future (1:13, 17, 29, 30). It is Adonijah's turn to seek one regarding his own. It is now Adonijah, not Solomon, who faces the prospect of being the object of a causative verb, **'put ... to death'**. From Adonijah's lips come words that must have been painful for him to utter, **'King Solomon'** and **'his servant'**, as he is forced to echo the acknowledgement of the people in 1:39. The movement from the acclamation 'Long live king Adonijah' (1:25) to fearing **'death by the sword'** has been very rapid.

1:52. So Solomon responded, 'If he proves to be an honourable man, not one of his hairs will fall to the ground. But if any treachery is found in him, he will die.'

The **'honourable man'** echoes Adonijah's description of Jonathan in 1:42. Of course, it will be for Solomon to judge whether Adonijah is **'honourable'**, i.e. 'loyal'. The expression **'not one of his hairs will fall to the ground'** is proverbial for the sparing of life in the face of threatened death (1 Sam. 14:45; 2 Sam. 14:11). The expression **'if any treachery is found in him'**, that is, 'if he causes any trouble' uses the word *ra'ah*, 'evil, trouble' in a somewhat technical sense of an act of disloyalty, though again, it will be for Solomon to determine what constitutes treachery. The bigger question that will

concern the writer is whether succeeding kings of Israel will display such treacherous behaviour in relation to their divine King, and whether he in turn will cause 'trouble' for them.

1:53. Then King Solomon gave orders for him to be brought down from the altar. He came and showed deference to King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, 'Go home.'

'King Solomon gave orders' (literally 'sent, gave a commission'), beginning to act in a kingly fashion. His order **'for Adonijah to be brought down'** once more makes Adonijah the object of a causative verb, reinforcing the reversal to which he has been subjected. The direction of movement is downwards because the altar, presumably within the tabernacle precinct, would have been on the high point of the citadel; but it is also symbolic of Adonijah's reversal of fortunes. What had begun with self-exaltation (1:5) ends in an enforced being **'brought down'**. He must now, as others had done to David earlier in the chapter (1:16, 23, 31), demonstrate his subservience to Solomon. The words **'go home'** do not indicate house arrest (he later has access to the court), but are ambiguously dismissive. Given our knowledge of what happened to Absalom after he was similarly dismissed (2 Sam. 14:24), the words are chilling. Solomon's action in sparing Adonijah has been variously interpreted as a magnanimous gesture, or a sign of his gullibility and weakness. It would seem that the writer intends us to view it initially as gracious, and there is nothing at this point to indicate that Adonijah will not fulfil Solomon's proviso uttered in 1:52. In hindsight, we may re-evaluate this initial impression. This is the first of seven references to 'house' in chapters 1–2, dealing with the establishment of Solomon's 'house' or dynasty; see comment on 2:36.

Application 1:28-53

This section is a classic tale of reversal of fortune and illustrates the truth that 'whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted' (Matt. 23:12). While Adonijah may have had the appearance and the bearing of a leader, God looks not on such outward things, but on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Our celebrations of our own successes may be very short-lived if God has other plans, for he can turn rejoicing into mourning (Amos 8:10) as well as the reverse (Jer. 31:13).

While at one level this is a story about human initiative, at another, we see that it is God who has been at work, through fallible human agency, to bring about his long-standing commitment. We struggle to understand how God's promises seem to depend for their fulfilment on human responses, without the certainty of their fulfilment being compromised. The resolution to this will never be complete within the Old Testament, but must await the fuller revelation of the grace of God in Christ, the son of David and the one who does perfectly fulfil the covenant requirements and whose perfect rule knows no bounds. The celebration of his rightful kingship over the world will be complete when the 'last trumpet' (1 Cor. 15:52) sounds to announce his triumphal entry. As 'all the people' followed David's son, so we are to express our allegiance to our Lord, not in words only, but in the worship of total submission.