

## STUDIES IN SAMUEL

# EPILOGUE

The division of the Old Testament books at the end of Samuel is quite artificial. The history of David is continued in I Kings with the account of Abishag and the revolt of Adonijah. The division we have now in the English Bible is not very early, as is indicated by the Septuagint in some of its copies in which the third book of Kings begins with I Kings, chapter three. The two chapters which intervene are thus numbered twenty-five and twenty-six of Samuel.

Comments from the book of Samuel would not be complete without some reference to the fact that David did become old and stricken in years. He ruled for forty years and did not begin his career until he was thirty (II Samuel 5:4). As he neared the prescribed three score and ten years (Psalm 90:10), he suffered an infirmity which caused him to chill. In a manner which seems crude to a civilization provided with mechanical and chemical corrective measures for such a condition, the people of Israel sought a young virgin to be David's constant companion, in order that the heat from her body might warm David. The maiden they found was Abishag, a fair damsel from Shunem. Shunem was a spot belonging to the tribe of Isaachar. It was here that the Philistines had camped before Saul's last battle (I Samuel 28:4). This locality was also the residence of the woman whose son Elisha raised from the dead (II Kings 4:35), and has been identified with *Shulam* at the southwest base of little Hermon and three miles north of Jezreel in the midst of a very fertile valley.

Abishag was a very fair maiden, and she ministered to the needs of the king in his infirmities; but the king did not consider her to be his wife or one of his concubines.

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His relationship to her was not that of a man with his wife, and Abishag was not above one of the household servants. Her relationship to him, however, was peculiar and unusual, a fact that indirectly brought about the death of Adonijah.

After David's death, Adonijah, who had been spared by Solomon, decided that he would like to have Abishag as his wife. He sent Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, to have an audience with Solomon in order to ask him to give Abishag to Adonijah. Adonijah felt that Bathsheba as the king's mother would have more influence with Solomon than he would have personally.

Solomon interpreted this request of Adonijah's to be highly improper, inasmuch as Abishag once was very close to King David. The situation was very much similar to that of Abner and Rizpah in the days of Ish-bosheth. Kings were very jealous of their concubines and wices. When a king died, the successor to the throne not only acceded to the throne but also inherited the king's household, being responsible for the continued support of the widows and children. If he were of a different house, he often would slay these heirs in order to prevent their making future claims to the throne. Abishag was Solomon's responsibility, and he felt that Adonijah's desire was quite out of place. Although Abishag was not a wife or concubine of David's, she had been in a very intimate association with David; and Solomon viewed Adonijah's request for her hand in marriage as a veiled pretension to the throne.

Adonijah had attempted to usurp the throne while David was still alive in order to prevent Solomon's accession. Adonijah had some reason for such action, inasmuch as he was the elder brother of Solomon and directly in line for the throne. He was the son of Haggith, the fourth-born of David's sons (II Samuel 3:4). Since Amnon had been killed by Absalom and Absalom had been slain in battle,

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the two older brothers of Adonijah could not succeed David to the throne. Nothing is known of Chileab, David's second-born son (II Samuel 3:3); and it is generally concluded that he also was dead.

Adonijah was born to David while David lived and ruled in Hebron, during the first seven years of his reign. Solomon was not born until after David had moved his capital to Jerusalem and had stolen Bathsheba from Uriah. Adonijah knew that David intended to have Solomon as his successor, but his own selfish interests led him to attempt to steal the throne. His revolt should not be considered an attempt to rebel against David, as was Absalom's effort; but he did try to supersede Solomon.

The Scripture says, "Then Adonijah, the son of Haggith, exalted himself" (II Kings 1:5). He prepared chariots and horsemen, with fifty men to run before him through the streets of Jerusalem. His father had not spoken a word in rebuke of him, giving him an exalted estimation of himself; and in addition, he was a very handsome person. Specific reference is made to the fact that he was born after Absalom (I Kings 1:6), making him the next in line to the throne.

Adonijah secured the support of some of the leading people in David's government. Joab, who had been faithful to David when Absalom rebelled, joined in Adonijah's conspiracy. The priesthood, which had been united behind David in the days of Absalom, was divided by Adonijah's attempted *coup*. Abiathar, the priest whose father had been slain in the days of Saul and who had fled to David for protection, was led away from David and persuaded to join Adonijah. Zadok, the other priest, remained loyal to David and Solomon.

Certain key men in David's government were not convinced by Adonijah's claims. Zadok, the priest, Nathan, the prophet, and Benaiah, one of David's mighty men, were all solidly back of Solomon's claims and David's in-

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tentions for him to be his successor. None of these men were invited to Adonijah's rally where he proclaimed himself to be king over Israel. Shimei and Rei, mighty men which belonged to David, also were not with Adonijah.

The area around En-rogel, at the southeast corner of the city, was chosen for the meeting-place by those who supported the claims of Adonijah. Adonijah announced a sacrifice, slaying sheep, oxen, and fat cattle, and inviting all his brethren of the king's sons and all the men of Judah who were the king's servants, except those who were not in sympathy with his cause.

Nathan, the prophet, learned of the meeting and informed Bathsheba, David's wife and Solomon's mother. He instructed Bathsheba to ask for an audience with the king and make inquiry about his intentions concerning his successor. It was Nathan's understanding that Solomon should succeed David to the throne. No doubt he had gathered this from the prediction which he had made to David about the son who should build the temple (II Samuel 7:12). More was involved than the mere succession to the throne. The fulfillment of prophecy was hanging in the balance. The will of God was to be done in the lives of the men who were involved.

Bathsheba asked for and received the audience with David. She asked David if he had not sworn to her by the Lord God that Solomon would be the one to sit on the throne. She then announced to David that Adonijah was ruling in Jerusalem. She specifically mentioned the feast which he had announced and the oxen, fat cattle, and sheep which were sacrificed. She enumerated those who were supporting Adonijah—Abiathar and Joab, particularly. Bathsheba informed David that the citizens of his kingdom were waiting for some word from him which would indicate his pleasure concerning his successor. With pitiable concern, Bathsheba predicted that if Adonijah were

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successful in acceding to the throne then she and Solomon would be considered offenders and probably be put to death (I Kings 1:21).

While Bathsheba was speaking, Nathan came in and substantiated her remarks and appraisal of the situation. Nathan specifically asked David if it were his intention that the fourth-born son would succeed him to the throne. He verified the report that Adonijah had chosen a spot rather remote from the palace and proclaimed himself to be king. It had even been reported that the people were crying, "God save king Adonijah" (I Kings 1:25). Nathan assured David that Solomon, Benaiah, and he were not invited to the feast and were devoutly loyal to David. Nathan concluded his interview with the king by asking if all this were David's intentions and done by his order.

David was aroused by all these reports. He acted immediately. King David recalled Bathsheba and swore again to her that it was not his desire for Adonijah to succeed him to the throne. He assured her that Solomon, their son, was his choice as a successor. With alacrity which had typified his earlier activity but had been lacking in the latter days of his reign, David took steps to thwart Adonijah's efforts.

David summoned Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiakim, one of David's mighty men. These men represented the religious, civil, and military leaders of Israel; and he gave them specific instructions which were to be carried out at once.

Certain routine procedures of state were to be followed in proclaiming Solomon to be the king. He was to ride upon the king's own mule and be brought down to the eastern edge of the city. He was there to be anointed king by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet as Saul and David had been anointed by Samuel the prophet. A trumpet was to be blown and the proclamation was to be made. The people were to cry out, "God save King

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Solomon" (I Kings 1:34). Solomon was then to lead a procession to the palace and there he was to be installed as king over Israel and Judah. This immediate and direct action of David's pleased Benaiah especially; and he said, "Amen: the Lord God of my lord the king say so too" (I Kings 1:36).

David's directions were followed precisely; and the king's bodyguard, the Cherethites and Pelethites, went down to put Solomon on the king's mule to make the trip to the Gihon on the western side of Jerusalem. Zedok the priest took a horn of oil out of the tabernacle with which to anoint Solomon. The trumpet was blown to signal the assembly of the people; and the people cried out, "God save King Solomon" (I Kings 1:39). The procession wound its way back into the city as the people followed Solomon to the palace playing on the pipes, and the earth was literally shaken by the sound.

Adonijah and those who were called to his abortive assembly heard the shout. Joab was especially attracted by the blowing of the trumpet and made inquiry about the uproar in the city. Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest, came at that moment with news that David had announced that Solomon was to be his successor to the throne. He also knew that Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah were backing Solomon's claims to the throne. His information included the detail that the king's bodyguard was attending Solomon and Solomon was riding on the king's own mule. Jonathan properly assessed the situation by announcing that the city was following Solomon and yielding to David's wishes in the matter. This news threw Adonijah's guests into an uproar, and they fled in terror from the scene. Adonijah himself arose and went to the altar and caught hold of the horns on the altar, a gesture of entreaty signifying that he was pleading with God and all who saw him that his life might be spared.

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News came to Solomon of Adonijah's pitiful plea, and Solomon assured him that he might live if he conducted himself in a worthy manner. He warned him that if wickedness were found in him, he would be put to death. Adonijah accepted the offer of pardon, and went to Solomon to do obeisance to his new king. Solomon dismissed him, and allowed him to return to his own dwelling in peace.

David lived for some time after announcing that Solomon should succeed him to the throne, but the day of his death approached nonetheless. Before he died, he called Solomon to him and encouraged him to conduct himself as a man. He especially exhorted him to keep the charge of the Lord, "to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His judgments, and His testimonies" (I Kings 2:3). David's charge was specifically based on a written law of Moses, a passing reference to the fact that the Pentateuch was in existence in David's day and formed the basis for the king's conduct as well as the conduct for the subjects of the land. Uppermost in David's mind was the knowledge that God had made a covenant with him (II Samuel 7), a portion of which carried the stipulation that if his children walked in the ways of God there should not fail him a man on the throne of Israel. This was God's promise to the royal family.

David gave specific instructions to Solomon with regard to certain matters of unfinished business in his kingdom. He specified that some kind of punishment should be meted out to Joab, his captain through the years who had demonstrated on occasion a wicked spirit. Joab had killed Abner, the son of Ner, and also Amasa, the son of Gezer—two valiant soldiers. David was also anxious that Barzillai, the Gileadite, be remembered for the kindness which he had shown David when David had fled from Absalom. He had promised Barzillai that his son, Chimham, would be taken into the king's family and given daily sustenance from the king's table. Others to whom David owed a

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debt of gratitude or a measure of punishment were Shimei, the Benjamite, who had cursed him as he fled from Jerusalem at the time of Absalom's rebellion. Although David had spared his life, he knew that some punishment should be given to him.

These touching final moments spent with Solomon were like the time that Isaac spent with Esau and Jacob as he sought to give a blessing to Esau even though the birth-right had been sold to Jacob (Genesis 27:1), and like the time when Jacob spent with his twelve sons in Egypt as he pronounced prophecies and blessings about each of them (Genesis 49:1-33). When David had attended to these last affairs of state and given a word of personal exhortation to Solomon, his duties as king were ended and soon thereafter he died. He was buried in Jerusalem, the city of David (I Kings 2:10).

Solomon succeeded David to the throne and ruled with wisdom. Adonijah gave occasion to Solomon for executing him when he asked to have Abishag the Shunamite, to be his wife, after she had attended David until the time of his death. Oriental potentates considered the wives and concubines to be their own personal property in a very special way, and any interest shown in them by anyone else was considered to be an effort to steal the throne as well. This was Solomon's view of Adonijah's request; and for that reason, he killed Adonijah.

Abiathar was called before Solomon who told him to go to Anathoth; a town in the tribe of Benjamin belonging to the priests (Joshua 21:18; Jeremiah 1:1). The town was a city of refuge and the birthplace of Jeremiah and also his residence for a great part of his life (Jeremiah 1:1; 11:21-23; 29:27). It lay three miles northeast of Jerusalem. It has been identified with the modern Anata, but is of little modern importance. Solomon spared Abiathar's life because he had attended the Ark in the days of David and had suffered affliction with him, especially at



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the time of Saul's killing all the priests (I Samuel 22:20-23). Abiathar was deposed from his office, and this was a fulfillment of the prophecy made in the days of Eli (I Samuel 2:31, 35).

Solomon also took direct action against Joab. Joab heard what had happened to the other conspirators who had followed Adonijah, and he fled to the tabernacle and caught hold of the horns on the altar in much the same fashion as Adonijah (I Kings 2:28; cf. I Kings 1:51). Solomon sent Benaiah to execute Joab, but Joab refused to be dragged away from the altar. Benaiah reported this to the king, and Solomon told him to slay him in the sanctuary. Joab had shed much innocent blood, and Solomon feared that he would bring blood-guiltiness upon his kingdom if he permitted Joab to live. Benaiah was faithful to Solomon's orders and killed Joab in the tabernacle area but allowed his body to be taken for burial to the wilderness of Judah which had been Joab's home.

Benaiah, one of David's mighty men and a faithful soldier under Solomon, was made captain of Solomon's army. Zadok the priest, officiated at the tabernacle; and Solomon did his best to put his kingdom in order.

One other duty was his to perform as he completed the unfinished business of his father's rule. Shimei, the man of Benjamin, who had cursed David when he fled from Jerusalem, was told to establish his residence in Jerusalem. He was instructed not to go out of the city, the border line being established at the brook Kidron, east of Jerusalem. Shimei agreed to the terms of Solomon's amnesty and kept his part of the bargain for quite a while. When two of Shimei's servants fled from him and went into a foreign territory, Shimei left Jerusalem without gaining permission from Solomon. Solomon heard that Shimei had broken his covenant, and he ordered that Shimei be executed. When these matters had been attended to, Solomon established the kingdom firmly under his hand.

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The people of Israel knew that it was David's intention for him to reign, and he had set his kingdom in order. No regent ever began his rule under more auspicious omens, for David had ruled well in spite of the failures which were noted in the Scripture. God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding; he was also endowed with a largeness of heart. His wisdom exceeded the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and the wisdom of the men of Egypt. Hiram, the king of Tyre, spoke a fitting benediction to the reign of David, and offered an appropriate invocation for the reign of Solomon as he said:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, that made heaven and earth, who had given to David the king a wise son, endued with prudence and understanding, that might build an house for the Lord, and an house for his kingdom” (II Chronicles 2:12).