

1

God's purpose prevailing

Please read 1 Kings 1:1-53

The issue was of immense and vital importance. Who would succeed David as King of Israel? David appears to have considered the matter settled. His successor was to be Solomon, the son of Bathsheba. Although this decision had not yet been announced to the nation (1:20), it was evidently common knowledge within the king's family (1:17,30) and among his closest associates (1:11-13). It was quite obviously known by another of David's sons, Adonijah. The fact that Adonijah invited to his 'coronation feast' all his brothers except Solomon (1:9-10) tells us everything we need to know. It was true that Adonijah was the oldest living son and that the custom in other nations was for the eldest son to succeed his father, but this custom was not yet in place in Israel, which had, on the contrary, a very strong tradition of God bypassing the elder to elevate the younger (Genesis 25:21-23; 1 Samuel 16:1-13). What mattered

in Israel was not that the eldest be honoured, but that God be honoured.

But Adonijah did not care what his father had determined. He did not allow for the possibility that his father's choice had been informed and guided by God himself. It made no difference to him that his father had made his choice as the covenant head of the covenant nation, that his father had walked with God in an extraordinarily intimate way. There was no room in Adonijah's head for God, for David or for Israel because his head was already full—full of himself and ambition. The author writes, *"Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king'"* (1:5).

Filled with himself and set upon exalting himself, Adonijah concocted his elaborate scheme to lay claim to the throne. He began by conferring with Joab, the captain of David's army, and Abiathar the priest (1:7). Joab and David had long been at odds with each other on several counts, and Joab's slaying of David's rebellious son, Absalom (2 Samuel 18:14), had so widened the rift that it could never be bridged. Abiathar's defection is not as easy to understand. Perhaps, as several commentators suggest, it was due to jealousy of Zadok, who had been placed ahead of him. After consulting with these men, Adonijah proclaimed a great feast (1:7,9).

All of this has a very familiar ring to it. Adonijah's brother Absalom had acted in a similar fashion when he sought to overthrow his father (2 Samuel 15:1-14).

The reality of evil within the church

Adonijah's failed scheme speaks powerfully to us about the reality of evil within the church herself. We must never lose

sight of the fact that Adonijah and his cohorts carried out their plan within the context of the covenant nation of Israel. The modern-day successor to Israel is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8; Galatians 4:28). We expect evil in society in general, but we have a tendency to think the church should be exempt from it. Alas, she is not! Adonijah was guilty of several evils. He rejected the will of God concerning his brother Solomon. He sowed the seeds of discord in the nation of Israel. He gave way to his pride and ambition.

The author's account of Adonijah suddenly leaps from the page. The very evils of which he was guilty are still found in the community of faith today. It is not at all difficult to find such rebellion against God's will and his truth. Nor is it difficult to find discord, pride and ambition.

The problem of evil in the world has always been vexing enough to the children of God. What are we to say about evil within the church? Some are quick to say the presence of evil within the church completely discredits her and her message. The truth is rather that in a sense it confirms her. The Lord Jesus Christ assured his followers that evil would exist in the context of the church while she is in this world. A glorious day is coming in which the Lord will finally deliver the church from every last vestige of evil, but while she is in this world she must endure it.

The proper response to evil within the church

The reality of evil in the church does not mean that the saints of God are to give in to it, any more than David and his followers gave in to the evil of Adonijah. They rather responded to the evil in their midst with wisdom and discernment.

Nathan

The prophet Nathan emerges from this account as one who acted with great wisdom. Ronald S. Wallace observes: ‘We must give full credit to Nathan for his alertness. He realized that God had placed him in a key position in this very acute and fateful situation. He had to be continually on the watch against those whose ways were a danger to the truth. He had to take full responsibility in the crisis, to begin to act alone.’¹

God has often defeated evil by causing one person to realize that he or she was in a strategic position and therefore must act for God and for his truth. Mordecai convinced Esther to take a stand for right with words that have motivated and energized the saints of God down through the ages: ‘Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ (Esther 4:14).

No one has ever been more discerning about evil and more steadfast in standing against it than Daniel. He recognized that God had placed him in a strategic position in Babylon and heroically resisted its evil and stood for God. Martin Luther recognized his strategic position and stood for God’s truth when no one else dared to do so. May God help us to do as these saints did. We are not lacking in evil these days, but we are sorely lacking in discerning saints.

David

David can be faulted in two respects. He had been much too soft with Adonijah, even to the point of never rebuking him for any evil (1:6). David can also be faulted for not making his choice of Solomon more vigorously and widely known. But while we acknowledge these faults, we must also credit him with acting wisely and decisively when he learned of Adonijah’s scheme.

Bathsheba's plain declaration that '*the eyes of all Israel*' were upon David to settle the matter of succession (1:20), her prediction that she and Solomon would be considered '*offenders*' if Adonijah came to the throne (1:21), and Nathan's confirmation of the developments (1:22-27) achieved their desired result. The old, doddering king sprang into action. After assuring Bathsheba that he had in no way changed his original pledge regarding Solomon (1:28-31), he called upon Zadok (a priest), Nathan (a prophet) and Benaiah (a soldier) to have Solomon ride on the king's mule to Gihon where Zadok and Nathan would anoint him and proclaim him king (1:32-35), assignments which they enthusiastically performed to the letter (1:36-40).

An example to be followed

The wisdom of Nathan and David alerts us to how we should respond to evil. Some Christians take a fatalistic view of it. Saying, 'What will be will be,' they blissfully excuse themselves from responsibility. Some Christians are exceedingly naïve about it. Never able to see danger, they seem eager to accommodate every new trend. Meanwhile our Lord continues to call his people to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16). We are to discern evil and stand against it. We are called to see the subtlety of it and the terrible damage it creates.

One wonders if the author of 1 Kings did not begin with this account so his readers, now exiled in Babylon, would think long and hard. Adonijah had been prevented from coming to the throne because Nathan and David had discerned the evil and had firmly resisted it. The nation's subsequent failure to do the same was the reason for the exile.

The defeat of evil

Casual observers of the events described in this first chapter might be inclined to ascribe Solomon's accession to good fortune. If Nathan had not heard of the scheme and had not taken quick action, Adonijah could have succeeded. David had a far different view of things. According to Jonathan's report to Adonijah, David had attributed Solomon's accession to God (1:48).

As far as David was concerned, God had been at work in the midst of this situation to perform his will. This may seem to be a surprising assessment. All through the account of Adonijah's evil scheming, God is apparently absent. As we read we could very well find ourselves inclined to cry: 'Where is God?'

When the whole episode comes to an end, David affirms that God was involved all along. For a while he gave Adonijah free rein, but then he stepped in and put Solomon on the throne. God's way of handling evil is always puzzling to us. Why did God ever allow Adonijah's evil to progress? Why did he not snuff it out at the beginning? One answer must be this: God allowed Adonijah to show his true colours so that no one could finally question whether Solomon was indeed the right choice. Ronald S. Wallace perceptively notes: 'It is characteristic of the way God deals with opposition to his rule that he often allows his opponents full scope to express what is in their minds and hearts so that there may be no doubt that in the end they deserved the punishment they received. He thus allows evil movements often to break out and ripen in order to show their true nature before they are finally crushed.'²

A picture of God and his anointed King

This account of Adonijah's vain attempt to seize the throne may

very well cause us to think of the Second Psalm. There we find that, just as David had designated Solomon to be King of Israel, so God has designated a king. There can be no doubt about the identity of this king. It is none other than God's own Son, as the psalm itself makes clear (v. 12). In the book of Acts, the apostles referred to this psalm. There was certainly no doubt in their minds that the anointed King of whom the psalm speaks was the Lord Jesus himself (Acts 4:23-28).

As we look further at the psalm we discover yet another parallel. Just as David's designated king, Solomon, was resisted and opposed by Adonijah and his followers, so God's designated King, Jesus, is resisted and opposed by many. And as Adonijah and his supporters thought they could circumvent David's designated king, so those who oppose God fancy that they can successfully resist him and his Christ. The psalmist portrays these opponents as plotting 'a vain thing' (v. 1) and their kings as setting themselves and taking counsel together (v. 2). The point of their consultations is how to overthrow God's anointed King. They say of God and his anointed: 'Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us' (v. 3).

How does the Lord God respond to all their raging and plotting? Does he call an emergency session of the heavenly cabinet? Does he worry or become agitated? Does he fly into a panic? Here is the psalmist's answer:

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The LORD shall hold them in derision.
Then he shall speak to them in his wrath,
And distress them in his deep displeasure:
'Yet I have set my king
On my holy hill of Zion'

(Psalm 2:4-6).

God has already done the very thing his enemies most want to prevent. He has already declared Christ to be King, and nothing will ever be able to change that. Charles Spurgeon is correct: 'Jehovah's will is done, and man's will frets and raves in vain. God's Anointed is appointed, and shall not be disappointed.'³

All that is left for God's enemies, then, is to cast themselves upon the mercy of God. They are called upon to 'be wise' (Psalm 2:10) by not nursing hopes of succeeding against God. They are commanded to 'serve the LORD with fear' (v. 11), that is, recognize his sovereignty and greatness and bow before him in awe and worship. They are urged to 'rejoice with trembling' (v. 11), that is, to recognize that their happiness and joy are to be found, not in resisting God, but rather in trembling in awe before him. They are told to 'kiss the Son' (v. 12), that is, show true affection to God's Anointed. And they are assured that they will 'perish in the way' if they refuse to do these things. Those who refuse to submit to Christ will some day be cut off while they are still walking in the way of rebellion. They will be going along in their hatred and spewing out their venom against God, and he will suddenly step in and cut them off. They will then find that they have not defeated God's Anointed, but have only succeeded in kindling his wrath (v. 12).

2

Solomon established

Please read 1 Kings 2:1-46

It was time for David to die. The once mighty king was now a mere shell of his former self. The strength and resiliency of olden days had fled, and the man who was known for his prowess in battle now trembled in his bed (1:1).

As David's life ebbed away his mind was still on his duty. He knew he could still be a source of blessing to his people by carefully instructing and charging his son and successor, Solomon. It was not enough for Solomon merely to have the throne. He must know how to reign from that throne. David, therefore, gathers the remnants of his once mighty strength and speaks solemnly and urgently to his son.

David's charge (2:1-9)

David's charge to Solomon may be divided into two parts: a call to obedience and a call to justice. Howard F. Vos refers