

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Kings, Lecture 3

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1 Kings 3-11 – Solomon

F. 1 Kings 2:5-12 David's Instruction on 3 People: Joab, Barzillai & Shimei

2. Barzillai

We are looking at verses 5 to 12 in chapter 2 of 1 Kings. David instructs Solomon to deal with these three individuals: Joab, Barzillai, and Shimei. We discussed Joab. The second one is Barzillai. We read in verse 7, "But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom"

When David had to flee from Jerusalem, he received assistance from Barzillai. You find that in 2 Sam 17:27-29, where you read, "When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows' milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, 'These people have become hungry and are tired and thirsty in the desert.'"

Later, when David was about to return to Jerusalem, Barzillai met him and sent him on his way. In 2 Sam. 19:31 you read of that: "Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim to cross the Jordan with the king to send him on his way from there. Now Barzillai was a very old man, 80 years of age. He had provided for the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. And the king said, 'Cross over with me and stay in Jerusalem and I will provide for you.'" But Barzillai said he didn't want to do that. In any case, he was a great encouragement to David, and he had acted loyally to David at a time when it seemed that Absalom would be victorious. In other words, he did it at great risk. If you're going to get yourself involved in taking sides in a revolution, you want to be pretty sure, if you're interested in your own self-preservation, you're on the

right side. But at great risk, Barzillai came to help David, even through the fear that at that point David was on the run. David has not forgotten that. And his loyalty here is rewarded, and he wants the family of Barzillai to be rewarded for his faithfulness. So he tells Solomon to show kindness to these people and to have them eat at his table.

3. Shimei

Shimei is the third individual. Verse 8 says, “And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD: ‘I will not put you to death by the sword.’ But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood.”

When David fled from Absalom, he was met by Shimei. That’s in 2 Sam 16:5-14. Shimei was a distant relative of Saul. And you read in verse 5 of 2 Sam 16, “As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul’s family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king’s officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David’s right and left. As he cursed, Shimei said, ‘Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood.’ Abishai son of Zeruih said to the king, ‘Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head.’ But the king said, ‘What do you and I have in common you sons of Zeruih? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, “Curse David,” who can ask, “Why do you do this?”’ David then said to Abishai and all his officials, ‘My son, who is of my own flesh is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It

may be that the LORD will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I have seen today.’ So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt.”

2 Samuel 19:18-23 we have another encounter with Shimei. When David returns to Jerusalem, we read Shimei crossed the Jordan and fell prostrate before the king and said, “May my lord not hold me guilty. Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind. For I, your servant, know that I have sinned, but today I have come here as the first of the whole house of Joseph to come down and meet my lord the king. Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, ‘Shouldn’t Shimei be put to death for this? He cursed the LORD’s anointed.’ David replied, ‘What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? This day you have become my adversaries. Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? Do I not know that today I am king over Israel?’ So the king said to Shimei, ‘You shall not die.’ And the king promised him on oath.”

Now David, at first, refused to let his men take any action against Shimei. But I think at the point where David gives his instruction to Solomon it had become clear in the meantime, that Shimei’s curse was not from the Lord. And David then instructs Solomon to take action against him. I think the basis for that is rooted back in Exodus 22:28. In Exodus 22:28 we read “Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.”

In 1 Kings 21:10 we’re in the context of the controversy between Ahab and Naboth, where Ahab wanted Naboth’s vineyard and Jezebel arranges for this phony trial to be held to accuse Naboth. Notice verse 10 of that chapter. She wrote these letters, and it says in the letters, “Seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death.” In other words, cursing God and the king was something for which someone would pay with his life. Shimei cursed the king. He cursed David. And I

think this should not be viewed as personal revenge of David on Shimei, it's just because Shimei cursed him that it offended him. I think it's part of David's political testament, given to ensure confirmation of Solomon's kingship and something that was done to protect the office that Solomon would assume on the basis of the law of God.

Now that does seem to create somewhat of a tension between what he said then and what he tells Solomon later, but it seems to me that perhaps the explanation for that is that it's clear by this time that the cursing was not a curse from the Lord.

Now David in one sense was a man of blood. In that first passage, David says in 2 Sam. 6:10; "If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask why did he do this?" See, it seems that at that point David isn't all together certain. Maybe the curse is valid. Maybe the Lord is telling him to curse. And it becomes obvious later that that curse was not of the Lord. It was out of Shimei's own heart. It wasn't something that the Lord was speaking through Shimei.

2. Solomon's Rule Consolidated – 1Kings 2:13-46

Alright, so those instructions were given with perspective to those three individuals. That's in 1 Kings 2 in verses 13-46, and that's "2" on your outline. If you look at the outline, under "A", "1" is "Solomon's Succession to the Throne: 1:1-2:12"; that's what we just looked at. "2" is "Solomon's Rule Consolidated, chapter 2:13-46."

There are two subsections in that passage from verses 13-46. The first one is 13-35. In verses 13-35 Solomon takes action against Adonijah and his two supporters, Abiathar and Joab. And the context for that is Adonijah requests to have Abishag for his wife. Abishag was a woman who had been secured to keep David warm in his old age. And you read in verses 13-35 of chapter 2 that Adonijah, through Bathseba, requests of Solomon that he may take Abishag as a

wife. We see in verse 17, “So please ask King Solomon, he will not refuse you, to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife.” “Very well” Bathseba replied. “I will speak to the King.” She goes to Solomon and says she has a request, and she says verse 21, “Let Abishag the Shunammite be given in marriage to your brother Adonijah.” Notice Solomon’s response “King Solomon answered his mother, ‘Why do you request Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? You might as well request the kingdom for him—after all, he is my older brother—yes, for him and for Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah!’” I think Solomon recognized that that request, given through Bathsheba, was another attempt to gain the throne. We have a note here in the NIV study Bible in verse 22 on that phrase, “You might as well request the Kingdom for him.” Solomon immediately understands Adonijah’s request as another attempt to gain the throne. The possession of the royal harem was widely regarded as signifying the rights of succession.

Though Abishag was a virgin, she would be regarded by the people as belonging to David’s harem. So marriage to Abishag would strengthen Adonijah’s claim to the throne. So Solomon then takes immediate action: Adonijah is put to death, Abiathar is removed from the priesthood, and Joab is also put to death. That’s in that section, verses 13-35.

(Question from the audience) How is it that Bathsheba didn’t realize the implication of Adonijah’s request?

Response: You would think so. I don’t know. How do you explain that? I don’t know, she seems there to be innocent of that, it seems to me. She seems to be just willing to make that request, not apparently seeing any significance to it, but Solomon immediately sees the scheme behind it.

Student Question: Are you going to comment a little bit on Joab’s grabbing the horns at the altar? That signifies a position of refuge. How is that different from the cities of refuge?

Response: I think the principles would be the same. But those cities of refuge, or the horns of the altar, were really only for the people who were innocent

of deliberate murder. In other words, there was killing, accidental killing, killing in certain situations for which the death penalty was not warranted, for which there would be refuge. I think the cities of refuge were provided for that, but the altar would have been an alternative to one of those cities. It functioned in the same way. A note here in the NIV study Bible says, “The right of the asylum was extended to those who accidentally caused someone’s death (Exod. 21:14). Solomon was justified in denying this right to Joab, not only for his complicity in Adonijah’s conspiracy, but for his murder of Abner and Amassa.”

b. Solomon Deals with Shimei – 1 Kings 2:36-46a

Alright, the second thing is in chapter 2, verses 36-46a. And that’s where Solomon takes action against Shimei. He had made an agreement with Shimei to remain in Jerusalem. Then one of Shimei’s servants left him. He went out to search for him and left Jerusalem, thereby breaking that agreement. For that, then, he was put to death. I’m not going to go into details of that. But you notice the conclusion of the chapter, which is 46b. The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon’s hands. That really concludes this first section.

In your outline that’s “A” “Introductory Material, chapters 1 and 2.” The central idea in those two chapters is that the Lord is at work to establish Solomon on the throne of his father David, and his kingdom is now firmly established. He is the one that the Lord had chosen to continue the Davidic dynasty, and he now assumed that position. And chapter 3 is a chapter on Solomon’s wisdom. We’re going to come back to that later because that subject comes up later. But chapter three is where Solomon asks for wisdom, and you have that illustration of the two women with the two children. One is dead, and one is alive. Solomon adjudicates that in a very wise way. That is chapter three, but I’m not going to comment on that at present.

I want to go on to four, which is “D” on your outline. “Solomon’s Reign Characterized.” If you glance at chapter four, you notice it’s a chapter with a lot

of lists and statistics--usually not the kind of thing you find very exciting reading. It begins in verses 2- 6 with the list of chief officials of the courts. These were Solomon's chief officials, and you have a whole list there. And then that is followed in verses 7-19 with a list of the twelve district governors. It seems clear that Solomon set up a national organization with governors over twelve distinct territories. The purpose of that you read in verse 7: he had twelve district governors over Israel who provided supplies and provisions for the king in the royal household. Each one had to provide supplies for one month of the year. So here you have twelve governors and twelve districts, and it was the responsibility of one of those districts every month to provide for the maintenance and support of the royal household. Then when you get down further in the chapter, you find details about the kinds of provisions that are needed to meet the needs of the court.

Look at verse 22: "Solomon's daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour, sixty cors of meal." This is daily. "Ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle, hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl." Verse 27: "The district officers, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king's table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking. They brought their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses." And there were a lot of them--verse 26 says four thousand stalls for the chariot horses, twelve thousand horses.

1) 12 Administrative Districts

Now, as you look behind the surface of those lists and statistics, I think there are some things we might notice. First, look at the twelve districts whose governors are named. You'll notice that the districts do not directly coincide with the twelve tribes and the tribal areas. If you glance down through that list, you'll see that six of the tribes are mentioned. Notice verse 8 is Ephraim; verse 16 is Asher; and verse 18 is Benjamin. There are six of them that are mentioned, and then general areas of the districts are indicated. It seems clear that in every case it

doesn't correspond directly with the tribal boundary.

But the interesting thing is that neither the area nor the name of the tribe of Judah is mentioned. Some interpreters have concluded from this that in Solomon's system of taxation, for supplying these provisions for his court, the tribe of Judah was exempted. And of course, the tribe of Judah was his own tribe. So some have concluded that the tribe of Judah in this system of taxation to support the court, Judah received special treatment. This raises the question of favoritism and, of course, the potential for dissention. And some feel that's part of the number of things that later on leads to the division of the kingdom. Now that's kind of reading between the lines. But neither the tribe is mentioned nor the area of Judah, so that may or may not be a legitimate conclusion to draw from that. It is a possibility. That's the first thing.

2. Solomon's Taxation

Second thing to notice is that the taxation is quite heavy. As we read in verse 7, each district had to provide supplies for the court for a period of a month. And the amount of the supplies were substantial. If you look at verse 22, Solomon's daily provisions were 30 cors of fine flour. A cor is about, according to the NIV note, 185 bushels. Thirty cors, and that's for a day! Multiply that by another 30 per month. It's an enormous amount of provision. That's just flour. Sixty cors of meal, ten head of cattle. That's a day. So times 30, that'd be 300 cattle for a month. A hundred sheep--that's 3000 sheep. And also, besides supplying the court, they had to provide for his horses. Verse 28. They had to bring quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses. In verse 26 it says he had 4,000 stalls for chariot horses and 12,000 horses. So they had to provide feed for 12,000 horses. And that's one of the districts that had to do that for a month of the year, and the following year they had to do it again; it'd go on year after year. Now, it seems that in the times of Solomon, with the kind of prosperity Israel enjoyed, that that didn't seem to raise much objection. People

seemed to be able to handle that and bear it without being too upset by it.

But what I think immediately comes to mind is the warning of Samuel back in 1 Sam 8 when the people first came and asked for a king. He gave them a warning. And said if you have a king like the nations round about, what's he going to do? He's going to take, take, take, take. In 1 Sam 8:11 and following we read that he is going to take your sons, he's going to take your daughters, he's going to take your crops. I think 1 Samuel 8 begins to appear not just an imaginary game here.

The taxes that Solomon instituted, it seems gradually came to be experienced as a burden. And as increasingly a real burden, so when you get to 1 Kings 12:4, we read the people say that Rehoboam, Solomon's son, "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you." So you see, by the time of Solomon's death and the succession of Rehoboam, this was felt as a real burden. And the people wanted it lightened, and Rehoboam wouldn't really do that. Alright, so that's the second thing--this heavy taxation.

3. Solomon's Kingship Like Other Nations contra Deut. 17

The third thing is kingship under Solomon begins to appear more and more like the kingship of the surrounding nations. I think initially it wasn't that way. When Saul became king, it seems that he had a very small organization. He acted more like a judge than a king. What court he had was modest. With David the court becomes more visible and organized. It grows. David built a palace. David had a harem. But that proceeds further with Solomon. So that when you get to Solomon, his court and his palace and his harem are equal to the most important rulers of the ancient world. And you can see that by comparing the statistics of 1 Kings 4, what we've been looking at, with those of the time of David. You can go back and look at the list of officials in David's court. It is a much smaller list than it is in the time of Solomon. You find that in 2 Samuel 8:15-18. So the number of

high officials grew significantly in Solomon's court. And the other thing that is significant here is Solomon's development of the army, even though David is the one who fought all these battles and Solomon basically was a man of peace as far as actually going out and waging war. He really didn't do much of that.

Solomon built fortifications and maintained alliances, but you read in verse 26 he had 4,000 stalls for chariot horses and 12,000 horses. Prior to the time of Solomon, the army of Israel never had horses and chariots. That is significant because Israel, in that sense, was an exception in the world of that day. Other nations had chariots and horses for a long time. I think this is also related to how Israel was to be different. If you remember when Israel fought against a coalition of kings in Northern Canaan at the time of the conquest, the Lord told Joshua he would give these armies into Israel's hand. Look at Joshua 11:6 and to what the Lord said then. These kings had chariots and horses. Joshua 11:6 says, "The LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them over to Israel, slain. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.'" Now, the normal thing would have been to capture the horses and chariots and use them yourself. That's always been the way military operations work. If you can defeat another army you get a lot of military weapons and supplies that strengthen your own army. But the Lord told Joshua when they defeated this coalition of kings to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.

If you go back to Deuteronomy 17 where you have the law of the king, Moses says when they come into the land and set up the king eventually, these are the things that kings shall do. One of the things the king was not to do was listed in Deuteronomy 17:16: "The king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them. The Lord has told you, you are not to go back that way again. The king is not to acquire great numbers of horses."

David had continued that policy of Joshua in conformity to the law of the king. Look at 2 Samuel 8:4. 2 Samuel 8 is the catalog of David's conquests. We

read in the fourth verse, “David captured a thousand of his chariots,” that is of Hadadezer son of Rahab, king of Zobah, but when he went to restore control along the Euphrates river, “David captured a thousand of his chariots, seven thousand charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstrung all but a hundred of the chariot horses.” All but 100. He skipped 100; that’s not significant compared to the thousand in the city of Solomon. Deuteronomy 17:16: “The king must not acquire great numbers of horses.” Great numbers of horses; I’m not sure the 100 horses was a violation of that. You might say David opened a door. It’s certainly more than Joshua did, but Joshua of course, was responding to a specific command. The Lord said to do that. In this other context there doesn’t appear to be a specific command. I think what the point is, I think we see a shift when we come to Solomon because he has this large military force. It seems to me the Lord did not want Israel to be like the nations round about them when it came to military organization and armaments. But with Solomon all that seems to change.

The NIV Study Bible note, comparing 1 Kings 4:26 with 1 Kings 10:26 and 2 Chronicles 1:14 indicates that Solomon had 1,400 chariots, meaning he maintained stalls for two horses for each chariot with places for about 1200 reserve horses. By way of comparison, an Assyrian account of the battle of Karkar in 853, about a century after Solomon, speaks 1200 chariots from Damascus, 700 chariots from Hamath and 2000 chariots from Israel (Northern Kingdom).

So it seems that Solomon here has begun to follow the pattern of the surrounding nations in building up this military force to at least similar, if not superior, strength. I want to come back to that later. But we’re just looking at several things sort of behind the surface of these lists of statistics in chapter 4.

I think when we consider all these things together, you get some conflicting signals of what is going on in the time of Solomon. I think primarily the statistics seem to say in this kingdom, peace has come under the rule of Solomon and, what I mean by that is, there’s abundance. You read in chapter 4 verse 20, “The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they

drank, they were happy.” Their lives aren’t threatened by wars or foreign enemies. Look at verse 25: “During Solomon’s lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his vine and fig tree.” So you get this idea of the kingdom at peace. They’re happy. They’re satisfied.

4. Solomon’s Wisdom

They live in safety and Solomon is a ruler with very great wisdom, and insight, and breadth of understanding. You read that in chapter 4, verse 29: “God gave Solomon wisdom, very great insight, breadth of understanding, as measurable as the sand on the seashore. His wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East.” So in some respects you see God’s blessing. It’s visible, and you have this kingdom of peace under the rule of Solomon. But as I said, there’s conflicting signals. At the same time, these statistics raise some disturbing questions. It seems that the kingship of Solomon is beginning to be conformed to the pattern of the kingship of the nations round about. Taxes are introduced that we find later become a heavy yoke and burden.

Vannoy’s Analysis and Application

I think what you find, and that’s why I’m spending so much time on this, I think you see there are cracks in this kingdom right from the very start. Taxation becomes a heavy burden. The favoritism shown Judah, if that’s a proper understanding, is something that also can easily lead to dissention and dissatisfaction. The introduction of horses and chariots--to the extent that you find it--seems ominous, you might say. So these are disturbing elements that as you read the history further, I think, do show themselves really to be fatal ultimately to the continuation of this peaceable kingdom--or this kingdom of peace--and ultimately contribute to its downfall.

I think that demonstrates that even though you have a chapter here of statistics that might be viewed as mundane information with little spiritual

significance, that if you really look a little deeper, there's a great deal of spiritual significance in these sort of mundane figures lists of names, and how many bushels of this and that. I think life is undivided. We don't live in two realms that have nothing to do with each other: a spiritual realm and a non-spiritual. This chapter deals mainly with mundane matters, you might say, but they do have spiritual significance.

I think that in our lives, as well, we can involve ourselves with things you may say have no spiritual significance, but that's a deception. Everything we do either advances or hinders our relationship with the Lord. And that is certainly true of Solomon in this situation. I see I'm overdrawn. Let me stop here. We have not finished this section. I'll make a few more comments next time.

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