

## Wise King Solomon



1 Kings 2:10 "David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. So, Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established."

So, last weeks' Old Testament reading was about Good King David lamenting the death of his eldest son, Absalom, who had led such a powerful rebellion against his father that David and his family were forced to flee from the fortified city of Jerusalem in fear of Absalom's troops. Now Good King David has died, and Wise King Solomon sat on the throne of his father David. Today's reading suggests a 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, as I have noted before, you aren't getting the whole story. Significant details are left out from the Sunday morning lessons.

This week's reading comes from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> Book of Kings, from the second chapter. But some other interesting details are overlooked from chapter one, which are neglected in the Sunday morning lectionary. At the very beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, David, as I mentioned before, 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, I said, or perhaps better yet, Who's Got Talent, and they found Abishag the Shunammite, (remember that name) 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, David's oldest son, Adonijah exalted himself, saying "I will be king in his place." Adonijah, we are told, was handsome and gathered an army, and he got Joab, David's old general, and Abiathar, David's old priest, to join him at a

royal banquet to announce his claim to the throne. Adonijah became then 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 in the reading two weeks 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 now that Adonijah announced himself as king, 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.

When I told you this story a few weeks ago, someone came up to me and asked what happened to Adonijah, who as the eldest son of David had claimed the throne? Well, Solomon promised not to harm Adonijah, saying, "If he proves to be a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the ground, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die."

Shortly thereafter we are told how Adonijah came and spoke with Bathsheba, saying, "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 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 father's power and reign, just as the rebel Absalom did by lying with his father's concubines on the roof of the royal palace for all to see. So Wise King Solomon had his rival Adonijah, the only surviving son of good King David, he had him killed. David's old general, Joab, who had supported Adonijah's claims to the throne, went home then and killed himself. And then 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 as today's reading suggests!

After Solomon has established his throne and eliminated his rivals, he had a dream at Gibeon, where God appeared to him while he slept and 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 several weeks are excerpts from the so-called wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible, all ascribed to wise King Solomon, excerpts from Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon, and the book of the Wisdom of Solomon. That 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.