

Introduction

So as we start our discussion on this thick, very interesting book, you might be wondering what a book about ancient Kings of Israel has to do with us. We don't have a king. We have a completely different system of government. What on earth could something this old possibly have to say to us today? Well I think JB pointed out several of those things last week. Although humanity is now thousands of years removed from the events in Kings, as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun. People are still committing the same sins, giving in to the same temptations, and experiencing just as much brokenness as they did in those days. Furthermore, if we really believe the whole Bible is God breathed, or as we say inspired, than it must have something to say to us, even in the Old Testament. Paul wrote this to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, saying: "All Scripture is [a]inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for [b]training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." And again in Romans 15:4 he says "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." He wrote these things before the church had the New Testament and affirmed it as Scripture. So the ancient books have great meaning for us today, just as they did for the early church. So this matters. All these weird names we're going to read about and fail miserably to pronounce are significant.

I also think that a discussion in particular of the Kings God put over his people is very relevant to the church. Because what you believe about who Jesus is matters for how you will then live. If Jesus is just a nice guy who had some good suggestions for how to live, than we can discard him whenever we choose, or throw out whichever of his sayings we don't agree with, which many are doing today, as they have done throughout scripture. But if he is King, as scripture says he is, if he is the one who will open the scroll, whom all of humanity will bow down to in worship, and who will put all his enemies underneath his footstool, than we have a duty and a responsibility to treat him as such. Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, which means that when you become a Christian, when you are born again, you are not your own. You belong to him. Being a Christian means daily submission to the rightful King. So Kings is going to tell us what God wants for his people when he gives them a King, and why they need a King of His choosing, not one like the nations.

My main point today is that God's people need a righteous King, and we have one in Jesus.

Who Will Sit on the Throne?

-David's Frailty(1:1-4)

JB brought out a major theme last week that we will see throughout the book of Kings. That is the decline of Israel. It's a very sad picture and its especially sad that a book about Israel's Kings is so full of failures. After Solomon's reign, and the kingdom splits, all of the northern Kingdom's Kings are bad. They're pretty awful. And Judah is somewhat of a mixed bag, but it does not end well either. The two exemplary Kings are Hezekiah, known for his trust in the Lord, when he prayed that awesome prayer for Yahweh to defeat Sennacherib after he insulted God in front of Israel. The other is Josiah, known for his revival of the word in Judah. When he found the scroll, he tore his clothes and brought about a massive

nationwide repentance for how God's people had offended Him and forgotten him. There are six others who are recognized for generally being good kings but who did not remove the "high places." Symbolizing the infection of idolatry in Judah. So it's somewhat of a bleak picture we have here, and we don't really start off well either. David is the heroic warrior king, the one God chose and who was faithful to the Lord, despite having some failures along the way. He is the hero of the story, but he is on his deathbed. David's frailty provides us with foreshadowing of what this book will be about. As David is in decline in the beginning of Kings, so will Israel be in decline throughout the book.

Like all of us will be, barring a tragedy, David has gotten old, and the scripture says he can't keep warm. His body is breaking down. And his servants decide that the way to fix this is to go out and find a beautiful woman to lie in his arms. Now we don't encourage this at Clairmont, in case you were wondering. But during those days it was common for the King to have multiple wives and concubines. So they're solution to keep him warm was to find the most attractive woman and let her keep him warm. This was also likely an attempt to increase his vitality. But the scriptures say that David was not intimate with her. Some like to believe that this is because of his purity. Others say it is because he physically can't. I think the latter is the better option, as it makes more sense. This is here to show us that David is a shell of what he once was. He can't take care of himself, he has no vitality, and as we will see in a minute, He is not in his right mind.

We're meant to feel the weight of this. Here is the greatest King Israel ever had, and as we will see, ever will have until Christ. But like all of us, he is human. We have already seen his weakness in that he was not perfect. He made many mistakes. Now we see his physical weakness as he nears the end of his life, and we are left with this unsettled feeling. If David is not the everlasting King, the one who will lead Israel in faithfulness forever, than who is?

What happens to David will happen to us all. David was likely tempted to look back on his life with a mix of regret and pride. He failed many times, but he was also mighty, and did great good for Israel. But we don't see this attitude from him. Throughout his life, he actually gave us a model for how we should live, not in his perfection, but in his weakness. This mighty warrior who killed a lion with his bare hands, slew a giant with a sling and some stones, drove back Israel's greatest enemies, wrote beautiful songs about the Lord, was never afraid to show his own weakness. At the end of His life, his accomplishments or lack of them did not matter. What mattered is what he wrote in Psalm 56, during his prime. "In God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?" That's what we have to hold on to. When all the things we find our identity in fail us, and they will, what will we put our hope in? You are not the sum of your accomplishments or your failures. You are a child of the One True God, or you're not. And so the question is, where do you find your identity? Are you going to be like Michael Jordan, who says to this day that he does not feel whole again now that he can't play basketball and dominate the way he did before? Or are you going to be like David who said In God I trust? What can flesh do to me?

-Adonijah Exalts Himself(1:5-26)

So at this point the line of succession seems to be unclear at least to some people. This is a potentially disastrous situation. We can think of Alexander the Great, who died at a very young age, having created the largest empire in history until him. He was likely poisoned by an enemy, and when he

died, he had not designated a successor. This almost immediately caused the Macedonian Empire to break up into several different smaller countries, ruled by a warlord, who had been once of Alexander's men, all because no one could agree on who should be the new king.

Now this situation is a little strange because the picture 1 Kings paints is that the only people who seem to know about the fact that Solomon is supposed to succeed David are his wife, Bathsheba and Nathan the prophet. If this is true, it's just bad leadership, and you have to wonder why he wouldn't tell anyone else. David was said to have the wisdom of the angels, so it seems uncharacteristic that he would have made such an obvious blunder. However, 1 Chronicles paints a different picture. In the last two chapters we see David receiving the promise of the Lord and then he makes an announcement to his cabinet that Solomon shall succeed him and that Solomon shall build the temple. Now we don't really know the exact timing of these events. It's possible that David's announcement came after Bathsheba warned him about Adonijah. But it's also possible that he made this declaration earlier, and that some of his cabinet along with his son just rebelled anyways. Either interpretation I think is valid, although I think he did make the announcement and Adonijah, Joab, and Abiathar just decided to rebel anyways when they saw that David was weak and no longer ruling. Either way, David is accountable for letting this happen while he's supposed to be ruling, and the rebels are accountable for turning against the king and exalting Adonijah without the King's blessing.

So now you can see why an opportunist would take advantage of a situation like this. David is not ruling, and now it's clear that he is weak, and vulnerable. So Adonijah decides he will be king.

The way this section progresses it's almost eerie how Adonijah is a mirror image of Absalom. He sees this as a chance for him to be King without getting his Father's blessing. He is described as never having been corrected in anything he did by David. He is also very handsome and loved by the people. The readers are meant to see here that this is headed for disaster, just like Absalom. We know how that went and what happened to Absalom.

Verse 5 says it perfectly though. Adonijah exalted himself and said I will be King. This is exactly the opposite of how David had begun his ascension. He refused to take Saul's life even when it was obvious that Saul had fallen into his hands, because he said, I will not take the life of God's anointed. David was patient and waited humbly for God to make him King, because he trusted Yahweh. Adonijah in contrast is in it for himself. He exalts himself instead of exalting Yahweh. Tragically we know plenty of Adonijahs in our culture. They're all over television and the internet. Our culture is obsessed with people who are famous, for making themselves famous. That is often the aspiration of so many young people. They don't say I want to be a doctor or a firefighter, or a pilot. They say I just want to be famous. Hauntingly, Adonijah is a good case study for where that kind of thinking can lead. In a culture that says me first, God's people should be the ones saying, not me but God first. John the Baptist speaking of Jesus said "He must increase, and I must decrease."

Adonijah gets support interestingly from the Judahites. Noticeably absent are any Israelites, furthering the growing division between Israel and Judah. Adonijah is trying to play the game of politics instead of lovingly looking after his own people.

And enter the prophet Nathan. We haven't seen him in a while. He returns yet again to ensure that the people of Israel know God's will for them. I want to make a note here about Nathan, and his predecessors and followers. I think we have often let the world inform us as to what our definitions of biblical terms are. The term prophet specifically, is often though in laymen's terms to be one who

interprets or predicts the future. That actually is not what a prophet is, certainly not a prophet of Yahweh. While the prophets often did have visions of the future and often did predict events accurately, that is only a small portion of what they did. A better way of understanding their role is that of a mouthpiece of God. Essentially a prophet was one who communicated to the people of God, the will of God and the nature of God. Typically, a prophet would show up when something was wrong, and this was intentional. The people needed to be reminded that God was not pleased with what they were doing. So the prophet would say the famous words, "Thus Saith the Lord." And that essentially was their job title. And this was often what got them in trouble as well. They would call out the wickedness they saw because Yahweh told them to, and they would then be imprisoned or killed for it. When Elijah runs from Ahab and Jezebel, he rightly fears for his life because he just told the king that he is being wicked, a capital offense in those days. So when we see Nathan show up here, it should immediately remind us of the last time he showed up in Israel, to rebuke David and get him to repent because he was engaged in wickedness. Here, Nathan again shows up because God is not pleased with the way things are happening. And we should also note that Nathan places his focus again on David. God holds David responsible for what is happening in Israel right now.

Nathan goes to Bathsheba asking her about what is going on. We get the impression that David is not in his right mind, even though the text doesn't clearly say it. Nathan instructs Bathsheba to go before the King and remind him of the promise he made to her that her son Solomon would sit on his throne, and to tell David that this was not what was happening, that in fact Adonijah had set himself up as king. As she is telling David this, Nathan shows up in the middle of this conversation and basically repeats what she just said. They also both tell David, "you do not know this, that Adonijah is rebelling." This is where we can probably infer that David is not in his right mind. Although he has not always done the right thing, he has not been unaware during his reign of what is happening. He even knew what Absalom was doing while the rebellion was beginning. So this is somewhat uncharacteristic of David. It's interesting that the writer here uses the same word he did at the beginning of the narrative. When Nathan says you do not know what is going on, the word know is the same one used for the fact that David did not know Abishag. Although one was talking about sexual intimacy and one was talking about understanding, the implication is clear, David is not the man he once was.

David is showing the fact that he is physically present and yet mentally checked out, and he has been for some time. How many of us are like that? You're talking to them and they seem to not even be hearing you. Or they're just on autopilot in everything they do. We can think of Adam Sandler in the movie *Click*, where he accidentally fast forwards through his own life, and when he finally slows down he sees the serious damage it has done. His family is in shambles from it. Our presence matters. It matters to our family, and our loved ones, and it matters if we are in leadership. The nation is plunging into chaos because her king is not ruling. He has no power and no knowledge of what is happening. And it appears he was absent with his own children. It says of Adonijah that David never rebuked him for anything he did. This is exactly like Absalom and now we have two sons who David has never held accountable for their actions, and they thank him for it by trying to steal his throne from him. We can only wonder what it would have been like had David been involved in his children's lives. So much of the turmoil he faces is because his children go bonkers. And Nathan and Bathsheba say it perfectly. "You don't know." Imagine your spouse saying that to you, after your child has done something really crazy, and you're wondering where this came from. "You don't know what's going on here." May the God forgive us for all the ways we are lost in our own worlds, and may the Spirit bring us back like Nathan did for David. "This is happening and you don't know, so wake up."

-Solomon Anointed(1:28-49)

We now see that David doesn't even go to Adonijah or send a messenger to him. He immediately and decisively gets up and takes action. He puts into play everything needed to make Solomon the legitimate king in the eyes of the people. Everything he does is to show publicly that Solomon has his father's permission and blessing to be the king. All of these things are meant to be public displays so that there is no question about who the king of Israel is now. And it works. Amazingly this works, with almost no further problem. Solomon has to clean up his father's mess but there is no civil war here. The people almost immediately get in line behind Solomon and Adonijah's whole inner circle evaporates around him. That's why he responds to the messenger's warning by running to the altar. He knows it's over. There is nowhere he can run and he has lost before he even began. This is a blessing from Yahweh. The fact that Nathan even shows up in the first place is a blessing. We don't know if Bathsheba would have said anything had Nathan not appeared. And we have no knowledge that it would have worked had he been absent. But we see here that God was displeased with this nonsense and so he rectifies it by using his servants, first Nathan to call attention to it and then Bathsheba to plead for action with Nathan's support, and then God graciously wakes David out of his sleepwalking and we see a glimpse of the man he was. No hesitation, and he then is present enough to remember to help his son and give him advice for when he is gone. This is what he should have been doing the whole time. And finally God uses his anointed King Solomon to stand up, and take action. The Lord is present throughout all of this nonsense, still working out his plan of salvation. God promised David that one of his children would sit on the throne of Israel and this narrative seeks to answer the question of who that would be. So we can clearly see that God is never absent even through some of the craziest political dramas and through wars, and through the sleepy times of peace, Yahweh is always active. God could have let the nation fight another civil war here, but he chose to be kind to his children though they didn't deserve it.

We also see here some more foreshadowing in the picture of Solomon taking the throne. It should remind us of King Jesus, riding on the donkey, with people in the streets shouting Hosanna. God always intended for Israel to have a King, it was just that He was to be their King. What we see here is that God has a hand in this episode. He is bringing his chosen servant to rule over his chosen people, and this is good for Israel. It should also stir more longing in us because even if we don't know how the story ends, we know that Solomon is human. He will make mistakes, and like his father, he will get old and he will die. We should see that Israel needs a King, and it needs one who will be perfect. This brings us to Revelation where all the nations are gathered around the throne and worshipping the King of Kings, the one who truly sets everything right for the people of God.

And now we get back to Adonijah. He has just had the kingdom taken out of his hands, and we really see that he never had it to begin with. So he hears that his brother Solomon has been made King, according to David's will and he recognizes it's over. This is what happens when we exalt ourselves. Adonijah's whole situation and his aspirations serve as a metaphor for how idolatry and rebellion work in us. We try to make ourselves our own king, instead of submitting to Jesus as King. And it never works out for us in the end. You might live your entire life in luxury and comfort, making yourself king, but you will not escape death, and you will not escape judgement. God's judgment comes for everyone and our only hope is not to go and use a religious symbol to avoid death, it is to repent and make Jesus the King of your heart and mind and body and soul. Jesus should have every part of you, not just your words, but your actions, and your thoughts, and your desires. Adonijah is a man who pictures what self exaltation looks like, in that he may have given lip service to God, but his heart was only concerned with himself. And he will eventually pay for that with his life.

Adonijah quickly makes a plea for his life because he recognizes that the gig is over, and he will die for rebellion, so he pleads for mercy from his brother. But again, his heart is not in it. Solomon makes this claim about him, that he will be merciful to Adonijah and let him live, provided that Adonijah shows that he is not wicked. So as long as Adonijah shows repentance, in that he will not try to steal the throne, he will live. But he doesn't. As soon as he gets the chance he tries again, making a request to have David's concubine, Abishag. Now in this period, this was a practice of showing that you had power as the king, by taking your predecessor's wife or wives. It was a power play, to try and usurp Solomon in the eyes of the people. And we even see his heart in how he comes to Bathsheba. He hasn't given up, he still wrongly thinks the throne belongs to him. This is what Paul describes as the difference between godly grief and worldly grief over sin. Godly grief leads to repentance. Worldly grief is just sorry you got caught and it doesn't lead to change, it just leads one to try a different way to sin, which is what Adonijah does. And we see what happens as a result of his treachery in chapter two. He makes this request and Solomon sees right through it for what it is, another attempt to steal the kingdom. What he said about Adonijah will be proven true soon enough.

So the question is, who is your king? As the text puts forth the question, who is the King of God's people, we are meant to ask who is our King, as God's people? Is it money, power, sex? All things which will be vices throughout Kings. Is it Buddha, or a new age view on morality? Or is it a particular hobby horse you have on how the church should function, or what people should be doing? All of these things are simply veiled attempts to place ourselves on the throne of our hearts, a place that should only be reserved for the true King, Jesus. If you're continually battling a particular sin, you need to ask yourself if Jesus is really your King right now. Repentance is the act of turning from sin, and part of turning is dethroning whatever idol it is that you are worshipping. So may the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of godly repentance.

What Kind of King Will Solomon Be?

-David's Instructions(2:1-9)

Now we get to the second question that needs answering in this narrative. That is what kind of King will or should Solomon be? In other words, we ask what should Solomon do as a good King? Well I'm glad you asked, because David tells us right here in chapter 2. It says that as his time to die drew near, he grabbed Solomon and talked to him. We don't know how much time has passed since the attempted coup. It's probably not very long, since David was already very old and frail during those events, and these instructions seem like the kind you would give as soon as the job starts. So this is likely soon after the coup has been dealt with and Solomon has taken over. David gets his son because he knows he is about to die, and he has to tell him these last few things. So these are things that David thinks are very important for the king to know. First he says to "be strong and show yourself a man." What great instructions from a father to his son. David knows from experience that being the king is going to be very hard for his son. Solomon has a massive responsibility placed on his shoulders now, and he has seen from his father that it is not easy and the king is not perfect. He will need strength to do this well, and we know that David throughout his life credited his strength with coming from the Lord. The Psalms are full of his praises to the Lord and his cries for deliverance and favor and forgiveness from God. David rightly saw that his position and his abilities came from his God. Solomon will need to rely on

this same God if he is to be a good king. He also says to show yourself a man. What another great line. We should ask ourselves after reading this, what constitutes being a man? Is it being a hunter? Being big and tough like Arnold Schwarzenegger? Or is it being the smartest most educated guy in the room? Well David says it right here, and elsewhere. Keep the charge of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. David also wrote in Psalm 1,

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,

Nor stand in the path of sinners,

Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

2But his delight is in the law of the Lord,

And in His law he meditates day and night.

3He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,

Which yields its fruit in its season

And its leaf does not wither;

And in whatever he does, he prospers.

4The wicked are not so,

But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

5Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

6For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,

But the way of the wicked will perish.”

This is what it means to be a man. If we give that any other qualifier than we make it exclusive to some gift or hobby or interest that a certain group of people have. But the Bible teaches us that a being a man means being one who delights in the Lord. Whatever else you do, if you get this right, you will be blessed. And David even says it to Solomon in his instructions, that you may prosper in all that you do wherever you turn. This doesn't mean Solomon won't face hardship or struggle. David doesn't promise Solomon a life of riches and ease. God gives him extraordinary wealth and luxury, but as a blessing, not as a promise. Solomon will prosper in all he does wherever he turns in that he will be blessed by God because he has favor with God. David said in this Psalm that you are happy if you do these things. He said nothing of riches or pleasure or power, all things which he had.

And God made David this promise that one of his descendants would sit on the throne if they kept his statutes. We also however have the promise God made to David that was unconditional, that God would place on of David's sons on the throne and that he would reign forever. So which is it? Well it's both. There is only one who sits on the throne of David forever, and he was perfectly righteous in every way, exemplifying many of the things David did, like saving his people from our true enemy when no one else would, or leading us in right, joyful worship, or putting all his enemies underneath his footstool. His name is Jesus, the Son of David, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and He is the one who demands our submission to his rule and his reign, and it is good for us. This is the King we should want, and this is the King we need, and this is the King who God promised, and who fulfilled God's promise to always have one of David's sons on the throne.

God's ways are not meant to be a fence for keeping us from living pleasurable lives, they're meant to be his loving kindness that keeps us from suffering and death under the weight of sin. When God says not to do something, it's because that is what is best for you. If you keep this command you will prosper. Getting this right informs every other part of your life. If you delight in the Lord and keep his ways and seek his counsel, you won't be living wickedly. Adonijah did not live this way. He delighted in himself instead of the law of the Lord. He sought to surround himself with bad counsel from wicked people, which David implies here is unsatisfying and foolish. This is something that both the CEO and the Janitor can do, because the focus is on being in relationship with God. We as the church have so often failed to teach boys and girls what it means to be a godly man or a godly woman. We've let the world dictate the terms of what it means to be male and female, and those things change with the winds of time and culture. And now we see with the sexual revolution what shaky ground that is to stand on. We need men who delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night, and we need women like that too. David was described to be a man after God's own heart. At the end of the day, that was the greatest thing someone could say about him, because throughout his life, he loved the Lord and sought him. That's very high praise and that is what we should all be aspiring to.

So what are we going to do? Are we going to keep letting the culture tell us what it means to be men and women? Are we going to put our responsibility to disciple our children on others, or are we going to do the hard work. These are the instructions David should have been giving Solomon his whole life, and Adonijah and Absalom, and all his other sons and daughters. He had some of the most intimate and extraordinary experiences with he Lord of anybody in history, and he didn't pass it along to his children very well. These instructions are very good, but they should have been what these three boys heard from the father every day as he walked with them and showed them the kingdom and the people, and what it was like to be King. May we not fall into that trap. So as we ask all the time here at Clairmont, who are you discipling? Who are you pouring your life into, and who are you teaching to walk in the commandments and testimonies and rules of the Lord?

-Solomon's Reign Established(2:10-46)

Now the rest of the instructions are those coming from Don Corleone. It does kind of read like a mafia hit list from The Godfather. David instructs Solomon to deal with these particular individuals and Solomon basically carries out his instructions. We won't spend too much time here but basically Solomon deals with five individuals, four of them are from David's instructions, and the first is his

rebellious brother whose we already talked about. Adonijah makes his crafty request, and gets what was coming to him from his refusal to repent. Solomon sees his request for the treason it is and has Benaiah take him out.

Solomon then exiles Abiathar from the priesthood for his part in the rebellion. The next guy is Joab, whom Solomon has executed for shedding innocent blood during peacetime, and then for being part of the rebellion as well. David tells Solomon to be kind to the sons of Barzillai as he had been loyal and a peacemaker. The last guy is Shimei. This guy was a Saul supporter who was basically upset as soon as Saul lost the throne. Solomon tells him to stay in Jerusalem, very simple instructions, and Shimei ignores them and so he is executed as well.

Now what are we to do with these instructions? In a way they each have strong warrant for being just actions, by both David and Solomon. Yet they also appear to be David's naughty and nice list that he is handing to his son to deal with. Well I think both of these are true. Paul says in Romans that his flesh and soul are at war with one another, and I think that is going on here. Both David and Solomon have good reasons for getting rid of these troublemakers, and yet they are probably also acting with somewhat selfish motives. We always have this as true within us because of the indwelling corruption of sin in our hearts, and it is something we need to be aware of and fight against. In any case, the section ends with the phrase that the Kingdom was established in the hands of Solomon

Conclusion

Now that is a lot of things happening in this narrative. So what are we supposed to do. I think the apex of this narrative is Chapter 2:1-4. In this we have what the King is supposed to be like, and we have the promise that is fulfilled in our true King Jesus. We need a better King and we have one. So the question is, will you submit to him. David's commands to Solomon were for the King of Israel to submit to and serve the one who was greater than him, and to lead the people to do the same. So who is King over you? It's the same question as who do you worship? What we worship is what we submit to. In Jesus we have the King who is worthy of our lives and so the question is have you submitted your life to him, and are you doing this daily? Paul says we have died to our old self, and that we are to put to death the old man, the rebel against the righteous king, daily. We've seen who would succeed David and sit on his throne, and the Bible tells us who would eventually do that for the whole world. In Jesus we have one who is greater than Solomon in all his glory, and David in all of his might and humility. Jesus said in Matthew 12:42, speaking of the failure of Israel to serve the Lord and listen to Him and obey Him: "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here." Jesus is greater than Solomon, and as he pointed out, Israel wouldn't even listen to Him. If He really is our King, than we will submit our entire lives to Him. What does it look like to submit to the King? It means putting everything we say and do and think and believe under the lordship of Christ. We ask of everything if it honors and glorifies Christ. Now may our gracious God help his wayward people to do that in our lives.