

1 Kings 2:1

David's Charge and the Clearing of the Kingdom

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 2:1–25

“Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth. Be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man, and keep charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies. As it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself, that the Lord may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth, with all their heart, and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee, said he, a man on the throne of Israel.

Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet. Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoary head go down to the grave in peace, but show kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table. For so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother.

And behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim. But he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I swore to him by the Lord, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. Now therefore hold him not guiltless, for thou art a wise man, and knowest

what thou oughtest to do unto him. But his hoary head bring thou down to the grave with blood.

So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David. And the days of David that reigned over Israel were forty years — seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem. Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was established greatly.

And Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, and she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably. He said, Moreover I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on. And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign. Howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's, for it was his from the Lord. Now I ask one petition of thee, deny me not. And she said unto him, Say on.

And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king, for he will not say thee nay, that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife. And Bathsheba said, Well, I will speak for thee unto the king. Bathsheba therefore went unto King Solomon to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right hand. Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee, I pray thee, say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother, for I will not say thee nay.

And she said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah thy brother to wife. And King Solomon answered and said unto his mother, And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom also, for he is mine elder brother, even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah. Then King Solomon swore by the Lord, saying, God do so to me also, if Adonijah hath not spoken this word against his own life. Now therefore, as the Lord liveth, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father,

and who hath made me an house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day. And King Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and he fell upon him, that he died.”

David and Solomon as Types of Christ

It has been observed that it requires both David and Solomon as types to set forth the coming and reign of the Lord Jesus. David's coming is connected with subduing all the enemies and gathering all the materials for the temple; he then transfers the kingdom to Solomon, the prince of peace. Solomon, in our chapter, is on the throne and ready to clear the kingdom of all offenses — which is what the Lord Jesus will do, according to the prophets, when he takes the throne. He takes the throne after coming from heaven and executing judgment upon the overt enemies, and then there are his sessional judgments, clearing the land of all iniquity.

So it was in these books that we wanted to consider the first three chapters of Kings. Chapter 2 gives us the clearing; chapter 1 shows how the kingdom was brought in; and when we reach chapter 3 we find Solomon allying himself with Pharaoh and decline setting in. Even though these are glorious types, there were personal failures in both men, from which much that is moral and instructive for the life of a believer may be learned.

It is almost, one believes, deliberate in the Scriptures that it should take two — David and Solomon together — to set forth the glory of the Lord Jesus as the king of his earthly kingdom. You will not find in any one individual a perfect image of him; there is much of Christ to be seen in many, but none sets him forth in fullness. Even in this matter of his coming kingdom, two are needed. And notice how the two of them are brought into connection: David charged Solomon. There is a unity in the two types, a oneness in what was before them, even as they differ in the character of their kingdoms.

David could not build the temple because he was a man of war. Solomon was the man of peace and could build it. It would not be appropriate for any mere man to hold both of those things together, but Christ can. There are things the Lord Jesus could do rightly that it would have been wrong for any other man to do. The leper said, “If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,” and then the Lord touched him — whereas a mere man was not supposed to do that, because the leprosy spreads. But in the case of the Lord Jesus, it was the cleanness that spread. So David had, as it were, blood on his hands from all his military occupation. “Jehovah is a man of war” — and this will be demonstrated in Christ. After all the enemies are subdued, then comes the final great feast of tabernacles and the inauguration of the kingdom. That will be Solomon’s character. Recall how Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, got upon his knees and raised his arms to heaven in prayer and praise — typifying the Lord Jesus as the Melchizedek priest upon his throne.

Kings and Chronicles — Two Perspectives

There is a characteristic difference between these three chapters in 1 Kings and the corresponding portions in 1 Chronicles. It is like reading Matthew’s gospel and then Mark’s — all four are about the Lord Jesus, but each from a different angle. In 1 Chronicles 29, the corresponding portion to what we read here in 1 Kings 2 is essentially one line: “And all Israel obeyed him.” Evidently, the various cases we have just read in 1 Kings are not worthy of mention from that viewpoint. Just as in the faith chapter, Hebrews 11, there is no mention of any of the faults of the saints.

While 1 Chronicles gives only so much as is necessary to complete a particular story, it has the character of omitting all the things we find in 1 Kings. That is a characteristic difference in the treatment of the subject. In 1 Kings it is man and his responsibility, and therefore his faults come out. In Chronicles, it is more of God’s purpose. In 1 Kings we get very strongly God’s governmental dealings

with what is wrong. It is man's responsibility and God's government that are under the focus of the Spirit in writing these Scriptures for us — that we should learn those things. We see this illustrated in the matter of David's sin with Bathsheba and the deaths of his sons: in Chronicles there is no mention of them. Imagine telling the story of David and leaving out Absalom and his rebellion — and yet Chronicles does.

The Clearing of the Kingdom

All through chapter 2, the clearing of the kingdom from the wickedness that had preceded, in these various men, is in view — to rid the land of its blood guiltiness. This is a type of the Lord Jesus as the coming Prince of Peace, ruling upon his throne in the re-established kingdom. God is not content to leave things the way that man in his sin has allowed them to become; there must be a clearing before the kingdom is set up as it should be.

The Lord himself said in Matthew 13:41 that “the Son of Man shall send his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all offenses, those that practise lawlessness” — that is at the end of the age, as Darby translates it. We have another view in Matthew 25, where the Lord gathers all the nations before him. This shows that there will be a complex of things that go on when his power is first introduced into the earth and everything is brought under the righteousness of his throne. Right now grace reigns through righteousness; but then righteousness shall reign. And in the eternal state righteousness shall dwell, because there will be no opposition to it. When righteousness reigns, sin may rear up, but it will be executed and dealt with promptly. At the beginning there will be a great clearing, bringing everything into adjustment to that holy throne.

The Five Charges of David to Solomon

David's charge in verse 3 is a most comprehensive one. Five things are mentioned: his ways, his statutes, his commandments, his judgments, and his testimonies. Psalm 103:7 says that God made known his ways unto Moses — Moses was in on the secret of God's ways, while the children of Israel saw only his acts. His statutes give the fixity of what he says; his commandments denote his authority; his judgments are righteous; and his testimonies testify of himself, his character, and who he is.

It is also worth pausing over verse 4, where David expresses confidence in the promise of God: "that the Lord may continue his word which he spake concerning me." This was something special that David could count on — God had made a promise to him. But the sad history that follows shows it was not kept by the children of David. It was God's intention that a man should occupy the throne of David. But first the thing is presented to man in his responsibility, his failure is proved, and then ultimately it is taken up by Christ and made good to God's glory. That pattern is warp and woof of all Scripture. That is why we have: "the first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven." God brought in the Mosaic covenant to show the children of Israel, who were samples of the first man in the flesh, that they could not obtain the promises by meriting them. That has been proved. Now things are in suspension while God brings out a heavenly work; and when he has finished with that, he will make good the promises sovereignly, in grace, undeserved by Israel: "the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob — and so all Israel shall be saved."

Now, the wisdom of Solomon comes out later. But in verse 9 a little detail is worth noting: "thou art a wise man." If I remember correctly, Solomon prayed for wisdom after this point — that is the angle of Chronicles. Solomon's wisdom was from God. So the viewpoint of 1 Kings comes through even in that phrase: it is wisdom as belonging to the man himself, while Chronicles would say it was given to him from above.

The Word of God and Its Critics

It is a wonderful thing to get help on these subjects, not least because of all the critics with their carping about the Word of God — wanting to adjust everything, theorizing about various writers and redactors. The most amazing thing about a concoction like that is that it cannot account for the wonderful things displayed in God's Word. If there is one controlling mind — the mind of the Spirit, who has Christ before him and God's glory in Christ — then these things are laid out in this wonderful and instructive way. The claim that 1 Kings was edited by a different editor from 1 Chronicles, and that this explains the difference, is laughable. There is no faith in God who gave us his Word.

Imagine Solomon arguing back to David: “I would like to keep the charge of the Lord, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes and commandments and judgments and testimonies as it is written in the law of Moses — but I'm not sure whether it was Moses or one of two or three editors, and I'm not sure which of them I should mostly listen to.” What an unbelieving response to God's Word. It is a relief to turn from the talk of editors to the pure Word of the Scriptures — and sometimes, perhaps, to learn from them.

Joab — Blood on the Girdle

Zeruiah was very likely a sister of David, which would make Joab his nephew. But relatives are not to be spared when something is due to God. “Blood runs thicker than water” may hold for man in the flesh; it is not suitable talk for a Christian, for what is due the Lord must come first in all considerations.

Joab was a shrewd politician. He did not fall away with Absalom's rebellion, but he did with Adonijah's, and that revealed him. He had wanted to be captain of the army; when David promised that whoever took the citadel in Jerusalem would become captain, Joab sprung into action at precisely that moment. He was a calculating fellow who knew when to act and when not. He ingratiated himself

with Absalom through the woman of Tekoa, though that tended to backfire. He slew Abner and Amasa, shedding the blood of war in peace — he could not claim these were justly done in battle. He wanted to rid himself of potential competition, and he murdered them in cold blood. David never forgot the victims. It is a good thing our sins are forgiven and covered by the blood, for we have that same sinful nature as these men; it is only God who restrains.

David's charge about the blood on Joab's girdle is worth noticing. In Scripture, the girdle points to service. He put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins — his service was ruined and defiled by this act. And he put it upon his shoes that were on his feet — his walk was ruined and defiled. David was not in a position to execute the judgment; but the time had now come in the ways of God for the one upon the throne to take care of it.

Barzillai — They Came to Me

Beside all these judgments, David adds a lovely thing: “show kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table.” When David wanted Barzillai to come with him at the restoration of the kingdom, Barzillai sent Chimham his son. Now David says “the sons” — an expansion of blessing because of the faithfulness of that man. And so it will be too in the millennium: even in the midst of the clearing of the land, there is that other side of it — blessing remembered and expanded.

What had Barzillai brought to David when he fled into the wilderness because of Absalom? Beds, basins, earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, parched corn, beans, lentils, honey, butter, sheep, and cheese. What a list. But notice what it says in our chapter. It does not say, “for so they brought me provisions.” It says: “For so they came to me.” It was that they came to him. What the Lord will remember and reward is not the particular items on the list, but that you brought yourself to him. That is what David remembered: “they came to me.”

Shimei — Reserved for Justice

David had never been a vindictive man; he did not avenge personal insult. When Shimei cursed him and hurled stones at him on the road, and Abishai wanted to go and take off Shimei's head, David said to leave him alone — it may be that the Lord had sent him. That was one of David's finest moral hours, bowing to that and leaving the thing in the Lord's hands. But it does not mean that the guilt was cleared and put away — it was not. It would not have come up here if it had been.

Shimei was a man of the family of the house of Saul — Shimei the son of Gera. He had cursed David with a grievous curse; there was murder in his heart toward the Lord's anointed. The Scripture says, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." For all Shimei cared, he would have liked to see one of those stones land on David's head. When David looked like he was getting power again, Shimei was among the first to run down and ingratiate himself back into favor. David did not act against him; but David's word to Solomon was, "hold him not guiltless — for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him." Universalism is a fraud. Nobody gets away with things. As the Apostle Paul wrote, some men's sins go before and some follow after — and those that follow after are not going to be less certainly judged; it is only that the judgment comes after they leave this scene.

David's True Last Words

When David dies in verse 10, we might go away thinking we have read his last words. It would be worth remembering that is not the case. We must turn back to 2 Samuel 23, which begins with the remarkable expression: "Now these be the last words of David." And there is a great difference between what we read in 1 Kings and those real last words.

“And he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain; although my house be not so with God. Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.” — 2 Samuel 23:4–5

David is speaking of Christ — the one who will be as the light of the morning when he comes to take up his kingdom. And he says: “this is all my salvation.” He knew about his own house: “my house be not so with God.” David’s house declined and dwindled until the kingdom was lost. But his last words were directly about Christ.

This is all my salvation and all my desire.