1 Kings 2:12–26

Adonijah’s Petition and Solomon’s Wisdom

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 2:12–26

“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. Albeit the kingdom is turned, 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, and more also, if Adonijah

have 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.

And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth unto thine own fields, for thou art worthy of death. But I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou bearest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted. So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord, that he might fulfil the word of the Lord which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh."

David's Seven Years at Hebron

The language that David reigned for seven years at Hebron is worth pausing over. The name Hebron in Scripture means fellowship or association. It was from the Vale of Hebron that the father sent the son to see how his brethren were doing. And Hebron was the place that Caleb desired and took. The thought that Hebron was built seven years before Zion is a suggestive one: there was, so to speak, a perfect period of fellowship and association before coming to Zion — the Lord hidden, not yet come to it.

As soon as David was come from Hebron to Zion, the Philistines spread themselves out against him. The battle started at that point, and he defeated them, and then went on to defeat the others. So the Lord, when he comes to Zion, will meet up with the enemies and deal with them. Then, once everything is established in peace, Solomon sits upon the throne of his father. The communion with God expressed by the place Hebron is put first — because one must walk with God in order to be truly used of him to fulfil his will and purpose. One must not leap over the prerequisite of walking with God in the interest of

accomplishing some great work. No doubt there were lessons for David during those seven years at Hebron.

Chapter 2 — The Cleansing of the Kingdom

Chapter 2 is really the chapter for Solomon to take away blood guiltiness from the kingdom. We get something here about the Lord coming and taking out of his kingdom all things that offend. Adonijah was not dealt with in chapter 1; that was left for this chapter, which stands between the bringing in of the kingdom and the decline that begins in chapter 3. Chapter 2 is the cleansing of the kingdom from these various things that offend.

Here comes Adonijah a second time, provoking the matter — and Solomon takes it in the most serious possible way. The cleansing of the priesthood follows, and then there remained Joab. Solomon did not summon Joab; Joab heard about what had happened and ran to the tabernacle to lay hold of the horns of the altar. The man was shrewd — a sharp politician. As soon as things began moving, he knew he was going to be taken too. What Adonijah did here was really bound up with that whole conspiracy, and it swept them all in one stroke.

The Three Conspirators — A Type of Revelation

Shimei is a fourth case dealt with in this chapter, but he is separate from the other three. The three are: Adonijah, the ambition and power behind the conspiracy; Abiathar, the religious head and leader; and Joab, the commander-in-chief of the armies of Israel. It is striking to think of the book of Revelation in connection with these three: the dragon as the power behind all, with a religious head, and a military head. The antichrist in Jerusalem, and the beast of the revived Roman Empire as head of western power. No doubt there are similarities to consider as we look at these ancient things and realize that there are prophecies in Scripture yet to be fulfilled upon this world.

Adonijah had been given ample space to repent, and he did not. Had he truly repented, he would not have done what he did here. That he came at all showed he was unrepentant of the conspiracy to take the kingdom. And Joab figured it out for himself without being told. As soon as the news broke, he knew — that is why he fled to the tabernacle. He was sharper than Adonijah himself in reading the situation. But the judgment falls on all who were comprehended in the conspiracy.

Adonijah's Petition — The Flesh and Its Claims

Adonijah came to Bathsheba and said, "Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine." But Bathsheba did not know this, for David had told her from way back that her son Solomon was to reign. To say the kingdom "was mine" was in the nature of a claim in the flesh — he was the oldest living brother. He was simply following himself; he had not judged himself at all. That same spirit of rebellion was showing itself again.

Then comes the pious statement: "Howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's, for it was his from the Lord." There is truth in that, but without a heart behind it. The mouth can speak something true without it coming from the heart at all. It is the first half of that verse that really came from the heart; the last half is just the lips — it sounds good and pious, but it does not mean anything. And it is significant that he mentioned Jehovah's name last. Had he been speaking the truth from his heart, he would have put that first: "Jehovah made Solomon king." Turning the whole verse upside down would have been a vast improvement.

Adonijah was a manipulative person. He rehearsed the situation to obtain a first "say on" from Bathsheba, and then a second, then finally the petition. It is how a manipulator works: asking questions the answer to which is yes, then springing the thing on you. There is nothing godly in this at all. And yet, on the other hand,

God allowed this so that the matter should break out into the open and Solomon could deal with it thoroughly. Sometimes things must finally come out before they can be dealt with. They can be working and working, and they have to come out, and then they can be laid hold of.

There are lessons in this portion for prayer. Petitions ought to be taken to God — that is where they belong. But it is a serious thing to contemplate the petitions that the flesh will dare to bring to God. It is a blessed thing when we can get on our knees and ask him things that we know he would be happy to hear. A heart like Adonijah's — so filled with self as its center and focus, without regard for what is due to the Lord Jesus — such a heart would receive the same kind of response to its petitions that Adonijah the son of Haggith did. One of the prerequisites for blessing through prayer is self-judgment. We ought to begin there.

Bathsheba — Discriminating Judgment and Intercession

It is interesting that Bathsheba asked, "Comest thou peaceably?" Even though Adonijah was not her own son, the alternative was at least a possibility in her mind. Yet she had not grasped the gravity of the whole thing. It is a nice thing to be gracious and accommodating, but there is also something called discriminating judgment — a faculty that needs to be in exercise all the time, especially with respect to matters that touch the person of Christ and his work. Here was a matter touching his throne, and there was not sufficient sensitivity to realize what was going on.

In this passage we have the clearest example in all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, of someone asking a petition of a mother to have the mother intercede with the one who can grant it. There was a little flattery too: "for he will not say thee nay." Adonijah had Bathsheba somewhat figured out, and he grossly miscalculated on Solomon. There is a parallel also with Herod's wife,

who manipulated King Herod through his daughter with one petition — it ended with John the Baptist's head on a platter. The Scripture's record of manipulating the king in this fashion is not, in either instance, a happy one. Manipulation always has the flesh as its object.

Bathsheba took the petition to Solomon with all its baggage, just as it had been presented to her. Notice what Solomon did: he never said nay to her — he kept his word — and yet justice fell anyway. No stroke fell upon Bathsheba because she asked a petition. He had said, "I will not say thee nay," and he kept those words in substance as well as in lip. That is a wisdom — as with the two women and the child.

Scripture Characterizes an Act by Its Tendency

When Solomon said to Bathsheba, "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" — he was seeing three men in this one request. Scripture characterizes an act by its tendency. We see the same principle in 1 Corinthians 8: "Why do you cause your brother to perish?" The brother does not necessarily perish, but that is the tendency of the act, and Scripture pronounces it accordingly. We see it in Matthew 5:32 as well: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery." It does not have to turn out that way, but that is the thrust of the act. Solomon brought all of this together and put it in bold relief. He saw the whole conspiracy comprehended in this one request.

It is also worth noticing the order of Solomon's words in verse 23 against the order of Adonijah's in verse 15. Adonijah put Jehovah's name last — the very last phrase in that long verse. But Solomon opens his mouth and begins with God: "God will do so to me and more also." He brings in God's name first.

Solomon’s Wisdom — God First

There is a certain character to the wisdom of Solomon, and there are lessons about wisdom in reading about him. This may be one of the smaller such lessons. Solomon’s wisdom was the kind of wisdom that mentions God’s name first instead of last. There is a certain fleshly wisdom that is expert in what is politically correct — networking, making connections, politicking. That was never Solomon’s kind of wisdom. Solomon’s wisdom put God first.

Now Anathoth in verse 26, where Abiathar’s fields were, was the very place where Doeg the Edomite slew so many priests of the house of Eli in the days of King Saul, until there was only one survivor. That one survivor was Abiathar. Solomon sent him back to the very place from which he had originally come. Doeg was a very unsavory character. He was at the tabernacle when David came and begged for the showbread and took away the sword of Goliath. He was detained before the Lord on that occasion — the one reason for such detention that the Scripture makes known is suspicion of leprosy. Perhaps that tells us something of his character. And yet the Lord used him, rather than an Israelite, to execute that sad judgment on the house of Eli. The priests were of his own people, and it was a very sad affair.

Solomon’s wisdom put God first instead of last.