

1 Kings 1

Limits of the Text

1 Kings 1 is a complete literary unit. It begins with David's declining health, which anticipates the need for a new king, and ends with Solomon on the throne.

Plot

1. Background – David's health declines (1:1-4).
2. Crisis – Adonijah takes the throne (1:5-10).
3. Resolution – David appoints Solomon (1:11-50).
4. Conclusion – Solomon spares Adonijah (1:50-52).

Towards Authorial Intent

The **dialogue** in the story is repetitious, nearly boringly so. The words are consistently man-centered. Adonijah said, "I will be king" (1:5). Bathsheba said to David, "You swore to your servant by the Lord your God saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me' "(1:17). Nathan said to David, "Have you said, 'Adonijah shall reign after me'?" (1:24). David set forth his plan of action by saying, "He shall be king in my place" (1:35). Finally, in Jonathan's speech, we hear some God-centered words when he quoted David as saying, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it' " (1:48). This, I think, is the point of the text. David has seen God fulfilling his promise (2 Sa 7:8-16).

External Context

1 Kings 1 and 2 are transitional chapters; they move the story from David's kingship to Solomon's kingship.

Interpretation

1 Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. 2 Therefore his servants said to him, "Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms, that my lord the king may be warm." 3 So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. 4 The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not.¹

In the first scene (1:1-4) the author revealed David's condition, thus setting the stage for the story. He was old and unable to stay warm.² His servants' first attempt to rectify the problem was to pile blankets³ on him, but this didn't help. Their second attempt was to find a "human electric blanket" for him. It was believed that the sight of a beautiful young woman and the chance to sleep with her would get his heart racing and his blood pumping again, but apparently it did not; nothing they tried could keep David warm. Some have said that since David did not take advantage of the sexual opportunity that lay before him (pun intended), he had lost his virility and thus lost his ability to rule.⁴ Whether that is true or merely sensationalistic,⁵ the main point of the opening paragraph is the same: David was no longer physically fit to rule; it was time to designate the next king.

5 Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.

In the second scene (1:5-10) Adonijah attempted to take the kingship from his father. Adonijah was David's fourth son (2 Sa 3:2-4). Absalom (2 Sa 18:14) and Amnon (2 Sa 13:28-29) were already dead at this point and presumably Chileab was as well, thus Adonijah was (apparently) the eldest remaining son. Since he was the eldest, he decided that he should be the next king and gathered the symbols of kingship around him (1 Sa 8:11).⁶

6 His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?" He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom.

The writer of Kings makes some observations about Adonijah; he was undisciplined, thus used to getting what he wanted, and he was very handsome. These observations

¹ ESV.

² He may have had a blood circulation problem (House, 87), such as arteriosclerosis, a hardening of the arteries (DeVries, 12).

³ The NET reads, "even when they covered him with blankets."

⁴ Provan, 24.

⁵ Davis, 15.

⁶ Provan, 24.

remind the reader about Absalom, who also undisciplined and handsome (2 Sa 14:25-26) and who claimed the kingship for himself the same way (2 Sa 15:1). By this the writer was saying that Adonijah was the same sort of man that Absalom was, lacking the spiritual character necessary to rule God's people and heading for the same fate.⁷

7 He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him. 8 But Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and Shimei and Rei and David's mighty men were not with Adonijah.

Adonijah persuaded two powerful men to join his cause. Joab was the commander of David's army (2 Sa 20:23) and gave a military presence to the coup; he was a great soldier, but he was also ruthless and ambitious. Abiathar was a priest who had been with David early on (1 Sa 22:20-23) and gave a spiritual presence. Still, support for Adonijah was not unanimous among David's supporters.

9 Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the Serpent's Stone, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, 10 but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother.

Adonijah offered sacrifices, just as Absalom had (2 Sa 15:12) and invited more people to join his conspiracy. The presence of the king's sons indicates that were agreeing to relinquish any rights they might have had to the throne. The presence of the royal officials gave even more validity to his claims.⁸ But despite this impressive array of followers, Adonijah still did not have unanimous support. Nathan, a spiritual leader, and Benaiah, a military leader, were not invited; neither was Solomon, thus the writer quietly informed his readers that there was another potential contender for the throne, a son of David who had not relinquished his claim to the throne.

At this point the crisis of the story has been reached. Will David find out what his son is doing? Will he allow the throne to be stolen from him while he yet lived? Will he agree to Adonijah's claim to the throne?

11 Then Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, "Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it?"

The third scene (1:11-27) has three sub-scenes, but all three work together to reveal Nathan and Bathsheba's plot to put Solomon on the throne. In the first sub-scene (1:11-14), Nathan and Bathsheba devised their plan.

⁷ Provan, 24.

⁸ House, 89.

Why was a plan needed? It was needed because David did not know. Apparently his poor health did not allow him to carry on his court as usual, so David was isolated and unaware of what was happening his own kingdom.

12 Now therefore come, let me give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. 13 Go in at once to King David, and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying, "Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne"? Why then is Adonijah king?' 14 Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words."

At this point the writer used Nathan to reveal a very important fact that was previously unknown to his readers, a fact that explained why Solomon was not invited to join Adonijah's crowning: David had promised Bathsheba that her son would be the next king. This oath is not mentioned in Samuel and was apparently not an official declaration, but Nathan knew this was David's desire.

Nathan's plan was simple: Give "independent" confirmation that Adonijah had usurped the throne despite the king's promise. Davis is right to exclaim that Nathan played the most crucial role in the story;⁹ God used him to keep the kingdom out of the hands of an undisciplined, ambitious man. Here is God's covenantal faithfulness to Israel on display.

Some have suggested that Nathan fabricated David's promise in order to advance his own choice for the next king, yet there is nothing in the text to indicate that this is true. This withholding of key information until the last minute is simply part of the literary skill of the author.

15 So Bathsheba went to the king in his chamber (now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was attending to the king). 16 Bathsheba bowed and paid homage to the king, and the king said, "What do you desire?" 17 She said to him, "My lord, you swore to your servant by the Lord your God, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.' 18 And now, behold, Adonijah is king, although you, my lord the king, do not know it. 19 He has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of the army, but Solomon your servant he has not invited. 20 And now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21 Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king sleeps with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders."

In the second sub-scene (1:15-21) Bathsheba carried out her part of the plan. Her plea to David emphasized David's promise and concern for the safety of herself and her son. She also inserted the important detail that Solomon was not involved in Adonijah's plot.

⁹ Davis, 19.

22 While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet came in. 23 And they told the king, "Here is Nathan the prophet." And when he came in before the king, he bowed before the king, with his face to the ground. 24 And Nathan said, "My lord the king, have you said, 'Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne'? 25 For he has gone down this day and has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest. And behold, they are eating and drinking before him, and saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!' 26 But me, your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he has not invited. 27 Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not told your servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?"

In the third sub-scene (1:22-27) Nathan carried out his part of the plan. His plea emphasized Adonijah's sneakiness and David's ignorance.

28 Then King David answered, "Call Bathsheba to me." So she came into the king's presence and stood before the king. 29 And the king swore, saying, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, 30 as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,' even so will I do this day." 31 Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and paid homage to the king and said, "May my lord King David live forever!"

The fourth scene (1:28-40) also has three sub-scenes, and they work together to describe how Solomon ascended to the throne. In the first sub-scene (1:28-31), David re-iterated his promise to Bathsheba, albeit once again given in secret. There is a startling transformation in David in these verses—from lethargic to energetic, from insulated to commanding—as he started to put his promise into motion.

32 King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada." So they came before the king. 33 And the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. 34 And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel. Then blow the trumpet and say, 'Long live King Solomon!' 35 You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, for he shall be king in my place. And I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah." 36 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, "Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, say so. 37 As the Lord has been with my lord the king, even so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David."

In the second sub-scene (1:32-37), David gave orders to crown Solomon. His instructions were precise and decisive; whatever was causing David's physical maladies

was not affecting his mind. Having Solomon ride David's mule would give a visual indication that David was giving his authority to Solomon.¹⁰ It's also possible that the mule itself was regarded as a symbol of kingship (see Zech 9:9 and its application in Mt 21:1-11).¹¹ Zadok and Nathan provided spiritual support, and Benaiah provided military support. Abishag may not have been able to rouse David, but the succession to his throne certainly did.

It's interesting to observe the juxtaposition between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. God promised David that he would establish his dynasty forever (2 Sa 7:1-17), yet that promise required a component of human responsibility¹² from both Nathan and David.

38 So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule and brought him to Gihon. 39 There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" 40 And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.

In the third sub-scene (1:38-40), Zadok anointed Solomon. There is a contrast between Adonijah's banquet and Solomon's anointing: openness. Adonijah invited a privileged few, while Solomon invited everyone. They blew a horn to announce the anointing, and everyone came and celebrated; the celebration was so loud it sounded as if the earth was splitting. "This is the proper way to become a king, the text tells us: out in open, with mules, oil, and music, with popular involvement. Adonijah's attempted coup, by stealth and patronage, is an aberration."¹³

The anointing of Solomon was important in at least three ways. First, the anointing of Solomon is the resolution of the story. David has heard about Adonijah's plot and responded decisively. Solomon was now in a position to deal with the usurper. Second, this anointing also represented a new chapter in Israel's history. Samuel had chosen previous kings at God's direction; now the king is choosing one of his sons to rule. "The placing of Solomon on the throne signals the beginning of the Davidic dynasty, a royal lineage that will eventually produce Jesus Christ."¹⁴ Third, the anointing was the fulfillment of God's promise to David in 2 Sa 7:7-17; a son of David now sits on the throne.

41 Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, "What does this uproar in the city

¹⁰ DeVries, 16.

¹¹ Provan, 29.

¹² Davis, 21.

¹³ Provan, 27.

¹⁴ House, 93.

mean?" 42 While he was still speaking, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came. And Adonijah said, "Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news." 43 Jonathan answered Adonijah, "No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king, 44 and the king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites. And they had him ride on the king's mule. 45 And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon, and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard. 46 Solomon sits on the royal throne. 47 Moreover, the king's servants came to congratulate our lord King David, saying, 'May your God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours, and make his throne greater than your throne.' And the king bowed himself on the bed. 48 And the king also said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it.' "

The fourth scene (1:41-53), where Adonijah heard that Solomon had been anointed as king, begins with a question: What does this uproar mean? The irony here is that Adonijah took advantage of David's isolation and ignorance to crown himself, yet in the end it is he who was isolated in a banquet and ignorant of what was going on.¹⁵ Jonathan, the son of one of Adonijah's main conspirators, brings the news about Solomon. In so doing he clearly revealed that his own loyalties belonged to "our Lord King David."

Jonathan's recitation of David's blessing contains the main idea of the text: It is the Lord, the God of Israel, who granted (or provided) someone to sit on his throne and allowed David to see it. David acknowledged that God was a covenant-keeping God, one who is always faithful to keep his promises.

49 Then all the guests of Adonijah trembled and rose, and each went his own way. 50 And Adonijah feared Solomon. So he arose and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. 51 Then it was told Solomon, "Behold, Adonijah fears King Solomon, for behold, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.' " 52 And Solomon said, "If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die." 53 So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and paid homage to King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, "Go to your house."

Suddenly everyone (wisely) realized they needed to be somewhere else, thus leaving Adonijah all alone. Fearing for his life, he ran to the tabernacle and grabbed one of the four horns of the altar (Ex 27:2). Exactly why he grabbed the horns is not known. Perhaps it stemmed from idea of a city of refuge (see Ex 21:12-14 or Nu 35), though Joshua commanded that the refugee make his case before the elders at the gate (Jos

¹⁵ Provan, 29.

20:4), not at a place of worship, and Adonijah could hardly claim to be innocent. Whatever the origin, both he and Joab (1 Ki 2:28) thought they would be safe before the altar.

Adonijah bartered for his life, and Solomon showed him mercy, though with a condition. So long as Adonijah demonstrated that he was without treason or disloyalty, he could live.¹⁶ The story ends here, but one senses that it's not really over, at least as far as Adonijah is concerned.¹⁷

¹⁶ DeVries, 20.

¹⁷ House, 94.

Three Levels of History

1. Personal history – This is a story of how King David chose his son, Solomon, to rule after him.
2. National History – This is a story about the formation of the Davidic dynasty.
3. Redemptive History – This is a story about God keeping his promise to David to establish his throne forever.

Jesus and the Gospel

This story reflects mankind's **need for redemption** through Jesus and the gospel.

1. What does this text teach us about ourselves? What need or deficiency in our lives does it expose? We are unable to bring about the promises of God. Sometimes we are not even aware of when a promise of is in (apparent) jeopardy.
2. What does this text teach us about God? How does it reveal God's grace to meet our need? God always keeps his promises. He thwarts the efforts of those who attempt to thwart him. Sometimes he uses his people to bring his promises to fruition.

Outline

This outline is based upon the scenes of the story:

1. Israel needs a new king (1:1-4).
2. Adonijah chooses himself to be king (1:5-10).
3. Nathan and Bathsheba plot for Solomon to be king (1:11-27).
4. David appoints Solomon to be king (1:28-40).
5. Adonijah hears that Solomon is the king (1:41-53).

Central Truth of the Story

The author of Kings wrote 1 Kings 1 in order to demonstrate to exilic Jews that God kept his dynastic promise to David despite David's age and Adonijah's ambition.

Teaching Outline

God always keeps his promises of God, and God wants this church to know that nothing can stop him from keeping his promises. In 1 Kings 1 we are going to see 4 ways that demonstrate that God will always keep his promises:

1. God keeps his promises despite physical problems (1 Ki 1:1-4).
2. God keeps his promises despite ambitious enemies (1 Ki 1:5-10).

3. God keeps his promises through faithful followers (1 Ki 1:11-27).
4. God keeps his promises through passionate leaders (1 Ki 1:28-40).
5. God keeps his promises through public announcers (1 Ki 1:41-53).

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