

## 1 Kings 2

### Limits of the Text

1 Kings 2 is a complete literary unit. David gave one last set of instructions to his son, Solomon, and his son carried out those instructions. Both halves of the story end with the same idea: Solomon's kingdom was established.

### Plot

1. Background – David neared his time of death (1 Ki 2:1).
2. Crisis – David charged Solomon to establish the kingdom by:
  - a. Obeying the Law of Moses (1 Ki 2:1-4).
  - b. Dispensing justice (1 Ki 2:5-12).
3. Resolutions
  - a. Solomon executed Adonijah (1 Ki 2:13-25).
  - b. Solomon banished Abiathar (1 Ki 2:26-27).
  - c. Solomon executed Joab (1 Ki 2:28-35).
  - d. Solomon executed Shimei (1 Ki 2:36-46a).
4. Conclusion – Solomon's kingdom was established (1 Ki 2:46b).

### Towards Authorial Intent

The **plot** points toward the strength of Solomon's kingship. His hold on the throne is so secure that he can execute even his father's enemies.

The **dialogues** at the times of judgment reveal something about the fate of those who oppose God's plan. Solomon said to Bathsheba that Adonijah might as well ask for the whole kingdom for himself and his co-conspirators, Abiathar and Joab, therefore he would die;<sup>1</sup> in contrast Solomon was expecting to be the second king in a dynasty of Davidic kings. In the case of Abiathar, the author inserted a comment noting that Abiathar's banishment fulfilled a prophecy against Eli's family. Samuel prophesied in 1 Sa 2:31-35 that Eli's family would be replaced by David's family. Solomon said to Benaiah that Joab had committed murder, and blood would come back on his own head; in contrast Solomon expected peace. Solomon said to Shimei that Shimei did evil to David, therefore the Lord brought back evil on his head; in contrast Solomon expected to be blessed. I suspect that these dialogues reveal the point of the story: Those who attempt to oppose God's plan will be punished.

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<sup>1</sup> At this point in my studies I'm not exactly sure why Adonijah's request was so wrong, but I suspect that he was still following in the footsteps of his brother, Absalom, who publically slept with his father's concubines to display his triumph over his father. In other words, I think it's a sign that Adonijah still wanted the throne. I'm expecting the various commentaries I consult to help me understand culturally why Solomon reacted so harshly against Adonijah.

## **External Context**

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

## Interpretation

1 When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying,

Before David died, he gave Solomon some final instructions designed to keep the fledgling Davidic dynasty intact. The first set of instructions concerned the Law of Moses (2:2-4) and the second concerned retribution and reciprocation. The language of the chapter is about establishing the throne (vss 4, 12, 24, 33, 45, 46).

2 "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, 3 and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, 4 that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'<sup>2</sup>

These verses are the high point of the chapter. David knew that in order for the dynasty to continue, his sons must obey God.<sup>3</sup> Even a king cannot do anything he wants; he must obey God's laws. David must have been very familiar with the law code of Deuteronomy, because the instructions he gave were paraphrases taken from that book:

- Keep his charge, statutes, rules, and commandments (Dt 11:1)
- Walk in his ways (Dt 8:6)
- So you may prosper in all you do (Dt 29:9)
- With all your heart and soul (Dt 4:29)<sup>4</sup>

Not only was David familiar with the law code of Deuteronomy, so was the author of Kings, who used the language of Deuteronomy throughout the book as he measured the various kings against the law and found them lacking.<sup>5</sup>

David gave Solomon three specific charges. First, be strong. David wanted Solomon to be courageous and confident.<sup>6</sup> His charge echoed the one Joshua gave the Israelites just before they entered the land: "Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have

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<sup>2</sup> ESV.

<sup>3</sup> To the exilic Jew in Babylonia, this statement must have rang true; their kings had not obeyed God like David had commanded, thus they lacked a man on the throne.

<sup>4</sup> Provan, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Provan, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, 304.

good success wherever you go” (Jos 1:6-7). Second, show yourself a man. This complimented the idea of being strong, as being strong and courageous before heading off to war was what men were supposed to be. Third, keep the charge of the Lord. To keep is to observe an obligation,<sup>7</sup> specifically to give careful attention to the obligations of the covenant.<sup>8</sup> Solomon was to keep the charge by walking in the Lord’s ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies. Walking has the idea of a lifestyle; David wanted his son’s way of life to be one of consistent obedience, just as his had been. The writer of Kings wrote of David, “David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Ki 15:5). Solomon had no problem knowing what God wanted him to do; the law contained statutes, commandments, rules, and testimonies. House distinguishes among these by saying that statutes and commandments refer to specific instructions while rules and testimonies refer to the case laws and rules for sacrifices.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the exact meaning of these words, there is a sense of totality here; the **entire** law must be kept.

Obedience brings blessing, and David mentioned two blessings to Solomon: prosperity and a confirmed promise. Prosperity means to be successful in an endeavor.<sup>10</sup> Joshua promised success to the children of Israel if they would obey the Lord (Jos 1:7-8), and David (1 Sa 18:5, 14) and Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:7) found success when the Lord was with them. If Solomon obeyed, not only would he have prosperity, but he would also find that God would establish his word. The idea is that Solomon would see God confirm his promise to keep a man on the throne so long as they obeyed.

5 “Moreover, you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed, avenging in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist and on the sandals on his feet. 6 Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace. 7 But deal loyally with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from Absalom your brother. 8 And there is also with you Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, saying, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ 9 Now therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.”

At this point, the text takes a puzzling turn. One moment David counseled obedience to God, the next the dispensing of justice, including the killing of men. How do these two

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<sup>7</sup> Brown, 1036.

<sup>8</sup> Harris, 276.

<sup>9</sup> House, 96.

<sup>10</sup> Swanson, DBLH 8505.

paragraphs, which are connected with a coordinating conjunction (moreover), relate to each other? Is David spiritual on one moment and politically ruthless the next? There are many and differing opinions from scholars, but I think the dialogues at the times of judgment are the key to understanding David's advice. God had made a promise to David. While obedience was required to keep a man on the throne, there was also an unconditional aspect to it. God said to David through Samuel, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sa 7:16). So those who worked to establish this kingdom, like Nathan and Bathsheeba (1 Ki 1:11-27) worked **with** God, but those who worked to destabilize this kingdom worked **against** God. Retribution wasn't given simply because it was deserved (and it was) or because it was politically expedient (though it was), it was given because it accomplished the stated plan of God. So obedience to the Law and justice work together to establish the kingdom and bring about God's plan.

The murders of Joab are found in 2 Sa 3:22-30 (for Abner) and 2 Sa 20:4-10 (for Amasa). Barzillai provided for David when he fled from Absalom (2 Sa 17:27-29). Shimei, a member of Saul's family, cursed David (2 Sa 16:5-14) and later apologized (2 Sa 19:16-23).

Although David gave instructions for reward and punishment, the author chose to focus on punishment. We don't know if Solomon rewarded Barzillai, but we do know he punished Joab and Shimei as well as Adonijah and Abiathar.

10 Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. 11 And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years. He reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. 12 So Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.

Here is a fairly standard death formula, something that was given for each of kings when they died. They include things like a summary statement, the length of reign, a burial location, and a successor (1 Ki 11:41-43, 14:19-20, 14:29-31, etc.).

"David's death marks the end of the most glamorous and momentous reign in Israel's history. This great character, second only to Moses in importance in the Old Testament, is buried in the capital city he himself built. Most importantly for 1, 2 Kings, he has placed Solomon on the throne, 'and his rule was firmly established.' The promises the Lord made to David in 2 Samuel 7 are beginning to come true."<sup>11</sup>

At this point, the crisis of the story has been reached, though it doesn't sound like much of a crisis. What will Solomon do? Will he take his father's advice? Will he pursue the Lord with his whole heart? (More on that in 1 Ki 3.) Will he give retribution to those who worked against the kingdom?

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<sup>11</sup> House, 98.

13 Then Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. And she said, "Do you come peacefully?" He said, "Peacefully." 14 Then he said, "I have something to say to you." She said, "Speak." 15 He said, "You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel fully expected me to reign. However, the kingdom has turned about and become my brother's, for it was his from the Lord. 16 And now I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me." She said to him, "Speak." 17 And he said, "Please ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife." 18 Bathsheba said, "Very well; I will speak for you to the king."

David had not mentioned Adonijah in his list of men to receive justice (1 Ki 2:5-9). Why not? First, he didn't really need to; the previous story (1 Ki 1) gave plenty of reason for Solomon to keep an eye on his older brother, and Solomon had already warned Adonijah to be on his best behavior (1 Ki 1:52). Second, David wasn't very good at disciplining his own sons, a fact that contributed to both Absalom's and Adonijah's bad behavior (1 Ki 1:6).

Adonijah asked for Abishag to be his wife. Why did he ask for her? Adonijah still desired to be king, and taking Abishag to be his wife was a subtle way to pursue the throne; sleeping with the former king's concubines was a visual way to claim the throne. Once again we find a parallel to the actions of his brother; Absalom slept with David's concubines after he had taken Jerusalem (2 Sa 16:20-23). Perhaps Abishag wasn't technically a concubine, since David had not had sex with her, but she would have still been in that general category.

Some have suggested that Adonijah's request was innocent; he was merely attracted to a very beautiful woman. This seems unlikely,<sup>12</sup> but if that was his only motivation, then the text is not highlighting Adonijah's continued ambition but his incredible stupidity.<sup>13</sup> Only a fool would pursue a course of action that might be interpreted as trying to steal a king's throne. Even if Adonijah's only being stupid, David's choice of a successor has been validated.

Bathsheba agreed to go along with Adonijah's request. Why? Some have suggested she was totally naïve and didn't understand what Adonijah was doing. Others have suggested she was shrewd and went along because she knew Solomon would exterminate him, thus removing a threat to the kingdom. Although based upon her actions in the previous story I suspect the later to be true,<sup>14</sup> this question is never resolved in the text. Whatever the reason for Bathsheba's response, it was not important enough to the main idea of the story for the author to explain it to us.

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<sup>12</sup> And it's certainly not how Solomon interpreted it; see 2 Ki 2:22.

<sup>13</sup> Davis, 29.

<sup>14</sup> As does House who says, "It is evident that she understands the nature of Adonijah's request and prudently warns her son of his rival's inept power play" (100).

19 So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him on behalf of Adonijah. And the king rose to meet her and bowed down to her. Then he sat on his throne and had a seat brought for the king's mother, and she sat on his right. 20 Then she said, "I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me." And the king said to her, "Make your request, my mother, for I will not refuse you." 21 She said, "Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah your brother as his wife." 22 King Solomon answered his mother, "And why do you ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom also, for he is my older brother, and on his side are Abiathar the priest and Joab the son of Zeruiah." 23 Then King Solomon swore by the Lord, saying, "God do so to me and more also if this word does not cost Adonijah his life! 24 Now therefore as the Lord lives, who has established me and placed me on the throne of David my father, and who has made me a house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death today." 25 So King Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and he struck him down, and he died.

Solomon certainly interpreted Adonijah's request as an attempt to regain the throne, which violated the condition of being a worthy man (1 Ki 1:52). For this (and the previous) attempt to overthrow what God has promised and established, Solomon had Adonijah executed. Crisis #1 had now been resolved.

Upon hearing Adonijah's request, Solomon immediately suspected that Abiathar and Joab were still involved in overthrowing the kingdom,<sup>15</sup> which leads to the two following paragraphs.

26 And to Abiathar the priest the king said, "Go to Anathoth, to your estate, for you deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death, because you carried the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because you shared in all my father's affliction." 27 So Solomon expelled Abiathar from being priest to the Lord, thus fulfilling the word of the Lord that he had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.

We have no information on what Abiathar had been doing since the attempted coup. Perhaps he had counseled Adonijah to keep after the throne; perhaps he had been behaving perfectly. Either way his part in supporting Adonijah was enough to be worthy of death, and now that Solomon was suspicious of him (1 Ki 2:22), Solomon acted. Because of his past association with David, Abiathar was merely removed from office and exiled to his estate in Anathoth.<sup>16</sup> Unlike Adonijah and Joab, he did not have additional actions that also warranted his death. Crisis #2 had now been resolved.

Solomon was thinking in terms of establishing the throne, but the writer of Kings saw the bigger picture. Solomon's actions were fulfillment of the prophecy Samuel spoke

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<sup>15</sup> House, 99.

<sup>16</sup> This site was 3.5 miles northeast of Jerusalem (DeVries, 38).

against Eli for failing to discipline his sons (1 Sa 2:31-34). Why did the writer bring this up? He was reminding his readers that God always keeps his promises, including those given prophetically, even if it takes multiple generations to fulfill.

28 When the news came to Joab—for Joab had supported Adonijah although he had not supported Absalom—Joab fled to the tent of the Lord and caught hold of the horns of the altar. 29 And when it was told King Solomon, “Joab has fled to the tent of the Lord, and behold, he is beside the altar,” Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, “Go, strike him down.” 30 So Benaiah came to the tent of the Lord and said to him, “The king commands, ‘Come out.’ ” But he said, “No, I will die here.” Then Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, “Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me.” 31 The king replied to him, “Do as he has said, strike him down and bury him, and thus take away from me and from my father’s house the guilt for the blood that Joab shed without cause. 32 The Lord will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and killed with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself, Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. 33 So shall their blood come back on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever. But for David and for his descendants and for his house and for his throne there shall be peace from the Lord forevermore.” 34 Then Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and struck him down and put him to death. And he was buried in his own house in the wilderness. 35 The king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada over the army in place of Joab, and the king put Zadok the priest in the place of Abiathar.

The event is connected to the previous two paragraphs; when news that Adonijah had been killed and Abiathar had been exiled came to Joab, he knew he was next. Knowing that Solomon had spared Adonijah’s life when he had grabbed the horns of the altar (1 Ki 1:51), Joab did the same. When Benaiah commanded Joab to come out, he refused, expecting that Benaiah was a pious man and would not violate the sanctity of the tabernacle; ironically, Joab himself didn’t seem to have any such qualms. But God had already anticipated such an event, and Solomon knew what the Mosaic Law said: “If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die” (Ge 21:14).

Why did Solomon order the death of Joab? He had been involved in Adonijah’s plot—and Solomon suspected he was at it again—which was sufficient cause to have him executed. But the reason Solomon gave (and David as well, see 1 Ki 2:5) was that the guilt for shedding innocent blood should be on Joab’s head, not the head of the Davidic dynasty. This concept of blood guilt is not new; we saw it with the very first murder. Cain killed his brother and God said, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground” (Ge 4:10). We also saw it in 2 Sa 21:1-14 when David took the throne. Saul had murdered some Gibeonites, and this blood guilt had caused a famine for three years. Both David and Solomon knew that divine retribution for Joab’s actions could fall

upon Solomon and/or his kingdom; Solomon did not want this to happen, so he executed Joab. Crisis #3 had now been resolved.

If blood guilt was such a big deal, why didn't David kill Joab himself? Why did he leave this task for his son? This is perhaps the most difficult question in the story. Perhaps David was being politically wise, keeping a great general and a handy strong man around, but failing to completely trust God for his security. Perhaps he was as poor at disciplining his friends as he was his sons. The writer does not inform his readers of David's reasoning in this matter, but he does remind them that the shedding of innocent blood is wrong and judgment for sin comes, whether sooner or later.

36 Then the king sent and summoned Shimei and said to him, "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and dwell there, and do not go out from there to any place whatever. 37 For on the day you go out and cross the brook Kidron, know for certain that you shall die. Your blood shall be on your own head." 38 And Shimei said to the king, "What you say is good; as my lord the king has said, so will your servant do." So Shimei lived in Jerusalem many days.

39 But it happened at the end of three years that two of Shimei's servants ran away to Achish, son of Maacah, king of Gath. And when it was told Shimei, "Behold, your servants are in Gath," 40 Shimei arose and saddled a donkey and went to Gath to Achish to seek his servants. Shimei went and brought his servants from Gath. 41 And when Solomon was told that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and returned, 42 the king sent and summoned Shimei and said to him, "Did I not make you swear by the Lord and solemnly warn you, saying, 'Know for certain that on the day you go out and go to any place whatever, you shall die'? And you said to me, 'What you say is good; I will obey.' 43 Why then have you not kept your oath to the Lord and the commandment with which I commanded you?" 44 The king also said to Shimei, "You know in your own heart all the harm that you did to David my father. So the Lord will bring back your harm on your own head. 45 But King Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the Lord forever." 46 Then the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and he went out and struck him down, and he died.

Shimei's original crime, the cursing of God's anointed king (2 Sa 16:5-8) was an offense worthy of death. Although Abishai desired to carry out his execution immediately, David did not let him. But Shimei's opposition to God's plan was not forgotten, and Solomon restricted his travel, perhaps to keep an eye on him and prevent him from starting an anti-Davidic movement. When Shimei violated the terms, he was executed. Solomon's reasoning was simple: Those who bring harm to God's plan bring harm back on themselves. The final crisis, crisis #4, had now been resolved.

So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

This statement wraps up the throne narratives (1 Ki 1 & 2); despite the actions of Adonijah and the others, God's plan was still on track.

How do we summarize this chapter? Is it a "fairly sordid story of power-politics thinly disguised as a morality tale?"<sup>17</sup> Is it a story that "has no hint of a motivating divine revelation [where] God's will is quite nonoperative [and God] is not directing Israel's destiny?"<sup>18</sup> I think not. I think the original readers of the book of Kings would have seen a repeated theme in each of the four resolutions. Those who oppose God's plan receive judgment from God (perhaps through his agents), though sometimes judgment is delayed. It should have been easy for the readers to apply this to their own condition as exiles in Babylon. The nations of Israel and Judah had not consistently obeyed God and kept the Mosaic Law, thus they were judged (through his agents, the Assyrians and Babylonians), though their judgment had been delayed for many generations.

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<sup>17</sup> Provan, 40.

<sup>18</sup> DeVries, 43.

## Three Levels of History

1. Personal history – This is a story of a king dispensing judgment to those who have caused problems for his house.
2. National History – This is a story about the formation of the Davidic dynasty.
3. Redemptive History – This is a story about God judging those who attempted to thwart his plan and his promise.

## 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 tend to do what we want and pursue what we desire, regardless of whether it is what God wants and desires.
2. What does this text teach us about God? How does it reveal God's grace to meet our need? God won't let us thwart his will or his promises; if we need to be punished and corrected, then he will do so.

## Outline

This outline is based upon the scenes of the story:

1. David charged Solomon to obey God and dispense judgment (1 Ki 2:1-12).
2. Solomon dispensed judgment to:
  - a. Adonijah (1 Ki 2:13-25).
  - b. Abiathar (1 Ki 2:26-27).
  - c. Joab (1 Ki 2:28-35).
  - d. Shimei (1 Ki 2:36-46).

## Central Truth of the Story

The author of Kings wrote 1 Kings 1 in order to illustrate to exilic Jews that God always judges those who attempt to thwart his plans, even though judgment may be delayed.

## Teaching Outline

God always accomplishes his plans, and God wants this church to know that no one can thwart him. In 1 Kings 2 we are going to see 2 situations where God accomplishes his plans.

1. God's plans are accomplished when people obey him (1 Ki 2:1-4).
2. God's plans are accomplished when people oppose him, even if:
  - a. They are royal (1 Ki 2:13-25).

- b. They are religious (1 Ki 2:26-27).
- c. They are violent (1 Ki 2:28-35).
- d. They are vulgar (1 Ki 2:36-46).

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