

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 2, 1 Kings 1:1-27

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Praising Solomon, or is it criticizing him? Yes, yes. And as in the book of Judges, the writer wants to force us to make some moral decisions. A good writer doesn't tell the reader what they should think.

A good writer is able to present the material and the readers will know what to think. And so it is here. So in these 11 chapters, Mike was asking if I was going to check your homework.

No, I'm not. This is how I would outline the section. And if you outlined it differently, that's okay.

The main purpose of these questions is simply to help you to dig into the text and let the text speak to you. I would see chapters 1 and 2 as securing the throne. As we'll see tonight, this was a pretty iffy deal here.

And so, in these first two chapters, is Solomon going to end up in charge of things or not? How's this going to go? Then, in chapter 3, we have two decisions, a foolish one and a wise one. Now, it's often said, oh, chapter 3 is about the wisdom of Solomon. And it certainly is.

But there are three verses at the beginning of that chapter that say, wait a minute, wait a minute. In some senses, that foolish decision made at the beginning of Solomon's reign nailed down the outcome 40 years later. You've all heard the old story, but in Kansas, in the 1920s, there was a road sign that said, choose your rut carefully.

You will be in it for the next 40 miles. There's a sense in which Solomon chose his rut early. God blessed him.

God blessed him marvelously. But there's a sense in which a path has been chosen that is going to lead to tragedy at the end of the story. We don't have many young people here, but I'd like to say that as loudly as I can.

What decision are you making today? It'll shape you. It'll shape you. So, two decisions, foolish and wise.

Most of the attention is given to the wise. And I think that's intentional. Then, in chapters 4 to 10, I would call Solomon's kingdom.

In chapter 4, we have his administration, the people who were working for him and how he organized the state and all of that sort of thing. Obviously, students have asked me over the years how the wisest man in the world could marry a thousand women. Well, I think it's obvious that his wisdom was especially in the area of administration. He wasn't necessarily wise on all fronts.

Then, in chapters 5 through 7 and 12, excuse me; I got my figures wrong there. It should be 5, 1 through 7, 51, building projects, 5, 7 through 7, 51. First of all, in chapters 5 and 6, the temple on which he spent seven years.

Then, there are eight very brief verses about the palace that took him 13 years. Then, there is a summary because the palace is clearly part of the temple complex, and it's all woven together. Again, we ask, oh really? Then, the temple furnishings, some nearly 40 verses, were given to the temple furnishings.

Then chapter 8, in many ways, is a high point in the whole book, dedicating the temple. And you see Solomon at his very best. Then, in chapter 9, verses 1 to 9, Yahweh responds to that.

This is a very interesting response, and again, you clearly indicate that Yahweh is not controlled by that temple. Yahweh is not the temple, and the temple is not Yahweh. He's independent of it.

Then in 9, 10 through 28, Solomon's accomplishments. He did all the things, including bringing gold from Ophir. And chapter 10 then winds it up with Solomon's glory.

The queen of Sheba comes to visit him and says the half has never yet been told. The story that I heard back home in Sheba was only half of what it really is. Then, in chapter 11, the final reckoning is presented.

Surely, one of the saddest verses in all of the Bible is found there in chapter 11. So, in my view, a marvelous example of the power of the Bible. It's not just whitewashing the guy.

On the other hand, it's not denying the wonderful things God did for him and did through him. That's one of the marks of the Bible's inspiration. It tells the truth about its heroes.

But on the other hand, it doesn't like a movie magazine glory in its hero's failings. No, it just lays it out there. And we say, oh, no.

Oh, yes. There it is in the complexity and the reality of life. Now, again, as we're going along here, if you've got questions, if you've got things you want to ask about, things I'm not making clear, don't hesitate for a moment, please.

I want to know what you're thinking. OK, anything on that first question on the structure of Solomon, of the Solomon account? All hearts clear. OK.

Look up First Chronicles 28 and 29. What does it say about Solomon's accession? And I have here the first seven verses of chapter 28 of First Chronicles that capture a bit of it. David assembled at Jerusalem all the officials of Israel, the officials of the tribes, the officers of the divisions that served the king, the commanders of thousands, the commanders of hundreds, the stewards of all the property and livestock of the king and his sons, together with the palace officials, the mighty men and all the seasoned warriors.

Now, who is invited to this meeting? The officers, the leaders, the people aren't involved here as far as this passage tells us. It's all the leaders, all the heads of the departments. Then King David rose to his feet and said, Hear me, my brothers and my people.

I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, for the footstool of our God. And I make preparations for building. But God said to me, You may not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and have shed blood.

Yet the Lord God of Israel chose me from all my father's house to be king over Israel forever. For he chose Judah as the leader in the house of Judah, my father's house. Among my father's sons, he took pleasure in me and made me king over all Israel.

And of all my sons, for the Lord has given him many sons, he has chosen Solomon, my son, to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. He said to me, It is Solomon, your son, who shall build my house and my courts, for I've chosen him to be my son.

I'll be his father. I'll establish his kingdom forever if he continues strong in keeping my commandments and my rules as he is today. So, what does this passage, and he goes on at considerable length in the rest of chapter eight and into chapter 29, what does this passage tell us about David's successor? He's chosen.

By whom? By God. Now remember, all over the Near East, the normal, normal succession is hereditary. The oldest surviving son, bingo, is automatic.

But not in this case. I want to talk about that a little later. What might be lying behind God's choice, but there it is.

Solomon has been set up in advance. And so we have to ask ourselves, what's going on then in this first chapter of Kings? What do verses one to four tell us about David's

condition? It looks like dementia, doesn't it? He's an old, old man. He can't get warm, freezing to death in bed.

And so they find a pretty young girl to come and sleep with him. But we're told he did not have sexual relations with her. So, we have an old man, an old man whose memory, it looks pretty clear, has failed him.

Now, Abishag will become important in the next chapter. What lesson do you draw from all of this? I'll tell you one lesson I've drawn: people get old. When they get old, some problems can arise because of that happening.

Again, in my mind, the beauty of this is it is telling the story as it happened. It's not making this man of God look better than he was, but he is subject to all of the failings of humanity. But God is at work.

God is at work. And so as we face growing limitations, we can dare to believe that God is at work in our lives. He's accomplishing his good purposes in spite of our failings.

So along comes Adonijah. Here is 2 Samuel 3, 2 through 5. Sons were born to David at Hebron. His firstborn was Amnon of Ahinoam of Jezreel.

Somebody tell us the story of Amnon. He wanted his sister, his half-sister, Absalom's full sister. By the way, we look at this list, and there is one son for each different wife.

And we say, good grief, what's going on here? Well, polygamy is going on here. The interesting thing is that as I read it, there is no place in the Bible where polygamy is seen as a good thing. It is always a source of tragedy.

It was, in some senses, a social necessity. Men are the weaker sex. We die early.

We kill each other. And you get too many women around. So what's to be done in that kind of society? Well, polygamy.

But is that a good thing? Is that God's intention? I see no evidence whatsoever. And in that case, it certainly wasn't. Here is a half-sister, an Amnon conceived.

Again, you just have to, I have to think about the wonder of the Bible. No place else in the ancient world do you have anything like this kind of writing. He wants his half sister and he takes her and then he hates her.

And Absalom, who's the next in line, right? No, there's Kiliab. And in 1 Chronicles 3, he's called Daniel. We know nothing about him other than these two references.

I rather suspect he died as an infant, but we don't know. But he's out of the picture, and Absalom is next. And Absalom is going to deal with his brother, who has raped his sister.

Now it's interesting. David is a remarkably decisive individual when it comes to matters of state. You see him again and again, making these instant decisions and going with them and being very successful with them.

In the case of later, when Absalom revolts against him, the instant David gets the news, bingo, pack up, we're leaving. They're gone. He doesn't dither around. Well, should we go? Should we not? But in matters of his family, he seems incapable of making a decision.

Karen and I have talked about this a lot over the years. One of the failings of Christian organizations is that we don't want to hurt people, so we tend not to take action when we should have.

And then the thing blows up and is really ugly. That's what happened here. Dad, are you going to do anything about this? I think it was because of his own sin.

I think that with that tragic day hanging over his head, he's thinking, how can I straighten anybody else out when I've done what I've done? We've all seen that in life. We've seen people who, because of their own sin, are unable to act when they should. I don't know if that's the case with David, but it certainly is his condition that he seems unable to make the necessary radical decisions with regard to his family.

So, Absalom killed Amnon at a party. Maybe they all had masks on. I don't know.

And the Bible says David was comforted when he heard the news of Amnon's death. But David could never, ever stomach treachery of any sort. David's character is out front, up top, and stuff under the covers, stuff hidden, he could never stomach.

And so, he could not. He's glad Amnon's dead, but he can't forgive Absalom. So, Absalom runs.

And Joab, again, these stories are so wonderful. Joab, the general, he understands. This can't go on.

Absalom is the oldest surviving son now. We can't leave him with his grandfather in Geshur, on the other side of the Jordan River, fomenting a rebellion at any moment. We've got to get him home.

And so, Joab cooked up a story and fed it to a lady, and she told David, and David was moved. And the upshot of the story is you've got to bring your son home. So, he says, yes.

Did Joab put you up to that? But he wouldn't meet with Absalom. He wouldn't be reconciled, couldn't bring himself to be reconciled with a treacherous person. The result was Absalom; the wound festered and festered and festered until Absalom finally got himself a chariot and 50 men to run with him.

Did you see that anywhere in our chapter? Adonijah did the very same thing. Obviously, there's something there about proclaiming yourself as the crown prince. Absalom did it and then made himself king at Hebron.

And eventually, as you know, he's killed. Okay. All that to say, Amnon is gone.

Kiliab, Daniel is gone for whatever reason. Absalom is gone. So, who's the oldest surviving son? Adonijah.

So, he has a right as far as the world's custom is to consider he will be the next king. Now, look at what goes on here. Adonijah, whose mother was Hagith, this is verse 5 of chapter 1. We're back in Kings again.

Adonijah, whose mother was Hagith, put himself forward and said, I will be king. So, he got chariots and horses ready with 50 men to run ahead of him. And then this next verse, his father had never rebuked him by asking, why do you behave as you do? What's that doing in here? What do you think? He's spoiled.

Yes. And what does a spoiled child do? Whatever it wants. Yes.

Especially if you're good-looking. Exactly. He's handsome.

Nobody has ever crossed him. But let me stop there. Should we cross our children? Should we thwart them? I mean, that's what it says.

David never thwarted the kid. Should we thwart our children? If they're doing wrong, is it doing any good to be thwarted? What good? All right. You can't always have your own way.

If you dream it, you can do it as a bunch of hogwash. You cannot always have your own way. You also must take responsibility for your choices.

Do you really want to go down that road? Here's where that road is going to take you, son. Why do you want to go down that road? One of my dads, I know I'm

getting old because I remember things he said. But again, again, he would say, what are you doing that for? Think about your choices.

Think about the consequences of your choices. Think about where it's going to take you. But David never did that.

Again, as I've said, it's with regard to his family. He seemed incapable of being decisive. Now, let me ask you, what do verses 7 through 10 tell us about Adonijah's understanding of the situation? Adonijah conferred with Joab, son of Zariah, who was the general, and with Abiathar, who was the chief priest, and they gave their support.

Oh, really? Weren't they in that meeting with David years ago? But Zadok, the priest; Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada; Nathan, the prophet; Shimei and Rehi, two of the brothers; and David's special guard, did not join Adonijah. Adonijah then sacrificed sheep, cattle, and fattened calves. Where was that? At the stone of Zohelath near Ein Rogel. Well, as I've told people for years, I can prove that I never took a degree in cartography.

That's the Kidron Valley, believe it or not. This is the Hinnom Valley, and the Roman name is the Tyropean Valley. This is the city of David on this ridge between the Kidron and the Tyropean Valley.

Up here is where the temple would be built. The Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle are somewhere in this city. Today, the old city wall goes something like that, so that, interestingly, the city of David is not actually in the modern city of Jerusalem.

But somewhere here was the Tabernacle. It probably wasn't up there yet, although we don't know for sure. But, yes, over here.

So, there's the Mount of Olives, there's the Kidron Valley, and Rogel is a spring down here. What's he doing? He's offering a sacrifice down here. Why is he doing this? He's got a faction together.

He's gone outside of the city, about half a mile, three-quarters of a mile away, and he's being crowned king there. Why would he do that? He does not have the support of a lot of the people. Why doesn't he have the support? They remember that David had chosen Solomon at the lead of God.

He hopes David has forgotten, and he hopes that he'll be able to present his demented father with a fait accompli. It's done. Again, there are scholars who will say there are two different stories of Solomon's coming to the throne.

There's the original one, where he comes to the throne as a result of a palace takeover, and then there's the chronicle story that dresses it all up. Well, I'm sorry, I don't believe that. I think Chronicles and Kings fit together very, very well.

And, in fact, I think the way Kings tells the story is that if Adonijah was to be the next king, and he knew it, he wouldn't have to go through all this stuff. No, he remembers, and there are people who remember. And so, he's trying to do it on the sly and get it over with as a done deal.

Now, let me ask you, what are Joab and Abiathar doing here? Joab is the general. Joab, again, these wonderful, wonderful character pictures in the Bible. Joab has been David's right-hand man for 30 years.

He has done David's dirty work. He has thought ahead when David was caught up in his family—that amazing story.

David says, don't kill Absalom. Don't kill him. David, he would kill you in an instant.

Don't kill him. Don't kill him. Let him go.

Joab says, kill him. Kill him. David cannot remain on the throne as long as that guy's alive.

Now, what's Joab doing here and Abiathar? As I said last time, you've got, I think I said, two family lines. Eliezer's line starts out with Joshua. They were the high priests.

And the line of Ithamar, the fourth son of Aaron. And somehow, the line of Ithamar becomes the high priests at Shiloh. Abiathar is from the Ithamar family.

He again, David picked him up after the destruction of the tabernacle and the theft of the ark by the Philistines. David picked him up, put him in, gave him the position again there at the tabernacle in Jerusalem. What are Joab and Abiathar doing with Adonijah? They would have been in that gathering of the officials.

What are they doing? Absolutely. Absolutely. And why are they giving it? Tradition.

Okay. Okay. Yeah.

He's the oldest son. He ought to have it. All right.

All right. Any other thoughts about why they would have done this? They don't want to be killed, but why would Solomon kill them? Something about the death of Absalom? Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Uh-huh. I think that is true, especially with Joab. I think it's very possible that David could not forgive Joab for what he did.

Very possibly. It doesn't explain Abiathar, but my sheet is wrong. I said that Solomon is the 11th son.

He's the 10th son, but he's the 10th son, for pity's sake. Are there any other reasons possible why these two guys would have turned against Solomon? I think possibly they could not forgive Bathsheba. I think very possibly.

I'm not blaming her. The Bible doesn't blame her, but I think it's very possible that they saw this woman as a usurper, and she's going to get her son in as king over my dead body. Now, this is the point where I want to talk about Solomon.

Why would God choose Solomon, for pity's sake? He's the 10th son. He's the son of an adulteress, an adulterer. Why would God do that? Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

Yes. Yes. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. And in addition, this is our God who takes the worst messes we can produce and redeems them, uses them for his glory.

Right through the Bible, the unlikely people are the ones who are chosen. Remember, the first three mothers of the kingdom were all childless. A childless woman in that situation was a zero.

God says, I choose them. Second, sons were worthless. Somebody said the reason that England built such an empire is second sons.

They had to go somewhere else and do something. And God chooses second sons. God didn't choose Jacob because he was a good man.

He was a crook, but he chose him because he was second. Somebody the world said was worthless. I think that's what's going on here.

Oh, God, I have done this terrible thing. I have destroyed my life. The sword is not going to depart from my house for the rest of my days.

Oh, God says, if you'll let me, I can redeem that. I can use a child of that relationship. I don't know why Joab and Abiathar would have jumped ship at this point.

As I say, clearly, they were right at the head of that group of officials to whom David made his announcement. They knew. But for whatever reason, they thought that Adonijah was a better choice.

Again, what looks like a better choice from the world's perspective is not necessarily a good choice if it's not God's choice. Humanly speaking, yeah, the eldest son is good-looking and capable.

Yeah, let's go with that. No, no, no. So, the question in Adonijah's mind and in the minds of his supporters was, are we going to do God's will? Are we going to do our will? And they chose their will, but they forgot about Nathan.

Interestingly, you wonder whether he was invited and turned down or whether they knew. Oh, no, no, no, no, no. He's with Solomon.

Again, here's the passage in 2 Samuel 12. Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba after the child of their adultery had died and went into her and lay with her. And she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon.

And the Lord loved him. We, I'm afraid, would have rejected him, but not the Lord. And he sent a message by Nathan the prophet.

So, he called his name Jedidiah, which means beloved of Yahweh. Because of Yahweh. So, Nathan was in there at the start.

And he's the one who's given the word by God. So interesting. Nathan is given the word.

David has sinned. David has done something tragic and terrible. And you've got to get his attention.

And Nathan is given this message. He is beloved of Yahweh. What does this tell us about Nathan? He honored God.

He's faithful in giving good news and bad news. It would have been so easy for a Nathan to have passed judgment upon Bathsheba and her child. But if God says he's beloved, he's beloved.

Nathan is a remarkable man in my judgment. Now, I ask the question here, what does this tell us about responsibility? Nathan is in a tough spot. The general has gone over with this good looking young usurper.

The high priest has gone over with him. A bunch of other people have gone with him, too. What's the temptation for Nathan? Keep your mouth shut and go with the crowd.

You can see the way the wind's blowing. But Nathan will not do that. He won't do it.

Now, why does he involve Bathsheba? This is verse 11. Nathan asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king? And our Lord David knows nothing about it. Now, let me advise you on how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon.

Now, let's stop there just a minute. Again, what does this tell us about what Adonijah knows? He knows Solomon has been chosen, and once he gets on the throne, he's going to have to kill Solomon because people are going to say, hey, wait a minute. David said Solomon was going to be king.

So, Nathan understands you, your life, and your son's life are in danger. Go into King David and say to him, my Lord, the King, did you not swear to me, your servant, surely Solomon, your son, will be king after me, and he'll sit on my throne. Wait a minute now.

Wait, wait, wait, wait. Shouldn't she say, my Lord, the King, didn't you announce this publicly to all your officers? That Solomon was going to be king. Why is Nathan pulling Bathsheba into this and why is he instructing her in this way? Yes? I think you got it.

Say it again. To David, she is irresistible. I think that's exactly right.

Again, David, I think, now again, you are certainly free to disagree with me, but I think the picture here is of an old man suffering from fairly severe dementia. I think if Nathan were to go in there and say, David, five years ago, you made an announcement that Solomon was going to be your successor. I think the old man would have said, oh, really? Did I? Oh, well, I think he's gotten Bathsheba involved precisely because she's irresistible to David and because, in his circumstances, it's not a question of remembering what I said to a bunch of officials five or six years ago.

It's what I said to this woman whom I love. I think that was going to get through the fog of his dementia. Now, again, you say, oh, that's speculation.

You got it right. It is. But I'm asking the question, why involve her anyway? Why pull her into this and why make it a personal thing between David and Bathsheba and not the great official announcement that had been made? Verse 14, while you're still there talking to the king, I'll come in and add my word to what you have said.

So, it happens. She goes in. She talks to the king.

She tells him. In verse 19, he sacrifices a great number of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep and invites all the king's sons, Abiathar, the priest, and Joab, the commander of the army. He hasn't invited Solomon, your servant.

My lord, the king, all the eyes of all Israel are on you to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord, the king after him. Otherwise, as soon as my lord, the king is laid to rest with his ancestors, my son Solomon and I will be treated as criminals. While she was speaking, Nathan, the prophet, arrived.

King was told Nathan, the prophet is here. So, he went before the king and bowed with his face to the ground. Again, it's my old age, I know.

But I have to laugh when I go to some church services, and people say, now let's stand for twenty-five minutes in an attitude of reverence to the lord. Well, the attitude of reverence in the Bible is flat on your face on the ground. I haven't seen a church service yet where they did that.

Bowed with his face to the ground. So, Nathan repeats what he has said. But me, your servant, this is now down in verse the latter part of twenty-five, no, twenty-six.

But me, your servant, and Zadok, the priest, and Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, the second in command of the army, your servant Solomon, he did not invite. Is this something my lord, the king, has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord, the king after him? Okay, that last question that Danny mentioned. Has Nathan manipulated Nathan and Bathsheba? Have they manipulated David? There are a lot of people who would say yes.

This is just raw manipulation. Manipulation has lies in it. All right, all right.

All right. What makes the difference between being wise and being manipulative? One of them has truth in it as opposed to lies. What else? We sang the song, The Mind of Christ.

How does the mind of Christ play into this kind of situation? Because we're all in them. You're waiting for me to answer you. Did you remind him of an oath? Yes.

This is something you've said. You said in the presence of God. I think I've thought about this a fair amount in my long, misspent life as a seminary faculty member.

We get an issue. I'm right. My cause is right.

Therefore, oh, precisely. Precisely. I'm right.

My cause is right. And therefore, any means is justified. What's wrong with that?
Okay.

Okay. All right. The self becomes the focus.

The question is not what does God want? The question is what do I want? So, one of the differences between wisdom and manipulation is motive. Why am I doing this? I'm doing it because I want to be proven right. Those other people are wrong.

And I'm right. And I will be proven to be right. Students often, not so much anymore, but used to think of academic settings as ivory towers.

The ivory towers are pretty badly besmirched because some of the most vicious fights that have ever been fought, not speaking about anybody here, are fought in academia. And because I'm right and I want my way, I can choose a way that is not right. So, for Nathan to say, okay, I think I need to involve Bathsheba in this.

In order to get David's attention. Why? Well, interestingly, he never says to save my life. His life was as much at risk as Bathsheba's and Solomon's were.

But I notice he never says that. The question is, did you say this before the Lord? Is this? And again, the great danger here is confusing my way and God's way. So, a great deal of introspection needs to go on.

Is this what I want or is this what God wants? If this is what God wants, how does he want to accomplish his purposes in ways that are consistent with his character and his nature? Lies are not. Cutting corners are not. Using people is not.

So, that question of why am I doing this? Is this really what God wants? And then, what is a godly method? A method that does not bring contempt to his name. A method that will be for the best of all parties. Now, on the outside, a wise course and a manipulative course might look a lot alike.

But underneath, one brings honor to God and the other brings contempt. And what we see here, it seems to me, is an example of godly wisdom. Being shrewd, figuring out what's going to work and what's not going to work.

But in the end, for God's divine purposes and not for Nathan's, there's a difference. Okay, well, we'll go faster on other parts of the book. But this particular beginning, I think, is profoundly important for understanding where the book's going to take us, where it's going to go on.

Okay, let me pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you. Thank you for the realism of your words. Thank you for not giving us powder puff stuff. Thank you for not sugarcoating reality. Thank you that you are at work in the nitty-gritties of life and that we can trust you.

You will accomplish your good purposes, even when we can't quite see how you're going to do it. Thank you, Lord, for using people like us to accomplish your purposes. I pray, Lord, that you'll help us, help each of us not to be manipulators, somebody who has to make people do what I want because I'm right, but someone who passionately loves you and wants your way and is willing to allow you to do it your way in your time.

Help us, Lord. We confess that again and again our motives are terribly tangled. Help us to be as critical of our own motives as we are of those whom we think are against us.

Help us, Lord. Help us to be godly men and women in all we do and say. In your name, we pray. Amen.