

Walking in His Ways That You May Prosper
1 Kings 1 – 2:12
November 19, 2023
Rev. Dave Dorst
CenterPoint Church

Introduction

I have not seen the recently concluded HBO TV series *Succession*, and from what I hear it's not one I would recommend. The show centers on the Roy family, whose patriarch, Logan Roy, has run a very successful and lucrative media company, but is in poor health. His four children, their significant others, and the top executives are all preparing for life and business after his death, and apparently the biggest question is who will take over. Hence the name *Succession*. One summary of the show says this: "As they fight for control of the company, and each other, their lack of morals is exposed at every turn. This family has no redeeming character values, and neither does any person attached to them. Watch them as they fight for the front seat on the bus to hell."¹

Succession from one leader to the next can make or break an organization, or greatly affect a nation. If there is no succession plan to hand over leadership from one ruler or leader to the next one, chaos and even violence can occur. When Alexander the Great died in 323 BC at age 32 after conquering the largest empire the world had ever seen, chaos ensued in the power vacuum that was left in his wake. As different areas of the empire rose up in revolt, Alexander's half-brother, Philip, was first chosen to rule. Later his infant son, Alexander IV was crowned co-ruler with him. But four of Alexander's top generals had high ambitions and started positioning themselves to rule, and they fought one another in what were called the "Successor Wars." For the next forty years, intermittent fighting broke out as Alexander's vast empire collapsed and broke up into separate kingdoms.²

As we wrap up David's life in today's text, we see the nation getting ready for a transition of power. David has already had one of his sons try to take the throne away from him, and in the chaotic aftermath of that fight, an outsider attempted to divide the country and take over as well. But David overcame both rebellions to stay on the throne for forty years, and he was hoping for a peaceful transfer of power since he had a succession plan in mind. The problem was that hardly anyone knew what that plan was, and in the absence of clarity, confusion crept in. And once again, one of David's sons rose up to take the throne against his wishes. The first twenty-seven verses of 1 Kings explain the circumstances surrounding

I. The Succession Crisis (1:1-27)

¹ Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. ² Therefore his servants said to him, "Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms, that my lord the king may be warm." ³ So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. ⁴ The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not. ⁵ Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. ⁶ His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?" He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom. ⁷ He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him. ⁸ But Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and

¹ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7660850/>

² <https://www.historyhit.com/what-happened-after-alexander-the-great-died/>

Shimei and Rei and David's mighty men were not with Adonijah. ⁹ Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the Serpent's Stone, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, ¹⁰ but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother. ¹¹ Then Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, "Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it? ¹² Now therefore come, let me give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. ¹³ Go in at once to King David, and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying, "Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne"? Why then is Adonijah king?' ¹⁴ Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words." ¹⁵ So Bathsheba went to the king in his chamber (now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was attending to the king). ¹⁶ Bathsheba bowed and paid homage to the king, and the king said, "What do you desire?" ¹⁷ She said to him, "My lord, you swore to your servant by the Lord your God, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.' ¹⁸ And now, behold, Adonijah is king, although you, my lord the king, do not know it. ¹⁹ He has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of the army, but Solomon your servant he has not invited. ²⁰ And now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. ²¹ Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king sleeps with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders." ²² While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet came in. ²³ And they told the king, "Here is Nathan the prophet." And when he came in before the king, he bowed before the king, with his face to the ground. ²⁴ And Nathan said, "My lord the king, have you said, 'Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne'? ²⁵ For he has gone down this day and has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest. And behold, they are eating and drinking before him, and saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!' ²⁶ But me, your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he has not invited. ²⁷ Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not told your servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?"

Throughout the books of 1 & 2 Samuel, David is shown as a strong warrior and capable strategist; a lover of women and a leader of men... 1 Kings begins with a David who is around 70 years old in such a fragile condition that they can't put enough clothes on him to keep him warm. I know that 50 is the new 30 these days, and so maybe 70 is the new 55? But David had lived a hard life that had left him old and cold. Physicians at the time thought that someone in this condition would improve with a warm body next to them. So despite the fact that the king had several wives and concubines, his servants thought that they needed to find a new, young, beautiful woman to lie next to him to keep him warm. Her name was Abishag; not sure why the text includes her name except that she reappears a few chapters later. The fact that the king "did not have intimate relations with her was not a sign of David's purity but of his physical frailty."³ The author is strongly emphasizing that if a young woman did not awaken and warm him, then he was in bad shape, very close to death.

This was the time for anyone who had designs on the throne to step forward and establish himself. Adonijah was the oldest living son of David, so he figured, "Hey, I'm good-looking, I'm in line to be king, let's make this happen." He decided to be proactive despite the fact that David had never promised him the throne, so he would claim it before David could designate a different successor. Apparently, he had not learned from his older brother Absalom's rebellion the dangers of trying to claim Israel's throne. And his power moves look just like the ones that Absalom had made: riding

³ Gary Inrig, *1 & 2 Kings* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), p. 11.

around in his chariots and horses with fifty men in front, reaching out to key men like Joab and Abiathar for support, and holding a big feast with the VIPs and most of his brothers. Adonijah didn't care whether David and God had designated a future king; he wanted glory and power and he tried to claim it the first opening he got. If you're wondering how he got so entitled, verse 6 says that his father never rebuked him when he was acting wrong. A lifetime of getting his way had taught him to demand what he wanted.

Of course, Israel had a different policy of choosing her kings than just the oldest son inheriting the throne. That policy was simple: God chose. God had chosen Saul, then David and now Solomon, the one brother that Adonijah had not invited to the feast. In fact, among the people missing from Adonijah's entourage were three key offices: Nathan, the true prophet, Zadok, the true priest, and Solomon, the soon to be true king. That should have been a clear sign that this was not a movement blessed by God, when Adonijah neglected the prophet, priest, and king that God had anointed to lead his people.⁴

Hopefully you remember that it was Nathan the prophet who had confronted David in such dramatic fashion after his affair with Bathsheba. He was godly, bold, and did not hesitate to speak truth to power. In this section, he had heard the news of Adonijah's coronation early and knew that David was not aware of what was going on. He also realized that the best person to get the king to act was Bathsheba herself. So, he went to her and reminded her that both her life and Solomon's life were in danger if no one intervened. So, Bathsheba approached her husband, the king, and filled him in on Adonijah's self-coronation. She reminded him of his oath to her, promised in Yahweh's name, that Solomon would be the next king. She challenged him to name Solomon publicly, since the nation was looking to him, verse 20 - "*the eyes of all Israel are on you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne.*" As she finished her plea, Nathan walked in and confirmed everything that she was saying, emphasizing the urgency to the king.

Let's see how David responded to all of this:

II. The Succession Resolution (1:28-53)

28 Then King David answered, "Call Bathsheba to me." So she came into the king's presence and stood before the king. 29 And the king swore, saying, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, 30 as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,' even so will I do this day." 31 Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and paid homage to the king and said, "May my lord King David live forever!" 32 King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada." So they came before the king. 33 And the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. 34 And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel. Then blow the trumpet and say, 'Long live King Solomon!' 35 You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, for he shall be king in my place. And I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah." 36 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, "Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, say so. 37 As the Lord has been with my lord the king, even so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David." 38 So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule and brought him to Gihon. 39 There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" 40 And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), p. 15.

joy, so that the earth was split by their noise. ⁴¹ Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, "What does this uproar in the city mean?" ⁴² While he was still speaking, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came. And Adonijah said, "Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news." ⁴³ Jonathan answered Adonijah, "No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king, ⁴⁴ and the king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites. And they had him ride on the king's mule. ⁴⁵ And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon, and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard. ⁴⁶ Solomon sits on the royal throne. ⁴⁷ Moreover, the king's servants came to congratulate our lord King David, saying, 'May your God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours, and make his throne greater than your throne.' And the king bowed himself on the bed. ⁴⁸ And the king also said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it.'" ⁴⁹ Then all the guests of Adonijah trembled and rose, and each went his own way. ⁵⁰ And Adonijah feared Solomon. So he arose and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. ⁵¹ Then it was told Solomon, "Behold, Adonijah fears King Solomon, for behold, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.'" ⁵² And Solomon said, "If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die." ⁵³ So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and paid homage to King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, "Go to your house."

As old and frail as David was, it didn't keep him from acting decisively and jumping into action to get Solomon crowned king immediately. He had Solomon ride his royal mule to Gihon where Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed him king. Then he would sit on David's throne, essentially co-ruling during the rest of David's days and taking over when he died. A few sermons ago I mentioned the choral song written by George Handel called "Zadok the Priest" that is sung at every British monarch's coronation ceremony in the past 300 years. It refers to this very incident: "Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon king. And all the people rejoiced and said, 'God save the king! Long live the king! God save the king! May the king live forever! Amen, Hallelujah.'"⁵ The bottom line is that before the day was over, the succession crisis had been decisively dealt with and the people in Jerusalem rejoiced and partied in the streets.⁶

If Adonijah thought that his father would just go along with his coronation without challenge, he found out quickly how wrong he was. He clearly didn't think everything through and underestimated the power of resistance of those loyal to Solomon. If he had known that David had promised the kingship to Solomon (which is not clear that he did), he should have known that David honored his promises and covenants. And the people that had come to his side were not as loyal as he had hoped, deserting him in fear as soon as they heard the report of Solomon's ceremony. Adonijah had probably planned to kill Solomon at some point to keep him from making a move on the throne, so he likely felt that Solomon had the same plans for him. Taking "the horns of the altar" in the temple (verse 50) was a symbolic way of claiming sanctuary and throwing himself on the mercy of the king. Thankfully, for Adonijah, his brother modelled his response after his father's usual response – mercy. Or at least conditional mercy: you may live if you conduct yourself like a worthy man from now on.

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zadok-the-Priest>

⁶ Inrig, p. 13.

Now that all of the pretenders to the throne have been dealt with, the last thing we see in David's life is him instructing his son, the next king:

III. The Succession Directives (1 Kings 2:1-12)

¹ When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, ² "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, ³ and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, ⁴ that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.' ⁵ "Moreover, you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed, avenging in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist and on the sandals on his feet. ⁶ Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace. ⁷ But deal loyally with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from Absalom your brother. ⁸ And there is also with you Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, saying, 'I will not put you to death with the sword.' ⁹ Now therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol." ¹⁰ Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹ And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years. He reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹² So Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.

This is an interesting final speech, with the first three verses directed at Solomon's soul and the next five giving instructions about how to handle some political situations. Some of the advice David gave about not letting his enemies die in peace seems at odds with his earlier advice to walk faithfully in all the ways of the Lord. It's a combination of authentic, sincere piety and pragmatic politics. It's clear that David had some scores to settle, some "loose ends to wrap up." He essentially gave Solomon a hit list; for his enemies to be dealt with so they would not plague the new administration. First was Joab, his main military general, who had won many battles for him, but had also killed his son and two other men that David did not authorize – v. 5 Abner and Amasa, "avenging in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war." David had never dealt properly with Joab, so Solomon would have to. The second man, Shimei; verses 8-9 remind us that he was the man who had cursed David when he was fleeing Absalom's army, but later asked his forgiveness, which David gave. But Solomon was tasked with ending his life anyways. Two long-standing blood-debts to deal with, but the third man, Barzillai, was worthy of Solomon's generosity to his children because of the friendship and help that he gave David.

The greater part of David's instructions is in the earlier verses, and it is the best instruction that a father can give his son: to be a man. And not just a man seeking his own agenda, but a godly man who would "walk in (God's) ways and keep His statutes... that you may prosper in all that you do." There are echoes of earlier successions in Israel's leadership, such as Joshua 1:7-8 when Moses had died, and Joshua was tasked with leading the people:

"Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall

meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

The one indispensable condition for the kingdom to continue to prosper was uncompromising faithfulness to God's covenant. Read 1 & 2 Kings to find out whether Solomon and the future kings remained faithful or not (spoiler: not so much).

And so the throne passed from father to son as David died at the end of forty years of ruling. Chuck Swindoll comments on David's legacy:

"Let me give you a list of the things Solomon received as a result of his father's hand. The nation was now unified under one flag. A royal capital had been established in Jerusalem. The military force of Israel was now respected by all the enemies around them, and every enemy had been subdued, including the Philistines. Israel's boundaries had been extended from 6,000 to 60,000 square miles. Prosperity had been brought in by the extensive trade routes that his father had set up... I'd call that an enviable legacy, and it was Solomon's to enjoy."⁷

I imagine Solomon sitting at a Thanksgiving feast like many of us will this Thursday, and everyone is taking turns saying what they're thankful for, and then it's Solomon's turn. And he just goes on and on about how blessed he's been, how much his father left, great land, great military, etc. And the kids are all squirming and his wives start complaining that the food is getting cold, but he just keeps going. Because David had left him an incredible kingdom, and then God blessed him and his nation further during his reign, making him the wisest and wealthiest king ever. Until he forgot where his source of blessing came from and stopped walking in God's ways.

The vast majority of parents want to leave their children an inheritance. They want to leave the family home, valued possessions, a trust or a brokerage account to help them afford to live a "good life." But so much more important than the physical things we leave them is the spiritual legacy we leave. Like David, we need to impress on our children the key to an abundant life: following the Lord. That's way more important than anything material we leave them. I've used Kara Tippetts' story once before in a sermon here – she was a woman who lived in Colorado Springs, the wife of a church planter, and a mother. She developed cancer and wrote a book called *The Hardest Peace*, knowing that she would die soon. One chapter of that book is a letter to her children knowing she would not be there as they grew up:

"I love being your mama. I love each moment I was granted beside you. When you meet the edges of life, the hard moments, the suffocating realities, I pray you would look to Jesus. I pray you would know His goodness, and in those edges know my prayers are meeting you – uniquely meeting you, even if I cannot."⁸

You don't have to be dying, though, to consistently pass on your faith to those around you. We can continually disciple our children, reminding them that life lived in obedience to God leads to the deepest joy and greatest blessings. It's not an easy road, your problems are not all magically solved for you, but you have the wisdom of the Holy Spirit inside you, the love of Christ guiding you, and the sustaining hand of God the Father working all things out for your good, trials and hardships included.

Conclusion

And so we wrap up our study of the life of David, the "man after God's own heart." The man that God delighted in and used to establish His chosen people in Jerusalem for the golden age of Israel.

⁷ Charles Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (Dallas: Word, 1997), p. 292.

⁸ Kara Tippetts, *The Hardest Peace* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014), p. 169.

As we've seen, the Bible gives us David's weaknesses in addition to his strengths. On the one hand, we often saw his refusing to act in anger, exercising mercy and forgiveness to his enemies. On the other hand, he often confused who his true allies and enemies were. His strengths as a military leader and king were undercut by his failures at home, where his adultery wreaked havoc, and his inability to discipline and shepherd his sons caused multiple rebellions. A flawed, sinful man, but one who loved God, as he wrote in his Psalms - beautiful, passionate, and honest songs to the Lord. A man from whom we can (and have over the past seven months) learn how to live our lives "coram Deo," before the face of God.

What is our next season on the church calendar? Advent. As the New Testament begins, the very first chapter (Matthew 1) records Jesus' genealogy, which flowed through both David and Solomon. And Luke's gospel has angels showing up announcing that "*unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*" And as this Jesus walked around performing miracles and teaching, even two blind men knew enough to address Him correctly: "*Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!*" (Matthew 20:30). In the middle of Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2, he said this:

"Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses." (Acts 2:29-32)

Even David's death and burial point ahead to his great Descendant who would be killed and buried, but who could not be held by death. The greater David lived a perfect life that David did not. Jesus was killed unjustly, but God the Father used His death to take away the sins of His people. Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb killed in our place to atone for our sins and gain us the forgiveness that the Father could now grant us. He rose from the dead because death had no claim on Him, and He ascended into heaven, where He sits on His eternal throne forever. And as Philippians 2 reminds us, one day, "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" Because He is the great King of kings, and we have the privilege of serving and following Him now. Amen.

Benediction

Romans 15:5,6 – "*May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"