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# Chapter 1

## SOLOMON SUCCEEDS TO THE THRONE OF DAVID

### 1 Kings 1:1-2:12a

The narrative of Solomon's succession to the throne of King David, his father, is the longest single story in 1 Kings. It is an unusually complex story for the Hebrew Bible, with numerous well-drawn characters, a subtle use of timing and point of view, and a carefully constructed symmetrical organization.

The story unfolds in nine sections, which are arranged in a balanced concentric pattern:

- A. King David is dying (1:1-4)
- B. Adonijah exalts himself (1:5-8)
- C. Adonijah holds a feast (1:9-10)
  - D. Nathan conspires to make Solomon king (1:11-14)
  - E. Four scenes in David's chambers (1:15-37)
  - D'. Nathan and others make Solomon king (1:38-40)
- C'. Adonijah's feast is disrupted (1:41-50)
- B'. Adonijah abases himself (1:51-53)
- A'. King David dies (2:1-12a)

The first two sections supply background for the narrative. (There is a grammatical technique in Hebrew for indicating where the background material ends and where the action proper begins; in this story, the action begins in verse 9.) The last section acts as a transition and link between this story and the following one about Solomon's consolidation of power. The action of the story occurs in verses 9-53, and takes place in Jerusalem and its environs during the course of one momentous day late in David's life.

*Background: Sections A and B*

King David had been a military and political genius. He delivered the people of Judah and Israel from Philistine oppression, welded them into a federated realm under a single king, and established them as a dominant power in the lands at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. David was celebrated as Yahweh's particular favorite; and indeed God had confirmed with him, through the mouth of David's court prophet Nathan, an unconditional covenant that his dynasty would last forever (2 Sam 7).

David's personal life, however, was far less successful. The gripping and tragic story of his familial disasters is told in 2 Samuel 9–20. David had an adulterous affair with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's soldiers. When the liaison resulted in pregnancy, David resorted to murder: at his order Joab, David's general in the Ammonite war, maneuvered Uriah into a dangerous mission during which several warriors, including Uriah, were killed. As if these sins had unleashed a poison in his whole house, David's sons began their own catalogue of crimes. His eldest son, Amnon, raped his own half-sister Tamar, and then spurned her. When David seemed incapable of disciplining Amnon, his third son, Absalom, who was Tamar's devoted full brother, murdered Amnon by treachery. Absalom fled David's territory, but was reconciled with David three years later through the intervention of Joab. The reconciliation was a chilly one, however; David permitted Absalom, now the heir,<sup>1</sup> to live in Jerusalem, but he refused to meet him face to face for another two years. Absalom's growing disaffection because of his father's treatment eventually ripened into ambition, and he mounted an armed rebellion against his father. It was now David's turn to flee Jerusalem. In the ensuing battle Joab killed Absalom, and the rebellion collapsed. This left Adonijah, David's fourth son, as heir apparent.

This, then, is the remote background: a king whose public, political shrewdness founded an empire and a dynasty but whose private, familial failures made a shambles of the succession. 1 Kings begins at the point where these two contradictory sides of David intersect. If there is to be a stable transfer of political power in the kingdom, he must act decisively on a family matter.

<sup>1</sup>David's second son, whose name was either Chileab (2 Sam 3:3) or Daniel (1 Chr 3:1), does not appear in the stories of the Davidic house. Most scholars surmise from this that he had died by the time of Absalom's attempt to usurp the throne.

## KING DAVID IS DYING: 1:1-4

In the first section of our story, King David is old and his health is failing. We are told that he "could not get warm"; presumably he suffers from arteriosclerosis, but in view of the sexual innuendoes of the next verses, the phrase surely has a double meaning. The principal concern of these verses is the irreversibility of the king's feeble condition, with which the section begins and ends:

- A. David's feeble condition (1:1)
- B. Plan: find a virgin to care for David (1:2a)
  - C. Her specific duties (1:2b)
- B'. Abishag is found (1:3)
  - C'. She carries out her duties (1:4a)
- A'. David is still impotent (1:4b)

His servants, that is, courtiers who have his confidence, propose to find a young virgin to care for the king. She will be "his attendant," a role whose specific duties are spelled out in two contrasting images: she will "stand" before him (NRSV, "wait on"), and she will "lie" beside him. (Similar therapy is attested in Greek medical literature of a thousand years later, though without the sexual dimensions. The underlying theory is that the vigor and energy of the youthful person will spread to the elderly one through physical contact.) The plan is carried out with only partial success. Abishag of Shunem, a small village in the tribal territory of Issachar, becomes David's attendant and serves him, but the king's potency does not revive. The narrator's remark that "the king did not know her" (the NRSV adds "sexually" to make the meaning explicit) is a comment, not on David's restraint, but on his terminal infirmity. Since the good of the kingdom depends on the king's health and energy, David's frailty points up the pressing importance of determining the dynastic succession.

The narrator draws a poignant picture of King David. His great age is emphasized by repetition: he is not merely "old" but "advanced in years." (If we can rely on the round numbers in 2 Samuel 5:4, David was about seventy years old.) The pathetic picture of the king shivering under piles of blankets contrasts starkly with the David who was the hero of 2 Samuel. This is no longer the vigorous, decisive leader of the past but the passive object of others' actions. Grammatically, he is the subject of no active verbs; things are done *to* him, not *by* him. His awareness, however, is still sharp, whatever his physical condition. The narrator signals this obliquely by showing us Abishag from two points of view. First he tells us that David's servants sought a beautiful girl and

found Abishag (v. 3a). Thus the narrator assures us of Abishag's beauty (at least in the eyes of the courtiers). Then he says that the servants "brought her to David, and she was very beautiful" (vv. 3b-4; the NRSV obscures this by translating as two separate sentences). This second allusion to her beauty is from the viewpoint of the king to whom she has just been brought, and whose eye for female pulchritude is evidently undimmed (cf. 2 Sam 11:2), even if he is no longer capable of availing himself of his opportunity.

And what of Abishag herself? At first glance she has little function in the plot beyond demonstrating David's continuing impotence. Neither her name nor her provenance is significant. She is deemed beautiful by both courtiers and king, a stereotypical prerequisite for the role she is to fulfill. Yet, to the reader aware of the story's remote background in 2 Samuel, there are indications that Abishag may be more important than she appears. Two phrases used of Abishag allude to passages about Bathsheba in 2 Samuel. First, David's perception of Abishag's beauty is described in terms similar to his reaction to Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11:2. Second, Abishag's duty of lying in the king's bosom recalls the same uncommon image in 2 Samuel 12:3, where Nathan uses a parable about a poor man and the ewe lamb that used to "lie in his bosom," to condemn David for his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Uriah. As the story develops, most of the principal figures in Adonijah's camp will have counterparts in Solomon's: Joab and Benaiah, Abiathar and Zadok, Jonathan and Nathan. Bathsheba's counterpart is Abishag, who has replaced her in the king's bed; Abishag's connection with Adonijah is implied also in 2:13-18, when he asks that Solomon give her to him as his wife.

#### ADONIJAH EXALTS HIMSELF: 1:5-8

The second section of the story introduces Adonijah, David's oldest surviving son. Since David founded a new dynasty, the principle of succession by the eldest son was not yet established by precedent in the kingdom; nevertheless, Adonijah assumed that he would succeed his father. Verses 5-6 highlight Adonijah's presumption:

- A. Adonijah's claim to be heir (1:5a)
- B. Adonijah's actions as heir (1:5b)
- B'. David's silence about Adonijah's actions (1:6a)
- A'. The grounds for Adonijah's claim (1:6b)

Several elements in verses 5-6 point up Adonijah's royal expectations. Throughout the Books of Kings, whenever a new king comes to

the throne in Jerusalem, his mother's name is given; this reflects the importance of the queen mother (the *gēbîrâ*, or "Great Lady") in the court of Judah. The mention of Haggith, Adonijah's mother, reminds us that the position of *gēbîrâ* is also at stake in the struggle that is about to ensue. The narrator also draws several parallels between Adonijah and the figure of Absalom in 2 Samuel and calls attention to the parallels by naming Absalom explicitly at the end of verse 6. The retinue of chariots, horses (not "horsemen," as several English versions, including the NRSV, render the word), and runners that Adonijah assembles repeats Absalom's pretensions preceding his rebellion against David (2 Sam 15:1). David's silence in the face of Adonijah's presumption recalls his inability to call Amnon to account for the rape of Tamar and his protective indulgence of Absalom even during the latter's armed coup d'état (see 2 Sam 18-19). Adonijah is, like Absalom himself, "a very handsome man" (v. 6; cf. 2 Sam 14:25-26), and follows Absalom in the presumed line of succession. The last elements, Adonijah's good looks and his birth order, balance his boasting in verse 5a and reflect his own point of view rather than being simply objective information supplied by the narrator. Adonijah, we see, is not only presumptuous; he is also spoiled and vain, counting on his father's indulgence and his own beauty to gain him the throne.

Unlike Absalom, however, Adonijah is not actively seeking to unseat his father. His claim "I will be king" (v. 5) contains an emphatic pronoun in Hebrew. (Such emphasis is often lost in English because our language requires pronouns where Hebrew does not. Its force here is "I, and no one else, shall be king.") It is a self-satisfied comment on his status as heir, not a statement of rebellious intent, which would emphasize the verb rather than the subject. His retinue is to be seen as the honor guard of a crown prince. In view of the lack of an established policy of primogeniture, Adonijah is perhaps overconfident, but there is no indication that this small force is the beginning of an army of usurpation. David's declining health would make an attempt to take the throne by violence unnecessary and foolish. Our impressions of Adonijah to this point are hardly flattering, but the support he has from such notables as Joab and Abiathar argues that he is not a fool.

Verses 7-8 offer the first hints of conflict in the story. Adonijah's succession has the support of powerful people in David's court, but other influential figures do not back him. The two parties are presented in partially balanced fashion. There is one military leader in each party: Joab, the head of the army, who supports Adonijah, and Benaiah, the leader of David's personal guard of mercenaries, who does not. Both are identified by a parent's name. (Joab is regularly identified as the son of Zeruiah, his mother, rather than by his father's name, which

would be more common Israelite practice. This may be because it was through her that Joab was related to David, who was Zeruiah's brother; see 1 Chr 2:13-16.) There is one priest in each party: Abiathar supports Adonijah, and Zadok does not. Each is identified as "the priest." In addition, those who do not support Adonijah include the prophet Nathan, Shimei and Rei,<sup>2</sup> and David's warriors (who were under the command of Benaiah). The narrator leaves open a tantalizing question: if they do not favor the heir apparent, whom do they support?

There is a historical and perhaps ideological division hidden behind these names. Joab and Abiathar represent the old guard; they were David's companions since his outlaw days during the reign of King Saul, before David's seven-year reign in Hebron and long before his conquest of Jerusalem. Adonijah was born during David's time in Hebron (2 Sam 3:4). By contrast, Benaiah, Zadok, and Nathan do not appear in the Hebrew Bible until after David conquered Jerusalem and established his capital there. Some scholars even suggest that Zadok and Nathan may have been functionaries of the Jebusite cult and court of Jerusalem before David took the city. Whether or not that is so, these individuals may stand for the more pluralistic and cosmopolitan viewpoint that develops in Yahwistic society after it becomes an imperial power. Solomon, born in Jerusalem, will ultimately show himself inordinately sympathetic to political and religious pluralism.

Solomon, however, has not yet been mentioned. Although as the story develops the essential conflict will be between Solomon's partisans and Adonijah's, these introductory sections do not contrast the two rivals; rather, they contrast Adonijah with David himself. David is old and infirm, confined indoors, surrounded by solicitous courtiers and a beautiful woman all concerned about his health. He is passive, acted upon but not himself acting. Our feelings toward him are sympathetic, but we recognize that he is no longer a figure to be admired and followed; his day is done. Adonijah is young and handsome, outdoors, in the midst of military might and political contention. He is active and decisive, boasting, gathering followers and marshaling political support. His personal qualities are unendearing, but his boldness elicits from us a certain grudging admiration. He has the support of shrewd and experienced people; perhaps his shallowness is only apparent and they perceive in him strengths that we have not yet dis-

<sup>2</sup>The names "Shimei and Rei," with no further descriptions, are obscure. Both are otherwise unknown, unless "Shimei" is the Shimei son of Elai of 4:18. The Hebrew text may be damaged. A small change in the Hebrew letters would yield "Shimei, the Friend," that is, "Friend [of the King]," which was an office in the royal court (see 4:5, where Zabud, son of Nathan, holds this position).

cerned. David is the past; the inevitable question is, Is Adonijah the future?

### *Conflict: Sections C and D*

#### ADONIJAH HOLDS A FEAST: 1:9-10

The action of the story begins in verse 9, when Adonijah holds a feast for his partisans at En-rogel, a spring a few hundred yards south of Jerusalem in the Kidron Valley. (The "stone Zohelath" is otherwise unknown.) Since the verb "sacrificed" usually occurs in cultic contexts, the feast may have been religious in nature. Here, too, there is a parallel with Absalom, whose rebellion began with a feast (2 Sam 15:11-12); but in Adonijah's case there is no indication that the event represents anything more than a celebration of solidarity with his followers.

Verses 9b-10 list those whom Adonijah does and does not invite to his feast. His list is expansive. "All his brothers, the king's sons" suggests that his status as heir is uncontested by the younger members of the royal family. Primogeniture is the presumption, if not yet the precedent. "All the men of Judah, the king's servants" (NRSV, "all the royal officials of Judah"), however, is exclusive: Adonijah apparently does not invite royal officials from Israel, that is, the northern tribes. This may be another indication of the ideological division noted above. Adonijah's support comes from those who are more closely identified with southern concerns and interests. The phrase also recalls the "servants" who brought Abishag to care for David (v. 2). Are the courtiers who are most closely in David's confidence all from Judah? Has David, in his old age, fallen under the influence of those who would put nostalgia for old ways and old loyalties in place of the broader vision needed in the new world of empire?

The organization of verses 9b-10 is a good demonstration of how the narrator relies on our active cooperation as readers to untangle ambiguity and, literally, to *make* sense of the text. The Hebrew reads, "And he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the men of Judah, the king's servants, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the warriors, and Solomon his brother he did not invite." Clearly the list includes both the invited and the uninvited, but where are we to understand the break between the two? (The translator of the NRSV, by moving the words "did not invite" to an earlier point in the sentence, has made our decision for us.) The narrator expects us to use the information in verses 7-8 and to conclude that Adonijah's invitations are extended on a partisan basis, excluding those who do not support

him as David's successor. This implies that Adonijah is aware of their opposition, and suggests too that, at least in Adonijah's mind, Solomon is their rival candidate for the throne. All these surmises will be confirmed as the story continues. Another narrative technique in verses 9-10 is also worthy of note. The narrator uses flashback to good effect. Logically, the invitations (and non-invitations) itemized in verses 9b-10 must have preceded the feast Adonijah holds in verse 9a. By recounting the feast before the invitations, the narrator builds tension and delays as long as possible introducing the name of Adonijah's rival, Solomon.

#### NATHAN CONSPIRES TO MAKE SOLOMON KING: 1:11-14

The scene shifts abruptly to a conversation between Nathan and Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. Nathan was David's court prophet, that is, his role was to communicate to the king God's opinion about affairs of state. It was Nathan who conveyed to David God's promise of an eternal covenant with him and his descendants (2 Sam 7), who confronted and condemned him for his crimes against Uriah (2 Sam 12:1-15), and who conferred a name of great promise on the newborn Solomon (2 Sam 12:24-25). In all those cases, where Nathan's words and activities were consonant with his holy office, the narrator is usually content simply to call him "Nathan"; he is styled "Nathan the prophet" only in 2 Samuel 7:2 and 12:25. Here, where he is embroiled in a sordid palace intrigue with no apparent divine mandate, the narrator insistently—and ironically—reminds us at almost every opportunity that this schemer is "the prophet." Bathsheba is the woman for whom David committed murder. The child of their adulterous union died, but Bathsheba soon bore David another son, Solomon (2 Sam 12:24-25). After Solomon's birth, neither he nor Bathsheba is mentioned again until this chapter.

We hear only Nathan's part of the conversation, but it is enough to reveal his political agenda and his verbal deftness. His claim that Adonijah "has become" king is a double distortion: it changes Adonijah's words in verse 5 from the future to the past tense, transforming them from an innocent assertion into an act of treason; and it implies that Adonijah intends his feast at En-rogel to be his inauguration as king. Nathan identifies Adonijah as "son of Haggith" to remind Bathsheba that the role of queen mother is also at stake, and he points out that she and Solomon are both in grave danger if her son does not succeed to the throne. He refers to David as "our" lord, thereby asserting both his solidarity with Bathsheba and his loyalty to David. Whether

Bathsheba would be motivated more by self-interest or by faithful devotion to David, Nathan offers her a reason to cooperate with his scheme.

Nathan intends to take the offensive in the struggle for succession. He proposes that Bathsheba approach David with a question about an oath the king purportedly swore to her guaranteeing her son's succession. (The very proposal contains a hidden irony, since the name "Bathsheba" may be translated "daughter of an oath"!.) As Nathan phrases it to Bathsheba, her question appears to assume that David has approved Adonijah's inauguration, though Nathan is well aware that this is not the case. The approach he counsels is calculated to stir up David's anger against Adonijah without endangering Bathsheba herself. It avoids suggesting that David is no longer in control of things, but it will lead him to conclude that Adonijah thinks so and is acting as if it were the case. The question form itself implies that David must have reasons for naming Adonijah as his successor, and thus softens the tacit accusation that David has violated an oath. Nathan promises to supply "independent" confirmation for Bathsheba's claim.

Nathan's instructions to Bathsheba (vv. 13-14) center on the oath David purportedly swore:

- A. What Bathsheba should do ("go in . . . and say," 1:13a)
- B. Bathsheba's words to David (1:13b)
- C. David's alleged oath (1:13c)
- B'. Bathsheba's words to David (1:13d)
- A'. What Nathan will do ("come in . . . and confirm your words," 1:14)

Bathsheba's and Nathan's actions are complementary: she will go in to the king and speak; he will come in after her and confirm what she has said. The speech Nathan gives her to address to the king consists of two questions surrounding the oath. The first question begins with an emphatic pronoun, "you," followed by the phrase "my lord the king" (Hebrew, *'ādônî hammelek*). The second question ends with the phrase "Adonijah is king" (Hebrew, *mālak 'ādônîyāhû*). The wordplay can be appreciated only in Hebrew: Who is king (*melek/mālak*)? Is it "my lord" (*'ādônî*, that is, David) or Adonijah (*'ādônîyâ*)? By phrasing things this way, Nathan suggests that the fundamental struggle going on is between David and Adonijah. Since David has already suffered greatly at the hands of another son who tried to wrest the throne from him, Nathan seeks to convince David that the present contention is a rebellion like Absalom's rather than a struggle for the succession.

The oath itself contains a two-part formula. Both parts put emphasis on the subject of the sentence: "Solomon [no one else] shall succeed

me as king; it is *he* who will sit on my throne." The formula will become a leitmotif echoing several times throughout the chapter, sometimes verbatim, sometimes with modifications. It expresses succinctly the real issue of the whole story: *Who* will be David's successor?

The crucial question, of course, is whether David actually swore such an oath or whether it is a fabrication by Nathan designed to cozen the aged king. The conventions of biblical Hebrew narrative would easily allow the narrator to make the situation clear. Yet there is no information here or elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to answer the question one way or the other. That fact is itself significant: we are *meant* to wonder. The possibility that Nathan and Bathsheba are simply taking advantage of David's condition to promote their own candidate raises uncomfortable questions not only about their honesty but about the whole process by which Solomon becomes king.

### *The Turning Point: Section E*

The crisis is reached in the central section of the story, which consists of four scenes that take place in David's chambers. The scenes are arranged in two parallel pairs:

- A. Bathsheba's audience with David (1:15-21)
- B. Nathan's audience with David (1:22-27)
- A'. David summons Bathsheba (1:28-31)
- B'. David summons Nathan and others (1:32-37)

#### BATHSHEBA'S AUDIENCE WITH DAVID: 1:15-21

In the first scene Bathsheba carries out her part in the intrigue Nathan has devised. The narrator sets the emotional stage by repeating things we already know, but now showing them to us from Bathsheba's point of view. As she enters the room, she confronts two stark realities: the king is very old, and she herself has been replaced at the king's side and in his bed by the beautiful Abishag (v. 15). Both facts underscore how completely her future depends on her success in the next few moments.

Bathsheba makes a profound obeisance, and the king greets her with a brief, two-syllable question; perhaps he can manage no greater effort. Ironically, his question ("What do you want?" Hebrew, *mâ-lāk*) echoes by coincidence the thematic term of the whole chapter, *mālak*, "to rule as king." Bathsheba then addresses the king. Her speech is a rhetorical

masterpiece. Structurally, it begins and ends with personal references: David's supposed oath to Bathsheba, and Bathsheba's danger if Adonijah becomes king (vv. 17, 21). Inside those references are two remarks about the succession: Adonijah has become king though David doesn't know it, and all Israel looks to David to decide who shall succeed him (vv. 18, 20). Centered within the speech is a detailed description of the feast Adonijah is celebrating at that very moment (v. 19).

The changes that Bathsheba makes in Nathan's proposed script reveal much about her strong character. The essence of what Nathan told her to say is in verses 17-18a. Everything in verses 18b-21 Bathsheba says on her own initiative. Moreover, where Nathan recommended an oblique approach, Bathsheba mounts a frontal assault. Her emotional manipulation of David is quite different from what Nathan envisaged, but it is equally effective. Instead of questioning David, her words begin with an emphatic pronoun, "you," and bluntly assert that he did make the oath. Bathsheba cites the oath exactly as Nathan worded it, but she adds to the oath's weight by claiming that David swore it "in the name of Yahweh your God" (NRSV, "by the LORD your God").

Where Nathan would have Bathsheba ask why Adonijah has become king—as if David must have made the decision, but for unknown reasons—she confronts him with his ignorance of what is taking place. Unknown to David, she says, others are acting to void the oath he has made. The theme of David's "not knowing" recalls for us that he "did not know" Abishag (v. 4); his physical impotence is symptomatic of his loss of control of public affairs. The implication that David is losing his grip would wound him deeply, and the tacit accusation that he has become an oathbreaker as a result would add insult to injury. Verse 18 repeats the wordplay mentioned above: "Adonijah has become king" (*'ădônîyâ mālak*) and "my lord the king" (*'ădônî ham-melek*). The latter phrase will recur three more times in Bathsheba's speech (vv. 20-21), as if to drum into David's consciousness that she is unswervingly loyal to his kingship rather than Adonijah's.

Bathsheba's description of Adonijah's feast repeats information we have already learned from the narrator in v. 9 with two variations, both of which exaggerate the solemnity of the feast. Where the narrator told us that Adonijah sacrificed "sheep, cattle, and fatlings" (the NRSV translation is not exact here), Bathsheba says he sacrificed "oxen, fatlings, and sheep in abundance." Moreover, since she has just said that "Adonijah has become king," David will inevitably infer that the feast is an inauguration ceremony. She also tailors Adonijah's list of invitees to suit her purposes. In verse 9b Adonijah invited "all his brothers, the king's sons," reflecting both his own point of view ("brothers") and their significance as members of the royal family ("sons"). Bathsheba,

addressing David, simply calls them "the king's sons" (NRSV, "all the children of the king") in deference to David's point of view. Adonijah invited "all the men [i.e., royal officials] of Judah"; Bathsheba leaves this out, since it could suggest a wider political support for Adonijah than she wishes to acknowledge.

Bathsheba adds the names of Abiathar and Joab, whom the narrator has already identified in verse 7 as supporters of Adonijah, though they were not specifically mentioned among those invited in verse 9. The information that two of David's oldest and most faithful comrades have joined Adonijah will come as a further painful betrayal. At the same time, her description of Joab as "commander of the army" subtly introduces a threat of violence that she will invoke again at the end of her speech (v. 21). Since it turns out later that David harbors a secret, deadly grudge against Joab (2:5-6), the mention of Joab here may be a further factor influencing David to turn against Adonijah. As uninvited, she names only Solomon, though the narrator also listed Nathan (of whose exclusion she is clearly aware) and Benaiah. By naming Adonijah's supporters but not Solomon's, Bathsheba conceals the fact that the struggle is between two rivals for their father's throne and conveys the impression that it is between Adonijah and his supporters on the one side and David and those loyal to him on the other. Solomon is simply one of those loyal to David: in Bathsheba's terms, he is David's "servant," a term she does not use of Abiathar or Joab. The phrase "Solomon your servant" in verse 19 is emphasized (the inverted word order of the NRSV reproduces the emphasis well).

The phrase that begins verse 20, "You, my lord the king," is not grammatically integrated with what follows and thus has considerable emphasis. It introduces a flattering appeal to David's vanity that is particularly ironic, since it is Bathsheba who is in fact telling David who should be king after him! The flattery is well timed. After arousing mixed feelings of anger and guilt in David, Bathsheba gives him the opportunity to regain stature (at least in his own eyes) by acting decisively to name a successor. She affirms David's freedom to choose whomever he wishes. In reality, however, her earlier statements that David has sworn a sacred oath in Solomon's favor and that Adonijah has already laid claim to David's throne undercut that freedom and influence David's choice in one direction. The end of verse 20 echoes both parts of the alleged oath: "who shall sit on the throne" recalls the last words of the oath, and "after him" recalls the same word in the first half of the oath (the word is obscured in verse 17 of the NRSV behind the phrase "succeed me," which is literally "reign after me").

In verse 21 Bathsheba returns to a personal appeal. The words do not flow smoothly from verse 20 (the NRSV's "otherwise" is not in the

Hebrew), and the abruptness of the transition points up that this is the emotional bottom line for Bathsheba: she and Solomon are in danger. The phrase "lies down with his ancestors" (NRSV, "sleeps with his ancestors") is a stereotyped Hebrew euphemism for death and burial, reflecting the custom of burying several generations of a family in a common tomb, usually a cave in the ubiquitous limestone hills of Palestine. In David's case, the traditional phrase is inappropriate, since his ancestral home was in Bethlehem, where he grew up as a shepherd. As conqueror of Jerusalem, the "City of David," and as king and founder of a new dynasty, he would not be buried in the family tomb in Bethlehem but in a newly dug royal tomb in his own city. Bathsheba's use of the phrase may be nothing more than convention. On the other hand, it may recall to the king the demands of generational loyalties, and thereby underline both David's obligation to Solomon and Adonijah's alleged repudiation of those loyalties. In any case, the collocation of "sitting on the throne" and "lying down" points once more to David's feebleness: he is bedridden and moribund, no longer able to sit on the throne. The need to assure the succession is pressing.

Bathsheba does not spell out in detail the offense of which she and Solomon will be held guilty (v. 21) or the penalty which that offense will incur. Leaving things to David's imagination is an effective ploy, for, as we will see (2:5-9), David is quite capable of imagining bloody ends for those who oppose royal power. It is noteworthy, though, that Bathsheba lists her own danger ahead of Solomon's (the NRSV reverses Bathsheba's word order): "I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders." This reflects the personal quality of the appeal, but it is also a shrewd psychological move. David may or may not have a particular attachment to Solomon, but his former love for Bathsheba was the stuff of legends. If the power of that devotion can be awakened again, it will likely overwhelm less emotionally volatile issues such as primogeniture or even fitness to rule, much as it once overwhelmed moral strictures against adultery and murder.

#### NATHAN'S AUDIENCE WITH DAVID: 1:22-27

Nathan enters as planned. The Hebrew text is very vivid, putting us immediately into the scene: "And while she is still speaking to the king, in comes Nathan the prophet!" We must assume that Bathsheba withdraws, as would be proper when the king has speech with one of his close advisers, since later she will be summoned back to David's chambers (v. 28). The fact that the narrator does not explicitly mention

her departure, however, allows the memory of her presence to hang in the air, as it were, coloring the scene for us much as Nathan's frequent repetitions of Bathsheba's very words will remind David of her. Nathan's approach to David contrasts with Bathsheba's in several ways. Unlike the wife, who can approach the king immediately, the prophet-courtier must be announced. Bathsheba "bowed," but Nathan "bowed, face to the ground" (NRSV, "did obeisance . . . with his face to the ground"). Where Bathsheba's speech was personal and emotional, Nathan's is formal and concerned about political policy. His approach befits a royal adviser: in a significant matter like the succession, he would expect to have been consulted. As in verses 8-10, the repeated mention of Nathan's position as court prophet underscores the irony of his guiding role in this palace intrigue despite the apparent absence of any divine commission to do so.

The first sentence of Nathan's speech (v. 24) is not a question in Hebrew, as the NRSV translation would have it, but a statement: "My lord the king, you have said . . ." The pronoun "you" is emphatic and admits of no suspicion that Adonijah's succession could have occurred without David's approval. Similarly, the word order emphasizes the name Adonijah: "it is Adonijah [not someone else] who shall rule after me." Nathan's strategy thus complements Bathsheba's. Where she averred that David promised the throne to Solomon and that Adonijah's actions are done in David's ignorance, Nathan pretends to believe that David has decreed Adonijah's succession. His words, however, are carefully chosen to echo to David the oath in favor of Solomon that Bathsheba has just spoken of (cf. vv. 17 and 24).

David is caught on the horns of a dilemma. If Bathsheba is correct, he has lost control of his kingdom; if Nathan is correct, David has violated a solemn oath. We know that Nathan is not correct, of course, and David presumably realizes it as well. But if Nathan is not correct—so the conspirators hope David's thinking will run—then Bathsheba must be, and David owes Solomon the throne in fulfillment of his solemn oath. Moreover, the prophet's feigned assumption that David has acted in Adonijah's favor will only intensify the king's ire at what both Bathsheba and Nathan paint as Adonijah's presumption.

As evidence for his conclusion that David has named Adonijah to succeed him, Nathan speaks of the feast Adonijah is holding at that very moment. His description of it corresponds extensively with Bathsheba's in wording, thus further confirming to David Bathsheba's honesty and accuracy. But Nathan adds new details calculated to further the conspiracy in Solomon's favor. Lest David think that Adonijah's seizure of the throne is an accomplished fact, Nathan reveals that the feast is being held "today." It is not too late to thwart the pretender's

coup! Nathan deemphasizes the list of invitees by leaving out, as Bathsheba also did, the royal officials and by substituting "the army commanders" for the more inflammatory name of Joab.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, he heightens David's impression of the treasonous character of the gathering by painting the scene in vivid and explicit language as a royal coronation feast: "Here they are, eating and drinking with him, and they've said, 'Long live King Adonijah!'" To a reigning monarch, the acclamation of another as king can only be sedition; and for David in particular, who was once before driven from Jerusalem by a usurping son, the news would evoke as well all the danger, pain, and suffering of the days of Absalom's rebellion.

Unlike Bathsheba, Nathan lists several people whom Adonijah did not invite to his alleged coronation. He places himself first, in terms that strongly emphasize his precedence and loyalty: "And me, myself, your servant, . . . he did not invite." Between his own name and that of Solomon he mentions Zadok the priest to balance Abiathar's presence among Adonijah's supporters, and Benaiah to balance the military commanders. The narrator has already told us that Nathan, Benaiah, and Solomon were not invited (v. 10), and Zadok's status as a non-supporter of Adonijah (v. 8) makes it likely that he was not invited either. Nathan's interweaving of verifiable facts and unverifiable innuendoes gives his speech great manipulative power. He uses the same word as Bathsheba, "your servant," at the beginning and end of the list to mark these four as a small group still loyal to David. The implication is that loyalty to David excludes one from being numbered among those who support Adonijah. In this way Nathan achieves the same illusion as Bathsheba: he presents the conflict as being between Adonijah and David, each with his band of followers, rather than as being between Adonijah and Solomon.

Nathan's final words are a conditional statement, not a question (the NRSV translation is misleading): "If this affair has come about at my lord the king's behest, then you have not let your servants know . . . ." Nathan does not question what David has supposedly done; he simply and somewhat diffidently expresses his surprise and disappointment that David has acted without consulting his loyal retainers. The mildness of his complaint adds one more fillip of guilt to the pressure building up on David. But at the same time Nathan offers David a way out of his dilemma: the king can deny that he is behind Adonijah's actions and repudiate them.

<sup>3</sup>This is the reading of the Hebrew text and one ancient Greek translation. Another ancient Greek manuscript tradition, which the NRSV follows here, has "Joab, commander of the army."

Nathan's speech ends with the phrases that have reverberated in David's chambers since Bathsheba's opening words about David's alleged oath: "sit on the throne" and "after him." For us, the incessant repetition of these phrases (vv. 17, 20, 24, 27) unifies the speeches of Bathsheba and Nathan and reflects their character as a single, coordinated campaign. For David, it keeps forcefully in the forefront of his consciousness the decision he must make.

With this final echo of the oath, the story reaches its crisis. Bathsheba and Nathan have used an impressive array of rhetorical strategies to pit David against Adonijah and to present Solomon as the only son still loyal to David. Although they both pay lip service to David's freedom to act on the succession in any way he sees fit, their potent mixture of information and insinuation effectively narrows his options. If he favors Adonijah, he will in effect be surrendering to those who have seemingly betrayed him. If he chooses Solomon, he will both reward loyalty and thwart those who, as Bathsheba and Nathan tell it, have risen up against him.

#### DAVID SUMMONS BATHSHEBA: 1:28-31

The turning point occurs here, at the structural center of the story, between the two pairs of interviews in David's chambers. The narrator calls him by his full title, "King David," which also marked the beginning of the first half of the story (v. 1). The title also reflects his change from passive to active: David now becomes decisive and commanding, and will remain so until we are told of his death in 2:10. The very first word of the scene in Hebrew is an active verb, "answered." Except for the weak, two-syllable question in verse 16, it is the first thing David has said or done in the entire story.

This scene, like so many of the preceding ones, is carefully structured:

- A. A statement of David about Bathsheba (1:28a)
- B. Bathsheba comes and stands before the king (1:28b)
- C. David reaffirms the oath (1:29-30)
- B'. Bathsheba bows and kneels before the king (1:31a)
- A'. A statement of Bathsheba about David (1:31b)

David's statement is a summons. He calls Bathsheba into his presence to reaffirm to her the oath she claims he has sworn. Nathan has presumably left David's chambers, since he will have to be called back in verse 32, but the narrator passes over his departure in silence, just

as he did with Bathsheba's in verses 22-27. The effect is similar: Nathan's influence still lingers in the room, even though the king thinks he is acting on his own initiative. The opening verb of the scene strengthens that effect: "King David *answered*." His decision to act in Solomon's favor, as original as it may seem to David himself, is in fact only a *response* to the pressures his beloved wife and trusted courtier have brought to bear upon him.

Bathsheba enters. At her first appearance before David in verses 15-16, she was a petitioner; she approached him, therefore, with a bow. Here she is a summoned subject; she therefore does not bow but "stands before the king"—the standard Hebrew phrase for being at his service. Ironically, this was the position for which Abishag was sought (v. 2: "let her stand before the king"). Bathsheba's implied victory over her beautiful rival foreshadows David's decision to support Solomon over the handsome Adonijah.

David's oath in verses 29-30 is actually an oath within an oath. He swears, in effect, to do as he has sworn, repeating at the center of his solemn speech the words that Bathsheba supplied him with as far back as verse 17. His oath begins with the standard formula, "As Yahweh lives," approximately equivalent to "so help me God" in contemporary American idiom. But he expands the standard formula with a personal reference to Yahweh's faithful care for him. We see here a glimmer of one facet of this complex king's character. Alongside his political shrewdness (which, as we shall see later, can be entirely without scruples), alongside his parental ineptitude, alongside the monumental human weakness that led him to adultery and murder, he has a deeply religious personal devotion to Yahweh.

David's oath in verse 30 contains three clauses, each one introduced by the emphatic word *kî*, "indeed." The effect is powerful and cumulative, culminating in David's present resolve: "Indeed, just as I swore . . . saying, indeed, Solomon shall sit . . . , indeed, just so will I do . . . ."

In the process of voicing his oath, David draws heavily on Bathsheba's earlier words to him, but with some significant changes. Where Bathsheba claimed that David made the oath by "Yahweh your God," David now swears by "Yahweh, the God of Israel." David's devotion to Yahweh is not only based on God's faithfulness to him personally; it also includes a recognition of Yahweh as the national God. This is a subtle repudiation of a political ideology that sees the king as principal mediator between the divine and human realms—the standard view of kingship in the Ancient Near East. For David, Yahweh is directly and immediately the God of the whole people.

A second change is found when David quotes the oath that Bathsheba "reminded" him of. David repeats her words exactly but

adds the phrase "in my place" at the end of the oath. The phrase corresponds to "after me" in the preceding line and gives the whole clause better stylistic balance. In fact, it turns this formula into a poetic couplet complete with end-rhyme (which is rather uncommon in Hebrew poetry):

Solomon your son shall reign after me (*'aḥāray*)  
And he shall sit on my throne in my place (*taḥtāy*).

The effect is twofold. First, poetry embedded in a Hebrew prose narrative often marks a particularly solemn statement. Here the words of the oath—which have been repeated often enough in the story to constitute a leitmotif—become finally effective. They become what Nathan and Bathsheba claimed they were: a royal promise determining the succession. Second, the added phrase highlights the idea contained in "after me," namely, that Solomon's accession to the throne was originally intended to take place after David died. With his next words David will change that expectation.

David's new oath is brief: "Indeed, just so will I do this day." The significant phrase is "this day," which answers to Nathan's shrewd "today" in verse 25. The phrase in David's mouth is more emphatic: not simply "today" but "*this* day." In order to circumvent what he believes is an attempt to seize the crown, David must act right away, before Adonijah's supposed coup can achieve its goal. And therefore the supposed original oath, which promised Solomon the throne upon David's death, must be revised. Solomon must become king "this day," to rule the kingdom as coregent with his father during David's last days.

Bathsheba's reaction is, first, to express her gratitude by a profound obeisance. The two terms are the same as those used for her petitionary approach in verse 16, plus the description "face to the ground" that characterized Nathan's courtly bow in verse 23. By this means the narrator reminds us of both earlier scenes where the seeds were planted that have now borne fruit. Her exclamation, too, is extravagant. She addresses David more elaborately than anywhere else in the story: "my lord the king David," and she wishes him to "live forever." The language is typical courtly exaggeration (cf. Ps 72:5), but in view of David's nearness to death it carries a certain poignant irony. After watching Bathsheba's calculated manipulation of David in verses 17-21, we are justified if her sentiments here ring a bit hollow in our ears.

## DAVID SUMMONS NATHAN (AND OTHERS): 1:32-37

David's decisive behavior continues, and the narrator continues to style him with the full title "King David." He sends for Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, the loyal "servants" whose names Nathan so conveniently supplied him as having "not been invited" by Adonijah. There is an irony in the Hebrew text that is lost in translation, for Adonijah's invitation and David's summons are both expressed with the same verb, *qārā*, "to call." David's summons and the celebration to which it leads will counter and cancel Adonijah's invitation and feast. The king proceeds to give detailed instructions for a ceremony that will inaugurate and enthrone Solomon as king. We shall eventually see this ceremony from three different points of view: here from David's perspective as he plans it; in verses 38-40 from the narrator's perspective as it unfolds; and in verses 43-48 from the perspective of a supporter of Adonijah as Jonathan recounts it to the group gathered at En-rogel.

In a series of eight commands, David details who is to participate in the ceremony and how it is to proceed. First, Benaiah, Zadok, and Nathan are to assemble "the servants of your lord." The term does not mean menials but, as it did in verse 2, courtiers close to the king. Next, they are to mount Solomon on David's own mule. David calls Solomon "my son," reflecting both David's point of view and the basis for Solomon's advancement to the throne. Horses were used for pulling chariots, but they were not yet riding animals in Israel. The commoner's mount was a donkey (see, for instance, 2:40), while the mule seems to have been restricted to the elite; most references to mules in the Hebrew Bible either associate them with the royal family or list them as items of tribute brought to the king along with other exotic and valuable goods. The king's own mule was presumably a particularly notable animal, and, in fact, it is the only time a *female* mule is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. David refers to it a bit pompously as "the mule which is mine," rather than just "my mule" (NRSV, "on my own mule"). If Solomon is seen riding David's own royal mount, it will be clear to all that his accession to the throne has David's blessing.

Third, Benaiah, Zadok, and Nathan are to "bring Solomon down" to the spring Gihon. This corresponds to Nathan's claim that Adonijah has "gone down" (v. 25) to hold his purported coronation feast. It is an ironic coincidence that David chooses the Gihon for Solomon's ceremony. That spring lies less than half a mile north of En-rogel in the Kidron Valley, where Adonijah's feast is in progress, although neither Bathsheba nor Nathan informed David of its location. Why David would choose the Gihon is unclear. It has no cultic or royal associations that we are aware of, although that may be due to our scanty information

about customs in pre-Davidic Jerusalem. It was at that time the main source of water for the city, even though its principal access lay outside the city walls.

At the Gihon, David says, Zadok and Nathan are to anoint Solomon to be king over Israel. Anointing has many meanings in Israel and in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. In this case it was a consecratory act that set the anointed person apart for unique religious functions. Priests, or according to some passages only the high priest, were anointed. But the word is most commonly applied to the king, who was sometimes called "the anointed (*māšîāh*) of Yahweh"; this is the origin of the term "Messiah," which originally meant simply "the anointed (king)." Solomon is to be set apart by anointing for the unique role of king over Yahweh's chosen people. Since anointing is a cultic act, Zadok, the high priest, is to perform it. As prophet, Nathan may also have actively anointed Solomon. There was precedent in the prophet Samuel's anointing of both Saul and David (1 Sam 10:1; 16:1-13), and one of Elisha's disciples will later anoint Jehu (2 Kgs 9). But he is not mentioned as having done so in verse 39, and his role may have been to pronounce a divine oracle of approbation of the new king such as the ones embedded in Psalms 2:7-9 and 110:1, 4.

Solomon will be "king over Israel." The term "Israel" here is a formal and cultic one, as befits the ceremonial language David is using. It refers to the whole people of Yahweh and comprises two originally separate political entities, Judah and Israel (in a more restricted sense). Compare, for example, verse 35, where the narrower political terms are used. The two entities had independently chosen David as their king (see 2 Sam 2:1-4; 5:1-5); his hope was to weld them into a single united kingdom. This hope expressed itself in a religious ideology: the nation was a single people, the people of Yahweh, who had chosen them for his own. Their name as his people was "Israel." The religious ideology was powerful enough to hold the kingdom together through two reigns, but the union came apart after Solomon died (see below, on 1 Kings 12).

David's next command is to sound the shofar, the ram's-horn trumpet. This was not an ordinary horn. It was used chiefly in two contexts: in times of war and in times of solemn religious observance. Its sounding here marks this occasion as singularly important. The people in the city, unexpectedly hearing the shofar in the Kidron Valley, would immediately know that it announced something portentous. After the shofar, David commands a public acclamation, "Long live King Solomon!" This answers exactly to the cry Nathan told David that Adonijah's supporters were shouting (v. 25) and marks in a vivid way the reversal of Adonijah's fortunes and the victory of Solomon's partisans.

In verse 35, David continues with two final instructions. First, the participants in the rite are to climb back up to the city (the hill up from the Gihon is quite steep), with Solomon in the lead on the royal mule. There is in this instruction another subtle allusion to Adonijah's downfall. Solomon's journey is down (v. 33), then up. By contrast, Adonijah began by rising: he "exalted himself" (v. 5; literally, "lifted himself up"); he will finish by being "brought down" from the altar and bowing low to Solomon (v. 53). Finally, David instructs that Solomon is to "enter and sit on my throne; it is he who shall reign in my place." With this decree of enthronement the thematic words originally found in verse 13 and repeated so frequently throughout the story resound again to put the seal, as it were, on Solomon's victory.

David's last words in verse 35 do not continue the series of directives about the ceremony, since the previous instruction has brought the leitmotif of the oath to fulfillment. Rather they are an explicit assertion of the king's commitment to the political decision he has just made. Several points are noteworthy. The word order strongly emphasizes Solomon: "*Him* have I appointed to be ruler . . ." The word for "ruler," *nāgîd*, appears only here in the whole story. Everywhere else, even in David's mouth, this is a struggle for the office of king. Why the different term here? The answer lies in political history. Not only was the Davidic kingdom a federation of two entities, Judah and Israel; kingship itself was relatively new in the political life of both groups. The older term, *nāgîd*, was more deeply rooted in the traditions of the people, particularly the people of the northern area, Israel. The term "king," *melek*, still smacked a bit of Canaanite political systems. It was David's goal not only to unite the Yahwistic peoples of Judah and Israel into a single kingdom but to include the numerous non-Yahwistic elements of the population as well. He determines the same for Solomon: his son will be "king" according to the new political structures David has erected; but he will also be *nāgîd*, faithful to the older traditions of his Yahwistic subjects. Since he is thinking in terms of the political composition of his kingdom, David naturally speaks of "Israel and Judah," unlike verse 34, where the cultic context made the more comprehensive religious term "Israel" appropriate.

Benaiah responds to David's decree with great enthusiasm. Though David has not given him any explicit task to perform, his office as commander of the king's personal troop of mercenaries would be known to the ancient reader and his function as armed guard for Solomon would be evident. David's language as he describes the ceremony is formal and cultic; mention of security forces would be out of place. By allowing Benaiah to speak here, the narrator achieves two things. First, he achieves a certain balance in the scene: Zadok and

Nathan have been given tasks to perform, but Benaiah has been left out; this gives him a chance to act. Second, the narrator intimates something about Benaiah's character. He is quicker to cheer David's decision than either Zadok or Nathan. Does his alacrity reveal the kind of swift, even unquestioning obedience that is often prized in military personnel? In other words, is Benaiah a yes man? We will have more reasons in 1 Kings 2 to suspect that he is.

Benaiah's first word is a powerful one. "Amen!" is an exclamation of commitment much stronger than its use in English would suggest. Its fundamental meaning is to express the absolute reliance of the speaker on the person to whom he or she is speaking. In response to a statement, it means, "I trust your honesty and accept that what you say is true." In response to a promise, it means, "I trust your faithfulness and rely on what you promise." In response to a directive, as here, it means, "I trust your integrity and will obey what you command."

Benaiah continues with what is probably a wish: "May Yahweh ordain . . .," though the Hebrew can be understood as a simple statement of fact expressing Benaiah's confidence in the rightness of David's decision: "Yahweh will ordain . . ." Like Bathsheba in verse 17, he relates Yahweh directly to David ("the God of my lord the king") rather than to the whole people as David did. This may be standard court flattery, but it also reflects an aggrandizement of the intermediary role of the king that is not fully compatible with the thinking of pre-monarchic Yahwism. If his words are understood as a statement rather than as a wish, the aggrandizement is extreme: the king has said it, therefore God wills it.

In verse 37 Benaiah continues with two further wishes for the newly named king. The first desires for Solomon the same level of divine favor that David has enjoyed. The second goes beyond the first, expressing the hope that Solomon's reign will actually exceed David's. Some have read this remark as tactless, but it is not. In Israelite understanding, David's glory would live on in Solomon's. To wish that Solomon grow even greater than David is not to disparage David but to wish for him an ever increasing fame in the next generation. Benaiah ends his unrestrained outburst with the same elaborate title used by Bathsheba in verse 31, "my lord the king David."

The figure of David undergoes a startling transformation in these two scenes. In place of the feeble, passive, even unresponsive old man of the first half of the story, we witness a determined figure, able to make a firm decision and to act unhesitatingly on it. Whatever the king's physical frailties, he is clearly in complete control of his mental faculties. The narrator signals that control particularly through David's use of language. David is able to quote exactly Bathsheba's version of

the oath. He recalls details of Nathan's speech (e.g., the word "today," the verb "go down," the acclamation of Adonijah) and incorporates responses to them in his speeches. Even more impressive is his rhetorical inventiveness. He elevates the oath as originally spoken by Bathsheba to solemn poetry by the addition of a single word, and he structures his own oath around three repetitions of "indeed" that bring it gradually to a powerful climax. His directives for Solomon's inauguration ceremony are organized symmetrically:

- A. Solomon is to be seated on the king's mule;
- B. He is to be led down to the Gihon;
- C. He is to be anointed king;
- D. The shofar is to be sounded;
- C'. Solomon is to be acclaimed king;
- B'. He is to go up, leading the people;
- A'. He is to sit on the king's throne.

Furthermore, David distinguishes clearly and appropriately between cultic and political language. When he orders the ceremony, his sentences use parallel syntax and cultic vocabulary (for example, "Israel" as the whole people of Yahweh). Each sentence begins with an imperative verb or its equivalent; the whole series of commands has a regularity and cadence that befit the rubrics of a cultic celebration. On the other hand, when he speaks in political terms at the end of verse 35, he breaks the pattern of the series of commands to emphasize Solomon's primacy and uses politically sensitive terms like *nāgîd* and "Israel and Judah." Perhaps most striking of all is David's unprecedented decision to establish a coregency immediately. This reveals both a sharp insight into the demands of the current moment and an ability to formulate creative solutions to those demands.

These evidences of David's mental alertness further complicate the unresolved issue of the genuineness of the oath. There are reasons to consider it a fabrication intended to dupe a dotard king; for example, if it was genuine, Bathsheba, to whom the oath was allegedly made, should have raised the issue, not Nathan. Yet, if it was a fabrication, it is unlikely that it would have succeeded, for a dotard this David plainly is not. The ambiguity is never resolved and in fact forms part of a covert pattern of ambivalence that runs through 1 Kings 1-11 (see the discussion of the characterization of Solomon, p. 33).

*Resolution: Sections D', C', and B'*

The next three sections of the story unravel the twisted strands of conflict. The first describes Solomon's inauguration ceremony as it unfolds at the Gihon spring. The second shows Adonijah's faction as it receives the news about Solomon's victory. The third brings the two rivals face to face to determine Adonijah's fate.

## NATHAN AND OTHERS MAKE SOLOMON KING: 1:38-40

The scene of Solomon's anointing is succinct but conforms closely to David's instructions. However, instead of repeating David's formal, step-by-step directives, the narrator reorganizes the elements for greater narrative interest. He situates our vantage point, as it were, at the Gihon. From there we watch the procession come down the slope of the Kidron Valley from the city: the first word of verse 38 is the verb "went down." This necessitates recounting the events out of chronological order, since several of the details mentioned later (for instance, mounting Solomon on the king's mule and taking the horn of oil from the tent) must have preceded the descent to the Gihon. It is a mark of the narrator's deft artistry that we do not sense the temporal dislocation as disrupting the flow of the story.

Verse 38 identifies the principal members of Solomon's entourage, whom David commissioned to perform the ceremony. For David's "the servants of your lord" the narrator substitutes the "Cherethites and the Pelethites," mercenary soldiers who made up David's personal bodyguard. The terms are of uncertain meaning; most scholars think that they are etymologically related to "Cretans" and "Philistines," that is, to various seafaring groups that came out of the west and settled on the Mediterranean shore of Palestine in the century or so before David's rise to power. David chose them for his closest guard precisely because they were drawn from neither Israel nor Judah; they owed allegiance to neither of the political components of the kingdom but to David alone. At this time they were under Benaiah's command.

Before Zadok anoints Solomon, the narrator inserts a note that Zadok had taken the oil from "the tent," that is, the tent that David constructed in Jerusalem to house the ark of Yahweh (see 2 Sam 6:17). This holy oil, itself consecrated by being in the presence of Yahweh, will in turn consecrate Solomon king. The shofar is blown and Solomon's kingship is acclaimed, as David ordered. Of note here is that "all the people" voice the acclamation. Since the entire ceremony is done hurriedly in order to forestall Adonijah's supposed coup, it is

improbable that any effort is made to gather the populace. It is more likely that the fateful sound of the shofar draws a curious throng to the Gihon, who then join spontaneously in the ceremony.

At this point the narrator adds a graphic description of the crowd's joyous celebration, "piping" and "rejoicing" as they follow Solomon back up to Jerusalem. He ends with a startling image: their tumult is so great that it splits the earth! The claim is certainly an exaggeration, but it serves an important narrative purpose: it assures that the noise is loud enough to be heard a half-mile away, where Adonijah and his supporters are feasting unawares. Since the narrator has situated us at the Gihon, we watch the procession return to the city, but we do not join it. The last of David's directives, therefore, namely the enthronement of Solomon, is not yet mentioned, since it takes place out of our sight. Instead of climbing to Jerusalem with the procession, we turn south a few hundred yards down the Kidron Valley to En-rogel to watch as Adonijah's partisans learn of what has transpired.

#### ADONIJAH'S FEAST IS DISRUPTED: 1:41-50

The loud noise of the crowd at the Gihon serves as the bridge to carry us to En-rogel, enabling us as readers to keep our temporal bearings despite the shift in our vantage point. In fact, the transition is instantaneous, for the noise we heard at the Gihon in verse 40 is just being heard by Adonijah and his guests in verse 41. The assembled guests hear the general uproar; the battle-trained ears of Joab pick out of the din the ominous sound of the shofar, though he does not mention it to the others. His question is oddly phrased in Hebrew and may be a colloquialism something like "Why this noise of the city a-roaring?" The parenthetical remark that the guests have just finished eating when they hear the noise is prophetic: the noise means, in fact, that Adonijah and his partisans no longer have any reason to celebrate. The party is over in every sense!

The next verse begins vividly. "While he [Joab] is still speaking, here comes Jonathan!" The expression is identical with that used in verse 22 and points up a comparison of Jonathan and Nathan that we shall examine in a moment. Adonijah welcomes Jonathan warmly as an *'iš ḥayil*, a barely translatable phrase that means something like "a worthy fellow," "a solid character," "a man of substance." In this context it implies Jonathan's loyalty to Adonijah and the latter's awareness and appreciation of his support. Adonijah blithely assumes that because Jonathan is a friend, his news must be good. Adonijah's complacency and vanity have not changed from our first introduction to

him in 1:5-8. Unknown to him, however, his star has fallen. The narrator has brought us to En-rogel just in time to savor the irony of his impending disillusionment.

Jonathan's first word intensifies the irony. The NRSV translates it "No," as if Jonathan is aware that his news will spell disaster to Adonijah. But the Hebrew word carries this meaning only in texts composed much later than this passage. At the time that this scene was probably written, the word conveys strong agreement: "Yes, indeed!" Either Jonathan is using the word sarcastically ("Ha! *Sure* I bring good news!"), or he naively presumes that Adonijah and his guests will be overjoyed that David has finally acted and named a successor, even if that successor is Solomon. In the latter case, we have to visualize Jonathan giving an eager and excited account of Solomon's consecration and enthronement, oblivious to the horror dawning on the faces of his audience. The narrator offers us no sure way to resolve this ambiguity. On the contrary, he piles irony upon irony. The word Jonathan uses, *'ăbāl*, sounds almost exactly like an entirely separate Hebrew word, *'ābal*, meaning "to mourn." Whether he realizes it or not, Jonathan's news sounds in Adonijah's ears as a reason to mourn.

Jonathan recounts the events that have taken place. First, the pith of the message: "Our lord the king David" (note the elaborate formula already used by Bathsheba and Benaiah; like them, Jonathan seems truly devoted to David) "has made Solomon king." He goes on to describe the details of the inauguration ceremony from the perspective of an observer. We have already seen those details from David's viewpoint and from the vantage afforded us by the narrator. How does Jonathan's view differ? Unlike the narrator in verses 38-40, he tells the story in the order in which the events occurred. But he abbreviates or even leaves out some events that he probably considers of secondary importance. For example, he mentions all the participants, including the mercenary guards under Benaiah's command, but he telescopes the procession to the Gihon into one clause. He recounts the anointing but does not speak of the shofar, the presence of "all the people" (vv. 39-40), or their acclamation of Solomon's kingship. He mentions the procession back up the hill and the rejoicing but not the pipes. He answers the question Joab was asking when he arrived, but not in quite the way we expect. He does not identify the noise Adonijah and his companions heard as the crowd's joyful tumult on the way back up to the city. He says rather that it was an uproar in the city itself, one that presumably broke out as the news spread through the streets.

With those words Jonathan's description turns to things we did not see from our position at the Gihon. The rest of his speech is punctuated by three repetitions of *wəgam*, "and what's more" (the NRSV obscures

the repetition; *wəgam* is the first word of verses 46, 47, and 48); each occurrence introduces a separate bit of news. The first item is something we can anticipate, since it was part of David's original directives: Solomon has taken his seat upon the throne.

The second and third items are as much news to us as they are to Adonijah. The second item recounts a scene in David's chambers. David's "servants" (the courtiers of verse 2? the Cherethites and Pelethites?) come to David to congratulate him and offer blessings on the reign of his son. Their wishes are very similar in spirit to those voiced by Benaiah in verses 36-37, including the use of a title that links God personally to David (the Hebrew of verse 47 has "your God" where the NRSV has simply "God"). David acknowledges their words by "bowing upon the bed." The odd image seems to confirm that David was bedridden (cf. Gen 47:31).

The third item is David's prayer in response to his servants' good wishes. Several of his words recall earlier elements of the story. He uses the national term "God of Israel," as he had done also in response to Bathsheba. His "today" recalls Nathan's words in verse 25 and David's repetition of the term in verse 30. The phrase he uses for Solomon's kingship, "sit on my throne," echoes the familiar thematic words of the oath. The narrator, too, slips an ironic echo into David's speech: the verb the NRSV translates as "granted" is *nātan*, which is also Nathan's name! Nathan may appear to us to be the moving force behind Solomon's victory, but David assures us that it is really Yahweh who is responsible. The whole prayer reminds us of the devout side of David's character, about which we have already had occasion to comment.

This is not the only play the narrator makes on Nathan's name. The figure of Jonathan is introduced here not as a highly developed character—he appears nowhere else in 1 Kings—but to add depths of allusion and irony to the tale. One aspect of this is the way in which the narrative function of Jonathan (= "Yo-Nathan") contrasts with that of Nathan. Nathan began the conflict with his announcement to Bathsheba that "Adonijah has become king and our lord David does not know it"; "Yo-Nathan" ends it with his announcement to Adonijah that "our lord the king David has made Solomon king."

A second aspect of Jonathan's presence in the story is that he is a further thread in the narrator's tapestry of allusions to the earlier struggle for the throne between David and Absalom. The story is recounted in 2 Samuel 15-17. When Absalom's forces temporarily drove David from Jerusalem, several of David's loyalists remained in the city. Ostensibly they transferred their allegiance to Absalom, but in reality they acted as spies, sending information to David in the wilderness. These included Hushai, an adviser of David, and the priests

Zadok and Abiathar; the priests' sons, Ahimaaz, son of Zadok, and Jonathan, son of Abiathar, acted as messengers. They did not enter the city but stayed at En-rogel to receive their intelligence from their fathers. From there they brought it to David. The contrast of the two stories is strong. In both, Jonathan is a messenger. But in 2 Samuel he comes *from* En-rogel, bringing word to David (who will ultimately be victorious) about his eldest son's seizure of the throne. In 1 Kings he comes *to* En-rogel, bringing word to the eldest son (who has been defeated without knowing it) about David's awarding the throne to another.

Jonathan's speech provides another example of the narrator's ability to manipulate narrative time. Realistically, Jonathan could not have seen what he claims to have knowledge of: he arrived at En-rogel just as Joab was reacting to the sound of the shofar; Solomon's enthronement, the wishes of the servants, and David's prayer had not yet occurred. Yet the distortion of time is so deftly done that we scarcely notice it. If we did, we would have to suspect some strange campaign of deception on Jonathan's part; but we do not. We accept his recital at face value, since the events of which it informs us accord entirely with our expectations. The temporal telescoping simply adds to the speed with which the events seem to unfold. We sense a sort of breathless rush—Jonathan must have run all the way to En-rogel—that his repeated "and what's more" only intensifies.

Jonathan's news quells any spirit of celebration at En-rogel. The reactions of Adonijah's guests in verse 49 are compared and contrasted with Adonijah's own in verse 50. (Adonijah's name is emphasized at the beginning of verse 50, which could be translated: "But as for Adonijah, he feared . . .") The guests "tremble"; Adonijah's fear is more specific: he "fears Solomon." The guests "get up and go, each his own way"; Adonijah also "gets up and goes," but his way, too, is more specific: he goes to the altar, where he claims sanctuary by grasping the "horns of the altar." The altar in question is not further identified, though it is probably the altar at the tent housing the ark of Yahweh. Later Joab will seek refuge there as well (2:28). The "horns of the altar" are projections on the four corners of the altar's flat top; several examples of such altars have been found in archaeological excavations in Palestine. These projections were smeared with the blood of sacrificial animals and were considered the holiest part of the altar. To grasp them was to put oneself under the protection of the deity, a protection that could be annulled only for very grave cause.

In terms of unraveling the narrative conflict, Adonijah's refuge at the altar temporarily checks the resolution of the story. Two elaborate, contrasting movements here reach a momentary stalemate:

*Adonijah's movement*

large entourage gathered  
 descent to spring En-rogel  
 feasting  
 the shofar heard  
 news of Solomon's kingship  
 entourage scattered  
 refuge at the altar

*Solomon's movement*

small entourage gathered  
 descent to spring Gihon  
 anointing  
 the shofar blown  
 acclamation of Solomon's kingship  
 entourage increased ("all the people")  
 sits on the throne

Solomon sits on the throne, with royal and military power to back him; he has won. But Adonijah clings to the altar, with divine sanctuary to protect him; he has not admitted defeat. One more step is necessary to resolve the issue: the rivals must meet.

## ADONIJAH ABASES HIMSELF: 1:51-53

The third section of the resolution finally brings the two rivals together, although even here their meeting is delayed until the very last words of the scene. Since Adonijah cannot leave the altar without relinquishing his asylum, negotiations between him and Solomon take place through intermediaries. Thus the narrator can put their encounter off until the last possible moment.

This scene is linked to the preceding one by the repetition of the mention of Adonijah's fear followed by his taking sanctuary at the horns of the altar. Adonijah's reaction to Solomon's victory is ambiguous. We have not yet seen Solomon in action and know very little about his character; Adonijah presumably knows him better than we do. Is Adonijah's fear of bloody reprisals from Solomon an accurate reading of Solomon's character? Or is it perhaps a projection of how Adonijah himself would have acted had he been victorious (compare Nathan's warning in verse 12 and Bathsheba's plea in verse 21)? Below we will examine the narrator's use of suspense and ambiguity in revealing Solomon's character to us.

Adonijah's actions show that he knows Solomon has won. His words, however, attempt to salvage at least a degree of personal safety from the wreckage of his ambitions. Through the anonymous messengers he asks of Solomon an oath of amnesty before he will agree to leave his place of refuge. The fact that Adonijah thinks he still holds any cards to bargain with is consistent with the naive complacency that has characterized him throughout the chapter (for example, in verses 5 and 42). It is not the last time that Adonijah will reveal this trait; eventually it will prove his undoing (see 2:13-25).

What Adonijah says is a curious mixture of the tactless and the tactful. He phrases his request baldly and does not use the small forms of social politeness that are available in Hebrew. For example, he says, "Let Solomon swear to me . . ." instead of "Let Solomon swear to me, if he will . . .," and "that he will not kill me" instead of "that I shall not die." Yet he calls himself Solomon's "servant," implying that he acquiesces to Solomon's lordship.

Solomon's response is shrewd. He apparently accedes to Adonijah's request, but in fact he holds back on two important counts: he does not swear an oath, and the amnesty he grants is conditional rather than absolute. Moreover, the conditions are couched in vague generalities that offer Adonijah nothing in the way of real security. The first condition is that Adonijah must prove to be a *ben hayil*, virtually the same phrase Adonijah himself had used of Jonathan in verse 42. It might be translated here "worthy" or "noble"—but who is to say what specific behavior will satisfy such a condition? The second condition is even vaguer: "wickedness" must not "be found" in him. Again, who defines "wickedness," and who will do the finding? The answer is clear: Solomon will decide, as and when he wishes, whether the conditions have been fulfilled.

The negotiations completed, the narrator quickly brings the scene to an end: verse 53 speeds through these final actions with five verbs in fifteen words. Adonijah does not "come down" from the altar; rather, Solomon has him "brought down." Does Adonijah realize that Solomon's mercy is only superficial and refuse to leave the altar voluntarily? In contrast to their subtle and wordy negotiations through intermediaries, their encounter is brief and terse. Adonijah acknowledges Solomon with a silent obeisance, and Solomon dismisses him with two words: "Go home!"

Solomon's final command is one more allusion to the Absalom story. Before Absalom's rebellion he had been in self-imposed exile because he feared David's reprisals for having murdered Amnon (see above, p. 4). The reconciliation that Joab engineered brought Absalom back into the country but not into David's good graces. David would not see him face to face but sent him "to his home" (2 Sam 14:24). The command does not impose a form of house arrest—at least not in Adonijah's case—since it is clear from the next chapter that he still had access to the palace. But it can hardly be called a cordial reunion. In Absalom's case, his dismissal by David was only a partial and temporary resolution of the conflict. His attempt to seize the throne materialized afterward. Will a similar pattern occur with Adonijah? We sense that it might and, in view of the vagueness of the conditions Solomon imposes in verse 52, it seems that he thinks so too.

The narrator's language reflects Solomon's ascendancy and Adonijah's defeat. Adonijah is named in verse 51, and never again in the scene. It is as if his significance as an individual evaporates with his hopes for the throne. On the other hand, the narrator names Solomon seven times in the three verses, four of those times by the full title "King Solomon." The title is used first by the messengers, then by Adonijah as reported by the messengers (both in verse 51). In verse 53 the narrator uses the title twice, the second time reflecting Adonijah's viewpoint as he abases himself before the monarch.

#### THE CHARACTERIZATION OF SOLOMON

The lack of characterization of Solomon throughout the whole story to this point is striking—until this scene he is almost entirely absent! Despite his centrality in the plot, the narrator keeps him at a distance from us. For example, in verses 5-7 we meet Adonijah, we learn his mother's name, his birth order, his handsomeness, his actions as heir apparent, and the names of his supporters. By contrast, we are never told explicitly that Solomon is Adonijah's rival, nor do we learn much personal about him. We know only how other characters perceive him: Adonijah seems to consider him a competitor for the throne; Nathan, Benaiah, and others apparently favor him. But we do not know whether he shares their hopes or is even aware of them, or whether the narrator favors Solomon or Adonijah.

Solomon himself does not appear on the scene until verse 38. Even when David summons the participants in Solomon's ceremony of anointing and enthronement (v. 32), he does not summon Solomon himself! When we finally see Solomon in verses 38-40, it is as if from a distance, and he is completely passive. He is seated on the mule, he is led to Gihon, he is anointed by Zadok, the people go up after him. He is the subject of no verbs, he speaks no words, he performs no actions. The only active thing he does is "sit on the throne" (v. 46), and this we hear of only through the words of another character, Jonathan. Solomon has become king, and we have learned virtually nothing about him!

When we arrive at the scene where Adonijah and Solomon will meet face to face, we are justifiably curious. The narrator's strategy has built up considerable suspense about this unknown who has unexpectedly emerged as David's successor. How he treats his erstwhile rival will give us our first insight into his character. Adonijah expects the worst; Solomon's judgment, however, turns out to be merciful, even if it is framed in politically cautious language.

Our first impression of the new king is accordingly positive. We sense, however, beneath the vague conditions with which he hedged Adonijah's amnesty, that Solomon is not a simple and straightforward character. In addition, the unresolved question of David's alleged oath, even though it reflects on the integrity of Nathan and Bathsheba more than on Solomon's, nevertheless casts a shadow of doubt over the entire series of events that won him the throne. This narrative strategy will mark the next several chapters of the Solomon story: on the surface he will be presented generally in a positive light; beneath the surface the narrator will strew gaps and ambiguities that invite a much more critical appraisal of Solomon.

### *Transition: Section A'*

The first scene of chapter 2 serves as a transition between the stories in 1:1-53 and in 2:12b-46. The scene comprises a narrative frame, 2:1 + 2:10-12a, and a lengthy speech by David, 2:2-9. The frame, which recounts David's death, completes the concentric pattern described above (see p. 3) and brings the story of chapter 1 to a close. The speech looks forward to the events that follow in chapter 2, where Solomon acts to eliminate those he considers threats to his security. By interweaving the two elements in this way, the narrator is able to give us simultaneously a sense of closure and a sense of smooth continuance.

### NARRATIVE FRAME: 2:1, 10-12a

Most of the action of chapter 1 happened in a single day, as the frequently repeated "today" made clear (vv. 25, 30, 48, 51; in verse 51 the NRSV translates it "first"). This scene appears to take place some time later. It is not clear how much time has passed, but we do not get the impression that it has been very long. The opening words, "David's time to die," remind us that the decisive David of 1:28-35 is still the old man of 1:1. His energetic words do not change the fact that he remains bedridden (1:47). His death cannot be far off. Now that time has come. The words thus establish a connection with chapter 1, particularly with 1:1-4, despite the apparent lapse of time since those events. They also point forward to 2:10-12a, the end of the present scene, which recount David's death, burial, and succession by Solomon.

Biblical heroes often deliver themselves of long speeches when they are at the point of death (see, for instance, Jacob in Genesis 49,

Moses in Deuteronomy 31–33, Joshua in Joshua 23–24, and Samuel in 1 Samuel 12). And the verb “to charge, to command” is sometimes used to describe a deathbed speech that expresses the dying person’s last wishes (for example, Gen 49:29; see also 2 Sam 17:23 and 2 Kgs 20:1, where the NRSV translates the verb “set [your house] in order”). David’s words in verses 2–9, therefore, are presented as a sort of last will and testament, conveying the final thoughts and desires of Israel’s greatest king. (See below, p. 37, for a discussion of the speech itself.)

The account of David’s death and burial and the succession of Solomon follows a common pattern for marking the transition from one king’s reign to another’s (see below, p. 206). David is said to “sleep with his ancestors,” a stereotyped reference for dying in peace, as opposed to dying violently by assassination or in battle, and being buried in one’s family tomb. (Bathsheba used the same formula in 1:21.) In David’s case the conventional phrase is only half appropriate: he dies peacefully but he is buried, not in his ancestral tomb at Bethlehem, but, as the next words state, in the “City of David.” This term for Jerusalem reflects that David’s conquest of the city (recounted in 2 Samuel 5:6–10) was accomplished using his own private troops, not forces from the tribes of Judah or Israel. Jerusalem thus became David’s private holding, crown property rather than part of either of the larger political entities that made up David’s kingdom. As founder of a new royal dynasty, David would be buried inside his own capital; subsequent royal tombs would be located in the same area. (Several very large tombs have been unearthed in Jerusalem on the southern end of the Ophel hill, where David’s city was situated. Many archaeologists suspect that they were the royal tombs of the kings of Judah, though they were used as quarries in Roman times and no identifying marks have survived. The present tourist site in Jerusalem known as “King David’s Tomb” is almost certainly based on later, inauthentic traditions.)

David’s reign is computed at forty years. The number may be conventional for “a full generation,” since “forty” is a traditional length for periods of time and particularly for reigns.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the specification that the forty years included seven at Hebron and thirty-three at Jerusalem, and the similarity of this information to that in 2 Samuel 5:4–5, may indicate that, in David’s case, forty years is approximately accurate. The narrator neatly balances religious and political

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, the phrases “forty days” in Genesis 7:4, 12; 8:6; Exodus 24:18; 34:28; Numbers 13:25; and “forty years” in Genesis 25:20; 26:34; Exodus 16:35; Numbers 14:33. Rules of “forty years” are mentioned in Judges 3:11; 5:31; 8:28; 1 Samuel 4:18; 1 Kings 11:42; 2 Kings 12:1.

perspectives. He uses "Israel" in the religious sense of the whole people. But by recalling that David's reign had two phases, Hebron (where David ruled only over Judah) and Jerusalem (where he ruled over both Israel and Judah), the narrator gives due weight to the fact that David's kingdom never entirely lost its character as a federation to become a truly unified nation.

The standard notices, or "regnal formulas," that mark the end of a king's reign usually conclude with the statement that "so-and-so succeeded him" (literally, "reigned in his place"). The regnal formulas are so conventional and stereotyped that the use of a different phrase here for Solomon is noteworthy. The words "sat on the throne of David his father" are still another echo of the leitmotif of David's oath from chapter 1. They answer, finally, the question Bathsheba voiced in 1:20 and bring the whole drama of chapter 1 to an appropriate conclusion.

Before we go on to look at David's speech, which will orient us forward toward the events of 2:12b-46, we should pause to appreciate the overall narrative artistry of the story we have just examined in detail. The narrator has in fact created two different stories and told them side by side. The first is a story that contrasts Adonijah and Solomon as two rivals for David's throne. This contrast is established narratively by equipping each rival with a similar band of supporters: a mother, a priest, a military commander, and miscellaneous others (Adonijah invites "all the king's sons, and all the men of Judah"; Solomon is accompanied by "the Cherethites and Pelethites, and all the people"). The contrast is furthered by the way in which each principal is characterized: Adonijah is depicted directly, and we see him as vain, naive, presumptuous, and complacent in his future as heir. For the most part, Solomon is depicted indirectly, as others see him or act upon him. We learn virtually nothing directly about him until near the end of the story, and what we learn then is compromised by its ambiguity. The story is a form of "victorious underdog" tale so typical of the Hebrew Bible, where younger sons supplant older ones with such regularity that the pattern becomes almost predictable (for example, Ishmael and Isaac; Esau and Jacob; Perez and Zerah in Genesis 38:27-30; Manasseh and Ephraim in Genesis 48:8-20). Adonijah, the heir apparent, is handsome, well-known, and has influential support for his claim on the throne. Nevertheless, he loses out to a shadowy figure of whom we know little at the start of the story and little more at the end.

The second story is the one crafted by Nathan and Bathsheba to tell David. It presents the struggle for the throne as a conflict between Adonijah and David himself. As Bathsheba and Nathan portray them, Adonijah's actions are an overt attempt to seize the throne. This naturally influences David to decide against him. But the two conspirators

carefully avoid presenting Solomon as an alternative candidate for succession. They do not compare him with Adonijah, nor do they give any indication that the two sons have similar groups of supporters. Yet Bathsheba and Nathan manage to inform David of all the necessary names, with their respective allegiances; and their repeated protestations about the loyalty to David of those who are in fact Solomon's partisans direct his attention where they want it to go.

The theme of Absalom serves to unite the two stories. For David, Adonijah's alleged grab for the kingship cannot avoid raising the specter of Absalom's earlier rebellion, with all its attendant social and political upheaval as well as the personal suffering and grief it entailed for David himself. This supplies motivation for David's decision to act definitively by naming Solomon as coregent immediately, lest another civil war break out. Yet, surprisingly, none of the textual allusions to the Absalom stories occur in conversation directed to David, where they would strengthen his perception of Adonijah as a usurper. Rather, most of them are found in the narrator's own words; they are all for the reader's benefit. Since the narrator never gives us any reason to believe that Adonijah's actions are an attempt on the throne, we know that that is not the link between him and Absalom. The link is that both were heirs apparent, and neither obtained the throne. Thus the narrator foreshadows failure right from his first mention of Adonijah, where the allusions to Absalom begin (1:5). The foreshadowing extends to chapter 2 as well, where Adonijah, like Absalom, will lose his life.

#### DAVID'S SPEECH: 2:2-9

David's speech has long troubled commentators. It is an uneasy combination of religious platitudes and unscrupulous violence. The juxtaposition of verses 2-4 and 5-9 is jarring, and many scholars have suggested that verses 2-4 are an insertion by a later deuteronomistic editor.<sup>5</sup> The reason for such an editorial insertion would be to put in

<sup>5</sup>"Deuteronomistic" is the term scholars use to refer to the theological school of thought in the eighth to sixth centuries B.C.E. that produced the final forms of the books of Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings. These works are collectively called the "Deuteronomistic History," since they take their theological inspiration from the Book of Deuteronomy. The theological passages composed by members of this school can be identified by characteristic vocabulary and style (for example, "statutes, commandments, ordinances and testimonies") and by characteristic theological preoccupations such as the importance of the Temple in Jerusalem, "the place that Yahweh your God has chosen for his name to dwell" (see, for example, 1 Kgs 8:29).

David's mouth—and thus endow with Davidic prestige—unalloyed deuteronomistic theology. Similar deuteronomistic ideas are found in the farewell speeches of Joshua (Josh 23) and Samuel (1 Sam 12). Many passages of the Hebrew Bible underwent such editorial modification in the course of the centuries before they became recognized as sacred texts, and it is indeed possible that something similar has happened here. That should not prevent us, however, from attempting to understand the text as a coherent product in the shape that its final editor gave it. In this instance there are three observations that can enable us to make sense of the undeniable disparity between the two parts of David's speech.

First, there is the character of David himself as we find it particularly in 2 Samuel. He is surely the most richly drawn, complex, and multifaceted human figure in the Hebrew Bible (only the character of Yahweh is more complex). We have already had occasion to refer to David's deep and sincere religious devotion to God, which nevertheless did not prevent him from committing adultery and murder or protect him from failing completely as a parent. David also showed himself capable of bloody vendetta (2 Sam 21:1-9), as well as of profiting from political murder while his own hands remained clean (e.g., 2 Sam 4). It is certainly not inappropriate that his final speech, meant to "set his house in order," reflects these same extremes of character.

Second, there is the character of Solomon as we will see it revealed in 2:12b-46. He is always attentive to the niceties of legal observance, yet he is not above twisting evidence and, if need be, falsifying it in order to gain what he wants. The ambivalence in David's speech between pious obedience to the law and ruthless expediency aptly foreshadows the ambiguity we will find in the narrator's characterization of Solomon.

Third, there is the possibility of reading the speech as having a consistent tone throughout. To do so, we must remember that when a narrator puts pious deuteronomistic language in a character's mouth, it is no longer a narrator talking, much less a deuteronomist. The language must now be read in the context of the character and the entire situation. David may use deuteronomistic language for purposes quite different from a deuteronomistic theologian. Here, for example, David is in the process of giving Solomon his final advice, one king to another, on how to assure his success. But David's suggestions are made by innuendo, indicated by oblique references like "act according to your wisdom" (v. 6) and "you are a wise man; you will know what to do" (v. 9). David expects Solomon to be shrewd enough to read between the lines of his advice. The deuteronomistic platitudes in verses 2-4 function much like the references to wisdom. Solomon is to hear both

platitudes and pragmatism and to read between the lines: "Obey the law (you know what I mean) and make sure you protect yourself from your enemies."

David's opening sentence shows that he is aware he is about to die and that these will be his last words. We anticipate, therefore, that what he tells Solomon will be weighted with the solemnity of the moment. His first command to his son is "Be strong! Be a man!" In terms of the whole speech, the command points forward both to the discipline necessary to be faithful to Yahweh's law and to the brutality of the advice David will impart in verses 5-9. "Being strong," for David, means religious obedience; it also means ruthlessness.

The exhortation to obedience is couched in generalities. The "law of Moses," from a deuteronomistic point of view, would mean the Book of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut 17:17-20, which may have been written with the disastrous example of Solomon's reign expressly in mind). From a reader's point of view, however, the phrase would refer to whatever was currently thought to be the "torah" in David's time. After the first five books of the Hebrew Bible became "the Torah" in the last centuries B.C.E., a reader would have understood "the law of Moses" as meaning the Pentateuch. Since David is not specific about what this law entails, the issue does not become significant for the narrative's development. The reason for obedience is eminently practical: success. This too is standard deuteronomistic thought, but in the context of David's subsequent advice, it smacks of an opportunism far from deuteronomistic morality.

There is a second reason for obedience; verse 4 is grammatically parallel to the end of verse 3 (read "so that the LORD may . . ." for the NRSV's "Then the LORD will . . ."). Obedience will assure the fulfillment of a promise Yahweh made to David. The divine "word" of which David speaks is not found elsewhere in these exact terms, but the reference is almost certainly to Yahweh's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. That oracle, delivered to the king by the prophet Nathan, assured David that Yahweh would never abandon his successor, and that David's dynasty, kingdom, and throne would endure forever. The most significant difference between the oracle in 2 Samuel 7 and David's recollection of it here is the addition of a condition. David's descendants are assured the throne *on condition* that they are ardently faithful to Yahweh. Nathan's oracle included no such qualification; in fact, 2 Samuel 7:14-15 is explicitly unconditional. This is the first appearance of a motif that will grow in importance through the entire story of Solomon. Indeed, it is one theological key to the whole drama of Israel in the Books of Kings: the promise to David of an eternal kingdom depends upon the kings' fidelity to Yahweh's ways. There

is as yet no mention of what will happen if they are unfaithful; that will become clearer as the motif develops through the book.

David's last words in verse 4 pick up the term "throne" from the earlier oracle (2 Sam 7:13, 16) but use it in a way that recalls yet again the oath formula from chapter 1. There is one other modification. Neither in chapter 1 nor in the original oracle was the throne called "the throne of Israel." Given the two meanings of "Israel"—the religious meaning referring to the whole kingdom and the political meaning referring to the northern group of tribes in the federation—what is at stake? Will infidelity threaten the unity of the federation—in other words, the throne of Israel (that is, the northern tribes) will be lost to the Davidic king? Or will it threaten the dynasty itself—the throne of Israel (that is, the whole kingdom) will fall into other hands? As the long, tragic story of 1-2 Kings will show, both are at stake. The breakup of the federation will occur first, and quickly: at Solomon's death the northern tribes will reject his son and choose a non-Davidid to rule them. And eventually Jerusalem, the kingdom of Judah, and the Davidic throne itself will fall to the armies of Babylon.

The second part of David's speech is of very different character. David instructs Solomon on how he should treat three individuals whose actions have had an impact on David's career. Two are to be destroyed, one is to be rewarded. The commands for destruction surround the one for reward and are much longer and more detailed. This gives these verses a predominantly violent, negative tone. The structure of the speech is balanced, with an internal variation in the reward section:

- A. Joab's punishment (2:5-6)
  - a. reason for punishment
  - b. order to punish
- B. Barzillai's reward (2:7)
  - b'. order to reward
  - a'. reason for reward
- A'. Shimei's punishment (2:8-9)
  - a". reason for punishment
  - b". order to punish

Verse 5 begins with a linking word and an emphatic pronoun ("and besides, *you* know").<sup>6</sup> The effect is to draw Solomon's attention to an

<sup>6</sup>There is much disagreement between the standard Hebrew text and the ancient translations on the exact wording of verse 5. The NRSV follows the Hebrew, as we shall.

unspoken connection between David's preceding remarks about the law and past events of which Solomon is already aware. The connection, we surmise, is that Solomon must never lose sight of obedience to the law of Moses as a condition for the dynasty's continuance; therefore, when he carries out David's subsequent instructions, he must do so with caution and cleverness. The events of which David will remind him will supply him with grounds for action that will not jeopardize the divine promise.

David's next words, "what Joab . . . did to me," reveal that David is acting out of a personal sense of injury. He perceives the murders of Abner and Amasa with which he charges Joab as personal affronts, affronts which, despite the passage of many years, David has neither forgotten nor forgiven. The story of Joab's killing of Abner is told in 2 Samuel 3, and his murder of Amasa is recounted in 2 Samuel 20. In both cases Joab may have had a legitimate political mistrust of his victim. But he also had strong personal reasons for doing away with them: Abner had killed Joab's brother (though it was in self-defense; see 2 Sam 2:18-23), and Amasa had been appointed by David to take Joab's job (2 Sam 19:11-15). David claims that Joab's deeds were acts of war done in time of peace and so deserve punishment. David may also want to suggest that Joab's guilt implicated David as well, since he was Joab's superior and therefore responsible for his actions.<sup>7</sup> In that case, only Joab's death will expiate his crimes and remove the onus of bloodguilt from the house of David.

David's directive is not direct. Instead of telling Solomon what to do, he fixes Solomon's attention on himself. "Your wisdom" (v. 6) is a way of signaling to Solomon that it will be up to him to figure out how best to deal with the situation David is leaving him. All that David is concerned about is the bottom line, and even this he couches in euphemisms like "gray head" for "old age," "go down to Sheol" for "die," and "in peace" for "of natural causes" (v. 6). The images are all lovely, but the message is brutal: old, faithful Joab is to be killed.

The second instruction is to reward the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite by giving them a royal pension (that is the meaning of "eat at your table"—v. 7). This repays loyalty with loyalty, since Barzillai supplied David with food when the king was fugitive from Absalom's seizure of the throne (the story is in 2 Samuel 19:31-40).

The third instruction concerns one Shimei, son of Gera. David says that Shimei is "with Solomon." This could mean no more than that Shimei is living in Jerusalem, but it reminds us that among those who

<sup>7</sup>One ancient Greek translation strengthens this suggestion by reading "my" belt, waist, sandals, and feet instead of "his."

"were not with Adonijah" is a Shimei (1:8). We do not know whether this is the same Shimei, since in 1:8 the narrator does not tell us his father's name. Nor do we know if the Shimei of 1:8 is one of Solomon's partisans, though most of those who "were not with Adonijah" turned out to be on Solomon's side. The possibility that they are the same person is disturbing. If they are, then David is about to tell Solomon to turn on one of his own allies because of an ancient offense that ally committed against David. The contrast with Barzillai, where David told Solomon to reward loyalty with loyalty, is stark.<sup>8</sup>

The story of David's dealings with Shimei is told in 2 Samuel 16:14 and 19:16-23. In the first passage David is fleeing from Absalom, who has captured Jerusalem. On his way he is accosted by Shimei, a relative of King Saul, whose family David disenthroned. Shimei curses David for his violence against the Saulids. When one of David's military retainers threatens to kill Shimei, David orders him spared: "Let him alone, and let him curse, for Yahweh has bidden him." The second passage takes place after Absalom has been defeated; David is making his victorious way back to Jerusalem. Shimei comes to meet him again, this time with an obsequious apology for his earlier behavior. The same retainer again wants to execute him, but David grants him pardon and swears an oath that he will not be killed. David justifies his leniency as an amnesty to celebrate his restoration to the throne; but the careful reader may suspect that the presence of a thousand Benjaminites backing Shimei had some influence on the king's decision (2 Sam 19:17)!

David's account of his dealings with Shimei is selective. He leaves out his earlier assertion that Shimei cursed him at Yahweh's bidding; he leaves out Shimei's apology; and he leaves out the thousand Benjaminites whose presence compromised the freedom and sincerity of the royal pardon. In this way he portrays Shimei's crime of *lèse majesté* in the worst possible light, and his own leniency in the best. Even more deceptive is the way David rewords his oath. His promise to Shimei in 2 Samuel 19:23 was without loopholes: "You shall not die." When he recounts this to Solomon, he rephrases it to "I shall not put you to death by the sword," leaving open the possibility that someone else, such as Solomon, could do so, or even that David himself could do so by some other means. David's instruction for dealing with Shimei is as round-

<sup>8</sup>This uncertainty is never completely resolved. Much later in the Solomon story the reader will learn that there is another Shimei, son of Ela, whom Solomon made one of his high officials (1 Kgs 4:18). At that point it will become reasonable to assume that this is the Shimei of 1:8, but until the reader reaches that point, the discomfort is unrelieved.

about as his directive about Joab and uses very similar language. Solomon is to use his wisdom again, and Shimei is to die a bloody death.

What motives lie behind David's bloodthirsty advice to Solomon? What moves the dying king to leave as his last words to posterity such violence? There are three possibilities, and all of them have some support in the text.

First, there is the most straightforward reading of the text. David may be concerned that the past actions of Joab and Shimei pose a continuing threat to Solomon. The bloodguilt Joab incurred by the murders of Abner and Amasa could bring divine displeasure upon Solomon if it were not expiated by Joab's death. In Shimei's case, the danger is his curse. The ancient concept held that a curse was an effective force which, once uttered, continued to work its ruin unless God intervened or the one who uttered the curse died. Shimei, therefore, has to be killed in order to protect Solomon from its inevitable effects.

Second, David may be genuinely concerned for Solomon's future security. David knows that Joab supported Adonijah; if the canny general is not disposed of, Solomon's cause will always be in jeopardy. And Shimei is a Saulid; his connections to the former king Saul and his history of hatred for the Davidic house make him a continuing threat to Solomon's welfare. David is aware, however, that Solomon cannot act despotically without violating the condition David mentioned in verse 4. He therefore supplies Solomon with legal pretexts for removing both of these dangerous men. David's words support this view by emphasizing the connection between the demands of the law of Moses and the instructions of verses 5-9 and by counseling shrewdness and subtlety with his repeated references to Solomon's wisdom.

Third, David's words may reveal the vengeful hatred of a vindictive old man. David had more reasons than the murders of Abner and Amasa to wish Joab ill. Joab was also responsible for the death of Absalom, which David took particularly hard. Furthermore, when David's grief over Absalom became excessive, Joab rebuked him severely (2 Sam 18-19). David's words in verse 5, "what Joab . . . did to me," suggest that David may have had these more personal affronts in mind. In Shimei's case, David's skewed account of the events indicates that he still harbors resentment for Shimei's bitter words.

With this enigmatic and ambiguous speech, David's career comes to a close. Few characters in ancient literature are more complex than this king, sinful saint, man of blood, and obedient servant of Yahweh. What strikes us, as we reflect on his final words, is David's assumption that Solomon will be like him, able to combine in a single life faithful obedience to God and ruthless, bloody, political expediency. David's references to Solomon's "wisdom" are the first appearance of the

theme that will characterize this king for the ages. As the term recurs over and over again in the remaining chapters of the Solomon story, Solomon's wisdom is a divine gift, admirable in its exercise and positive in its results. But here, at its origin, the theme is shadowed by the violence of the advice to which David attaches it.