

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## Who Has the Kingdom?

### I Kings 1:1-53

**Intro:** The Book of I and II Kings are a continuation of the story of the nation of Israel, or rather, the kingdom of God. As we make our way through these 2 volumes there will be times where we may wonder just whose kingdom it really is but to be sure, the kingdom is Jehovah's. Now, if you have braved your way through these 2 historical OT books, you may have been bamboozled by the apparent maze of seemingly unnecessary detail. This is especially true when trying to keep up with the different kings of Judah and Israel, some of whom have the same names and rule at the same time. It can all seem to run together in a historical overload and melt into hopeless confusion: too much history!

Actually, it's not. In fact, the writer has taken it easy on us, deliberately trying to avoid scholarly fatigue. You see, I & II Kings provide us with a continuous story of the Israelite monarchy from the time when David handed over his rich and extensive kingdom to that kingdom's final destruction. That's 400 yrs of history in little more than 50K words – that's a fantastic reduction of detail. This means the author left out most of what he could have said. American has only existed for a little over 200 yrs but the volumes of books that deal with our history fill multiple libraries! When you look at it from that perspective, you realize the author needed to be very selective and thus, what he does include must be of great importance.

The author has no intention of providing us with an exhaustive history of Israel but more of a prophecy – a God-authorized version of how we should view that history. These books don't just contain history, they also teach theology, especially the faithfulness of God in keeping His covenant, the sovereignty of God in directing the destinies of all nations and the holiness of God in opposing idolatry. Originally, I & II Kings were just 1 book, Jewish tradition says it was written by Jeremiah, others hold that there were many authors. Regardless of authorship, it has been accepted as the inspired Word of God for several millennium and as such, it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (II Tim 3:16).

Now, since there is so much information in these books, I am instituting a

self-imposed policy of intentional neglect. There is a great temptation to chase every chronological, historical or theological rabbit that may appear in the text but if we are going to make any real progress through these books, we're going to have to be able to deal with at least a chapter a week. So, we can't stop and talk about everything we find along the way unless it concerns the main topic of the chapter. At least that is the intention...so let's jump right in

**1-4** – Right from the start we get a picture of an old, cold and decrepit king David. He had been Israel's greatest leader, expanding the kingdom's reach nearly to the borders that God had promised Abraham back in Genesis. Now, David is at the twilight of his glorious reign. He was so old now that he couldn't even keep himself warm, much less rule the nation. David was only in his 70's here but he seems older than his years. I guess for David, it wasn't just the years – it was the mileage! He had come a long way from the sheepfolds of Bethlehem.

The introduction of Abishag may seem strange (even immoral) to our modern sensibilities but it was proper for David to allow this because 1) it was a recognized medical treatment in the ancient world and 2) David almost certainly made this young woman his concubine. That's why they had to search for her – they had to choose someone who was eligible for marriage or to be a royal concubine (virgin). Of course, the issue of physical relations was out of the question, she was there mainly care for the king in his dotage and to keep him warm (alive) as much as possible.

David's diminished abilities presents a picture of the kingdom of God in a precarious position in the world. We've seen this before in Israel's history: the death of Joseph in Egypt and the rise of slavery; the death of Moses and the transition to Joshua; the death of Joshua and the rise of Baal worship – and these are just a few examples, including our text. David's impending death is a transition point in the kingdom of God; a critical situation where a wrong move, a false step or a selfish turn could spell disaster. There is a lesson here for the modern church today. How often are we bombarded with the various crises and dangers that confront us every day from the unprecedented moral decline of society, political upheaval or financial instability? How often has the church passed through difficult times, walking on the edge of disaster? I'd say more than we know but apparently, there is a divine hand that steadies us.

**5-10** – David’s diminished capacity is cause for concern but the real danger to the kingdom is seen in Adonijah, David’s eldest living son. When you compare the 2, Adonijah is everything David isn’t. Here is an energetic would-be king! He has ambition (5a), style (5b), image (6b), position (6c) and both military and religious support (7, 9). With all this going for him we may wonder why he shouldn’t be king. It seems that the author is ambivalent to this upstart but that is not really the case. On 1 level, he is simply describing Adonijah and his political maneuverings, an objective – here-are-the-facts report. But in reality, the author offers us a purely negative view of Adonijah.

If you compare the description of Adonijah’s fine looks with the glowing picture of Absalom in I Sam 14), the description of Saul (I Sam 9) or even David’s oldest brother Eliab (I Sam 16) you begin to pick up on the negative connotations. Each one of these royal or potentially royal persons was physically impressive but they were either rejected by God or their lives ended in a disastrous way. By implication, the author is telling us that Adonijah belongs to that same class of good-looking losers. He sees Adonijah as being unfit for leadership. Now, you may question why that matters, seeing Adonijah was David’s eldest son and thus, by the customs of the day, should be rightfully considered the heir to David’s throne. What’s the big deal?

Well, there are actually 2 big deals! 1) A real leader looks at a crisis and asks, “What can I do that will best help the people?” An opportunist looks at a situation and asks, “How can I use this situation to promote myself and get what I want?” Opportunists show up uninvited, focus all attention on them and end up making the crisis worse. That’s the king of person Adonijah was. He had a good marketing campaign and hoped that if he projected the image of a king, he would become a king in reality. But, there’s more to it than just saying “I will be king” (5). Lust for power and position may be the necessary characteristics of successful human politics but these qualities are not marks for leadership among God’s people.

The kingdom of God has suffered greatly from unqualified leadership. In I Tim 3, Paul provides a list of the necessary qualifications for church leaders, elders and deacons. What’s interesting about this list is that it almost exclusively stresses godliness over giftedness and character rather than

skill. Knowing that, it's not hard to accept that the spirit of Adonijah is alive and well in the church today. There are many who take advantage of a period of transition to exalt themselves and those particular bodies or congregations have suffered greatly because of it.

Adonijah's actions here are also a big deal because 2) He was defiantly rejecting the clear Word of God. Yes, it was customary for a king's eldest son to assume the throne but the throne of Israel was not subject to the rules of hereditary succession. Jehovah was the ultimate ruler of Israel and He would determine who the next king would be and He already had! In **II Sam 7**, God makes a covenant with David and in it He tells David that one of his descendants would build the temple in Jerusalem and that God would establish the Davidic dynasty forever. Later, in **I Chron 22:9**, we learn that Solomon is the son of David that God has chosen to be king and build the temple. David then relays this information of succession to Solomon and the leaders of Israel. Then again, in **I Chron 28**, David conducts a national townhall meeting (convocation) where he delivers this information to the entire nation.

Thus, there is no way that Adonijah, Joab (head of military) and Abiathar (high priest) could not have known this. The sad reality is that they did know this – they just didn't agree with it. Joab had always been fiercely loyal to David but not always loyal to David's wishes. It's obvious by their actions that Adonijah, Joab and Abiathar didn't agree with David's declaration of Solomon as the heir to his throne. What they failed or refused to consider was that this wasn't just David's word – it was God's Word. What lesson do we take from this? As we will see in **ch2**, it is the height of foolishness to ignore God's word but choosing to reject God's Word is dangerous and often fatal.

**11-27 – vs11** shows just how far removed from power David really was in his dotage. He didn't know what was going on around him in his own kingdom. The true was worse than that. If Adonijah succeeded in becoming king, it would be customary for him to remove all other claims to his throne; meaning Bathsheba and Solomon would be executed. It may seem as though Nathan's trying to pull a fast one on David by staging all of this but that is not the case. At no time did Bathsheba or Nathan attempt to mislead David by twisting or even exaggerating the truth. No, Nathan just knew how indulgent David was to his sons and that he would find it hard to believe that

Adonijah could do such a thing. Thus, he needed to arrange it so the message would be presented in a convincing way. He knew he had to get David's attention and nothing does that like hearing your wife and favorite son are about to be executed!

What we have in Nathan is a wonderful picture of a servant who loves the kingdom of God! How crucial is his role in this story! Everything rests on Nathan. He not only informs Bathsheba of Adonijah's attempted coup but he also intervenes with a plan to stir old, cold David into action. Nathan was the man who stood in the gap. His love for the kingdom compelled him to act to goad David off his couch and protect Bathsheba and Solomon from certain death. One non-royal servant makes the difference and preserves the kingdom.

Humanly speaking, everything hinges on Nathan. The implication of the text teaches us that there is real dignity in one's service to Christ's kingdom, no matter how small it may seem at the time. It's impossible to tell how crucial one servant's labor may prove to be, at least on this side of eternity. There are countless examples throughout church history of seemingly pointless acts of service reaping an amazing harvest – from the lowly Sunday School teacher who lead D.L. Moody to the Lord or the Swedish missionaries that only lead 1 child to Christ before being defeated by disease and death. And even if our labors fail to produce obvious fruits here on earth, surely a Lord who remembers cups of water handed to His people will not think lightly of our faithfulness, large or small.

**28-40** – What a change has come over David! Even when Bathsheba came to see him in vs16, all he could muster was 2 Hebrew syllables translated literally, "What to you?" He seemed to be completely out of gas there but in vs28 he's full of gusto: calling for Bathsheba, reaffirming his previous oath, calling for Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah, giving detailed instructions for anointing and installing Solomon as king. David was no longer doddering – he was decisive! Yes, I'm sure he was concerned for Bathsheba and Solomon's safety but more than that, I believe David had a zeal to see the Word of God fulfilled. Furthermore, David knew that in order for him to see the Word of God fulfilled in his life, The Word of God must be honored by his life. Yes, God was the One who would establish David's dynasty but even that divine assurance calls for a component of human responsibility. God had promised David a kingdom and a dynasty and David could not afford to



be apathetic towards what happened to his kingdom.

Too many times Christians fall into the trap of thinking that God's going to take care of all their problems so they don't have to be concerned about anything. "Jesus, take the wheel" while I sit here and scroll through facebook all day long. If you're a child of God, God has a responsibility to care for you but you also have a responsibility to care about the things of God, to care about His kingdom and your place in it, your role in it. What is it that stirs you, a kingdom servant, to life? What lights a fire under you and riles up your zeal? Hopefully more than just bad traffic or lost internet access. What about, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." What stirs us reveals us. Sadly, we're usually only whipped into action when our comfort zone is being threatened.

**41-53** – Although Adonijah put on his best marketing campaign, he did not win the hearts of the people. They knew that Solomon was the man, not Adonijah. To show just how quickly David's orders of succession were carried out, Solomon was proclaimed king before Adonijah's coronation feast was over. The main course was BBQ but for dessert, all he could serve his guests was a dish of utter surprise and fearful expectation of just retribution! No wonder all his guests slithered away, their stomachs were cutting back flips inside them. Everyone who supported Adonijah could now expect to be looked upon by this new administration with suspicion and contempt.

Adonijah's gamble was a bust. When he heard that Solomon rode on the king mule he knew it was Game Over and he moved to preserve his life by taking hold of the horns of the altar. It was almost a universal custom in the ancient world that a religious altar was a place of sanctuary from justice or revenge. This was tantamount to Adonijah asking for forgiveness. Things weren't looking good for the pretty boy home team but at least at this point, Adonijah made the proper response and that's all that's required by his merciful brother, King Solomon. So long as he continues with this submission, he will be safe. Of course, we know there's such thing as an outward, external submission that is miles apart from a willing, internal one. Was Adonijah sincere in his submission? We'll see that in **ch2**.

I mentioned earlier that the kingdom of Israel was actually the kingdom of God in that it belonged to Jehovah, its destiny was determined and controlled

by Him. Of course, that then begs the question: if it belonged to God, why did it end so disastrously? That's an important question and the answer is very simple. Although the kingdom belonged to God, He still chose to exercise and advance His kingdom through the use of human agents. These agents were to perform the duties and responsibilities of their God-given positions through faithful obedience and adherence to God's explicit instructions as well as the implicit principles contained in His Word. If they did this, God's kingdom advanced and Israel prospered. If they refused to obey and followed the desires of their own hearts, the kingdom would suffer corporately as they would personally. As we will see in this study, there is far more tragedy than triumph in Israel's history.

Now, we may be quick to judge those OT characters and question how any people who were so closely blessed by God's provision and impressed by God's power could ever even contemplate ignoring or rejecting His Word, let's not forget that God still chooses to expand His kingdom on this earth by human agents, only these agents are called His children. If you are a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, you're not only a child of God but you are also a servant in His kingdom. As such, you are still required to advance that kingdom through faithful obedience to God's Word. Are you doing a better job of that than the Israelites of old? I certainly hope so because God has provided us with their history to serve as a "cautionary tale."

We can no more presume to live our lives by our own dictates than Adonijah, Joab or Abiathar did. And, if we persist in following their example, we may very well end up in a similar position as they – on the wrong side of God's will!

If that describes your current lifestyle, then you need to do exactly what Adonijah did – you need to run to Jesus for forgiveness. If you've been walking according to your own dictates instead of following God's Word, you need to remedy that situation by repenting and start getting into God's Word and pressing into God's will. Yes, God's kingdom will expand, it will advance, it will be victorious; there's no question about it. The only question is – will it do so because of your service or in spite of it? 😊