

Show Yourself a Man

1 Kings 1-2

Key Verse: 2:2,3

“I am about to go the way of all the earth,’ he said. ‘So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go....”

Today's passage begins with King David in his dotage. A dramatic struggle unfolds regarding succession to his throne. The front runner was Adonijah, with his group of supporters. They were very strong. On the other hand, there was Solomon who looked weak and unqualified. But Solomon became king. It was God's will. To bring about God's will, Nathan played an important role. However, becoming king was one thing; being a successful king was another. David charged Solomon, emphasizing what he must do to be a successful king. He must be a man, that is a mature person. True men can be successful whatever they do. Let's learn from David's words today.

I. David makes Solomon king (1:1-53)

First, Adonijah said, "I will be king" (1-6). Look at verse 1. "When King David was old and well advanced in years, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him." King David had been courageous and strong, a warrior who always won victory. But as he aged, his desires waned and his strength faded, like Castro in Cuba. Battle wounds bothered him, and he was tired. David's servants brought in a beautiful young girl, Abishag to serve him, in the hope of restoring his vitality, but to no avail. It seemed his death was inevitably approaching. A question arose: Who would be David's successor? In any assembly, raising a new leader is very important. Many bloody battles have been fought over this. David's kingdom was no exception.

Look at verse 5. "Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, 'I will be king.' So he got chariots and horses ready with fifty men to run ahead of him." Humanly speaking, Adonijah seemed to be the best choice. He was

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next in line among David's sons (6; 2 Sam 13:28,29; 2 Sa 3:4; 1 Ch 3:1; 2 Sam 18:14). He was a very handsome man, and a man of ability. General Joab of the army supported him, as did Abiathar the priest, representing a significant religious element. Usually, this kind of support is enough to enable one to gain power. Adonijah invited all of his brothers, the king's sons, and all the men of Judah who were royal officials to a big feast with an endless supply of gyros and bulgogi and prime cut steaks. He intended it to be a kind of inauguration party as he stepped forward to claim kingship. Yet, there was a problem.

Adonijah had not sought God's will. Israel was not just an ordinary kingdom, but a kingdom ruled by God. Adonijah needed to approach God in prayer first. But he did not. Without prayer, he succumbed to the desire of his sinful nature to exalt himself. Furthermore, Adonijah disregarded King David. As a son, he must respect his father. As a successor, he must respect his predecessor. But he ignored David, thinking he was aged and powerless, and out of touch. This was actually David's fault. David had been so busy as king that he neglected to discipline Adonijah properly. Young men who grow up without discipline easily become haughty. They tend to think too highly of themselves. Fathers must train their sons to fear God and respect their elders. This is the beginning of wisdom. Without discipline, anyone can become proud, tragic and useless. Adonijah looked mature outwardly, but he was not a man; he was a spoiled boy. Jesus said, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Mt 23:12).

Second, Nathan supported Solomon as king (10-27). Though the movement to crown Adonijah spread, several key leaders did not join in, including Zadok the priest, Benaiah, and Nathan the prophet. They must have been alarmed as support for Adonijah grew. Especially, they must have feared Joab, who exercised enormous influence over Israel's military. It seemed that the movement would sweep through Israel like an irresistible force. Nathan perceived the danger this posed to Israel. It would lead to a humanistic view of the kingdom, to division, and to much bloodshed. It would claim the lives of Solomon and his mother Bathsheba. Nathan remembered God's promise to make Solomon king (13). He knew that God's will was upon Solomon, not Adonijah. Nathan wanted God's will to be done in Israel. So he decided to support Solomon, risking his life. He wanted to help David pass the kingship to Solomon according to God's will. He enlisted

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Bathsheba to help, believing that David would listen to her. Bathsheba entreated David, based on his promise before the Lord to make Solomon king. Then she warned him, "But now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it" (18). While she was speaking, Nathan came in and confirmed what she had said (24). Through their timely coworking, Adonijah's coup d'etat was exposed before King David, and he awakened to deal with it.

Nathan played a decisive role in making Solomon king. He was a man of God who listened to the word of God. He believed Almighty God was the true Ruler of Israel. He believed God would fulfill his promise to make Solomon king and use him to build his temple (1 Ch 22:9-10). He believed God would fulfill his word no matter what kind of military or political forces were in opposition. He stood on God's side and worked to fulfill God's will at a critical time. It was risky. Yet he did so courageously because he had faith in God's word. He was a true man and a man of God. We need men of God like him in our times. There are young people whose spiritual lives are at risk, not because of coup d'etats, but because of the power of sin and death through postmodernism, hedonism and materialism. They need men of God who will tell them, "God has chosen us as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Let's live a holy life so that God can bless us." May the Lord help us to be like Nathan for our children and the young people on our campuses.

Third, David makes Solomon king to fulfill the will of God (28-53). As David listened to Bathsheba and Nathan, he came back to his senses. He remembered God's promise and the oath he had made to Bathsheba. His faith came alive, and he gained power and wisdom to take action. He said: "As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place" (29,30). So he called in Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah, and gave them orders to set Solomon on his own mule and anoint him king over Israel. It was done as David instructed. Zadok anointed Solomon with sacred oil. They sounded a trumpet and people shouted, "Long live King Solomon!" And all the people went up after him, playing flutes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound (40).

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What happened to Adonijah and his followers? Look at verse 49. "At this, all Adonijah's guests rose in alarm and dispersed." The power drained out of their bodies and they began to choke on their steaks. They abandoned each other and dispersed, hoping not to be noticed. Their unity and commitment based on humanism completely dissolved. Adonijah, who had seemed so powerful, was now trembling before King Solomon. He could not just disappear, so he clung to the horns of the altar, seeking to save his life. Solomon wisely promised to spare him if he showed himself to be a worthy man. Here we see that the one who sought power out of selfish ambition surrendered to one who obeyed the will of God. 1 John 2:17 says, "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." We must seek God's will first in whatever we do, including which school we attend, which major we study, which job we take, who to marry and so on. Then we will experience God's victory and blessing.

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II. Solomon's throne established (2:1-46)

First, David's charge to Solomon (1-4). When Solomon took David's throne, David praised God for allowing him to see his successor established (1:48). Now it was time for David to depart. Before doing so, he shared his final words of wisdom with Solomon, words that could guide him to success as a king. David had considerable experience and knowledge. He could have said many things. What were his final words to Solomon? Look at verse 2. "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. 'So be strong, show yourself a man....' Then David told Solomon how to be a man. Look at verses 3-4. "...and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: "If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel."" Here we can learn two important lessons about being a man and being a leader.

In the first place, one should be strong. The historian Josephus said that Solomon was 14 years old when he became king--a freshman in high school. Yet he should be strong. After Moses' death, Joshua succeeded him as a leader of Israel. God told Joshua, "Be strong and very courageous" (Jos 1:7). In order to be a leader, one should be strong and courageous. If one is weak, he cannot be a leader. Leaders must confront many difficult problems. They must make right decisions while enduring the pressure of heavy responsibility. They must carry out the mission God has given them in spite of opposition. If one is weak, he cannot overcome trials and temptations. So, to be a leader, one should be strong physically, mentally and spiritually. How can one be truly strong? Paul encouraged Timothy: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Ti 2:1). We can be strong when we hold on to God's grace. In God's grace we must train ourselves to be strong, strong enough to deny ourselves, overcome temptations, endure hardships, and receive discipline. We must be strong to be a man and to be a leader.

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In the second place, one must show himself a man. According to the general consensus, the defining characteristic of a man is courage. To show oneself a man is to demonstrate genuine courage. On 9/11/01 many of New York's firefighters and policemen went into the Twin Towers to rescue people who had been trapped. Many of them did not come back out alive. They showed themselves men of courage and earned our lasting gratitude. President Abraham Lincoln looked rather skinny and humble. But he was a man of true courage. During the most difficult time in our history, he had to decide whether to concede to the demands of the South and allow America to be divided, or to preserve the Union, though it meant fighting a costly Civil War. After much prayer and struggle, he made the hard decision to preserve the Union at any cost. He knew many people would die, but he believed the preservation of the Union and freedom for the slaves was worthy of such a price. He believed it was God's divine discipline upon our nation for a higher purpose. God used him to maintain our nation as one nation under God, and to use us as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

A real man exercises his courage to obey the truth of God. David said in verse 3, "observe what the Lord your God requires, walk in his ways and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements." David was a real man. David's charge to Solomon was not just from his mouth, but from his life of love for God and obedience to the word of God. When the giant Goliath threatened Israel, the men of Israel were all terrified. But David was filled with righteous anger which came from his love for God. This compelled him to meet Goliath in battle. As they came together, David said to Goliath, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Sam 17:45). With sling and stone, he struck Goliath on the forehead, felling him, and cut off his head.

When David became king, he was not proud. He humbled himself, prayerfully seeking God's will before doing anything. Furthermore, David knew how to repent. Once David committed adultery and murder. He was rebuked by Nathan the prophet. Then David repented of his sin with tears: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love...do not cast me from your presence nor take your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps 51:1,11). Real men repent to restore their love relationship with God.

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David loved the Lord with all his heart. He obeyed the words of God as the expression of his love for God. So he said in Psalm 18:1-2: "I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer...." Also he said in Psalm 25:4-5: "Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are my God and my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."

When David lived as a man before God by observing God's word, God made him prosper wherever he went and in whatever he did. David had experienced this. Now David charged Solomon to hold on to God's word and to live according to God's word. What inheritance should we leave for our children? Should we leave material possessions? Material inheritance may ruin them. Should we leave a legacy of human achievements? This can make people proud and useless. We must leave a spiritual legacy, especially of obedience to God's word. We must fear God and love God and God's word with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Then we can truly prosper and pass on a good spiritual legacy. On the other hand, if we disobey God and become tragic, we cannot say to our children, "Show yourself a man." Parents are a child's best teachers. In order to raise our children or our Bible students, we must live like David. We must walk in the Lord's ways and live by his words. Then we will prosper, our children will prosper, our church will prosper, and our nation will prosper. Success and failure are not in the hands of men, but in the hands of God. We may be weak, but when Almighty God is with us, we will prosper. Let's pray that we may fear God, hold on to God's word, and live according to it.

Second, Solomon followed David's instructions (5-46). David instructed Solomon not to let Joab's gray head go down to the grave in peace (6), for he had killed Abner and Amasa, two of Israel's best military commanders, in cold blood during peace time. David instructed Solomon to show kindness to the sons of Barzillai who supplied food to David and his men during Absalom's rebellion. David helped Solomon to practice both justice and grace at the same time. Even the best of men want to practice only justice or only grace, but David trained Solomon to do both. David also instructed Solomon to deal wisely with Shimei who called down bitter curses on David as he fled from Absalom. David was clear

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in reward and punishment to advance God's will and to root out humanists who hindered God's will. After instructing Solomon, David breathed his last. Solomon sat on the throne of David, and his rule was firmly established (10-12).

Verses 13-25 tell us of Adonijah's death. Though Solomon had spared his life, he had not even begun to repent of his evil desires and insolent behavior. He had merely bided his time, waiting for another opportunity to exalt himself. After David's death, he tested Solomon. He requested Abishag, King David's woman, as his wife. Adonijah was a threat to the peace and stability of the kingdom. How did Solomon deal with him? Solomon was a young teenager, and Adonijah was his much older brother. But Solomon did not hesitate to take decisive action. King Solomon ordered Benaiah to strike Adonijah dead. Solomon had accepted David's charge from his heart.

In verses 26-27, Solomon deals with Abiathar the priest. Abiathar deserved to die because he joined in Adonijah's conspiracy. But Solomon merely dismissed him from priestly office and sent him back home because he had carried the ark of the Lord and had endured hardships with King David. This fulfilled the word the Lord had spoken about the house of Eli.

Verses 28-34 are about the death of Joab. Joab was the first cousin of David. Joab had many military accomplishments in establishing David's kingdom. In spite of all this, why did David see him as a dangerous person and have him removed? It was because he was a worldly man who greatly disturbed the work of God, swayed by his own private concerns. Many years earlier, Joab had murdered Abner as revenge for killing Joab's brother, Asahel in battle (2 Sam 3:27). This caused great trouble to David, for it raised doubts about David's sincerity in uniting a divided kingdom. Joab also murdered Amasa out of thirst for power, and out of envy. Joab also disobeyed David's direct orders and killed Absalom during his rebellion. Joab often acted out of his own sinful desires, doing what was contrary to David's word and to the will of God. David always wanted to peacefully unite the kingdom according to God's will. But each time he tried to do so, Joab's wicked deeds caused by his sinful feelings made it extremely difficult. Joab didn't follow God's will. He followed in his own way. If such people remained in Solomon's kingdom,

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it would be a great disaster. So David ordered Solomon to remove him. Solomon wisely followed David's instruction.

Shimei had cursed David as he was pursued by Absalom. He assumed that God was dethroning David and raising the house of Saul once again. He didn't accept David as the Lord's anointed. He also harbored bitterness. So when David was in a crisis, he called bitter curses down on David. Shimei, like Joab, was self-centered. Neither of them could discern the flow of God's history. They viewed people with humanistic eyes. As soon as this kind of people were removed, the kingdom was firmly established in Solomon's hand. Humanistic people become a huge obstacle to the work of God. Yet we also have traces of humanism in us as well. If we want to be useful to God we must remove these traces from within us.

In this passage we learned how to be a true man and prosper. We must fear God and love God and God's word. We must understand what God is doing in our times and obey his will. Then God will bless us in whatever we do. God will also bless our children, and our Bible students as well.