

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 1

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the two books of Kings like the two books of Samuel were considered as one book, and were named “And the king”, which is the literal translation of the opening word of the book. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the “Septuagint” (LXX), which was completed in the third century B.C., divides the books of Samuel and Kings into “Of the Kingdoms 1”, “Of the Kingdoms 2”, “Of the Kingdoms 3” and “Of the Kingdoms 4”. Then in the fifth century A.D., Jerome translated the Old Testament into Latin Vulgate and used the title “Books of Samuel” 1 and 2; and “Books of Kings” 1 and 2, and this terminology is used in the English translations.

Based on traditional belief, the prophet Jeremiah wrote the books of Kings. The books describe the history of the kings from David to the Divided Kingdom (Israel-the kingdom in the north and Judah-the kingdom in the south). The events cover almost five

hundred years of history of the nation, Israel. It is not a complete and exhaustive account of the history of Israel of that period but rather, it is a selection of events which demonstrate God’s working in the affairs of men, in particular, Israel, with whom He made an everlasting covenant. The accounts show God’s overall control of history and they portray the religious cum prophetic point of view and not the secular historian point of view. The events are not just factual but they are marked with appropriate theological comments.

The purpose of the books is not explicitly stated but study will reveal that they serve as a warning of the inevitable punishment to those who disobey God’s laws and also, as an encouragement to those who obey God’s laws and receive God’s promise of blessings. It gives us a chronological account of the period of the kings.

OUTLINE

1. David’s old age (vv. 1-4);
2. Adonijah’s attempt to seize the throne (vv.5-10);
3. Nathan and Bathsheba’s intervention to foil Adonijah’s attempt (vv. 11-27);
4. David’s confirmation of Solomon as his successor (vv. 28-40);
5. Adonijah’s failure in his rebellion (vv. 41-53).

COMMENTARY

David's Old Age – 1:1-4

David was advanced in years and near the end of his reign. He was about seventy years old (see 2 Samuel 5:4). The physical condition, which is described in the text, is not unusual for an aged man. No matter how many layers of warm clothes they covered him with, he could gain no heat to keep himself warm. His servants (or physicians) suggested that a young virgin woman be sought to wait upon David at his pleasure and to nurse him. Let her “cherish” him i.e. to minister unto him, and sleep with him so that the king might get heat. This was a traditional cure prescribed by ancient doctors. This was not a sexual thing as the Bible has made it very clear that David “knew her not”. Galen, the Greek physician (2nd century) propounded that the health and heat of a young body could be transmitted to the body of an aging old person as a medical treatment.

They found the young woman. Her name was Abishag (“my father is a wanderer”), a Shunammite, an inhabitant of Shunem. Shunem was a little village in Issachar, which was in the north of Israel, south-west of the Lake of Galilee. She is described as “very fair”, a very beautiful damsel and she served and nursed David as required of her. But David “knew her not”. This was an expression to mean that David had no sexual relationship with her. Whether she became his wife or not sparks a debate among some commentators.

Nothing is said about her being David's wife. On the evidence of 1 Kings 2:13-22, some have suggested that David had taken her to be his wife. Adonijah's request for Abishag to be given to him was another attempt to claim the throne (note Solomon's response to Bathsheba's petition, 1 Kings 2:22). However, it would be more likely that she became one of his concubines.

Adonijah's Attempt to Seize the Throne – 1:5-10

Apparently, David was by this time too weak to function effectively as ruler of the country. In addition, David had not named his successor. In such a situation, some ambitious people would capitalise on it to seize power. Adonijah was one such person. He was the eldest of the surviving sons of David (2 Samuel 3:2-4). He therefore had a claim to the throne of David on the grounds of his hereditary right. But in Israel, being the oldest was no guarantee that he would succeed the king. God chose the man who should rule His people as in the case of David who was the youngest among his brothers. Hence, it was David's prerogative to name his successor. Moreover, Adonijah was good looking; an acceptable criterion for kingship approved of men (1 Samuel 16:12).

Adonijah exalted himself and declared that he would be king (v.5). He felt that his father's silence must have meant consent! He even had chariots and horsemen, and fifty warriors to run before him whenever he made his public

appearance. David did not know about what Adonijah did as the Bible said that he “exalted himself”. Adonijah managed to persuade Joab, Israel’s chief commander of the army, to join him. Why Joab supported Adonijah was quite obvious. It was because of David’s old age and obvious displeasure of him. Adonijah also got Abiathar, the priest to be on his side. Abiathar was probably jealous of Zadok for David apparently preferred Zadok to him (2 Samuel 8:17). This was the way to be king: an entourage plus key leaders such as a high priest and chief of general staff accompanying you in public.

These two very influential persons of Israel helped Adonijah. The acquisition of instruments to stage a *coup d’etat* was complete. He had the military and the religious sectors behind him. He performed precisely like his brother Absalom who previously attempted to seize the throne. On the other hand, Zadok, the priest, and Benaiah, a military commander in his own right (2 Samuel 23:20-22), and the prophet Nathan, and two other men, namely, Shimei and Rei, and David’s mighty men, were not for Adonijah (v.8). It is obvious that Adonijah might have approached them or at least attempted some kind of recruitment for their support. But these loyal servants of David did not join him. Adonijah then held a big feast at En-rogel. He did not call Nathan, Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother. The fact David’s feelings for these men whom that these men were not called shows

that the attempt to seize control of the nation was ill founded. It was not good but evil.

Nathan’s and Bathsheba’s Intervention – 1:11-27

Having learned that Adonijah had declared himself king, Nathan took swift action to prevent Adonijah from being king of Israel. He quickly told Bathsheba that her life and the life of her son, Solomon, would be in danger, if Adonijah were to reign (v.12). This was not a mere threat to get Bathsheba to act. But this was consistent with the practice in those days for a new king who ascended the throne, to kill all those who were his contenders or posed a threat to his kingship. Nathan could have also been concerned for his own life. Yet another reason was that he knew that God’s will was for Solomon to succeed David as king of Israel (1 Chronicles 22:8-9). This was the spiritual significance which supersedes all other reasons including economic and political ones.

Nathan suggested a plan to get David to name Solomon as his successor. Nathan counselled Bathsheba to politely ask David why it was Adonijah who reigned when he had promised her that Solomon would reign after him and ascend the throne (v.13). Nathan gave the undertaking that after she had asked David, he would enter into the presence of the king and confirmed her words.

Bathsheba followed Nathan’s suggestion accordingly. She presented

herself before David. After performing the usual custom of respect before a king, she said to David in her own way rather than the way Nathan had counselled her. She reminded David that he had sworn before the LORD that Solomon should reign after him and sit on the throne (v.17). She pointed out that Adonijah now reigned and asked if the king knew about it (v.18). She further complained that Adonijah threw a feast and had called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab, but Solomon was not invited at all (v.19). She then added that all Israel were expecting the king to declare who should reign after him (20). And if the king failed to do so, she feared that she and her son, Solomon, would be treated as criminals (v.21). We see that Bathsheba had her own mind. She was forthright with the king. She did not beat around the bush.

At this point while she was still speaking, Nathan entered and the king was told that Nathan the prophet had come. Nathan paid his obeisance to the king. He tactfully proceeded to ask the question whether David had appointed Adonijah to reign after him. Nathan informed the king that Adonijah had given a feast and had invited all the king's sons, and army generals, and Abiathar, the priest, and they all ate and drank and declared, "God save king Adonijah."(v.25). Nathan then complained that "me, even me thy prophet", and Zadok the priest and Benaiah, and Solomon, they had not called. Nathan did what was right

having known the will of God for Solomon. He was not playing on some commentators claimed to be David's favourites. The spiritual plan for the Temple to be built by Solomon would have been thwarted if Adonijah had succeeded.

Nathan then asked David whether the appointment of Adonijah was done at the instruction of the king, and it was the case that David did not inform him his servant, of who should be king after him (vv. 26, 27). Nathan and Bathsheba were not suggesting that David immediately abdicate the throne but to appoint Solomon as the one who would be king-designate until David's death. The king, on the other hand, clearly showed that although he was physically weak, his mind and heart and spirit were still vibrant and resolute.

David's Confirmation of Solomon as His Successor – 1:28-40

Nathan's last words prompted King David into action. He summoned Bathsheba to be brought before him. He declared to Bathsheba that he had sworn before the LORD that Solomon would reign after him and sit on the throne in his stead. David then declared that he would honour the oath made to Bathsheba, and would straightaway take the appropriate action (v.30).

King David then summoned Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah before him. The king gave specific instructions what they ought to do. They were to take the king's servants, and cause Solomon his son to

ride upon his mule and bring him down to Gihon, a fountain place just outside the city. Zadok and Nathan would then anoint Solomon there as king over Israel. The trumpets would sound, and they were to say, "God save King Solomon." Then they should follow Solomon that he might come and sit upon his throne. He should be king in his stead. David confirmed that he had appointed Solomon to rule over Israel and Judah. Nathan and Benaiah said "Amen" and in that context, it means "may it be so according to the will of the LORD God of David." (v.36). And they pronounced a blessing upon Solomon that the LORD would be with him as He had been with David, and that Solomon's reign would be greater than that of David. So Zadok and Nathan carried out all that David had specifically instructed them. Zadok took the horn of oil from the Tabernacle (there was only one horn of oil) and anointed Solomon. Then all the people gathered after Solomon, celebrated and rejoiced.

Adonijah's Failure – 1:41-53

Adonijah and company were ending their feasting when Joab heard the sounding of the ram's horn. It was significant to all Israelites as this was the manner in which communication was made in those days. He asked what caused the noise and uproar in the city. While they were asking questions among themselves, Jonathan, Abiathar's son, came to them. He was not with them when they were celebrating and feasting. Probably, he

was sent to keep an eye on developments in the palace. Adonijah invited him to report any good news to him.

Jonathan gave a summary of the events that took place in the palace. He gave a precise chronological account of what happened. He reported with the words that the king had made Solomon king (v.43). The king had sent with Solomon, Zadok, the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, the son of Jehoida, and the Cherethites and Pelethites, and Solomon was put on the king's mule. Zadok and Nathan anointed Solomon in Gihon. And they had come to the city rejoicing and the city responded with great jubilation. Jonathan answered Joab's question that this was the noise that they heard (v.45). Moreover, Solomon sat on the throne of the kingdom. Then the king's servants blessed King David, saying that God would make the name of Solomon better than the name of David and make his throne greater. And King David acknowledged by bowing himself on the bed, and said, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it" (v.49).

Solomon's ascension spelt the end of Adonijah's usurpation of the throne for the moment. If it had continued, rebellion and civil war would break out. When Adonijah heard the news, his guests were afraid and every one fled from him. Adonijah himself also feared for his life, and he fled to the

tabernacle and grasped the horns of the altar (v.50). This action was for mercy for those who knew they were guilty of a crime punishable by death. A plea for mercy would ensue and the accused would then wait for judgement. It was allowed that he be killed with his hands on the altar. Adonijah pleaded with King Solomon not to take his life. Solomon spared Adonijah on condition that he proved himself “a worthy man”, which means that he must behave himself. If he were to continue in his wicked ways, he would die (v.52). So Solomon sent his men to release Adonijah who then came to king Solomon and paid homage to him. Solomon told him to go home.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Once again, we see God’s direct intervention in the affairs of men. God had said to David that Solomon would be the next king after him. God sent Nathan the prophet to call Solomon, “Jedidiah” meaning “loved of the LORD” (2 Samuel 12:24-25, cf. 1 Chronicles 22:8-9) to make him king. Adonijah’s attempt to seize the throne was against God’s Word. If he believed that he had legitimate claim to the throne by right of primogeniture, he should have been patient and waited until the king appointed him. Another thing which he could have done, was to ask the king, his father David, whether he would be the next king after he died. He did not take any such action; instead he secretly colluded with Abiathar and Joab to seize the throne while his father was still alive.

God could have struck him with illness that would have incapacitated him or struck him dead. But He did not. He used Nathan his prophet to take the initiative together with Bathsheba to approach the king. Adonijah however speeded up this process. He should be commended.

In application, God’s mandate to the church is to advance His kingdom. The work of the church therefore is the work of God, the Lord Jesus Christ being the Head. Every member of the church, from the pastor to the ordinary member, is accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ. Any attempt to have a change of leadership in the church should be done decently and in an orderly manner according to God’s Word. Any move to leave the church to reach others for Christ should be done in a God-honouring way, for the means are just as important as the end and the end never justifies wicked means. God does not condone the action of and is definitely displeased with leaders of the church who meet stealthily in darkness plotting to overthrow the current God appointed leadership. Such ways are clearly censured by the Word of God. God’s work must be done in God’s ways for God’s glory. Let us learn this lesson well.

Abiathar and Zadok, the priests, had developed good relationships with one another. That was true of Benaiah and Joab. But what happened? We see how a selfish grasp for power can destroy relationships as well as

individual personalities. People, who aspire to positions of high responsibility and power especially, in the kingdom of God, must be put down. These are self seekers that will ruin the church. They are evil men who would lie and plot their way into leadership. The present leadership must beware of such wicked men. God will judge these evil men. God will always fulfil His plan and purpose and protect and preserve those who walk in His ways. AMEN.

2. Name the supporters of Adonijah and Solomon. What are your comments on each of them?

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 1 Kings 1:1-4; Psalm 90:1-12.

TUESDAY: 1 Kings 1:5-10; Luke 14:7-11; Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 29:17.

WEDNESDAY: 1 Kings 1:11-27; Matthew 10:16; Proverbs 27:6.

THURSDAY: 1 Kings 1:28-40; Matthew 21:1-9; Proverbs 4:23; 23:7.

FRIDAY 1 Kings 1:41-53; Proverbs 21:1; 2 Corinthians 5:10-15.

3. Why was Solomon not involved at all in this entire escapade of making him king by his own mother and Nathan the prophet?

Discussion Questions

1 Could silence truly mean consent in a situation such as this in 1 Kings 1?

4. Have you encountered any Adonijah in your life's experiences? Elaborate.

5. What makes men grab power and glory even at the expense of friends and family? Would you pay the price of sacrificing your children, family or friend for power and glory?

6. Did Solomon do the right thing in forgiving Adonijah when the law requires him to put Adonijah to death for what he did?
