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1<sup>st</sup> Kings 1:1-40

Women of the Hebrew Scriptures: Bathsheba ~ Ensuring Legacy

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## 1 Kings 1:1-40

King David was old and advanced in years; and although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. <sup>2</sup>So his servants said to him, Let us find a *governess* to keep our King warm. <sup>5</sup>Now Adonijah son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king"; he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. <sup>6</sup>His father, King David, had never at any time displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?" He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom. <sup>7</sup>He conferred with Joab son of Zeruiah and with the priest Abiathar, and they supported Adonijah. <sup>8</sup>But the priest Zadok, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the prophet Nathan, and Shimei, and Rei, and David's own warriors did not side with Adonijah. <sup>9</sup>Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fatted cattle by the stone Zohemoth, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, <sup>10</sup>but he did not invite the prophet Nathan or Benaiah or the warriors or his brother Solomon. <sup>11</sup>Then Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, "Have you not heard that Adonijah son of Haggith has become king and our lord David does not know it? <sup>12</sup>Now therefore come, let me give you advice, so that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. <sup>13</sup>Go in at once to King David, and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne? Why then is Adonijah king?' <sup>14</sup>Then while you are still there speaking with the king, I will come in after you and confirm your words." <sup>15</sup>So Bathsheba went to the king in his room. The king was very old; <sup>16</sup>Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance to the king, and the king said, "What do you wish?" <sup>17</sup>She said to him, "My lord, you swore to your servant by the Lord your God, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne. <sup>18</sup>But now suddenly Adonijah has become king, though you, my lord the king, do not know it. <sup>19</sup>He has sacrificed oxen, fatted cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the children of the king, the priest Abiathar, and Joab the commander of the army; but your servant Solomon he has not invited. <sup>20</sup>But you, my lord the king—the eyes of all Israel are on you to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. <sup>21</sup>Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king sleeps with his ancestors, that my son Solomon and I will be counted offenders." <sup>22</sup>While she was still speaking with the king, the prophet Nathan came in. <sup>23</sup>The king was told, "Here is the prophet Nathan." When he came in before the king, he paid homage to the king, with his face to the ground. <sup>24</sup>Nathan said, "My lord the king, have you said, 'Adonijah shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne'? <sup>25</sup>For today he has gone down and has sacrificed oxen, fatted cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's children, Joab the commander of the army, and the priest Abiathar, who are now eating and drinking before him, and saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!' <sup>26</sup>But he did not invite me, your servant, and the priest Zadok, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon. <sup>27</sup>Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not let your servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?" <sup>28</sup>King David answered, "Summon Bathsheba

to me.” So she came into the king’s presence, and stood before the king. <sup>29</sup>The king swore, saying, “As the Lord lives, who has saved my life from every adversity, <sup>30</sup>as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,’ so will I do this day.” <sup>31</sup>Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground, and did obeisance to the king, and said, “May my lord King David live forever!” <sup>32</sup>King David said, “Summon to me the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.” When they came before the king, <sup>33</sup>the king said to them, “Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. <sup>34</sup>There let the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ <sup>35</sup>You shall go up following him. Let him enter and sit on my throne; he shall be king in my place; for I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.” <sup>36</sup>Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, “Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so ordain. <sup>37</sup>As the Lord has been with my lord the king, so may The Lord be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David.” <sup>38</sup>So the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, went down and had Solomon ride on King David’s mule, and led him to Gihon. <sup>39</sup>There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, “Long live King Solomon!” <sup>40</sup>And all the people went up following him, playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth quaked at their noise.

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord  
**Thanks be to God**

### **“Women of the Hebrew Scriptures: Bathsheba – Ensuring Legacy”**

He is now old and growing feeble –  
but at the height of his power the world paid attention.  
He brought together political factions,  
Built an empire;  
Took what he wanted when he wanted it – trophies, women – and he wasn’t bashful about it.  
Had children by three different wives and then had strange and complicated relationships with all of them.  
Now that he is aging and losing his faculties, there is a power struggle.  
Who is going to take over the empire?

I am of course talking about the television show, Succession on HBO. This story follows the character, Logan Roy, and his children. Logan is the patriarch and CEO of the Waystar corporation – a global media conglomerate with vast resources and influence. As different factors such as age and health impact Logan’s standing in the company, the children are all vying for top spot.

Does this sound familiar though? It should! There are more than a few current day scenarios that are playing out in the world around us today that reference the same themes. But proving

the proverb from Ecclesiastes true, *“What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.”* (Ecc. 1:9) The basic plotline of Succession could have been ripped from the headlines of the Jerusalem Times during the time period of our story from the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings. To understand the importance of Bathsheba in today’s passage it is important to understand David and the context of his life – not that I want to define Bathsheba by the men in her life. But how she used her own agency and what power she had in today’s story is in direct relation to the men and power structures of her time period.

Ok, David – KING DAVID – that King David – the beloved king that united Israel and Judah – the northern and southern kingdoms bringing all the tribes of Israel under a single monarch. Technically he was the 2<sup>nd</sup> King of Israel – David was the shepherd boy who replaced Saul whom God rejected. David was the first renaissance man... he was apparently great at everything – In battle, he triumphed over Goliath the Philistine armed only with a sling shot and stones. It is said he was a legendary harpist, and poet – most of the Psalms in the bible are said to have been written by David or to be about the reign of King David. David was said to be very handsome and he definitely embraced a broad understanding of the practice of marriage – having eight wives, with Bathsheba becoming his final wife. How Bathsheba became David’s wife is important because it was the fatal flaw of his reign. Bathsheba was the world’s beauty, but she was married to another man. When David saw her, he wanted her and sent for her while her husband was at war. When she became pregnant with David’s child, the king arranged for her first husband’s to be stationed in a place while in battle that would lead to his death. David’s behavior in this situation displeased The Lord who spoke through the Prophet Nathan saying, *“<sup>10</sup>Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. <sup>11</sup>Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house;”* (2 Sam. 12:10-11)

That is exactly what happened. King David’s son’s had it rough. The first child conceived with Bathsheba died shortly after childbirth. There is little said in the bible about David’s 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest son, so it is believed that he also died at a young age. This left Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah and Solomon. Amnon was killed by Absalom for hurting their sister. After returning to Jerusalem from exile Absalom staged a coup that led David to strike him down.

Years have passed since that coup attempt and David is now very advanced in age. The text tells us that David, once so vital and gregarious, can’t even stay warm. It is so bad that a governess, a full-time caregiver, must be appointed to keep him warm. The text is way more explicit than the word governess, but the point is that David is no longer the man he once was, and this is having political consequences.

Adonijah the oldest living son has read the political landscape and sees the power void developing. I am going to try and assume the best intentions about Adonijah here – he is the oldest son...he probably assumed he was going to be King. Today’s text tells us, “Adonijah exalted himself declaring, ‘I will be king.’” Without consulting the feeble king David, Adonijah goes through all the motions. He gathered the appearance of a royal procession, he spoke with some of David’s political allies – getting the political endorsements, if you will, of strategic leaders from David’s past.

But as he was building his own little fiefdom, he must have known something wasn't right because he did not invite his brother, Solomon, or other important religious leaders, like the Prophet Nathan.

*"I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house"*

It seems the repercussions of those words will not end.

I think it is important to note that what happens next is not about God. God is not an active agent anywhere in this story. We have interpreted God's activity into the text, but God is not active. There is not a place in this story where God directs Nathan's actions.

[Having said that,] There are clues in previous stories for how we think God wanted things to turn out and it wasn't with a King Adonijah. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, the text tells us that at Solomon's birth, "The Lord LOVED Solomon – this child found favor with The Lord."

These warm feelings did not wane as Solomon grew up. Solomon was blessed and highly favored. But nowhere did God tell the Prophet Nathan to take action as David's health was waning.

But that is what the Prophet Nathan does. Observing what Adonijah is doing he goes to the person he perceives to have the POWER necessary to ensure a future where he has access to the King of Israel. The Prophet Nathan goes to Bathsheba. He says, 'Ok it's time to worry. That other son is trying to take power. And you know what's going to happen to you and Solomon and me when that happens. He gives her a plan to plant the idea that King David promised to make Solomon King. Then he will come in and confirm those words.

Bathsheba hears Nathan's words but takes it a step further. Where Nathan told her to ask the question, "Did you not say Solomon was going to be King?"; Bathsheba goes to David and says, "You swore on gram's grave that Solomon was going to be King...Oh sorry, that is what we say in my family when we are really serious about something.

Bathsheba actually said,

*"My lord, you swore to your servant by the Lord your God, saying:*

*Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king,*

*and he shall sit on my throne.*

<sup>18</sup>*But now suddenly Adonijah has become king,*

*though you, my lord the king, do not know it."*

The prophet Nathan does come in and continues to handle a King whose fabled mental capacities have definitely dimmed. Together Bathsheba and Nathan ensure the future of the God's people by getting David to make it official – to crown Solomon as his successor and King of Israel.

The people of Israel were obviously THRILLED to have a King Solomon instead of a King Adonijah. They were partying in the streets so much that the earth quaked at their noise.

This is a very complicated story – there are two competing coups angling for control and power in David’s Israel. His mental and physical abilities are seriously diminished, but David is STILL the king of Israel. When I read this story, I am always left feeling like Nathan develops this plan for his own purposes – he needs to remain close to power. When I try to assume the best intentions with Nathan I will say he does this so that the King of Israel is close to God’s Messenger. I love that it was Bathsheba who was the person with the power to make things happen here. Bathsheba, who was grafted into this family with very little of her own agency or power, turned out to be the person who held David’s heart and who helped direct him towards God’s intended future. Bathsheba becomes invested in Nathan’s plan for her son, for Solomon. She is motivated by love for another, not necessarily for herself.

This is an important point for a church in a time of transition. In times of transition challenges to power and claims of authority can arise from many different places. How do we value these competing voices and competing narratives? What drives our decision making? When God’s plan isn’t as clear as we would necessarily like it to be in the moment, what steps are we taking to ground ourselves in God’s call for the community so we can move forward together?

I pray that we can be like Bathsheba – that we can make decisions with love in our hearts – a love that drives us to take action for others. And may that love be a reflection of God’s true intentions for the God’s people – not a love that is easily manipulated or emotional, but a love for justice that flows from the heart of God.

May it be so. Amen.