

# ONE

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1 KINGS 1:1–2:46  
[1 CHRONICLES 29:22-30]

## *Sunset and Sunrise*

“A crisis isn’t what makes a person; a crisis shows what a person’s made of.” In one form or another, you find this statement in the writings of insightful thinkers from antiquity to the present. Another version is, “What life does to you depends on what life finds in you.” The same sun that hardens the clay melts the ice.

The kingdom of Israel was facing a crisis because King David was on his deathbed. In facing this crisis, different people responded in different ways.

### **1. Adonijah the opportunist (1 Kings 1:1-10)**

A real leader looks at a crisis and asks, “What can I do that will best help the people?” An opportunist looks at a crisis and asks, “How can I use this situation to promote myself and get what I want?” Opportunists usually show up uninvited, focus attention on themselves and end up making the crisis worse. Adonijah was that kind of person.

*The occasion (vv. 1-4).* Adonijah was David’s oldest living son and was probably thirty-five years old at this time. David’s firstborn, Amnon, was killed by Absalom; his second son, Kileab (or Daniel),

must have died young because there's no record of his life; and the third son, Absalom, was slain by Joab (1 Chron. 3:1-2). As David's eldest son, Adonijah felt that he deserved the throne. After all, his father was a sick man who would soon die, and it was important that there be a king on the throne of Israel. Like his older brother Absalom (2 Sam. 15:1-6), Adonijah seized his opportunity when David wasn't at his best and was bedfast. However, Adonijah underestimated the stamina and wisdom of the old warrior and ultimately paid for his pride with his life.

Abishag became a companion and nurse for David and was probably officially considered a concubine, so there was nothing immoral about their relationship. She will become a very important person in the drama after David's death (2:13-23). Adonijah made the mistake of thinking that his father was unable to function normally and therefore interfere with his plans, but he was wrong. Instead of being a sympathetic son, Adonijah decided to claim the throne for himself. If he won the support of his siblings, the government leaders, the priests, and the army, he could pull off a coup and become the next king.

*The traitors (vv. 5-7).* Following the example of his infamous brother Absalom (2 Sam. 15:7-12), Adonijah began to promote himself and generate popular support. Like Absalom, he was a handsome man who had been pampered by his father (v. 6; 2 Sam. 13-14), and the unthinking people joined his crusade. Wisely, Adonijah got the support of both the army and the priesthood by enlisting Joab the general and Abiathar the high priest. Both of these men had served David for years and had stood with him during his most difficult trials, but now they were turning against him. Yet Adonijah knew that the Lord had chosen Solomon to be Israel's next king (2:15), and Abiathar and Joab certainly understood this as well. When the Lord gave David His covenant (2 Sam. 7), He indicated that a future son would succeed him and build the temple (1 Chron. 22:8-10), and that son was Solomon (1 Chron. 28:4-7). Adonijah, Abiathar, and Joab were rebelling against the revealed will of God, forgetting that "[t]he counsel of the Lord stands forever" (Ps. 33:11, NKJV).

*The faithful (vv. 8-10).* Again, like his brother Absalom, Adonijah hosted a great feast (2 Sam. 15:7-12) and invited all his brothers

except Solomon (v. 26). He also ignored several other important leaders in the kingdom, including Zadok the high priest, Benaiah the leader of the king's personal guard, Nathan the prophet, and David's "mighty men" (2 Sam. 23).<sup>1</sup> This was a coronation feast and the guests were proclaiming Adonijah as king of Israel (v. 25). Perhaps some of them thought that the ailing King David had actually laid his hands on Adonijah and named him king. After all, Adonijah's brothers were at the feast, which suggested they made no claim to the throne. But surely the guests were aware of the absence of Solomon, Zadok, Benaiah, and Nathan. And did anyone ask when and where Nathan had anointed Adonijah, and if he had been anointed, why the event was so secret? The faithful servants of God and of David had been left out, an obvious clue that Adonijah had named himself as king without any authority from David or the Lord.

Often in Bible history it appears that "truth is fallen in the street, and equity [justice] cannot enter" (Isa. 59:14, NKJV), but the Lord always accomplishes His purposes. "The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands" (Ps. 9:16, NKJV). Adonijah's great feast was the signal David's loyal servants needed to inform David that it was time to name Solomon the next king of Israel.

## **2. Nathan the loyalist (1 Kings 1:11-53)**

If ever King David had a loyal friend and adviser, it was the prophet Nathan. Nathan brought the good news about God's covenant with David and his descendants (2 Sam. 7:1-17), and Nathan also shepherded David through those dark days after the king's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12). Nathan must have had musical gifts as well because he helped David organize the worship in the sanctuary (2 Chron. 29:25-26). When Solomon was born, Nathan told the parents that the Lord wanted the boy also named "Jedidiah—beloved of the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:24-25). When Nathan heard about Adonijah's feast and his claim to the throne, he immediately went to work.

*Nathan informed Bathsheba (vv. 11-14).* Though we haven't read anything about Bathsheba since the birth of Solomon, we must not conclude that she had been unimportant in the affairs of the palace.

Her conduct in this chapter alone is evidence that she was a courageous woman who wanted to do the will of God. To be sure, it was her son who was to be the next king, and if had Adonijah succeeded in gaining the throne, both Bathsheba and her son would be killed (vv. 12, 21). But the fact that Nathan turned immediately to Bathsheba suggests that he knew what the future queen mother could do. Also, the way Adonijah approached her and Solomon received her (2:13-19) indicates that both men recognized her as a woman of influence. It's unfortunate that too many people think of Bathsheba only as "the adulteress" when it was her intervention that saved Israel from disaster at a critical hour.

*Bathsheba informed David (vv. 15-21).* The prophet had given Bathsheba the words to speak, a brief statement of only two questions that she expanded into a very moving speech. The key word in the dialogue of this entire scenario is "swear," used in verses 13, 17, 29, and 30. Nathan and Bathsheba knew that David had promised that Solomon would be the next king because Solomon was God's choice. David had publicly announced the appointment of Solomon when he announced the building of the temple (1 Chron. 22, 28). When God gave a special name to Solomon, this certainly suggested that he would be David's successor (2 Sam. 12:24-25).

Bathsheba bowed before the king (v. 16, and see 23, 31, 47, 53) and then reminded him of his oath that Solomon would be the next king of Israel. She then informed him that Adonijah was hosting a coronation banquet and that Abiathar and Joab were there with all the royal sons except Solomon. Obviously the banquet was not to honor Solomon! Adonijah had proclaimed himself king, but all Israel was waiting for David's official word concerning his successor. Her *coup de grace* was the obvious fact that if Adonijah became king, he would quickly get rid of both Bathsheba and her son. What David did was a matter of life or death. Abishag was witness to all that Bathsheba said (v. 15).

*Nathan informed David (vv. 22-27).* While Bathsheba was speaking to her husband, Nathan came into the palace and was announced, so Bathsheba left the room (v. 28) and Nathan entered the bedchamber. He asked the king two questions: Did David announce that

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Adonijah would sit on his throne, and had the king done this in secret without telling his servant the prophet (vv. 24, 27). Sandwiched between these two questions was his report that Adonijah was now celebrating his coronation, all the king's sons except Solomon were at the feast, and so were Abiathar and all the military commanders. Nathan didn't mention Joab, but Bathsheba had already done that. What Nathan revealed was that Joab had brought his officers with him, so the army was backing Adonijah. However, David's loyal servants—Nathan, Zadok, and Benaiah—had been ignored. That being the case, Nathan wondered if Adonijah really had the authority to proclaim himself king.

It's very likely that Nathan's recitation of these facts brought to David's memory the terrible days of Absalom's rebellion and he didn't want the nation to experience another civil war. Solomon was a man of peace (1 Chron. 22:9). Reared in the palace, he had no experience of war as did his father; and if there was a civil war, how could he build the temple?

*David instructed his loyal servants (vv. 28-37).* David responded immediately to the crisis and told Nathan to call Bathsheba back to his bedside. The two were alone (v. 32). David spoke to Bathsheba and reaffirmed the fact that her son Solomon was to be the next king of Israel. He had sworn this to her privately and would not back down on his oath. But then David went even further and *made Solomon his coregent that very day!* "I will surely carry out this day . . ." (v. 30). If David waited too long, Adonijah's rebellion could grow in strength; and after David died, who would have authority to act? By making Solomon his coregent immediately, David stayed in control and Solomon would do his bidding. Solomon was no longer merely prince or even heir apparent: he was now coregent with his father and the king of Israel.

David then asked them to call his loyal servants—Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the head of his personal bodyguard—men he knew he could trust. He instructed them to proclaim Solomon king in a public demonstration at Gihon. This was an important place of springs on the eastern slope of mount Zion less than a mile up the valley (north) from En Rogel where Adonijah was

hosting his great feast (v. 9). It wouldn't take long for the news to get to Adonijah! Solomon was to ride David's royal mule, and it was to be announced that Solomon was sharing David's throne as king and would be David's successor. Zadok and Nathan were to anoint Solomon with the holy anointing oil from the tabernacle. The trumpet would be blown, declaring to the people that this was an official event. Solomon was now king and ruler over all Israel and Judah.<sup>2</sup> (See 4:20, 25.)

Benaiah was the son of a priest (1 Chron. 27:5), but he chose a military career and became one of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:20-23) and the leader of David's personal guard, the Cherethites and Pelethites (v. 38; 2 Sam. 8:18). After hearing David's instructions, Benaiah spoke up enthusiastically in agreement and thus gave both David and Solomon the support of the soldiers under his command. Later, Solomon would execute Joab for his treachery in following Adonijah and would give his position to Benaiah (2:35). Benaiah was as loyal to Solomon as he had been to David.

*The Lord informed Israel (vv. 38-53).*<sup>3</sup> Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, protected by David's personal troops, obeyed David's instructions to the letter and announced to all Israel that Solomon was king. The people were ecstatic as they played their musical instruments and shouted "God save King Solomon." This shout echoed down the valley and reached En Rogel where the people were shouting "God save King Adonijah" (v. 25).

As they finished their meal, Adonijah and his guests heard the shouting and the sound of the trumpet and wondered what was going on in Jerusalem. Had David died? Was it a declaration of war?

Their questions were answered by the arrival of Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest who had assisted David during Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam. 17:17-22). Adonijah thought that Jonathan was bringing good news, but it turned out to be the worst possible news for Adonijah, Abiathar, and Joab. Jonathan's report is that of an eyewitness who saw Solomon riding the king's mule and watched as Zadok and Nathan anointed the new king. But verses 47-48 describe what transpired in David's bedchamber (vv. 36-37), and we wonder where Jonathan obtained this information. Did he hear Benaiah tell

his troops that they would now be loyal to Solomon as they had been to David? Did Nathan or Zadok quote David's words to the people?

Jonathan made it clear that Solomon was *at that very moment* the king of Israel. Adonijah, his fellow conspirators, and his guests knew what that meant: they were all under great suspicion. The guests, including the naïve princes, all rose up and fled back to the city for safety, and Adonijah fled to the tabernacle for asylum. This was the tent in Jerusalem, which housed the ark (1 Chron. 16:1, 37). The tabernacle with the other furnishings was at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39-40; 1 Kings 3:4). There was an altar there and Adonijah took hold of the horns of the altar, which is what people in danger did before the establishment of the six cities of refuge (2:28; Ex. 21:13-14). A place of asylum at least delayed judgment and gave the accused an opportunity for a hearing (Deut. 19).

Solomon showed mercy to his brother and allowed him to return to his home in Jerusalem. This amounted to house arrest because the king's guards could keep Adonijah under constant surveillance. But Solomon also warned his brother to be careful how he behaved, for as an insurgent, Adonijah was worthy of death.<sup>4</sup> If he stepped out of line, he would be executed. Adonijah bowed before Solomon, but his heart was submitted neither to the Lord nor his brother.

### 3. David the realist (1 Kings 2:1-11; 1 Chron. 29:26-30)

David "served his own generation by the will of God" (Acts 13:36, NKJV), but he was also concerned about Solomon and the next generation. David had his enemies, some of whom were in his own household and inner circle, and he wanted to be certain that the new king didn't inherit old problems. During his long reign of forty years, David had unified the nation, defeated their enemies, successfully organized kingdom affairs, and made more than adequate preparation for the building of the temple. He sang his last song (2 Sam. 23:1-7) and then gave his last charge to Solomon.<sup>5</sup>

"Put the Lord first" (*vv.* 1-4). The Old Testament records the last words of Jacob (Gen. 49), Moses (Deut. 33), Joshua (23:1-24:27), and David (1 Kings 2:1-11). "I go the way of all the earth" is a quo-

tation from Joshua at the end of his life (Josh. 23:14), and “Be strong and show yourself a man” sounds like the Lord’s words to Joshua at the start of his ministry (Josh. 1:6). Solomon was a young man who had lived a sheltered life, so he needed this admonition. In fact, from the very outset of his reign, he would have to make some tough decisions and issue some difficult orders. David had already commissioned Solomon regarding building the temple (1 Chron. 22:6-13), a task that would take seven years. One day Solomon would come to the end of his life, and David wanted him to be able to look back with satisfaction. Blessed is that person whose heart is right with God, whose conscience is clear and who can look back and say with the Master: “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4, NKJV).

David’s words parallel those of Moses when he commissioned Joshua (Deut. 31). First Moses admonished Joshua to “be a man” and face his responsibilities with courage and faith (vv. 1-8), and then Moses gave the law to the priests and admonished the people (including Joshua) to know it and obey it. The king was expected to be familiar with the law and the covenant (Deut. 17:14-20), for in obeying God’s Word he would find his wisdom, strength, and blessing.<sup>6</sup>

But David also reminded his son of the special covenant the Lord had made concerning the Davidic dynasty (v. 4; 2 Sam. 7:1-17). He warned Solomon that if he disobeyed God’s law, he would bring chastening and sorrow to himself and the land, but if he obeyed God’s commandments, God would bless him and the people. More important, God would see to it that there was always a descendant of David sitting on the throne. David knew that Israel had a ministry to perform in providing the vehicle for the promised Redeemer to come to earth, and the future of God’s redemptive plan rested with Israel. How tragic that Solomon didn’t fully follow God’s law and was the means of promoting idolatry in the land and then causing the kingdom to be divided.

“*Protect the kingdom!*” (vv. 5-9). David knew that there were perils lurking in the shadows in the kingdom and he warned Solomon to act immediately and deal with two dangerous men. *Joab*, commander of David’s army, was the first to be named. He had stood by David

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through many difficult trials, but from time to time he had asserted his own will and been guilty of murdering innocent men. Joab was David's nephew and the brother of Abishai and Asahel, and all of them were noted warriors. But Joab killed Abner because Abner had killed Asahel (2 Sam. 2:12-32). Joab also killed David's son Absalom even though he knew David wanted him taken alive (2 Sam. 18). He murdered Amasa, whom David had appointed leader of his forces (2 Sam. 20), and he supported Adonijah in his quest for the throne (1 Kings 1:7). Joab had been involved in David's scheme to kill Bathsheba's husband Uriah (2 Sam. 11:14ff), and perhaps the crafty general was using his knowledge to intimidate the king. David didn't mention Uriah or Absalom to Solomon, and Solomon already knew that Joab was a traitor to the king.

The second dangerous man was *Shimei* (*vv.* 8-9). He was a Benjamite and a relative of Saul who wanted to see Saul's line restored to the throne. He cursed David when David was fleeing from Absalom (2 Sam. 16:5-13). To curse the king was a violation of the law (Ex. 22:28), but David accepted this unkindness as a discipline from the Lord. Later, when David returned to the throne, Shimei humbled himself before the king and David forgave him (2 Sam. 19:18-23). But David knew that there was always a pro-Saul element in the northern tribes, so he warned Solomon to keep Shimei under surveillance.

David not only remembered dangerous men like Joab and Shimei, but he also remembered helpful men like *Barzillai* (*v.* 7), who had provided him and his people with what they needed when they fled from Absalom (2 Sam. 17:27-29). David had wanted to reward Barzillai with a place at his table, but the old man preferred to die in his own home. He asked David to give the honor to his son Kimham (2 Sam. 19:31-38); but now David instructed Solomon to care for Barzillai's sons and not Kimham alone.

David did go "the way of all the earth," and "died in a good old age, full of days and riches and honor..." (1 Chron. 29:28, NKJV). Solomon was already king and his throne was secure, so there was no need for any official decisions or ceremonies.

#### 4. Solomon the strategist (1 Kings 2:12-46)

The new king had his agenda all prepared: deal with Joab, deal with Shimei, reward the sons of Barzillai, and build the temple. But his first major crisis came from his half brother Adonijah.

*Adonijah's request (vv. 13-25).* Solomon had graciously accepted Adonijah's submission to the new regime (1:53), although Solomon certainly knew that the man was deceitful and ready to strike again. The fact that Adonijah went to the queen mother with his request suggests that he expected her to have great influence with her son. Adonijah's declaration in verse 15 shows how confused he was in his thinking, for if Solomon was God's choice for the throne, and Adonijah knew it, why did he attempt a coup and try to seize the crown? Like Absalom, he thought that a popular demonstration and the cheers of the people meant success. Perhaps Adonijah said "it was his [Solomon's] from the Lord" just to impress Bathsheba.

Students differ in their interpretation of Bathsheba's role in this scenario. Some say she was very naïve in even asking Solomon, but Bathsheba had already proved herself to be a courageous and influential woman. It's likely that she suspected another plot because she knew that possession of a king's wife or concubine was evidence of possession of the kingdom. This was why Absalom had publicly taken David's concubines (2 Sam. 16:20-23), for it was an announcement to the people that he was now king. It's difficult to believe that the king's mother was ignorant of this fact. I may be in error, but I feel that she took Adonijah at his word, *knowing that Solomon would use this as an opportunity to expose Adonijah's scheme.* By having Abishag as his wife, Adonijah was claiming to be coregent with Solomon!

Solomon immediately detected the reason behind the request and said, "Ask for him the kingdom also!" The king knew that Adonijah, Abiathar, and Joab were still united in gaining control of the kingdom. By asking for Abishag, Adonijah issued his own death warrant, and Benaiah went and took the traitor's life. David wasn't there to feel the pain of another son's death, but the execution of Adonijah was the final payment of the fourfold debt David had incurred (2 Sam. 12:5-6). The baby died, Absalom killed Amnon, Joab killed Absalom, and Benaiah executed Adonijah. David paid for his sins fourfold.

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*Abiathar's removal* (vv. 26-27). But Solomon didn't stop there: he also defrocked Abiathar the priest, who had supported Adonijah, and sent him into retirement at the priestly city of Anathoth, about three miles from Jerusalem. This had been the home of Jeremiah the prophet. In deposing Abiathar, Solomon fulfilled the prophecy given to Eli that his family would not continue in the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:27-36; see Ezek. 44:15-16). Zadok was made high priest (v. 35), and his descendants filled the office until 171 B.C. Solomon recognized the fact that Abiathar had faithfully served his father David, so he didn't have him executed.

*Joab's execution* (vv. 28-35). Joab no doubt had an efficient spy system, and when he heard the news that Adonijah had been slain, he knew he was next on the list. He fled to the tabernacle David had erected in Jerusalem for the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6:17) and there claimed asylum by taking hold of horns of the altar. However, only people who were guilty of manslaughter could do this and claim the right to a trial, and Joab was guilty of both murder and disloyalty to King David and King Solomon. Joab defied both Benaiah and Solomon by refusing to come out of the sacred enclosure, but Solomon was not to be treated in such an arrogant manner by a man who was obviously a traitor and a murderer. Though he was a soldier, Benaiah belonged to a priestly family, so it was legal for him to enter the sacred precincts, and he went and killed Joab at the altar and then buried him. Solomon then promoted Benaiah to be the commander of the army in the place of Joab (v. 35).

It's important to understand that Solomon wasn't simply acting in revenge in the place of his father David. Solomon explained that the death of Joab took away the stain of the innocent blood that Joab had shed when he killed Abner and Amasa. The shedding of innocent blood polluted the land (Num. 35:30-34) and the victim's blood cried out to God for vengeance (Gen. 4:10). The cities of refuge were provided for people who had accidentally killed somebody. They could flee to one of the six cities and be protected until the elders had investigated the case. But murderers like Joab were not to be given any mercy but were to be executed so that the innocent blood they had shed would pollute the land no more (Deut. 19:1-13; 21:1-9; Lev.

18:24-30). Saul's treatment of the Gibeonites had polluted the land and created trouble for David (2 Sam. 21:1-14), and Solomon didn't want that to happen during his reign.

*Shimei's daring* (vv. 36-46). Since Shimei was related to Saul (2 Sam. 16:5; 1 Sam. 10:21), he was a potential troublemaker who might arouse the tribe of Benjamin against the new king, and perhaps even stir up the ten northern tribes of Israel. David had brought unity and peace the nation and Solomon didn't want Shimei creating problems. He ordered him to move to Jerusalem, build himself a house, and stay in the city. If he left the city and crossed the Kidron Valley, he would die. Jerusalem wasn't that large a city at that time, so Solomon's men could keep their eyes on the Benjamite who had cursed David and thrown dirt and stones at him.

Shimei obeyed for three years and then disobeyed. When two of his slaves ran away and went twenty-five miles to Gath, Shimei decided to go personally and bring them back. Surely he could have hired somebody else to go get the slaves, but he went himself. Perhaps he thought he had fulfilled the terms of the agreement, or maybe he thought the guards weren't watching him. Most likely he was deliberately defying Solomon and pushing the limits just to see what he would do. He found out. Solomon knew that Shimei had left Jerusalem, and when he returned, the king confronted him with his crime. Solomon delivered a brief but powerful speech that condemned him for what he did to David and what he had just done to Solomon, and it ended with Benaiah executing Shimei the traitor.

Solomon was to be a "man of peace" (1 Chron. 22:6-10), and yet he began his reign by ordering three executions. But true peace must be based on righteousness, not on sentiment. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable . . ." (James 3:17, NKJV). The land was polluted by the innocent blood that Joab had shed, and the land could be cleansed only by the execution of the murderer. David didn't execute Joab, even after Joab killed Absalom, because David knew that he himself had blood on his hands (Ps. 51:14). David was guilty of asking Joab to shed Uriah's innocent blood, but Solomon's hands were clean. Solomon was indeed a "man of peace," and he achieved that peace by bringing about righteousness in the land.

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From the human viewpoint, it was sunset for David and sunrise for his son Solomon, but not from the divine viewpoint. “But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18, NKJV). As a leader, David was “as the light of the morning . . . even a morning without clouds” (2 Sam. 23:4, KJV), and for the sake of David, the Lord kept the lamp burning in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:36; 2 Kings 8:19). Even today, when we read and sing his psalms and study his life, that light shines on us and helps to direct our way.