

Day 49 – Apr. 6

Today, Solomon cements his place on the throne of Israel. And as has been the case, and as was the case normally in that day and place, it is a bloody affair.

Aside: I hear regularly from people that they are sick and tired of all the bloodshed and killing of Israel's history. I hear you, and I feel the same queasiness about the violence, but there are a few things about this we need to recognize for our own good. First, this bloodshed and violence has been here in these stories for thousands of years. Have we not read them before? Or do we have this reaction regularly when we read Israel's history? I fear that we have whitewashed our spiritual history, just as we have our political one, picking and choosing more palatable stories with less violence and ignored the rest. This is ok for our 3rd grade Sunday school class, but not for us as adults. We have to take ownership of our entire spiritual past, not just the parts we like. Second, as I've said before, we cannot judge the people of David's time with the same moral, political and social compass we use today. We are products of our own age just as they were, and in their day, violence and blood were a normal part of life, for better or for worse. Finally, I appreciate our squeamishness and think it speaks well of the fact that, like God, we hate violence, especially against innocents. So own your discomfort, but don't let it keep you from the Truth of our spiritual past.

Ok, on with the text. Solomon, whether by strategy or coincidence, gets rid of all of his political rivals while still maintaining his obedience to God. Adonijah his brother had already attempted a coup of David, and now attempts another one, though a clumsy one. In seeking the hand of Abishag, the young woman chosen to warm King David's bed in his old age, Adonijah was making one final bid for the throne. You'll remember that just 20 pages before, Absalom had demoralized and overpowered King David by sleeping with all of his remaining concubines, a common act of power and conquest in that day. Now Adonijah tried the same thing under the pretense of marriage, and failed. The question I had was why Bathsheba even entertained such an idea and brought it to Solomon. I believe she was a savvy politician and knew the outcome, and so allowed the request to be a good reason for Solomon to execute Adonijah. But whatever the behind-the-scenes plotting, Adonijah is eliminated as a political rival. And this is key because Adonijah, by the law of the land and of God, was indeed the rightful heir to the throne as the eldest brother. But often God has other plans that may oppose even His own law.

Next is Adonijah's followers. Abiathar the priest is deposed, fulfilling God's prophecy through Samuel that Eli's descendants would be stripped of their priestly rank. And then Joab, who, like Adonijah had fled to the sanctuary of the "horns of the altar", was killed there anyway. Why flee to the altar? Blood shed unjustly would sully and despoil the altar, making it unclean which is why this was a safe place for those with a king's rage chasing them. For Adonijah it worked, and he lived. For Joab, per his own request, it didn't and he was killed there anyway. But for Joab, who had killed unjustly, this was a sentence rather than a political maneuver. And so his blood was spilled justly and the altar was not stained. Which is important because if the altar, where things are ultimately made clean, becomes unclean itself, there is nothing that can make them clean again and they are forever removed from God. This was the reason Antiochus IV around 168BC slaughtered a pig on the altar, sparking the Maccabean Revolt. And similarly, this is why Jesus' new teaching that He makes us clean (rather than sacrifices at the altar) is so important, because now our cleanness before God comes from our relationship with Jesus rather than these sacrifices. Jesus cannot become unclean, and so our pathway to God is always open.