

Wise King Solomon



1 Kings 8:22 "Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. He said, 'O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that

which you promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.' Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.'"

So, two weeks ago, the Old Testament reading was about Good King David lamenting the death of his eldest son, Absalom. Then last week, it was the notice that Good King David had died, and Wise King Solomon sat on the throne of his father David. In this week's reading, Solomon has renovated the Royal Palace and now built a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, and is dedicating it in the presence of all the assembly of Israel. Here is portrayed the smooth and peaceful transfer of power from the beloved Good King David to his favored son, Wise King Solomon --- or so it would seem, but with these readings, you aren't getting the whole story. Significant details are left out from the Sunday morning lessons.

For instance, you were not told all the facts of the story of Absalom two weeks ago, the eldest son of King David, who raised a large army and rebelled against his father and his father's rule. What was not mentioned was that Absalom's rebellion was so successful and so powerful that he forced Good King David and his family to flee for their very lives to across

the Jordan River, to flee from the fortified capital of the royal city of Jerusalem before the overwhelming might of these rebel forces. David's rule was obviously not as popular as we often imagine, that such a large rebel army to be raised so rapidly. And in fleeing so quickly, 10 of David's 18 wives and concubines did not get out in time. And since in the ancient world virility was a sign of power, Absalom took those 10 wives and concubines of his father David and laid with them on the royal palace roof for all to see, as a sign and as proof of his virility and thus his power as the new King over Israel.

As we heard in the reading from two weeks ago, David's army fought back against Absalom's rebellion to regain their rightful place, and when Absalom's long, flowing hair got caught in a tree in the midst of battle, David's general Joab's men slew him. But when the news of that victory was brought to David at the end of that reading, David did not rejoice at the demise of his enemy, all he could do was lament the death of his favorite son: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" And after several days of weeping in his royal chamber and mourning the death of his eldest son, Joab, David's general, came in and scolded the king for mourning the death of this enemy of the state and ignoring his own soldiers, who had fought and died on his behalf, and recaptured his throne. Joab had to cajole and

force David to get up out of his bed and to go out there and finally congratulate and thank his troops who saved his kingdom, and so he finally did.

The story of Absalom comes towards the end of the 2nd Book of Samuel. Last week's reading comes from the beginning of the 1st Book of Kings, as does this week's. But in the verses before and after last week's reading, some other interesting details can be found, which are neglected in the Sunday morning readings. For example, at the very beginning of 1st Kings, David, we are told, had become old and bedridden, and though his servants covered him with blankets he could not get warm. So, his servants said, 'Let us get a young virgin for the king, and let her lie in his bosom, so that my lord the king may be warm.' So, we are told, the palace servants searched throughout all the territory of Israel for a beautiful girl, a sort of American Idol competition, or perhaps better yet, Who's Got Talent, and they found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The girl was very beautiful, and she became the king's attendant and 'served' him, but yet even so, the king could not get warm. He had lost his virility, and without it, a king was considered powerless.

Therefore, another of David's sons, Adonijah rebelled and exalted himself, saying "I will be king in his place." Adonijah, we are told, was handsome and he was the eldest son of David

since the death of Absalom, and so he gathered an army, and he got Joab, David's old general, and Abiathar, David's old priest, to announce their support of his royal claims. Adonijah became the new King of Israel, and the Scriptures tell us clearly that good King David never said a word against what Adonijah had done.

Still, in those days, as in our own, there are devious politics at work in the government. Nathan the prophet --- you remember him, he was the one who confronted King David about his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and about David's murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite, to cover up their pregnancy --- well this Nathan, perhaps fearing for his own life, plotted with Bathsheba, one of David's 8 wives and 10 concubines, to take away the crown from Adonijah. The prophet Nathan said to Bathsheba, 'let me give you some advice, so that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go in at once to King David, and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne? Why then is Adonijah king?' Then while you are still there speaking with the king,' Nathan said, 'I will come in after you and confirm your words.' I will come in and say to the King, yes, yes you did say that. I heard it. So, Bathsheba did as Nathan suggested. Bathsheba and Solomon, fearing for their lives if Adonijah became King,

convinced David that he had indeed previously promised Solomon the throne, even though David never had, but David was old, and forgetful, and Bathsheba and Solomon and Nathan took political advantage of that, such that Solomon was then declared the rightful heir to the throne by King David himself and he inherited the mantle of his father.

And so, we heard in last week's reading, David died and was buried in Jerusalem, with Solomon on the throne of his father, David. Immediately after those verses in chapter two and before the rest of the story today, there is more. We are told how Adonijah came and told Bathsheba that "You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel expected me to reign; however, the kingdom has turned about and become my brother's. . . And now I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me." Bathsheba said to him, "Go on." He said, "Please ask King Solomon – he will not refuse you – to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife." You remember Abishag, the Shunammite, the beautiful young virgin who was given to the elderly David towards the end of his life to keep him warm. And Bathsheba said, "Very well; I will speak to the king on your behalf."

But Solomon was wise and knew that Adonijah's request was political in nature, that by sleeping with the handmaid of his father Good King David, he would be claiming his power, just as the rebel Absalom did by lying with his father's wives and

concubines on the roof of the royal palace. So Wise King Solomon had his rival Adonijah, the only surviving son of good King David, he had him killed, and he had his father's old general, Joab, who had supported Adonijah's claims to the throne, killed, and Solomon had the priest Abiathar, who supported Adonijah's claims to the throne, he as a holy man was banished, and exiled from the land forever. And thus, it was after all, not a very smooth and peaceful transfer of power!

Another part of the narrative skipped over to get to this morning's reading after Solomon has established his throne and eliminated his rivals, is the story of the dream Solomon had at Gibeon, where God appeared to him while he slept when God asked Solomon, "What shall I give you." To which Solomon humbly replied, an understanding mind to help govern God's people. And we are told that it pleased God that Solomon did not ask for riches, for long life, or for the death of his enemies, such that God gave Solomon a wise and discerning mind, like no one had ever had before or would ever have afterwards. And indeed, the Old Testament readings for the next many weeks now are excerpts from the so-called wisdom literature, all ascribed to wise King Solomon, excerpts from Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon, and the book of the Wisdom of Solomon. That overlooked dream contains the Scriptural passage that justifies his title as Wise King Solomon, who did not ask God for riches or for long

life or for the death of his enemies, but only for an understanding and discerning mind to help govern God's people, which God gave him, we are told. Though Solomon also did get famously rich, lived a long life, and killed most of his enemies.

For as we see from the missing passages in the Sunday readings, Solomon's Kingdom was indeed firmly established, but by conniving treachery and by deadly force! For Solomon was indeed wise, wise in the ways of the world and the art of politics. Amen.