

1 Kings

REFORMED EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

A Series

Series Editors

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1 Kings

PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN



P U B L I S H I N G

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To

David Apple, Adam Brice, Pat Canavan, Marion Clark, Andrew Dinardo, Cora Hogue, Paul Jones, Philip Kirkland, Bruce McDowell, Jerry McFarland, Jonny McGreevy, Aaron Messner, Jonathan Olsen, Rick Phillips, Robert Polen, Chris Seah, Bryan Stoudt, Paul Tripp, and Carroll Wynne

– my colleagues and friends –

with genuine admiration for your service to Christ, deep appreciation for your encouragement through prayer, and everlasting gratitude to God for the ministry we have shared at Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church. At the same time, the church must constantly do the work of theology: reflecting on the teaching of Scripture, confessing its doctrines of the Christian faith, and applying them to contemporary culture. We believe that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from the biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole.

We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and theological reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. This is all the more true since the study of Scripture properly results in doxology and praxis—that is, in praise to God and practical application in the lives of believers. In pursuit of these ends, we are pleased to present the Reformed Expository Commentary as a fresh exposition of Scripture for our generation in the church. We hope and pray that pastors, teachers, Bible study leaders, and many others will find this series to be a faithful, inspiring, and useful resource for the study of God's infallible, inerrant Word.

The Reformed Expository Commentary has four fundamental commitments. First, these commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition characterized by careful attention to the details of the text. They are not exegetical commentaries—commenting word by word or even verse by verse—but integrated expositions of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary will thus present a sequential, systematic treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster Confession

Series Introduction

of Faith and catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Each volume will teach, promote, and defend the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are found in the Bible. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel, as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life—both public and private—with appropriate illustrations.

The contributors to the Reformed Expository Commentary are all pastor-scholars. As pastor, each author will first present his expositions in the pulpit ministry of his church. This means that these commentaries are rooted in the teaching of Scripture to real people in the church. While aiming to be scholarly, these expositions are not academic. Our intent is to be faithful, clear, and helpful to Christians who possess various levels of biblical and theological training—as should be true in any effective pulpit ministry. Inevitably this means that some issues of academic interest will not be covered. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a responsible level of scholarship, seeking to promote and model this for pastors and other teachers in the church. Significant exegetical and theological difficulties, along with such historical and cultural background as is relevant to the text, will be treated with care.

We strive for a high standard of enduring excellence. This begins with the selection of the authors, all of whom have proved to be outstanding communicators of God's Word. But this pursuit of excellence is also reflected in a disciplined editorial process. Each volume is edited by both a series editor and a testament editor. The testament editors, Iain Duguid for the Old Testament and Daniel Doriani for the New Testament, are accomplished pastors and respected scholars who have taught at the seminary level. Their job is to ensure that each volume is sufficiently conversant with up-to-date scholarship and is faithful and accurate in its exposition of the text. As series editors, we oversee each volume to ensure its overall quality—including excellence of writing, soundness of teaching, and usefulness in application. Working together as an editorial team, along with the publisher, we are devoted to ensuring that these are the best commentaries our gifted authors can provide,

so that the church will be served with trustworthy and exemplary expositions of God's Word.

It is our goal and prayer that the Reformed Expository Commentary will serve the church by renewing confidence in the clarity and power of Scripture and by upholding the great doctrinal heritage of the Reformed faith. We hope that pastors who read these commentaries will be encouraged in their own expository preaching ministry, which we believe to be the best and most biblical pattern for teaching God's Word in the church. We hope that lay teachers will find these commentaries among the most useful resources they rely upon for understanding and presenting the text of the Bible. And we hope that the devotional quality of these studies of Scripture will instruct and inspire each Christian who reads them in joyful, obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless all who read the Reformed Expository Commentary. We commit these volumes to the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the Holy Spirit will use them for the instruction and edification of the church, with thanksgiving to God the Father for his unceasing faithfulness in building his church through the ministry of his Word.

Richard D. Phillips
Philip Graham Ryken
Series Editors

PREFACE

David, Solomon, Elijah: the story told in 1 Kings is populated with great heroes of Israel—men of courage and charisma with many frailties and a constant need for grace. This story also has a full share of villains: Adonijah, Shimei, Jeroboam, Ahab. Most of all, though, 1 Kings is the story of Israel's God, who never fails to love his people or to keep them under his kingly care, even when they choose to follow the pathways of folly and idolatry.

Preaching through 1 Kings at Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church was a huge privilege. Indeed, that privilege seems even more precious now that I have left the congregation I love to follow God's calling to serve as president of Wheaton College.

The sermons on Elijah came first, during my early years at Tenth Church, when I sometimes preached for James Montgomery Boice on Sunday mornings. The sermons on Solomon and his successors came later. Now all this material has been carefully revised with the help of wise comments from good friends. Lois Denier, Cathy Kempf, Glenn McDowell, and Mary Ryken all suggested improvements to the Solomon material (some of which has been published elsewhere). Iain Duguid, Randy Grossman, Rick Phillips, and Jonathan Rockey read the entire manuscript and served me well by correcting my mistakes, strengthening my arguments, asking for more application, and the like.

I am grateful to God for the help of these friends and the joy of serving in Christian community. Special thanks go to Robert Polen for completing the arduous task of entering the final revisions, and to Marilee Melvin for helping me see this book to press. But perhaps my greatest debt

Preface

of gratitude is owed to everyone who prayed for me as I was studying, meditating, preaching, and finally writing about 1 Kings.

May God the Holy Spirit bless everyone who reads this book with a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ, who is the best of Israel's kings and the mightiest of all the prophets of God.

Philip Graham Ryken
Wheaton College

≈ *1 Kings*

THE RISE AND DECLINE
OF DAVID'S HOUSE

PART 1



*King Solomon:
Money, Sex, and Power*

1

KING ME!

1 Kings 1:1–10

Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, “I will be king.” And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. (1 Kings 1:5)



In every simple game of checkers there is a thrilling moment when one of the ordinary playing pieces suddenly becomes royalty. Having moved and jumped all the way to the far side of the board, a checker becomes a king. “King me!” commands one of the players. A second checker is carefully stacked on top of the first checker, and from then on the new king has the power to move all over the board.

Many people want the game of checkers to become their way of life. Not content to be ordinary, they want to be the royal center of attention. “King me!” they say, wanting enough power and money to get the control and buy the pleasure they want out of life. “King me!” is what the single man is saying when he gratifies his sexual desire instead of making a selfless commitment to love a woman for Christ. “King me!” (or “Queen me!” to use a term from the game of chess) is what the overbearing mother is saying when she makes her own peace the rule of her household, rather than pursuing the spiritual

King Me!

progress of her children. And “King me!” is what I am saying whenever my own desires become my main concern, even at the expense of others.

The problem with building our own little kingdoms is that we never find our rightful place in the true kingdom of God. This central issue in the Christian life is also the central issue in 1 and 2 Kings. Who will be king? Will we accept the kingship that God has established, or will we always insist on having our own way in life?

OLD KING DAVID

The question of kingship arises right from the beginning of 1 Kings. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel were dominated by the kingship of David. But 1 Kings begins by telling us that “King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm” (1 Kings 1:1).

For anyone who admires King David, this scene is full of pathos. David was among the greatest of earthly kings—maybe *the* greatest. From boyhood he performed many heroic feats in battle. He killed lions and bears to defend his father’s flocks and herds. He slew giants. He conquered kingdoms. He established a fortress for his people in Jerusalem. He sired a royal dynasty, fathering many sons to be the princes of Israel. But now the famous king was old and gray, and for all his former greatness, it was all he could do to stay warm in bed (or should I say deathbed?).

David’s feeble decline is a sad reminder of our own frailty. The king was about seventy years old when these events took place (see 2 Sam. 5:4). What happened to him will happen to almost all of us: our hearing will fail; our eyesight will grow dim; our limbs will get weak and brittle. Eventually we will be confined to bed, and maybe we will find it hard to stay warm. How important it is, therefore, to heed this counsel from Scripture: “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (Eccles. 12:1). If, like David, we give our hearts to God when we are young, we will still remember him when we are old, and he will remember us.

Poor David! As he tried to get warm, his servants tried to help. They put him in warmer pajamas, but the king stayed cold. Then they piled heavy blankets on his royal person, but still he shivered under the covers.

So they proposed a practical remedy—one mentioned in several ancient medical textbooks:¹

Therefore his servants said to him, “Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms, that my lord the king may be warm.” So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not. (1 Kings 1:2–4)

Abishag’s employment as a kind of human hot water bottle raises more questions than it answers. Were David’s servants simply trying to keep him warm? If so, then why did they conduct a Miss Israel pageant to find the prettiest young thing in the whole country? Though the situation seems charged with sexuality, we also sense that the king is diminished. This is hardly the David who knew Bathsheba—the David who fathered Solomon and many other sons. Not even a stunning young virgin can warm his blood. On the contrary, his sexual incapacity shows that he has suffered the loss of vitality and virility.

Soon old King David will be dead and buried, which shows one of the inherent limitations of kingship in ancient Israel. All the kings died, throwing the kingship into question for each new generation of the people of God. David was the best of Israel’s kings, yet even he went down to the grave, where his body remains to this day. His very mortality meant that he could never be the ultimate king for God’s people.

This shows, by way of contrast, the superior kingship that we have in Jesus Christ, who is the true Son of David and the only divine Son of God. Jesus also died, suffering crucifixion for our sins. But on the third day he was raised again to reign forever in kingly majesty. Jesus Christ is the immortal King of all ages (see 1 Tim. 1:16). This is the kingdom we need, ruled by a king who will never die again, but will always live to rule us and defend us. Jesus will never shiver in the cold chill of old age, but will remain at the full blaze of his divine powers for all eternity—our once and forever King.

1. Howard Vos cites Galen, among others; see *1, 2 Kings*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 34.

I WILL BE KING

As David's kingship came to an end, his royal court was full of intrigue. The courtiers were whispering in the passageways: "Who will be the next king?" This question had been on people's minds for years, much the way that people have long speculated about who would succeed England's Elizabeth II. In fact, there had already been at least two attempts to take the throne away from David: the rebellion of his son Absalom, which led to civil war (2 Sam. 14–18), and the uprising of Sheba the Benjamite (2 Sam. 20). David was able to quell both rebellions, but as he grew older he also grew weaker. Now he could not even get warm in bed, and what one scholar has described as "his shivering impotence" was creating a power vacuum.²

As far as God was concerned, David's rightful heir was supposed to be Solomon. Although he was not the oldest son—he was tenth in line—Solomon was the chosen son. God does not always choose the oldest son, as David's own coronation illustrates (1 Sam. 16:10–13). We know from 1 Chronicles 22:9 that the word of the Lord had announced to David that Solomon would be the next king: "Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever" (1 Chron. 22:9–10). By divine calling, Solomon would be Israel's king.

There was another contender for the kingship, however—an alternative candidate to sit on Israel's throne. Most people saw him as the heir apparent. His name was Adonijah, and he seemed to be everything that David used to be but wasn't anymore. The Bible describes him as "a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom" (1 Kings 1:6). Humanly speaking, Adonijah had everything going for him. He had all the qualifications that people usually look for. Like his older brother Absalom (an ominous connection, given the civil war that Absalom waged against his father's house; see 2 Sam. 14:25–27), he was easy on the eyes, which counts for a lot in life—more than we sometimes like to admit. As far as kingship was concerned, Adonijah looked the part (at

2. B. O. Long, "A Darkness between Brothers: Solomon and Adonijah," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19 (1981): 84.

least to people who look at outward appearances, which God doesn't; see 1 Sam. 16:7).

Furthermore, as David's oldest living son, Adonijah was next in line for the throne. He was David's fourth-born son (see 2 Sam. 3:4). The king's oldest son, Amnon, had been killed by his younger brother Absalom, who in turn was put to death. No one knows what happened to Chileab (2 Sam. 3:3), who simply disappears from the story and may perhaps have died in his youth. According to the ancient principle of primogeniture, most people would have said that Adonijah had a legitimate claim to the throne.

So the young man Adonijah decided to seize his chance, declaring his intention to be the king after David. The exact wording of his declaration gives us a window into his soul and maybe into our own souls as well: "Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king'" (1 Kings 1:5). Grammatically, the word "I" is in the emphatic position. We can almost imagine Adonijah pointing to himself or even thumping his chest as he said, "*I* will be king." Furthermore, the form of the verb for exaltation may indicate continuous action,³ as if to show that Adonijah's self-exaltation was not simply a one-time occurrence; his whole life was all about putting himself forward to be the king.

From the merely human perspective, Adonijah's ambition is thoroughly understandable. After all, who wouldn't want to be the king? Besides, isn't it the natural order of things for a king to show some initiative and seize his crown?

If that is what we think, then we need to remember that this was no ordinary kingdom. The royal house of David was part of God's plan for the salvation of the world. David had received a divine and covenant promise that his dynasty would last forever, that his throne would be established eternally (see 2 Sam. 7:16–17). This was the will of God. It would also be the *work* of God, which meant that rather than making its own choice for a king, Israel was supposed to trust God to provide the man of his choice.

Some commentators interpret David's decline as a constitutional crisis. "The reason for the rivalry among David's sons to be king," they say, "was that the constitutional procedure for determining succession had not been

3. Gene Rice, *Nations under God: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Kings*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 9.

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established.”⁴ But that was not the real problem. Israel *did* have a policy for the royal succession. The policy was divine appointment: God would anoint his own king in his own good time. As it said in the Law of Moses, “set a King over you whom the LORD your God will choose” (Deut. 17:15). The problem was that men like Adonijah (and also Absalom) would not accept God’s choice, but kept exalting themselves. They would not even wait for their father to die (cf. Luke 15:12), but tried to take by force something that was only God’s to give.

Have you ever felt the same temptation—the temptation to take what you wanted when you wanted it instead of waiting for what God would give? Little people are tempted to do it by saying, “That’s mine!” and grabbing whatever they can get. Bigger kids are tempted to do it by getting angry when they do not get their own way. Some adults are tempted to do it by taking the pleasures of sex without waiting for the gift of marriage. Others are tempted to climb over other people to get the next promotion, or to put themselves forward for ministry without any calling from the church, or to gain ungodly control over their spouses by manipulation or force.

In one way or another, we are all tempted to exalt ourselves. All too often we are like Diotrefes, whom the New Testament describes as someone “who likes to put himself first” (3 John 9). But when we put ourselves on the throne, God is no longer the God of our lives; he is only another one of our servants. Rather than seeking his kingdom, we expect him to advance ours. Sooner or later we will get upset with him for not doing whatever it is that we expect him to do for us. Typically we get angry when we do not get what we want, which makes anger one of the best clues to our own private idolatries. When we are angry at the world or angry with God, it is almost always because we have the wrong person on the throne.

FOR HIS OWN GLORY

To see the shape that self-exaltation takes in our own lives, we need to look more carefully at the way Adonijah crowned himself king. His decision to “king” himself was a decision he made for his own glory and pleasure without ever submitting to the rule of God. We make the same mistake whenever

4. Ibid., 7.

we decide to “king” ourselves: we seek our own honor and pleasure without submitting to the rule of God.

Consider the various ways that Adonijah acted for his own honor. First, “he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him” (1 Kings 1:5). If you want people to know how important you are, it helps to have your own entourage! So Adonijah gathered his posse, so to speak—an honor guard of palace chariots, with footmen to run ahead and announce his coming. Even before he arrived, people would know that someone important was on the way.

When it comes to being important, image is everything. If you are going to be the king, you have to act like the king, and that includes having people around to treat you like the king. You need to have some followers—people to tell you how great you are. And so, like his brother Absalom before him (another ominous connection), Adonijah grandly employed a retinue of horses and chariots and foot servants (see 2 Sam. 15:1).

Adonijah also made sure to gain the support of some of the most powerful leaders in Israel: “He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him” (1 Kings 1:7).

Though their careers ended in disgrace, both of these men were key leaders. Joab was the commander of Israel’s army. For many years he had served as David’s right-hand man. Joab was the general who helped the king conquer Jerusalem, who suppressed every rebellion against his royal throne, and who protected his life by assassinating his enemies (e.g., 2 Sam. 2:13ff.; 1 Chron. 11:4–6). Unfortunately, Joab had also killed David’s son Absalom, which put him out of royal favor and diminished his political influence. Yet perhaps by aligning himself with Adonijah, he could regain his powerful position in the kingdom.

Abiathar the priest was also making a power grab. Like Joab, he was one of the king’s old associates, a man who had been with David almost from the beginning (see 1 Sam. 22:20–23). Abiathar was not the high priest, but maybe he wanted to be. In any case, he decided that he would follow Adonijah in his rise to power.

So Adonijah had friends in high places—powerful military and religious leaders who could help him get what he wanted. Knowing the right people is important. If you want to get ahead in life, it helps to be able to say things

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like, “You know, I was talking to my good friend Joab the other day, and he said . . .” It also helps to have people around who will tell you what you want to hear, affirming your ambitions and praising your purchases without criticizing your faults or correcting your sins.

Adonijah also honored himself by making a public display of his personal wealth and religious commitment: “Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the Serpent’s Stone, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king’s sons, and all the royal officials of Judah” (1 Kings 1:9).

This grand feast, with its long guest list, would accomplish a number of important political purposes. It would enhance Adonijah’s reputation for being religious (even though the Serpent’s Stone was hardly the proper place to make sacrifices to God!). Throwing a party would also unite people, bringing them together to form a political alliance. Table fellowship was an important sign of solidarity in biblical times. In this case, it virtually amounted to a public coronation ceremony (see 1 Kings 1:11).

Adonijah did all this self-promotion to strengthen his political position. He was hanging out with the right friends, spending time with the popular people, and throwing the biggest parties. At the same time, he was giving many people the impression that he was deeply religious. Yet Adonijah was doing it all for his own honor and glory.

We are tempted to “king” ourselves the same way. We try to impress people with what we have, who we know, or how much we are doing for God. Sometimes we care more about what people think of us than we do about who we really are before God. Thus we surround ourselves with people who will tell us that we are doing the right thing, even (and maybe especially) when we are doing the wrong thing.

How do we do this? We do it by quietly making sure we get most of the credit for the success of a project, or by showing off the electronic gadget we recently purchased, or by letting people know we are wearing the latest fashion, or by giving the impression that we are part of the “in” crowd, or by doing whatever it is that people in our community do to keep score. Maybe we simply fuel our sense of self-importance by gently complaining about our heavy workload, especially the good work we do in Christian ministry. But one way or another, we want people to know how good we are. We may not do it by riding a chariot, hiring fifty servants, and inviting celebrities over

for dinner, but we do the same thing in subtler ways. We do it with what we buy, what we say, what we wear, and the general impression we try to leave that we are something more than we really are.

FOOLISH PLEASURE

Not only do we seek our own honor, but we also pursue our own pleasure. Adonijah shows us this as well. It was not simply for his own glory that he crowned himself king; it was also for his own pleasure. The Bible indicates this by telling us that “his father had never at any time displeased him by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’” (1 Kings 1:6). This is a terrible indictment of David for his failure in fatherly discipline. It also happens to be one of the most important comments made anywhere in the Bible on the subject of raising children.

The implication is that David should have been holding his sons accountable, and that if only he had done so, Adonijah would not have been living for the glory of a crown that was never his to claim. The Bible further implies that such discipline necessarily would have displeased him, even though it would have been for his own good. But instead, Adonijah was rebellious—spoiled rotten. David had not loved his son wisely, but too well. An excessively indulgent father had produced a self-exalted son. As Paul House wisely comments, “Good looks and a favored status, coupled with parental indulgence, rarely build strong character. Neither do they instill wisdom.”⁵ Adonijah may well have enjoyed a happy childhood, but his father’s lack of discipline eventually led the young man into treason.

These are all principles we can take straight into the Christian home. Fathers and mothers have a responsibility to hold their children accountable for their actions. “Why have you done this?” is a good and often a necessary question to ask. It forces children to explain their actions, and hopefully to examine the underlying motivations of their hearts. This may have the happy result of helping them see how sinful they are, and how much they need a Savior. It may also help them to see the difference between living for their own pleasure and living for God’s pleasure, between “kinging” themselves and living for the glory of God.

5. Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 88.

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Parents need to know that this kind of accountability often makes children angry. Of course it does! The fallen nature is going to be angry anytime its sins are exposed. But a child's very displeasure may well be a sign that he or she is receiving precisely the discipline that is needed. Of course, the Bible also warns fathers (especially) not to *provoke* their children to anger (see Eph. 6:4), which is often a temptation for fathers. To avoid this, every act of discipline needs to be surrounded with clear and loving communication; repentance and reconciliation may be needed on both sides. But the point in 1 Kings 1:6 is that effective parenting has a way of displeasing children.

If you are a father or a mother, do you love your children enough to displease them? Parents who never displease their children are not doing their job. It is often tempting to make one's day easier by making one's child happier, but to do so in ways that relinquish parental authority. However much peace or popularity this buys when children are young, it will only bring heartache in the end. Matthew Henry wisely said that parents "who honor their sons more than God, as those do who keep them not under good discipline, thereby forfeit the honor they might expect from their sons."⁶

To avoid this disappointment, parents need the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to know how to displease their children only for their children's benefit and for the glory of God, not out of their own frustration. Ask this question: Am I carrying out this discipline because I am good and angry, or because I am thinking clearly and carefully about the training my child needs to make spiritual progress?

Children need to understand this as well. If your parents make you angry sometimes, it is probably because they love you enough to discipline you. If they ask, "Why did you do this?" or "Where have you been?" do not shut them out. Do not decide to do whatever you please. And do not say that it is none of their business. It *is* their business. It is their business because it is your business, and it happens to be their business to help you do your business with God. Otherwise, you will grow up to be like Adonijah, living for your own pleasure, perhaps, but never receiving the blessing of God. If you crown yourself the king, or the queen, eventually your life will turn out to be a royal disappointment!

6. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2, *Judges to Job* (New York: Fleming Revell, n.d.), n.p.

THE TRUE AND RIGHTFUL KING

What should Adonijah have done? One of the best places for anyone to start in life is with the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Adonijah didn't know that catechism, of course, but he could have learned its first principle from the Law of Moses: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." Adonijah had this exactly backward. He was living for his own glory and his own enjoyment rather than for the glory and the pleasure of God. What makes this especially ironic is that the man's very name means "the LORD is Master." Yet Adonijah wanted to be his own master, and thus he never submitted to the rule of God.

To be more specific, he never submitted to the authority of the prophet, the priest, or the king that God had established in Israel. As we have seen, Adonijah conferred with Joab the general and Abiathar the priest. But he never conferred with the three men who had true, God-given spiritual authority in Israel: the prophet, the high priest, and the king. Thus we read in verse 8 that "Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and Shimei and Rei and David's mighty men were not with Adonijah." We read further in verse 10 that Adonijah "did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother."

The reason this matters is that these men were the rightful leaders of Israel. Many Bible scholars have described this passage as a power struggle between two rival political parties: Judah versus Jerusalem, or the old establishment against the new revolutionaries. But that is to miss the deeper spiritual point. Nathan was Israel's true prophet—a man who even had the courage to stand up against David himself (see 2 Sam. 12:1–15). Zadok was the true high priest—a man directly descended from Aaron, the first high priest in Israel (see 1 Chron. 6:49–53). The other mighty men—like Benaiah, who was the captain of the king's bodyguard (see 2 Sam. 23:20–23), or Solomon, whom God had chosen to be the next king—represented the rightful kingship of David.

So although Adonijah conferred with his supporters, he did not consult the prophet, or the priest, or the king that God had anointed to lead his people. He did not consult them because he knew they would not support him. He had made his own decision to be the king, for his own glory and his

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own pleasure, without ever submitting to the rule of God, as represented by his prophet, his priest, and his king.

This gives us a practical principle for our own decision making, which is always to submit to the will of God. Am I doing what am I doing because it is what I want to do or because it is what God wants me to do? Happily, in the goodness of God many of the things that God calls us to do *are* the things that we want to do. But whenever there is any conflict, we need to submit to God's authority.

It is characteristic of godly decisions that they are made out in the open, with the help of godly counsel, including from people who are willing to tell us some things we do not want to hear. Submitting to God's will always starts with knowing the Scriptures, which rule some things in and some things out. It also includes listening to the people God has provided for our spiritual guidance: parents, perhaps, or spouses, or teachers, or bosses, or pastors and elders in the church, depending on our situation in life.

This counsel is especially important anytime we are thinking of doing something that we do not want other people to know about. When a child hides something from her parents, or a husband holds secrets from his wife, or a worker misleads her employer, or a church member keeps something from his pastor, this is always a sign of a spiritual problem. This is what Adonijah did. He talked to Joab and Abiathar because he knew they would support him, but he did not talk to Nathan or Zadok, and he certainly never talked to his father David. If we want to hear only from people who will always tell us that we are doing the right thing, we are acting like the rulers of our own lives, and we will end up like Adonijah. The very fact that we do not want certain people to know what we are planning to do may well be the proof that they really do need to know.

Do not seek your own pleasure and glory, but submit to God's will for your life. For Adonijah, this meant consulting with Nathan, Zadok, and David. For us it means submitting to Jesus Christ, who is the true Prophet, the faithful Priest, and the rightful King for the people of God. Every time we see a prophet, a priest, or a king, we can make a connection to Jesus Christ, for the work of these Old Testament leaders pointed to his person and work. Jesus is the Prophet who speaks the Word of God; listen to what he says. Jesus is the Priest who offered himself as a sacrifice; trust in him for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the King who rules us and defends us; ask for his protection.

As we consider Christ as King, we can hardly help but notice that his kingship is the antithesis of everything we see in Adonijah. Adonijah announced his own kingship, for his own glory and his own pleasure. But Jesus did exactly the opposite. Unlike proud Adonijah, he did not ride palace chariots or hire footmen to announce his royal majesty. Instead, he rode a lowly donkey, and whatever attendants he had were people who followed him of their own free devotion. Jesus did not come to do his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him, even when this meant going to the cross for our sins. Setting aside his own pleasure, he endured the pains of crucifixion. Then, rather than exalting himself, he waited for God the Father to raise him from the dead and lift him to heaven's high throne (see Phil. 2:6–11).

This is the King we serve: not a king who is in it for himself, but who rules for the good of his people and the glory of God. Now we are called to live the same way: not “kinging” ourselves, but crowning Christ as King, and serving others for Jesus' sake.