



First Kings - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

As David's death approached his eldest son Adonijah, supported by some of David's men including Joab, declared himself to be king. The prophet Nathan advised Bathsheba to go to David for he was unaware of what Adonijah had done. She and Nathan spoke with the king and he decided that Solomon would be the next king. He gave instructions that Solomon should be anointed as king immediately. When Adonijah hear of this he feared for his life and fled to the altar of the Lord for protection. He was then summoned to Solomon to give account of what he had done.

I 1 Kings 1:1-11:43 - The Reign of King Solomon

The first eleven chapters of First Kings are an extensive description of the reign of David's son Solomon, a king who was great when he obeyed God and depended on God for wisdom but whose reign ended in tragedy as he departed from God's ways and worshipped other gods.

I.a 1 Kings 1:1-2:46 - Solomon Becomes King

The beginning of the Solomon story is also the end of the David story, specifically the section of David's story that begins in 2 Samuel Chapters 7-12, where Nathan and Bathsheba, who play such important roles in 1 Kings Chapters 1-2, are first prominent. Nathan had promised David that God would raise up one of his sons and establish his kingdom forever in 2 Samuel 7:12-13. How would this promise be fulfilled, in view of Nathan's later word of judgement to David in 2 Samuel Chapter 12 and the awful story that follows in 2 Samuel Chapters 13-24? The first two chapters of Kings set out to resolve this question.

I.a.i 1 Kings 1:1-27 - The Struggle for the Succession

David was frail in his old age and a young girl called Abishag was called to keep him warm but she was not his mistress. As the end of David's time approached his eldest surviving son Adonijah declared himself to be the next king but there were those among David's advisors who did not support this move. The prophet Nathan and Solomon's mother Bathsheba went into David and told him that Adonijah had become king and that David should rule in favour of Solomon.

¹ King David was old and advanced in years; and although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. ² So his servants said to him, 'Let a young virgin be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king, and be his attendant; let her lie in your bosom, so that my lord the king may be warm.' ³ So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. ⁴ The girl was very beautiful. She became the king's attendant and served him, but the king did not know her sexually.

1 Kings 1:1-4

King David was old and advanced in years. This was the twilight of a glorious reign. David was now so old that he could not even keep himself warm, much less rule the nation. David was about seventy at this time. He seems even older than his years; but for David, it was not just the years - it was the mileage. He seemed to live the lives of four or five men in his lifetime.

Let a young virgin be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king, and be his attendant; let her lie in your bosom, so that my lord the king may be warm. The Hebrew expression for wait appears in Leviticus 18:23 as 'give herself', where it refers to availability for sexual intercourse; his attendant or 'be in his service' leaves the precise nature of the service unstated; and 'in your bosom' has sexual overtones in Genesis 16:5 and Micah 7:5, where it is translated as 'your embrace.' It may have been that this beautiful girl, Abishag was intended to interest David sexually; and his impotence (but the king did not know her sexually) is all the encouragement that Adonijah needs to foment rebellion: <<*I will be king*>> (v.5).

This practice may seem strange in the modern era but it was a recognised medical treatment in the ancient world, mentioned by the ancient Greek doctor Galen. When Josephus described this in his Jewish Antiquities, he said that this was a medical treatment and he called the servants of 1 Kings 1:2 physicians. David almost certainly made this young woman his concubine to preserve her reputation. While it was unwise for David to take more than one

wife, it was not at that time illegal or specifically prohibited by God. Later, Adonijah would condemn himself to death by asking for Abishag as a wife. His request would only be so outrageous if Abishag had belonged to David as a concubine and not merely as a servant.

Abishag the Shunammite. From ancient times, many have wanted to associate this beautiful young woman with the Shulamite addressed in the Song of Solomon (Song 6:13 and throughout). According to the theory, as she ministered to David, she became romantically involved with his son Solomon and was later the subject of his love poem. Yet this is conjecture at best and Shumen is not the same as Shulam. Shunem, the modern Solem, lay eleven kilometres southeast of Nazareth and five kilometres north of Jezreel in the territory of Issachar, and was visited by Elijah: <<*One day Elisha was passing through Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. So whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for a meal*>> (2 Kings 4:8). Therefore, there is no real basis to identify Abishag with the Shulamite of Song 6:13.

She became the king's attendant and served him. This scene of David's diminished ability shows that question of David's successor had to be addressed. King David could not last much longer, and his family history had been marked by treachery and murder. At this point, it was worth wondering if there could be a bloodless transition from David to the next king.

⁵ Now Adonijah son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king'; he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. ⁶ His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, 'Why have you done that?' He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom.

1 Kings 1:5-6

Adonijah was the fourth of David's sons born in Hebron (2 Samuel 3:2-5), and the eldest surviving. The firstborn, Amnon, and third, Absalom, have died by this point in the story (2 Samuel Chapters 13-18), and the second, Chileab, is presumably also dead having been unmentioned since 2 Samuel Chapter 3.

Exalted himself. This implies that Adonijah is usurping David's and, more importantly, God's right to designate a successor; this is the same term seen in Korah's revolt against the leadership of Moses: <<*They assembled against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, 'You have gone too far! All the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. So why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?'*>> (Numbers 16:3). Adonijah's actions contrast with David, who waited patiently for God to raise him to office, even refusing to take Saul's life at last twice in 1 Samuel Chapters 16-31. Here, however, the authors recall Absalom in their reference to

chariots and horsemen (or horses) and fifty men (2 Samuel 15:1); and by their reference to the fact that Adonijah was a very handsome man, as was Absalom according to 2 Samuel 14:25-26; they already hint that he too is heading for a similar disaster.

Adonijah violated a basic principle in the Scriptures - that his people should let God exalt them and not exalt themselves: <<*For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up; but it is God who executes judgement, putting down one and lifting up another*>> (Psalm 75:6-7), and: <<*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you*>> (James 4:10). However, Adonijah had a good political and marketing campaign, and he knew how to present himself as king. He hoped that if he put forth the image of a king, he would become king in reality.

David was a handsome man and was attracted to beautiful women. It is no surprise that David's children were also very good looking and also had his weakness for sex. This gave them an unfair and unfortunate advantage.

His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, 'Why have you done that?' Adonijah, like Absalom, was in part the product of parental negligence and indulgence; David had never held him accountable for his actions. Sadly, David did not do a very good job raising his own sons. David failed to restrain his passions in some areas of his life; his sons showed a much greater inability to restrain their passions. In part this was because David did not discipline his own sons well. The following Scriptures would have been of benefit to David had they existed in his day: <<*Discipline your children while there is hope; do not set your heart on their destruction*>> (Proverbs 19:18), <<*Discipline your children, and they will give you rest; they will give delight to your heart*>> (Proverbs 29:17), <<*And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*>> (Ephesians 6:4). Refer also to the comments made on 2 Samuel 13:21, 14:24 and 15:4.

David did not seem to have a very good relationship with his father. The godly influence in his life seems to have come more from his mother than from his father. Twice in the Psalms he referred to his mother as the Lord's serving-maid (Psalm 86:16 and 116:16). It is likely that David did not have a good example of parenting from his father. Yet, this does not excuse David's deficiencies as a father. He knew how his heavenly Father treated him - how he was comforted and helped by the correcting rod and staff of his Shepherd (Psalm 23:4). He could have learned how to be a good father from his Father in heaven.

⁷ He conferred with Joab son of Zeruiah and with the priest Abiathar, and they supported Adonijah. ⁸ But the priest Zadok, and Benaiah son

of Jehoiada, and the prophet Nathan, and Shimei, and Rei, and David's own warriors did not side with Adonijah.

1 Kings 1:7-8

The events of Chapters 1-2 are to be understood in light of the Judah/Israel tensions already evident in the Books of Samuel and soon to reappear in 1 Kings Chapter 12; refer to 2 Samuel 20:1 and 1 Kings 12:16.

Joab and Abiathar were men with deep roots in David's Judæan past, e.g. 1 Samuel 22:20-23 and 2 Samuel Chapters 2-3. By contrast, only Benaiah and David's own warriors or mighty men, i.e. his special guard, in the opposing group had such a long-standing association with David; refer to 2 Samuel 23:8-39.

They supported Adonijah. Sadly, David's chief general Joab and the high priest of Israel Abiathar each supported Adonijah. They did not consult the Lord or David before giving their support to this unworthy son of David. It is sad to see these once trusted associates of David turning against him late in his life. Joab, the most powerful of Adonijah's supporters, had always been fiercely loyal to David, but not to David's wishes. In supporting Adonijah's pretensions to the throne, Joab was acting characteristically. Joab may have sought revenge for David's choice of Amasa over him in 2 Samuel 19:13, and because Benaiah now had more authority over military affairs. Abiathar might have been jealous of Zadok the priest most favoured by David and listed in 2 Samuel 8:17. It appears that professional rivalry had darkened into bitter hatred.

Zadok Benaiah, Nathan, and David's own warriors did not side with Adonijah. Fortunately, there were some prominent people in Israel who did not support Adonijah but remained loyal to David, awaiting his decision as to who would be the next king.

Shimei was an antagonist of David from the house of Saul (2 Samuel 16:5-14), while neither Nathan nor Zadok appear in the narrative before 2 Samuel 7:2 and 8:17, respectively, i.e. after David's move from Hebron to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 5:6-10.

⁹ Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fatted cattle by the stone Zohemoth, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, ¹⁰ but he did not invite the prophet Nathan or Benaiah or the warriors or his brother Solomon.

1 Kings 1:9-10

Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fatted cattle. The idea is that Adonijah burned the fat of these animals as a sacrifice to the Lord, and he used the meat to hold a dinner honouring and blessing his supporters.

He invited all his brothers, the king's sons. Although all his brothers were invited the text does not say they supported Adonijah. In fact, they would all later pledge their allegiance to Solomon as their king: <<*All the leaders and the mighty warriors, and also all the sons of King David, pledged their allegiance to King Solomon*>> (1 Chronicles 29:24). Note that it was the royal officials of Judah who were invited to Adonijah's feast, not those of Israel.

The spring En-rogel was south of Jerusalem, at the juncture of the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys, and provided the city with a source of water additional to the important Gihon Spring (v.33) about half a mile to the north.

¹¹ Then Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, 'Have you not heard that Adonijah son of Haggith has become king and our lord David does not know it? ¹² Now therefore come, let me give you advice, so that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. ¹³ 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?" ¹⁴ Then while you are still there speaking with the king, I will come in after you and confirm your words.'

1 Kings 1:11-14

Our lord David does not know it. This shows both the wrong of Adonijah's attempt to take the throne and how far removed from power David really was. He did not know what was going on around him in the kingdom.

So that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Nathan knew that if Adonijah became king he would immediately kill every potential rival to his throne, including Bathsheba and Solomon.

Did you not swear? This oath is not mentioned anywhere in Second Samuel, and Nathan himself does not mention it to David when he consults with him in vv.24-27. Perhaps it was a private assurance between David and Bathsheba that was not public knowledge. However, it is known from 1 Chronicles 22:5-9 that David did in fact intend for Solomon to succeed him as king. This was a remarkable display of grace - that a son of the wife David took through adultery and murder in the most infamous scandal of his life should become his heir to the throne.

Then while you are still there speaking with the king, I will come in after you and confirm your words. Nathan knew that David was generally indulgent towards his sons and would find it hard to believe that Adonijah would do such a thing. He arranged it so the message would be presented in a convincing way.

¹⁵ So Bathsheba went to the king in his room. The king was very old; Abishag the Shunammite was attending the king. ¹⁶ Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance to the king, and the king said, ‘What do you wish?’ ¹⁷ She said to him, ‘My lord, you swore to your servant by the Lord your God, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne. ¹⁸ But now suddenly Adonijah has become king, though you, my lord the king, do not know it. ¹⁹ He has sacrificed oxen, fatted cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the children of the king, the priest Abiathar, and Joab the commander of the army; but your servant Solomon he has not invited.

1 Kings 1:15-19

The king was very old; Abishag the Shunammite was attending the king. This is included as a reminder of David’s limited capabilities as king. He needed the help of Bathsheba and Nathan brought to him in the following verses.

Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance to the king. Although Bathsheba was a favoured wife of long standing, she still knelt or lay before David in recognition as his position as king, even in his poor physical state. This was not just protocol, it was the correct way for her to behave in the presence of the Lord’s anointed, especially in this setting with Abishag in attendance. This way of greeting a kingly husband is also seen with Queen Esther: *<<As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favour and he held out to her the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the top of the sceptre>>* (Esther 5:2).

You, my lord the king, do not know it. The play on the idea of ‘knowing’ in Chapter 1 underlines the extent of David’s loss of power in his old age. He was not able to ‘know’ Abishag sexually (v.4) as he had once known Bathsheba, and now he does not know about Adonijah, even though he had previously had the reputation of possessing *<<wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth>>* (2 Samuel 14:20b).

²⁰ But you, my lord the king – the eyes of all Israel are on you to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him.

²¹ Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king sleeps with his ancestors, that my son Solomon and I will be counted offenders.’

1 Kings 1:20-21

Bathsheba is concerned that if David does not appoint Solomon as the next monarch prior to his death (my lord the king sleeps with his ancestors), she and

her son will be treated as rivals to the throne, therefore counted offenders, and their lives will be at risk. She knew that David's death was imminent: <<*Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David*>> (1 Kings 2:10). and time was of the essence.

²² While she was still speaking with the king, the prophet Nathan came in. ²³ The king was told, 'Here is the prophet Nathan.' When he came in before the king, he did obeisance to the king, with his face to the ground. ²⁴ Nathan said, 'My lord the king, have you said, "Adonijah shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne"?' ²⁵ For today he has gone down and has sacrificed oxen, fatted cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's children, Joab the commander of the army, and the priest Abiathar, who are now eating and drinking before him, and saying, "Long live King Adonijah!" ²⁶ But he did not invite me, your servant, and the priest Zadok, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon. ²⁷ Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not let your servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?'

1 Kings 1:22-27

The prophet Nathan came in. The last place record of Nathan was in 2 Samuel Chapter 12, where he rebuked David over the scandal with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. Yet now, at the end of his days, David received Nathan; the sense is that he remained a trusted friend. David did not treat Nathan as an enemy when he confronted him with a painful truth.

Long live King Adonijah! While Adonijah's attempts to consolidate power and succeed David as king are evident, Nathan emphasises the alarming purpose of the events to motivate David to quickly resolve the problem of royal succession.

Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not let your servants know? Nathan also stated the facts about Adonijah, and then gave a personal appeal. He asked David, who was his dear and trusted friend as well as his king, "Is it possible you have chosen Adonijah to be king and have not told me?"

I.a.ii 1 Kings 1:28-53 - The Accession of Solomon

David promised Bathsheba that their son Solomon would succeed him as king and he sent for the priest, prophet and one of his key warriors to instruct them to anoint Solomon king immediately. They did so and there was great celebration among the people. When Adonijah heard of this he fled to the altar for he would be safe there and he stated he would not leave it until Solomon promised not to

harm him. Solomon said Adonijah's fate depended on whether he was judged to be a good or evil man, and he had him summoned into his presence.

²⁸ King David answered, 'Summon Bathsheba to me.' So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. ²⁹ The king swore, saying, 'As the Lord lives, who has saved my life from every adversity, ³⁰ as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, "Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne in my place", so will I do this day.' ³¹ Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground, and did obeisance to the king, and said, 'May my lord King David live for ever!'

1 Kings 1:28-31

As the Lord lives. This introduced a solemn oath. David would confirm the previous promise he made to Bathsheba, that her son Solomon would become the next king.

Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king. David promised to settle the issue that very day. He would abdicate the throne and give the crown to Solomon.

May my lord King David live for ever! As is clear from the context, Bathsheba uses the conventional form of speech that one would normally use in addressing a king: <<*They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, 'O king, live for ever!'*>> (Daniel 3:9), and: <<*Daniel then said to the king, 'O king, live for ever!'*>> (Daniel 6:21). The use of this convention, however, does not imply that Bathsheba is insincere, but that she is reaffirming her loyalty to David.

³² King David said, 'Summon to me the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.' When they came before the king, ³³ the king said to them, 'Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. ³⁴ There let the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, "Long live King Solomon!"' ³⁵ You shall go up following him. Let him enter and sit on my throne; he shall be king in my place; for I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.' ³⁶ Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, 'Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so ordain. ³⁷ As the Lord has been with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David.'

1 Kings 1:32-37

Summon to me the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada. These were three prominent leaders in Israel who did not support Adonijah as king. David knew who was loyal to him and who was not.

Have my son Solomon ride on my own mule. Solomon's ride on David's mule marks him as David's favoured son. More than this, the mule itself may also have been regarded as a symbol of kingship by the people; refer to Zechariah 9:9 and Matthew 21:1-11 for its relationship to the Messiah.

Gihon. Refer to the comments made on vv.38-40 below.

There let the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint him king over Israel. This is a rare glimpse of all three offices in cooperation - prophet, priest, and king. Each of these offices was gloriously fulfilled in Jesus.

David wanted the proclamation of Solomon as successor to be persuasive. He had five points to the plan:

- Have my son Solomon ride on my own mule.
- Let the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint him king.
- Blow the trumpet.
- Say, "Long live King Solomon!"
- Let him enter and sit on my throne.

The trumpet here is almost certainly a sheep's horn or Shofar.



A Shofar

Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so ordain. Benaiah understood an important principle - that unless the Lord God said 'Amen!' to the selection of Solomon, he would not stand. Benaiah sensed that this was the Lord's will, and offered the prayer that God would in fact so ordain it.

So may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David. This pious wish of Benaiah had an interesting fulfilment. On a

human level, Solomon's reign was indeed greater than David's. But on a spiritual, eternal level, it was not.

³⁸ So the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule, and led him to Gihon. ³⁹ There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, 'Long live King Solomon!' ⁴⁰ And all the people went up following him, playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth quaked at their noise.

1 Kings 1:38-40

The Cherethites and the Pelethites. These are probably the 'servants' of v.33, apparently David's own personal troops; refer to 2 Samuel 8:18, 15:18, 20:7 and 20:23. They were probably mercenaries drawn from among the non-Israelite population of Canaan, most likely, as the names imply, of Cretan and Philistine origin.

And had Solomon ride on King David's mule. Apparently, this was the OT equivalent to a presidential motorcade.

Led him to Gihon. Gihon, the site of the anointing, was just outside the city in the Kidron Valley, on the east bank of Ophel. It was at this time Jerusalem's major source of water and was therefore a natural gathering place of the populace.

There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Literally, it is *the* horn of oil. This was a specific container of oil kept in the tabernacle for special ceremonies of anointing: <<*Samuel took a phial of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him; he said, 'The Lord has anointed you ruler over his people Israel. You shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around. Now this shall be the sign to you that the Lord has anointed you ruler over his heritage*>> (1 Samuel 10:1), <<*Then he brought out the king's son, put the crown on him, and gave him the covenant; they proclaimed him king, and anointed him; they clapped their hands and shouted, 'Long live the king!'*>> (2 Kings 11:12), and: <<*I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him*>> (Psalm 89:20).

The tent. The most natural assumption might be that this is 'the tent of the Lord' that appears also in 1 Kings 2:28-30, i.e. the tabernacle. In 2 Chronicles 1:1-6 the Chronicler, however, differentiates David's tent in Jerusalem, i.e. the temporary location of the Ark of the Covenant, from the original tabernacle in Gibeon, so the reference is in fact unclear.

And all the people went up following him, playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth quaked at their noise. Although Adonijah put forth his best marketing campaign, he could not win the hearts of the people. They sensed that Solomon was the man, not Adonijah.

⁴¹ Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. When Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, ‘Why is the city in an uproar?’ ⁴² While he was still speaking, Jonathan son of the priest Abiathar arrived. Adonijah said, ‘Come in, for you are a worthy man and surely you bring good news.’ ⁴³ Jonathan answered Adonijah, ‘No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king; ⁴⁴ the king has sent with him the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and they had him ride on the king’s mule; ⁴⁵ the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan have anointed him king at Gihon; and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you heard. ⁴⁶ Solomon now sits on the royal throne. ⁴⁷ Moreover, the king’s servants came to congratulate our lord King David, saying, “May God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours, and make his throne greater than your throne.” The king bowed in worship on the bed ⁴⁸ and went on to pray thus, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who today has granted one of my offspring to sit on my throne and permitted me to witness it.”’

1 Kings 1:41-48

The guests who were with him heard it. The location of Adonijah’s party at Enrogel (v.9), just south of Jerusalem in the Kidron Valley, prevented direct observation of Solomon’s anointing (vv.38-40), but they could hear the subsequent celebrations. Notice how carefully Jonathan the son of the priest Abiathar expresses his personal loyalties to our lord King David.

As they finished feasting. The banquet was not even over before Solomon was proclaimed king. Bathsheba and Nathan acted quickly and it was rewarded.

Why is the city in an uproar? This was very distressing to Adonijah. He had the support of some important powerful men, i.e. those attending his banquet, but now he knew that the heart of the people belonged to Solomon.

Solomon now sits on the royal throne. Now that Solomon had become king he had a sacred duty to perform: <<*When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical*

priests>> (Deuteronomy 17:18). Solomon would have been well versed in the Scriptures from an early age but this command had to be fulfilled by each king in order for them to refocus on the laws of God and to ensure that they were obeyed throughout the kingdom.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who today has granted one of my offspring to sit on my throne and permitted me to witness it. This told Adonijah that even King David was completely behind Solomon. There was no hope for his future as king.

⁴⁹ Then all the guests of Adonijah got up trembling and went their own ways. ⁵⁰ Adonijah, fearing Solomon, got up and went to grasp the horns of the altar. ⁵¹ Solomon was informed, ‘Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon; see, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, “Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not kill his servant with the sword.”’ ⁵² So Solomon responded, ‘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.’ ⁵³ Then King Solomon sent to have him brought down from the altar. He came to do obeisance to King Solomon; and Solomon said to him, ‘Go home.’

1 Kings 1:49-53

The guests of Adonijah got up trembling and went their own ways, knowing that alignment with him may mean being designated rebels. They came for a nice dinner, and to support Adonijah. They left quickly as soon as it was clear that he would not and could not be king. Now it was dangerous to be a supporter of Adonijah as king.

The horns of the altar. The horns were part of the structure of the altar that was in the Tabernacle: <<*You shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze*>> (Exodus 27:2). Adonijah believes that the altar, as a holy place, protects him from Solomon’s vengeance. This reflects a common ancient Near Eastern custom with regard to asylum at shrines. It is important to understand that this ancient custom was not used in Israel to protect a guilty man: <<*Whoever strikes a person mortally shall be put to death. If it was not premeditated, but came about by an act of God, then I will appoint for you a place to which the killer may flee. But if someone wilfully attacks and kills another by treachery, you shall take the killer from my altar for execution*>> (Exodus 21:12-14).

So Solomon responded, ‘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.’ Solomon gave Adonijah a limited reprieve. This went against all custom in the ancient

world. It was common - even expected - that when a new king assumed the throne that he would execute every potential rival. Solomon not only let a potential rival live, but one who openly tried to subvert his reign. This was a large measure of grace and mercy on the part of Solomon, and a good start to his reign. At the same time, Solomon wanted Adonijah to know that if he should show the slightest inclination towards rebellion, he would be killed instantly. Mercy would be withdrawn and justice would be delivered quickly.

Not one of his hairs shall fall to the ground was a saying meaning that a person should not be harmed in anyway: <<*Then the people said to Saul, 'Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great victory in Israel? Perish the thought! As the Lord lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground; for he has worked with God today.'* So the people ransomed Jonathan, and he did not die>> (1 Samuel 14:45).

He came to do obeisance to King Solomon. Adonijah knew he received great mercy from Solomon, and he wanted to show his gratitude for it and his reliance upon Solomon's mercy. That is exactly what he received for Solomon said to him, 'Go home.'