

1 Kings 1:1-27

The question of the succession has dominated the closing chapters of 2 Samuel. Who is to succeed King David? Back in 2 Samuel 7 Nathan conveyed the Lord's promise to David. He would place one of his descendants on the throne and establish his kingdom for ever. But since that moment 'the sword' has been active in David's family. Amnon his eldest son has been murdered by Absalom the third in line. He in turn has been killed in battle. (we have to presume that Chileab his second son is also dead).

The chapter opens with a pathetic picture of Israel's monarch. The King is a very old man whose preoccupation is keeping himself warm. His world has become extremely small. Its composed of his attendants who fuss over his bed clothes and a pretty girl appointed to wait on him. The king is unaware the world beyond his bedroom. We need a new king.

Attention now turns to Adonijah, David's eldest surviving son. His strategy is ominous. *Now Adonijah put himself forward and said I will be king. (5)* This stands in contrast to David's approach to the throne. He refused to promote himself choosing rather to wait God's time. *Adonijah got chariots and horses ready with fifty men to run ahead of him. (5)* This was Absalom's approach (2 Sam 15:1) and is set to end in the same way that his power grab ended.

Once again we see people divide around the 'new king'. Joab and Abiathar give him their support while Zadok, Benaiah and Nathan keep their distance. As with Absalom these become critical choices. Later in the Bible the descendants of these people will reject the true Son of David in favour of Caesar. *Shall I crucify your king? Pilate asked. We have no king but Caesar, the chief priests answered. (John 19:15)*. It will prove to be a decision with terrible consequences for them.

It is at this point in the story that Nathan takes command. He directs Bathsheba in what she must do and he follows her into the Kings presence laying out before David the events that have taken place. His intervention will energise the old King into action.

- Give thanks that in King Jesus we have one who is always accessible, fully informed and in complete control of all events.
- Notice how many of David's Psalm's counsel waiting. It regularly appears in Psalms 37 - 40 (37:7,9,34. 38:15. 39:7. 40:1 NIV sometimes translates wait as hope or look for). Are their situation we need to avoid fretting over or becoming angry with and simply quietly wait?
- Pray that God would raise up wise 'counsellors' like Nathan, who know how to act in difficult situations.

1 Kings 1: 28-53

Adonijah has sought to take advantage of the King's incapacity. The first part of the chapter makes David look like a patient not a king. The king occupies his bed rather than his throne. His eldest son makes his bid to fill the vacuum by means of canvassing support and hosting a lavish banquet.

But through Nathan's planning and skilful presentation, *(Have you my lord the king, declared that Adonijah shall be king after you... (24))* the gravity of the situation is impressed on the king and he is spurred into action.

Bathsheba and Solomon, because of the circumstances surrounding their entry into the royal circle, may have been viewed negatively by the palace insiders. Solomon is specifically mentioned as not being given an invite to Adonijah's party. (10) His birth though is described in different terms. *She gave birth to a son and they named him*

Solomon. The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah. (2 Sam 12:24,25). Once again we are reminded that God's ways are not our ways.

David confirms Solomon as his true successor. (32-40)

David uses all his skill to indicate that Solomon is the true king in waiting. He is placed on the King's mule, he is anointed by the true prophet and priest (Nathan and Zadok). And he takes his place on David's throne with David's blessing. (35) By contrast Adonijah's attempts to look regal seem inept. At news of these events in Gihon, Adonijah's party scatters and he himself is found clinging to the horns of the altar pleading for his life.

The gospel presents us with a choice over which king we are going to follow. Jesus is born in the time of King Herod and lives in a land ruled by the Roman Emperor. At his trial he will come face to face with both these powers. As Solomon's credentials are located in the will of his father so Jesus is confirmed as the true Messiah by his heavenly Father. At his baptism God's voice is heard to speak: *This is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased.* His Scripture fulfilling death advances his claim to be the long awaited Messiah. And the process is completed by his resurrection. Peter announced to the crowds on the day of Pentecost: *God has raised this Jesus to life.... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. (Acts 2:32,36)*

- The passage challenges us to be concerned about the next chapter. Are we committed to putting in place those things that will be important for the next generation but which we ourselves will not be part of?
- We need wisdom to know who to follow. It's easy to be taken in by the trappings of power. Can we learn to discern who has God's approval rather than popular appeal?
- Give thanks that God the Father has gone to great lengths to identify his Son as our true King.

1 Kings 2: 1-12

The last glimpse we get of David is this conversation he has with his son and successor Solomon. Here David advises Solomon on the matter of kingship.

Remember who the great king is. (2-4)

Deuteronomy 17 instructs the king *'to write for himself a copy of the law....he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees (Deut 17:18)* David urges Solomon to be strong and act like a man (2) He is not to be afraid to live submissively beneath God's constraints even although he is the king. No doubt as there were for David other voices will advocate a different approach. The young king is to hold firmly to God and his ways. This more than anything else will secure the stability and success of his kingdom.

Remember to settle the old scores. (5&6, 8&9)

David directs Solomon to kill Joab and Shimei. David moves from religious matters to politics. It could be argued that both of these men posed a threat to the fledgling kingdom. Joab had sided with Adonijah and Shimei belonged to the house of Saul. Yet it's dubious whether the Law of Moses would have directed Solomon to behave in this way.

The section ends with the statement: *So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David and his rule was firmly established. (12)* That is true politically. He will seem to be in a very stable place. Spiritually though the foundations set out in v2,3 will prove to be less secure.

- Where do we locate our security - in the ability to control our circumstances or in our commitment to God's word?
- What would be your top piece of advice that you would pass on to the next generation if you knew you were shortly to leave this world?

1 Kings 2:13-46

The second half of this chapter is punctuated with a series of executions. What are we to make of these events?

Adonijah enlists Bathsheba's help in securing Abishag as his wife. Is this more to do with power than love? Is Adonijah making a bid for the throne by this means? When Absalom sleeps with his father's concubines it is interpreted as an irreversible claim to the throne. (2 Sam 16:20-22) The truth is we can't be sure. Clearly though Solomon will interpret it in this way and it will cost Adonijah his life.

Dale Ralph Davis comments: *....even if Adonijah's request was not sinister it was stupid. Assuming Adonijah had a modicum of sense he would surely understand that Solomon could reasonably interpret his request as subversive.... If Adonijah wanted to live he had only to sit still (1:52,53). The same goes for Shimei (36-46)*

There are other judgment calls being made in this chapter. Were Joab and Abiathar complicit in the supposed plot? Joab for sure has innocent blood on his hands but his guilt in this matter is by no means conclusive. It may simply be a reminder that gratuitous violence has a way of catching up with people. As Jesus said, "all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matt 26:52). Abiathar is banished rather than executed. As the last in the line of the house of Eli, his removal completes the prophecy of 1 Samuel 2:27-36 and Zadok is revealed as the *faithful priest who will do according to what is in my heart and mind.* (1 Sam 2:35)

However much we may be troubled by the methods of *establishing the kingdom (46)* set out here we ought to be clear, God will ultimately remove all evil from his kingdom. (Read again 2 Thess 1:9,10) In the end what will matter is whether we have submitted to the rule of King Jesus.

- Pray for those who rule over us to be able to recognise and respond appropriately to evil.
- Give thanks that we live under the wise and gracious rule of King Jesus.
- Keep before yourself that there are serious consequences for all those who refuse to obey the gospel.

1 Kings 3: 1-15.

The name of Solomon is closely associated with wisdom. This chapter reveals the source of that wisdom. God meets Solomon at Gibeon and invites him to "*Ask for whatever you want me to give you.*" (5) Solomon asks God to give him a discerning heart to govern his people justly. (9) "This wisdom is a supernatural gift from God. It is not innate and it is not acquired by patient hard work, utilizing careful observation and self discipline" (ESV Study Bible) This is the wisdom that has its beginning in relating reverently and humbly to the Lord and his will. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.* (Psalm 111:10)

The chapter though also sounds a couple of warning notes. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 gives instructions to Israel's kings. *The king moreover must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told*

you, 'You are not to go back that way again. He must not take many wives or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. (16,17)

There are good reasons why God warns his people from seeking close relations with Egypt. Their influence will turn out to be wholly negative. The final act in Judah's decline comes about when they rebel against Babylon on the grounds that Egypt will rescue them. But Pharaoh's army don't show up. Here we find Solomon seeking an alliance with Egypt and securing it through marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. It may seem insignificant at this stage but it will become a deadly trend in Solomon's life.

God not only gives Solomon wisdom but he adds wealth and honour. (13) The Bible does not commend poverty nor does it regard wealth as inherently evil. Because God is the giver, it does not mean we are free to do as we please with the gift. Money is sometimes a blessing and sometimes a curse but it is always a test. Solomon would need to call on his God given wisdom to handle his God given wealth effectively and safely.

- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. David offers to teach us the fear of the Lord in Psalm 34. *Come my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (11)* Will we enlist as his pupils?
- Sin starts small in our lives. Perhaps we need to audit those trends that maybe developing at taking us in a certain direction.
- Wealth may be a gracious gift of God but it also constitutes a test. Ask God for wisdom to handle money wisely.

1 Kings 3:16-28

David addressed his son (2:9) as *'You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him'*. Chapter 2 does display a kind of wisdom. Solomon makes his kingdom secure by pretty ruthless means. Chapter 3 and this incident with the prostitutes reveals a different quality of wisdom. The new gift of wisdom that he has received from God allows him to govern more justly.

Solomon is appealed to by 2 prostitutes over the identity of a child who both claim as theirs. Proverbs warns the young from being seduced by persuasive words and the smooth talk of the adulteress. (7:21) *For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double edged sword. (5:3)* Solomon's wisdom though allows him to see through the words spoken by the two women.

The King called for a sword (24) and in the light of chapter 2 the possibility of blood being spilled remains high. But this time Solomon's sword results in justice been done. And not only being done but being seen to be done. *When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given they held the king in awe, because they saw he had wisdom from God to administer justice. (28)*

- God's wisdom is intensely practical. *Do not forsake wisdom and she will protect you; love her and she will watch over you. (Prov 4:6)* Wisdom will enable us to see through the dangerous lies of our culture. It is worth pursuing.
- *But the wisdom that comes down from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3:17)* Give thanks for the wisdom evident in the life of the Lord Jesus, the ultimate Son of David.

1 Kings 4: 1-34

It's possible to read these verses as merely interesting historical detail about a bygone age. Their relevance for us is guaranteed by the significance of this king. God had promised David that he would establish the kingdom of his offspring. And in God's vocabulary establishing means doing so for good. (see 2 Sam 7). In the rule of Solomon we are given a preview of the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ. It lets you see the kind of images that were in people's minds when they heard Jesus say: "*The time has come, the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*" (Mark 1:15) It clearly was very good news.

This chapter offers us a glimpse of life in the Kingdom of God.

V20 provides a summary statement. *The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy.*

Organisation is key to the success of the project. V1-19 introduces us to the main players and the system put in place to ensure the royal household was well supplied (7) But significantly this is not a system designed for the benefit of the rich and powerful. The summary verse (20) indicates that despite the vast numbers people were well supplied. They ate, they drank they were happy.

V21 & 24 describes the extent of his rule. These boundaries go as far as the land described by God to Abraham. It is because of the King's dominion over his neighbours that the security of Israel is highlighted. *During Solomon's life time Judah and Israel....lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under the own fig-tree. (25)*

Reading this should whet our appetite for the visible arrival of God's kingdom: rich provision, deep joy and ultimate security are promised under the government of the Lord Jesus Christ. God provides this preview to sustain us as we wait for that outcome. Revelation describes it in these words: *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever. (Rev 11:15)*

- Israel has come a long way in a short time. Saul ended his days in defeat and despair (1 Sam 30,31) God is able to transform situations through leaders who 'seek first his kingdom and his righteousness' There is a lesson there for all of us.
- Good organisation is closely tied to Gods blessing. Playing our part faithfully in God's design matters.
- In Christ the Kingdom has '*come near*'. Our hope is strengthened as we observe the benefits of the kingdom beginning to be felt through the ministry of Jesus. Look out for his provision, joy and security as you read the New Testament.

1 Kings 5: 1-18

Chapter 4 ends by describing the breadth of Solomon's mind. He observed and commented on botany and biology. He attracted a vast audience from the nations who came to listen to his wisdom. There is a great deal going on as Solomon orders and directs the affairs of this vast region. But he does not lose sight of the main thing.

When Hiram king of Tyre sends his envoys to pass on his greetings Solomon has one thing in mind. "*I intend to build a temple for the name of the Lord my God.....*" (5) And although Hiram is one of the kingdoms referred to in 4:21 (*Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River Euphrates to the land of the Philistines.... These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life*) the King treats Hiram's approach with grace. There are lessons here about how we handle power and how we treat people who occupy a smaller place than us. V6 speaks of co-operation and remuneration. The implication of v12 is behind the cordial relations that were established between Israel and

Tyre stood the wisdom of God. Again we are reminded *The wisdom that comes from heaven is peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy (James 3:17)*

The significance of this building is vouched for not only by the vast work force but by the materials. *At the kings command they removed from the quarry large blocks of high-grade stone to provide a foundation of dressed stone for the temple. (17)* High grade dressed stone would normally be reserved for the facing of important buildings. Here its used on areas that will be buried beneath the ground such is the dignity and importance of the one who will come to dwell there.

- What would we place at the top of our 'to do' list?
- Does Solomon have things to teach us in the way we treat other people, particularly those who might be in our debt?
- The Church of Jesus Christ consists of his people. Does it command 'the best' from us as it did from Solomon?

1 Kings 6: 1-38

The time reference in v1 links the building of the temple to the departure from Egypt. Although they have occupied the land of Canaan for some time, the move from the Tabernacle (tent of meeting) to the Temple is the final act in the life of wandering. There is to be a permanence about Israel's presence in the land.

This is no ordinary building site. *No hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built. (7)* The builders conduct themselves with reverence, they are engaged in a holy task. Our significant religious building are elevated by the great occasions that take place in them. Perhaps a royal wedding or a state funeral. What will mark this temple as special is not that the King will 'go to church' there but rather that there *the Lord will live among the Israelites and not abandon them. (13)*

The interior is to be decorated with gourds and palm trees and open flowers. It is a reminder of Eden the garden environment where the Lord walked with his people in the cool of the day. Those things are once again being held out to Israel. But the cherubim carved on the doors of the Most Holy Place reminded the people that their sin made God dangerous. The way in to Gods presence has not yet been revealed.

The condition attached to God dwelling among his people is set out in v12,13. Follow my decrees and keep my statutes is the requirement. Sometime later Jeremiah rebuked this nation for treating the building a bit like a lucky charm. *Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the Lord.... if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm then I will let you live in this place. (Jer 7:4-7)*

- Ask God to impress upon you what a remarkable thing it is that we really do have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place.
- Give thanks that we do so by the blood of Jesus. Here is a sacrifice that is able to purge our lives of sin's deepest stains and enable us to stand unblemished in God's presence.
- Those who are forgiven much love much. Love for God means that we will enthusiastically keep his commandments.

1 Kings 7:1-12

It took Solomon thirteen years however to complete the construction of his palace. (1) A lot is made of the time Solomon gave to the building of his palace in comparison to the

temple. Emphasis is also placed on the work still to be completed on the interior of God's house. (13-51). It's tempting, knowing the end of the story as we do, to always be looking for the King's flaws. The simple fact is there is no hint of divine disapproval throughout the next 4 chapters (7-10). The temple is completed. The Lord takes up residence. Solomon dedicates the building. The Queen of Sheba is overwhelmed by what she encounters in Solomon's kingdom. I think most of us would be fairly content with ourselves if we left that kind of legacy.

The simple fact may be that Solomon took 13 years to complete his palace because it was bigger. It comprised 4 buildings. The so called Hall of Pillars (6); the House of the Forest of Lebanon (2-5); the King's house (8a) and the house of his wife, Pharaoh's daughter. (8b). The House of the Forest of Lebanon served as an armoury. Solomon's place of judgment was to the east of the Hall of Pillars.

- *Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (Matt 7:3)* Which projects have first claim on our time?
- Solomon finished the work he began. Jesus assessed a church in Asia Minor with the words, *"I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God"* (Rev 3:2) Do we as a church need to audit some of our responsibilities?