

Adonijah's Ambition: 1 Kings 1's Battle for the Throne

Scriptures for Today: 1 Kings 1:1-27

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Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. 2 Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. 3 So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. 4 And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not. 5 Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. 6 And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom. 7 And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah helped him. 8 But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei, and the mighty men which belonged to David, were not with Adonijah. 9 And Adonijah slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle by the stone of Zohelath, which is by En-rogel, and called all his brethren the king's sons, and all the men of Judah the king's servants: 10 But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he called not. 11 Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth it not? 12 Now therefore come, let me, I pray thee, give thee counsel, that thou mayest save thine own life, and the life of thy son Solomon. 13 Go and get thee in unto king David, and say unto him, Didst not thou, my lord, O king, swear unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? why then doth Adonijah reign? 14 Behold, while thou yet talkest there with the king, I also will come in after thee, and confirm thy words. 15 And Bath-sheba went in unto the king into the chamber: and the king was very old; and Abishag the Shunammite ministered unto the king. 16 And Bath-sheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king. And the king said, What wouldest thou? 17 And she said unto him, My lord, thou swarest by the LORD thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne. 18 And now, behold, Adonijah reigneth; and now, my lord the king, thou knowest it not: 19 And he hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the host: but Solomon thy servant hath he not called. 20 And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21 Otherwise it shall come to pass, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders. 22 And, lo, while she yet talked with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in. 23 And they told the king, saying, Behold Nathan the prophet. And when he was come in before the king, he bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground. 24 And Nathan said, My lord, O king, hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my

throne? 25 For he is gone down this day, and hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the king's sons, and the captains of the host, and Abiathar the priest; and, behold, they eat and drink before him, and say, God save king Adonijah. 26 But me, even me thy servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and thy servant Solomon, hath he not called. 27 Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou hast not shewed it unto thy servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him? ""

Introduction to 1 Kings 1: Transition Time

The story of Israel's monarchy is a story of transition, promise, and failure.

1 Samuel begins with Hannah's prayer and the birth of Samuel. God raises him as the last judge and first prophet of the monarchy. The people reject God's rule and demand a king, and Saul is chosen. But Saul fails — his disobedience costs him the kingdom. God raises up David, the shepherd boy, who defeats Goliath and becomes the man after God's own heart.

2 Samuel tells of David's reign. He unites the tribes, conquers Jerusalem, and brings the ark to Zion. God makes an everlasting covenant with him: that his seed will sit on the throne forever (2 Samuel 7). Yet David's sins — with Bathsheba, and in numbering the people — bring judgment and sorrow. Absalom rises in rebellion, but God preserves David. At the end of 2 Samuel, David is still king, but his kingdom bears the scars of sin and strife.

1 Kings opens with David old and frail, lying in bed. The giant-slayer is now stricken with years. The throne is unsteady, the kingdom is watching, and the promises of God hang in the balance. Who will reign after David? That is the question. And immediately, we meet a rival — Adonijah, who exalts himself and says, "I will be king."

But 1 Kings will show us the same lesson as the rest of Scripture: the kingdom belongs not to the ambitious, but to the anointed. God's Word, not man's will, determines the throne.

Outline of 2 Samuel 24 , 1 Kings 1, and 1 Kings 2

2 Samuel 24

1–9. David numbers the people against God's will.

10–14. David repents; God offers three judgments.

15–17. A plague kills 70,000; David pleads for mercy.

18–25. David buys Araunah's threshing floor and offers sacrifice; the plague stops.

1 Kings 1

1–4. David is old and Abishag ministers to him.

5–10. Adonijah exalts himself as king.

11–27. Nathan and Bathsheba warn David.

28–40. Solomon is anointed king.

41–53. Adonijah fears and submits to Solomon.

1 Kings 2

- 1–12. David's final charge and death.
- 13–25. Adonijah executed for seeking Abishag.
- 26–35. Abiathar banished, Joab executed.
- 36–46. Shimei confined and later executed.

Focus on 1 Kings 1:1–27

This passage shows us how God preserves His promise when man tries to seize it by ambition. David is frail, Adonijah is proud, but God's covenant is sure. The throne belongs to the one God chooses, not the one man exalts. This points us forward to Christ, the true Son of David, whose throne none can overthrow.

Now, before we get into the details of the Scriptures here, I want to tell you more about Adonijah because this set of Scriptures focuses on him. So, who is Adonijah?

Adonijah's Lineage and Family

- **Father:** King David.
Adonijah was one of David's many sons. By the time of 1 Kings 1, David was very old and weak (1 Kings 1:1), which gave Adonijah the opening to try to claim the throne for himself. Even while David is alive, Adonijah is trying to claim the throne.
- **Mother:** Haggith.
Scripture names her in **2 Samuel 3:4**: "And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith" She was one of David's wives or concubines. We don't know much else about her except her name and that she bore Adonijah.
- **Birth Order:** Adonijah was the **fourth son of David** (2 Samuel 3:2–4):
 1. Amnon (by Ahinoam of Jezreel)
 2. Chileab (also called Daniel, by Abigail)
 3. Absalom (by Maacah, daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur)
 4. Adonijah (by Haggith)

That means Adonijah was in line for kingship after his older brothers, but each of them was either dead or disqualified by the time we get to 1 Kings 1:

- **Amnon** was killed by Absalom after he defiled Tamar (2 Sam 13:28–29).
- **Chileab/Daniel** disappears from the record; many believe he died young but the Bible doesn't say much else about him.
- **Absalom** rebelled against David and was killed by Joab (2 Sam 18:14–15).
- That left **Adonijah** as the oldest surviving son of David when David was near death.
- **Adonijah's Ambition:** In 1 Kings 1:5, we see him try to grab the throne before Solomon is appointed:

"Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king"

Summary of Adonijah

Adonijah was the fourth son of David, born to Haggith. By birth order, after Amnon, Chileab, and Absalom were out of the way, he was the natural heir in man's eyes. But God's promise was not to the oldest surviving son — it was to Solomon, the son of Bathsheba, according to God's covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:12–16).

So Adonijah's history shows us a pattern we see over and over: **man looks at the outward order, but God chooses according to His own purpose** (cf. 1 Samuel 16:7).

Now that you know more about Adonijah, let's look closely at these Scriptures. Let's start there in verse 1 of 1 Kings chapter 1.

Exposition of 1 Kings 1:1–27

Verse 1 — David's frailty

""1 Kings 1:1

Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat.""

The mighty warrior of Israel, who once slew Goliath and led armies, is now feeble. Even the greatest of men fade, reminding us that all flesh is grass (Isaiah 40:6–8). David's weakness sets the stage for transition: no earthly king can last forever. This anticipates the need for a greater King, Jesus Christ, whose strength never diminishes and whose throne is everlasting (Hebrews 1:8).

Verses 2–4 — Abishag the Shunammite

""1 Kings 1:2–4

Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. 3 So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. 4 And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not.""

David's servants provide Abishag, a young virgin, to warm him (that was the reason — not sexual reasons), but the text is careful to say "the king knew her not." This highlights both his weakness and his restraint. Abishag later becomes key in exposing Adonijah's lust for the throne (1 Kings 2:13–25). Even seemingly small details become part of God's providence.

Because of Abishag's role here with David, she becomes an important part of what happens later.

In **1 Kings 2:13–25**, after David's death and Solomon's coronation, Adonijah comes to Bathsheba with a request: "Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king, (for he will not say thee nay,) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife."

When Solomon hears this, he sees it for what it really is — a **power play**. He orders Adonijah's execution immediately. In these times, the king's wives and concubines were considered part of the royal household. To marry or claim one of them was to symbolically claim the throne. Example: when Absalom rebelled, he publicly went in to David's concubines on the rooftop (2 Samuel 16:21–22). That was his way of declaring himself king.

Keep Abishag, this young virgin woman, in mind here as we study through the Bible. This is very important Scripture. Since Abishag was brought to David, she is considered to be one of the king's wives or concubines in status.

Verse 5 — Adonijah's ambition

""**1 Kings 1:5**

Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.""

Here is pride in its boldest form. Adonijah does not wait on God's choice—he exalts himself. This stands in stark contrast to Jesus Christ, who "humbled himself" (Philippians 2:5–11). Adonijah trusts in chariots, horsemen, and image, rather than God's covenant promise of Solomon's throne (1 Chronicles 22:9–10).

You can see the difference here. Adonijah is lifting himself up. And watch what leads to this in the next verse.

Verse 6 — David's failure as a father

""**1 Kings 1:6**

And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom.""

David never corrected Adonijah — no rebuke, no discipline. Proverbs 29:17 warns that correction brings rest, but David's silence bred rebellion. When Adonijah exalted himself, David said nothing, giving silent consent, just like Eli with Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam 2:22–25).

Adonijah was "very goodly," outwardly attractive like Saul and Absalom, but inwardly proud. God doesn't choose by looks (1 Sam 16:7). He was the next son after Absalom, so by human logic the throne was his, but God had already promised it to Solomon (1 Chr 22:9–10).

The lesson is clear: parental failure leads to public failure. Silence is not love—Proverbs 13:24 says sparing the rod is hatred. Outward appeal cannot replace God's choice. History repeats when fathers refuse to correct sin—David's indulgence with Absalom birthed rebellion, and again with Adonijah.

Verses 7–8 — Division in leadership

""1 Kings 1:7–8

And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah helped him. 8 But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei, and the mighty men which belonged to David, were not with Adonijah.""

Adonijah didn't move alone—he pulled heavy hitters into his rebellion. Joab, David's seasoned general, once loyal, had become a liability long before this moment. He murdered Abner (2 Sam 3:27) and Amasa (2 Sam 20:10) against David's will, shed innocent blood, and resisted David's wishes more than once. Now, in his old age, Joab throws in with Adonijah, openly opposing David and God's declared choice of Solomon. It shows how unchecked sin hardens over time: Joab's pattern of rebellion escalated into outright treason.

Abiathar, the priest, joins too—tragic, since he had once stood by David during Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam 15:24). But now, possibly seeking power or fearing loss of influence under Solomon, he sides with Adonijah.

But notice God's hand: not everyone is swept away. Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the commander, and David's loyal mighty men refuse to join. This is God's faithful remnant. When leaders compromise, God always keeps men and women who stand for His Word. Division in leadership is painful, but it separates false loyalty from true devotion.

Verses 9–10 — False worship and false fellowship

""1 Kings 1:9–10

And Adonijah slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle by the stone of Zoheleth, which is by En-rogel, and called all his brethren the king's sons, and all the men of Judah the king's servants: 10 But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he called not.""

Adonijah is staging a coronation feast, not seeking the LORD. Notice the location—**by the stone of Zoheleth, by En-rogel**—not at the tabernacle in Gibeon where the ark and altar were. If this were truly about God, he would go to the LORD's altar, where sacrifices were commanded (Deut 12:5–14). Instead, he picks a public spot to put on a show, just like Absalom had done years earlier when he stationed himself at the gate to steal hearts (2 Sam 15:2–6).

The abundance of sheep, oxen, and fat cattle makes it look like a religious celebration, but it's politics dressed up in religion. This echoes Saul in 1 Samuel 15:15, when he claimed the animals

spared from Amalek were "to sacrifice unto the LORD"—but God called it rebellion. Amos 5:21–23 and Isaiah 1:11–15 later declare that God despises sacrifices offered without obedience. Adonijah is proving that outward ritual means nothing when the heart is proud.

The guest list proves his motive even more. He invites allies who will support his claim but **deliberately excludes Solomon, Nathan, Benaiah, Zadok, and David's mighty men**—all the men faithful to God's word and to David's oath. If this were about true worship, why exclude the prophet of God? Why exclude the rightful heir? Because his goal isn't worship—it's power.

So yes—Adonijah's "sacrifice" is a photo op, a political stunt. It's appearance without substance, religion without obedience. It's man exalting himself in God's name.

Verses 11–14 — Nathan's wisdom

""1 Kings 1:11–14

Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth it not? 12 Now therefore come, let me, I pray thee, give thee counsel, that thou mayest save thine own life, and the life of thy son Solomon. 13 Go and get thee in unto king David, and say unto him, Didst not thou, my lord, O king, swear unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? why then doth Adonijah reign? 14 Behold, while thou yet talkest there with the king, I also will come in after thee, and confirm thy words.""

Nathan was no stranger to speaking truth to power. He first gave David the covenant promise of a lasting throne (2 Sam 7), then later confronted him over Bathsheba with the bold words, "*Thou art the man*" (2 Sam 12). Now in 1 Kings 1, Nathan steps in again—not for himself, but to protect God's Word.

He knew David had sworn Solomon would reign (1 Chr 22:9–10), so he wisely counseled Bathsheba to remind David, and then confirmed her words as the second witness (Deut 19:15). By doing so, Nathan blocked Adonijah's rebellion and preserved the covenant line.

Nathan shows us that prophets weren't fortune-tellers but covenant enforcers. God used Nathan to expose David's sin and now to secure David's throne. His courage proves that God always raises faithful voices to guard His Word against man's ambition.

Verses 15–21 — Bathsheba's petition

""1 Kings 1:15–21

And Bathsheba went in unto the king into the chamber: and the king was very old; and Abishag the Shunammite ministered unto the king. 16 And Bathsheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king. And the king said, What wouldest thou? 17 And she said unto him, My lord, thou swarest by the LORD thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after

me, and he shall sit upon my throne. 18 And now, behold, Adonijah reigneth; and now, my lord the king, thou knowest it not: 19 And he hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the host: but Solomon thy servant hath he not called. 20 And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21 Otherwise it shall come to pass, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders.""

Bathsheba enters David's chamber with humility—she bows before him and shows honor, even though he is weak and near death. Her respect contrasts with Adonijah's arrogance. She reminds David of his oath, not resting on politics but on the promise made *before the LORD his God*. This was more than a private vow; it was tied to God's covenant plan for Solomon's throne.

She reports Adonijah's rebellion: the feasting, the sacrifices, and the gathering of Joab and Abiathar. But she also points out the deliberate exclusion of Solomon. Adonijah was not just celebrating—he was scheming to eliminate God's chosen heir.

Bathsheba then presses the urgency. "The eyes of all Israel are upon thee"—the nation is watching David to see if he will act. And she warns that if he does nothing, she and Solomon will be treated as traitors once David dies. In other words, failure to act means the extinction of the covenant line.

Her appeal is both humble and wise: she bows in respect, she grounds her words in God's promise, and she stresses the life-and-death stakes. This isn't just about who gets the throne—it's about whether God's Word will be preserved. And we know that His words will be preserved. And Nathan, a true prophet of God, is making sure of that too.

Verses 22–27 — Nathan's confirmation

""1 Kings 1:22–27

And, lo, while she yet talked with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in. 23 And they told the king, saying, Behold Nathan the prophet. And when he was come in before the king, he bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground. 24 And Nathan said, My lord, O king, hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? 25 For he is gone down this day, and hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the king's sons, and the captains of the host, and Abiathar the priest; and, behold, they eat and drink before him, and say, God save king Adonijah. 26 But me, even me thy servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and thy servant Solomon, hath he not called. 27 Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou hast not shewed it unto thy servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?""

Nathan confirms Bathsheba's words. He exposes Adonijah's plot as rebellion, not royal decree. By two witnesses the truth is established. God vindicates His word and preserves His promise: Solomon, not Adonijah, will sit on David's throne.

Doctrinal Truths in 1 Kings 1:1–27

1. **The Doctrine of Human Frailty** (Ps 90:10; Isa 40:6–8) – Even kings grow weak; only God’s King reigns forever.
2. **The Doctrine of Pride** (Prov 16:18; Phil 2:5–11) – Self-exaltation ends in downfall; Christ’s humility brings exaltation.
3. **The Doctrine of Discipline** (Prov 13:24; Heb 12:6) – Neglecting correction in the home leads to ruin in the nation.
4. **The Doctrine of God’s Remnant** (Rom 11:5) – When the majority fall into error, God preserves faithful witnesses.
5. **The Doctrine of Covenant Preservation** (2 Sam 7:12–16; Matt 1:1) – God ensures His chosen King reigns, despite human schemes.

Practical Applications for 1 Kings 1:1–27

1. **Seek God’s Will First** – Israel asked “Who shall go up?” in Judges, but Adonijah said “I will be king” in 1 Kings. Pride speaks for itself; faith asks God first. In your life, don’t crown yourself—seek God’s direction in every step (Proverbs 3:5–6).
2. **Discipline in the Home Shapes the Kingdom** – David never corrected Adonijah (1 Kings 1:6). Parents, if you won’t say “no” in love, you may raise children who say “no” to God. Rule your home with grace and truth, for the next generation depends on it.
3. **God Preserves His Remnant** – While Joab and Abiathar went with Adonijah, Nathan, Zadok, and Benaiah stood firm. You may feel outnumbered, but God always has a faithful remnant. Stand with God’s truth, even if you stand with the few.
4. **False Worship Excludes the Godly** – Adonijah sacrificed oxen, but his feast was rebellion. Religious show means nothing if it shuts out God’s chosen. Don’t be deceived by religious activity—true worship obeys God’s Word (John 4:24).
5. **God’s Promises Outlast Men’s Plans** – Adonijah exalted himself, but Solomon was God’s chosen. People may scheme, but God’s promises stand forever (Isaiah 46:10). Trust His Word, not appearances.

Warnings and Encouragements from 1 Kings 1:1–27

Warnings

- **Beware of Self-Exaltation** – Adonijah said, “I will be king.” That’s the language of Lucifer (Isaiah 14:13–14). Pride always leads to destruction. Don’t crown yourself where God has not placed you.
- **Beware of Passive Parenting** – David failed to restrain his son, and his silence bred rebellion. A silent father today can raise a loud sinner tomorrow. Discipline with love while there’s still time.
- **Beware of False Religion** – Adonijah offered sacrifices, but it was all for himself. You can worship in form and still be in rebellion. Empty religion is rebellion dressed in robes.

Encouragements

- **God Always Keeps His Word** — Though Adonijah schemed, God's promise to Solomon stood. Man cannot overturn the covenant of God.
- **God Raises Up His Servants** — Nathan and Bathsheba stepped forward in courage. God always has faithful voices to speak for His truth. You can be that voice in your generation.
- **God's Justice Will Prevail** — Pride may strut for a season, but God humbles the ambitious and exalts the faithful. Wait on the LORD—He will set all things right (Psalm 37:7-9).

The Gospel Connection in 1 Kings 1:1-27

Adonijah tried to exalt himself to the throne, but God's promise was for Solomon. This points us to Christ, the true Son of David, whose throne cannot be stolen. Where men exalt themselves in pride, Christ humbled Himself unto death—even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8). Because He humbled Himself, God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name above every name.

Adonijah said, "I will be king," but Jesus said, "Thy will be done." One ended in judgment; the other in glory. The gospel reminds us that our hope is not in self-made kings, but in the King chosen by God. "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6). That King is Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Lion of Judah, who reigns forever.

Conclusion: The Power of 1 Kings 1's Battle for the Throne

Adonijah's ambition shows us the danger of self-exaltation, passive parenting, and false religion. But God preserves His promise, raises His servants, and ensures His chosen king reigns.

One-Sentence Takeaway: When men crown themselves, they fall; when God crowns His Son, He reigns forever.

Let's pray.