

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF FIRST KINGS, CONTINUED

2. LAST WORDS AND DEATH OF DAVID [2:1-11].

2:1-6] - This "last will and testament" Passage is very similar to the language of Psalms 119. These "days" may have been an extended period of months. The words do not necessarily refer to immediate death. David's charge to Solomon may be regarded as twofold:

(1) an exhortation to obey the law of Jehovah (3-4);

(2) an admonition to deal wisely with David's enemies and friends, according to their deserts (5-9).

David specifically instructed Solomon to eliminate his two "most dangerous" enemies: Joab and Shimei. Some critics get all bent out of shape by claiming these instructions to be "extremely cruel"; but we should recognize that while inflicting harsh penalties upon them may have started because of David's personal desire for revenge, that was not the ultimate reason!

Joab, the "chairman" of David's "joint chiefs of staff" was, in fact, guilty of a double murder — Abner (2 Sam 3:27) and Amasa, son of Jether (2 Sam 20:10). It should be further noted that Joab had been correctly accused by David of committing acts of war in times of peace. He therefore must die at once; as illustrated by the picturesque figure of speech with the bloody girdle and shoes (verse 5).

2:7] - The aged Barzillai had sustained David in his flight from his son Absalom (2 Sam 19:31ff); without which, David might have succumbed to starvation in the wilderness.

2:8-9] - During that "Absalom rebellion", this unknown "wannabe", Shimei came out to meet the fleeing King, cursing as he came and flinging dust and stones (an extreme insult) at David and his entourage (2 Sam 16:5-13). After the rebellion had been repressed, Shimei asked for pardon which David gave him as far as execution of punishment was concerned.

There are two views of David's charge to Solomon to "hold him (Shimei) not guiltless (guilty)" (verse 9):

(1) David actually feared that the curse which Shimei had pronounced might someday come true; and therefore, the best way to avoid it was to remove the one who had uttered it; rendering it inoperative.

(2) Since Shimei was a Benjamite from the neighborhood of former King Saul, David feared that he might strike at the throne again, once his protective custody was withdrawn.

Before any actual penalty was imposed, Solomon gave Shimei a reprieve which was strongly conditioned on his "good behavior".

2:10] - The fortress city of "Jebus" which David's army (under the leadership of the aforementioned General Joab) had wrested from the "Jebusites" and later claimed for his capital city became the burial ground for the great King. Though David was born in Bethlehem (also known in Scripture as "The City of David" – remember the announcement of the birth of Jesus), Jerusalem henceforth was to be designated "The City of David".

The "Tomb of David" is still a well-visited tourist site in Jerusalem. It is located in the southwest portion of the city, outside the "old city walls" and somewhat near the site of the "Upper Room", in what would have been part of the original fortress city of "Zion" or "Jebus".

2:11] - David died at the age of seventy, after having reigned a total of forty years. He had reigned seven years over the Hebron area, a small southerly sector within the Tribe of Judah, and thirty-three years over the entire nation of Israel (c 1010— 971 BC).

3. SOLOMON'S ELIMINATION OF HIS RIVALS TO THE THRONE (2:12-46).

2:12-15] – As Solomon was established as King of Israel; his half-brothers all came to "wish him well" (whether they meant it or not). One of them

was Adonijah, who had tried to usurp the throne from him. He attempted to go through Solomon's mother with a seemingly innocent request.

This last statement, "it was from the Lord" clearly tells us that Adonijah knew that Solomon had been designated as the heir apparent by The Lord Himself. It could also be inferred that all the children knew of David's decision – and that David had been led of God Himself in making it.

2:16-17] - He approached Solomon's mother with a seemingly harmless but really insidious request. He said, in effect, "Let Abishag be given to me." This young girl had been David's private "hospice nurse" in his declining state. Solomon's mother, Bath-Sheba did not have God's Leadership skills and could see nothing unusual or perverse in this request; but simply an "affair of the heart," and so she readily agreed to talk to the king.

It should be realized that this was prior to God's officially granting "wisdom" to the King. He was already ahead of the game.

2:18-19] - She innocently became a go-between for Adonijah. With great courtesy the King received his mother with all the proper protocols . . . until she placed the request before him.

2:20-22] - Solomon's language here is sarcasm; as he could see right through this plot. Even though David had not "known" Abishag sexually, she could have nevertheless been considered an inheritor. With her could go the rights to the throne. Having once failed in an abortive attempt to seize the kingdom, Adonijah now sought in a more subtle way to gain his objective.

2:23-25] - This time, Adonijah would not be pardoned. He had failed to appreciate the mercy that had been shown him; therefore relentless judgment fell.

The new general of the army, Benaiah was dispatched to kill Adonijah immediately; which sentence was accomplished.

2:26-27] - Abiathar, a descendant of Aaron through Eli, was removed from his priestly office and sent back in disgrace to his home village. The reason for Abiathar's punishment, as stated by Solomon, was that he had par-

ticipated in Adonijah's rebellion. Though expelled, he was not executed, because he had remained faithful to David in the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam 15:24ff).

2:28-34] - Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the Tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.

Solomon now began to carry out the orders of his deceased father regarding his enemies. The Tabernacle was located at Gibeon (see 3:4), to which General Joab had fled, knowing that his doom was sealed. However, not even the "sanctuary of the altar" could afford refuge for the willful murderer. He had been rather slow to execute Joab because of his past service to the throne: he had not followed Absalom, but he had followed Adonijah.

Claiming "sanctuary" in the Tabernacle, Joab was first spared by Benaiah. This is to Benaiah's credit in that he did not want to violate any principles of protocol in this very serious act. Since Joab had committed murder and treason, he was worthy of death – even considering his prior service; and Benaiah wanted to be sure that was Solomon's decree.

The act of punishment was tantamount to removing any "bloody acts" from the family of David and placing them on the family of Joab "forever". It was necessary to do this!

The King was giving concrete evidence as to the justice of the sentence. The words of the "benediction" imply that once bloodguilt was removed from the throne, it would then stand in a position of blessing before God.

In an extreme act of grace, after the execution had taken place, Joab was interred in his own house; and the old general was not dishonored after all. To be buried on one's own property was a mark of distinction as in the case of Samuel.

2:35] – Solomon then officially replaced Joab with Benaiah; and moved on further down the line to replace Priest Abiathar with Zadok.

Zadok's appointment is going to give a lot of problems because of political and parliamentary maneuvering by the state from that time forward.

2:36-44] - The next problem for Solomon was to deal with Shimei.

The Kidron Valley divided Benjamin from Judah; and since Shemai was from Benjamin, this order forbade him to return to his own tribe. He was obviously placed under strict surveillance.

Whether Shemai forgot the restriction, or just decided to push Solomon on it; he violated the requirement of his "parole" and left the city limits of Jebus. It is difficult to believe that he forgot the requirement; and it is my opinion that he misunderstood compassion with weakness in Solomon!

Whether or not the use of the death penalty was justified is something for seminarians to argue over; but clearly, Solomon read into Shemei's actions a very serious motive, and punished him with death.

Solomon had now completed everything David had charged him to do!

2:45-46] - Solomon "congratulated" himself by proclaiming that the curse placed on David (and his family) would now be removed with Shemei's death.

NOTE: It would have been far better for Solomon if he had been as zealous in obeying the commands of God as he was in obeying the commands of David!