

## POETICS AND POLITICS IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE (1 KINGS 1-2)

First, let me explain exactly what we are going to talk about. Now politics has always been associated with the Bible. They are an inseparable pair. In a way you might say that the association of politics with poetics meaning the art of storytelling in the Bible is as old as Biblical interpretation, which means that it goes back to ancient times. I mean the beginning goes back to ancient times in both: Jewish and the Christian tradition. Let me briefly, very briefly illustrate.

In the Jewish tradition for example you have the ancient Rabbis. I mean, those whose words and works are immortalized in the Talmud. And they were of course the most ancient interpreters of the Bible. Not least, because they had to derive from the Bible the laws which round out Biblical law. So, and I return to it also in the Christian tradition, there arose the problem of authority. Authority, in other words, if you have God's word in the Bible, what right have humans to add to it, even if they are Rabbis? So in a sense it becomes a political problem. In other words, when I talk about politics there are nice sounding definitions but ultimately politics comes down to power. It's a question of obtaining power and the use, the exercise of power. And in the case of the Rabbis at least power depended on the authority in the eyes

of the people. And so in the interpretation practice of the Bible you can see how they took steps to increase the authority by trying to show that today is continuous with the Bible. Continuity is a key word because actually to this day when new laws are made then there is usually in the temple shown that it is not a revolution because revolutions in society have never worked. So they try to show continuity. What does continuity in interpretation in practice mean? So let me give you a simple example.

In rabbinical interpretation the good Biblical characters behaved like the ancient Rabbis. For example Jacob and Esau are described as going to the academy of the day to study the Torah. Never mind that the Torah was not given at that time. The Rabbis commit this break of tradition in order to show that Biblical life and present day life is the same. So in this way they establish a kind of continuity and authority, because if it's the same they have an authority to interpret the verses because it's the same, isn't it? So this is a very small example. We could speak about it all day of the ways that they obtain the power of establishing the law and they obtained it in a way that was acceptable to the people. And it was even more political than might be seen because at the time there was no longer a Jewish state. Most of the time

of the rabbis, the Jewish state did not exist. So in so far as there was authority in power it was concentrated in the rabbinic circles, which was epitomized by the high court of the Rabbis, the Sanhedrin.

So let's move to the Christian part. In ancient Christianity the same problem arose. Basically, the same problem: the problem of authority. And it was even more acute than in the case of the Rabbis because here foreigners claim continuity with the Bible, with the Hebrew Bible, at Biblical times. This is, if you think about it in political terms, the power behind the annexation of the so called Old Testament to the New Testament. Now of course there are very theological reasons that have been given over the ages for this twinning of the books. And I don't want to go into these reasons and certainly I don't want to dispute them here because that's not my point. All I want to do is simply to present a slightly new perspective on this act and say it was an act of trying to obtain legitimation.

As I said in the case of the Rabbis but now in a much more acute way, there arises a new religion and people ask: "Who are you? Where do you come from? With what authority do you speak?" So the way to obtain authority was again to lean on the old tradition, in this case, the so called Old Testament. And of course in Judaism and earlier in Israel it was not even called the Old Testament. The Old Testament is a political name in the sense that then you have, as it were, a continuity from the "old" to the "new". And these interpretive terms found expression in the central law of interpretation that was established in the New Testament itself. As you know, this principle of

law of interpretation is the one called "figura". The figura means that the interpretive term is used that the New Testament is already predicted by the Old Testament. Or the other way round, that the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. And you can find it made explicit within the New Testament itself, in the gospels, when they say: "Jesus said: This and that as it is written". And "is written" is always followed by interpretation from the Old Testament, in other words, that I said: "This is the way to show that the new is a fulfillment of the old". It's not a new thing, it simply makes manifest, it realizes, it fulfills what was written in the old. So, even without going to further details, I think you can see there is a remarkable parallel between the ancient traditions of interpretation in Judaism and Christianity. And I also hope that it is clear that what sounds at first sight strange speaking of politics in this context, is not so strange, because in each case it is a question of obtaining authority, authority to act, authority to influence, and so forth. In short it is a question of how an establishment gets enough legitimation so that it could influence society at large. So as I said, the relation between the Biblical text and politics or the art of Biblical narrative and politics goes back to the earliest times of interpretation.

So I will skip the older millennia in between because the examples are innumerable and just remind you of a few contemporary examples. Perhaps the best known one is feminism. That is, the rise and the struggle for women rights has of course tried to find a support in the Bible or tried to re-read, if you ask me, to reinvent the Bible.

Then for example questions are asked by feminism interpreters which were never asked before and it could be shown that the questions are irrelevant but it doesn't matter, they keep asking them. For example there is a Biblical narrative where a woman is mentioned and those interpreters will ask: "Why isn't the woman given a larger role?" To give one example of hundreds, in the story in Genesis 22, when Abraham goes to sacrifice his son Isaac, they keep asking: "And why is nothing said about Sarah in this affair?" Or in another story the analysis became very famous in feminist circles and has been attacked ever since the story of the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34. And my interpretation of that narrative has been attacked now for over two decades. Because it's a story of how Jacob's daughter Dinah was raped by a Canaanite and her brothers took revenge by killing them off. But they say: "I have said nothing about how Dinah felt about this business." So I'm a criminal against human kind, or more exactly against woman kind. So what I want to show again, the point is obvious. There is a political fight for the rights of women. And it is important in the Bible because the Bible is such an important text that no one can ignore it. So despite all the immense differences in time, in ideology, in the mode of operation between the Rabbis or the early writers of the New Testament and feminism, you can see that there is a disassociation of the Bible and its art of telling with some external interest, some external ideology, that does not have anything to do with the Bible itself. So this is what I'm not going to talk about. What I want to talk about is the politics within the Bible itself, the play, the interplay of politics and poetics in Biblical narrative itself as

part of its own message and its own communication.

So before we concentrate on our case in point in Kings, let me bring a larger example briefly that is relevant to this example we'll be focusing on. Well, there is a book in the Bible which is among the least read books, the book of Chronicles. And it's a pity that it's not more read because it's one of the most important interesting books in the Bible from certain points of view. As you probably know the book of Chronicles retells Biblical history. Most of it is a retelling of what was told already in earlier books. So the book of Chronicles starts with the word "Adam". That is with the beginning of humanity. But its main interest is retelling what was told in the books of Samuel and Kings. And when we compare what was written before to what Chronicles rewrites we find various differences. And among them I want to concentrate on the one that is of direct concern to us. And that is the difference between the books of Samuel and Kings which represent the mainstream of Biblical narrative and the view of Chronicles which is a later book and a very politically tendentious book. And political tendency is very clear. To the book of Chronicles David is an ideal. He is an ideal person and he's an ideal forever because the Messiah is going to arise from his lineage. And in a way the re-writing or the retelling of Chronicles is a reinterpretation of history.

That is when the Chronicler retells the stories about David, especially in the book of Samuel but also our story in what is told here in the book of Kings. It has a policy dictated by its ideal political interests. And the policy is very simple. All that those books tell,

Samuel and Kings, which is in David's disfavour and which present him in a bad light, is cut out. Nothing remains of David's faults, nothing of his crimes. Not even the fact that, for example to take the most famous crime in the story of David and Bathseba, when you're in a time of war he slept with the wife of one of his officers. And then when she told him she was pregnant he got the officer recalled, Uriah the Hittite. He got him recalled to Jerusalem and, to cut the long story short, got him killed. So, if you look for any mention of this terrible scandal, where a king abuses his power and commits adultery and murder, if you look for it in Chronicles, no place. And again the reason is simple. The reason is again the political ideal. It's that David is the one who determines in his house, the one who determines the past and who determines the future as well because the Messiah will come from him and the Messiah can't come from an adulterer and murderer. So again what you find is that within the Bible itself there are reinterpretations of earlier times or earlier writings that are driven by a mixture of ideology and ideal politics, as I call it. And what I want to claim further this is an example. We find a whole book. A book made up of two parts which is devoted to idealizing David. But the same principle holds to the Bible itself in fact of almost every Biblical book in every Biblical story. Because you have to remember that the Bible does not establish a religion in some of the modern senses of the word. The main thing in the Bible is action, human action, individual action, social action, national action, international action. And in this sense, the politics in the sense of relational struggles for power and for politics is built into the fabric of Biblical narrative.

And our story in the beginning of Kings is, I think, a wonderful case in point. So we'll get down to it but I want to apologize in advance. We could easily spend the whole day on it and I'm not exaggerating, from morning to night. Because as I think as I hope we'll see the Bible's art is an art of miniature. And the Bible packs into a single chapter what is sometimes written in the modern period in the form of a whole novel. Just think of how Thomas Mann who wrote a few chapters in Genesis into a multi-volume work about Joseph and his brothers. So what I think is, we're going to see some parts and some points but we could go into a lot of further details and therefore I apologize in advance that we're not going to go into everything, we simply don't have time.

Now King David was old and advanced in years and although they covered him with clothes he could not get warm. Therefore his servants said to him: "Let a young maiden be brought for the Lord my King and let her wait upon the King and be his nurse. Let her lay in your bosom that my Lord the King may be warm." So if we stop a moment here. This is quite a jump from the last time, we saw David when he was a middle aged man but still in his best strength, and here (in v. 1 and 2) we find him old. I mean he can't even get warm and his servants, which doesn't mean servant in a modern sense but it means the people close to him, the advisers, the people with whom he spent most of his life. And so they're worried of course for their own interest as well because the King is old and they lose much of their influence if he is sick. So in any fact the book starts with a political problem. The main political authority, the King, is weak. And the servants of

course not only worried about David the man, they are worried about David the King. And they hit upon an interesting idea. That young flesh will warm up these old bones. And it's not even said that David agreed, but they go ahead with the plan. And we are not shown what the plan is. I mean when they say: "Let her lay in your bosom, that my Lord the King may be warm", what do they have in mind? That she will act as a warm bottle of water? Or perhaps they have something else in mind which in the sense of an euphemism is something more radical for these old bones? In other words: A new concubine?

Now you find here in a very typical way one of the Bible's main forces or main devices of telling, namely the device of repetition. So you find here that there is a scenario. They tell him what they purposed to do. And now what we just read is the performance. This is what they will do. And in a way typical to the Bible, the performance is a little different from the scenario. And what is the difference? In the scenario they said that they will look for a virgin girl, a virgin maiden. And here in the performance we find that they're looking for a beautiful virgin maiden because she will be more effective for the purpose if she is beautiful. And if we missed a point, then the narrator repeats. Not only was she beautiful, he says. He says that she was very beautiful. So in other words, in plain language: They looked throughout the land for the most beautiful girl in Israel, the beauty Queen. And this is what they bring to the King's bed. And we learn in verse 4: And she became his minister but the King knew her not. In other words, not even the most beautiful girl in Israel can arouse the

King which means that the situation is really bad. David, as appears, is really so old as to become totally ineffective to rule, which means that the Kingdom of Israel is in trouble.

So in a way so typical to the Bible you can see how the personal and the political intermingle. And this teaches us something about the art of the Bible. I mean, I prefer that we see that art of the Bible as the tale unfolds but I'd like to say one thing, perhaps formulate a principle too, that you have already seen in action. Well, let me for now say just this: that the Bible's art of storytelling, is first of all an art of silence. In other words: what is significant is sometimes not so much what a narrator says as what he does not say. And what he does not say consists of mainly two silences:

First, the absence of judgment. The Bible rarely judges its characters and even more rarely its main characters. And the second silence is the silence about the world that is represented in the story that is told, the many important details. Sometimes the most important facts are not told. For example: here, as in many other Biblical stories, we do not get any, not even a single indication of the inner life of the characters. It is a story full of inner life in the sense that the characters are constantly plotting. So they have intentions, they have plans, they have maneuvers, but we are told nothing about them. We are told only about the obvious actions. This is important to keep in mind as we progress with the story.

Now a second principle which is even wider is that the Bible's art is an art of indirection. In other words, the Bible will not tell us things straight. Even in

what it says it expects us to infer for ourselves the real meaning of what was told. For example if we take the 4 verses we just read you realize that much of the few things even that we said are not said there by the narrator himself. They do not speak for example about the real intentions of the servants, for example, the hope of sexual intercourse of warming up the King. And even less does the narrator speak about the wider implications of the King's weakness. I mean officially, nominally those opening verses talk about an old man whose associates worry about him. The wider implication is the fact that this is a huge political problem which is never formulated by the narrator. And the same holds for the immediate sequel.

Look at verse 5: Now we can see another manifestation of what I call the Bible's art of silence and indirection. Here the indirection manifests itself in the art of composition, or, in more technical terms, of parataxis. So when you ask yourself: Why is the story, I mean after opening, why is the continuation about Adonia who exalts himself saying: "I will be King"? And the Biblical narrator expects us to infer the answer. There is a saying that nature abhors a vacuum. And the same is true of politics. When there is a weakness in the centre of power then somebody will try to push his way in. And that is exactly what happens in the case of Adonia. The King is weak, so he says: "I will be King!" And he will do it even in his father's lifetime.

Now let me quickly give you some background about the wider political framework in which this story happens. I said that the opening shows not only David but Israel to be in trouble, and

the trouble is even deeper than you might think. The narrator does not say everything about it but he expects us to make our conclusions from our knowledge of the book of Samuel where the Kingdom was established. And the book of Samuel showed us that the Kingdom rests on two feet: A King, in order to receive legitimate authority, needs first of all to be accepted or sometimes initiated by God. But he must also then be accepted by the people. If you remember the first King to be chosen by God was Saul. God ordered a prophet to anoint him, but the people did not accept him. And even some said: "Hey, will this man be lord over us?" Then arose a national emergency. Israel had to be defended against an enemy. Saul took very energetic action. He united the people, brought them together and won the war. Then he was in fact what Samuel proposed him to be. After this victory, he says: "Let us renew the Kingship." In other words: Now the King rests not only on one foot, God, but on the other foot as well, the people are finally behind him. And as we saw Saul's rise so we saw his fall. Once he lost his favour with God because of his sins, he also loses favour with the people and David becomes the popular hero. And in becoming the popular hero, he of course obtains the solid position of a double support, for he was anointed by God, already as a boy; and now when Saul loses his support, both, by God and the people. He becomes the popular hero, because he is the man who leads Israel to war against the enemy. In other words, what the book of Samuel has told us is this: There is no Kingship without this double support. So there is at least a kind of precedent for what a King needs in order to become established.

But how does a King, when he goes out, when he dies, or perhaps is killed, how does a King inherit the Kingdom? There is no law of succession, because in (the book of) Samuel there was no successor. Saul was killed on the battle field. David did not succeed him in the sense that he inherited it from him. But he was independently anointed and supported by the people. So you have to remember that here in our present chapter there is no law of succession, which means political chaos, because the King is weak. There is this vacuum at the heart of the political centre. And there is no way to determine who will come after the King. So it means an open struggle. And this is the context in which we have to see that Adonia decides that as there is no rule, there is no heir, no etiquette of succession, he is going to make himself King, King by force in fact. What he plans is a putsch. And it is in this light that we have to see the immediate continuation.

So we are told that he exalted himself, saying: "I will be King". And he prepared for himself chariots, horsemen and fifty men to run before him. His father had never at any time displeased him by asking: "Why have you done thus and so?" In other words, he is a spoiled child. In fact like all David's children. David was one of the toughest men in history. And there is a very, very interesting question: Were there any human feelings? I mean as distinct from his warm relationship with God? But he had one weakness, and these were his children. If you remember the book of Samuel, you find that wherever his children are concerned he exerts no control. And remember he was a control freak! This is the only way that a young shepherd from Bethlehem could become a ruler. He was not only

King of Israel. What he ruled was in effect the whole territory promised by God. From the river of Euphrates to what's called the river of Egypt. So this was a territory he controlled which is many times bigger than Israel itself. And you can't do it without exerting very, very careful control over your army, over your officers and so forth. And so you see the chaos in his house. There is one son that rapes a sister. Not a full sister, a half-sister because the mothers were different. This is the story of Amnon and Tamar. And then the brother, the full brother of the sister, the famous Absalom or the notorious Absalom, kills Amnon as a revenge. And David seems to be helpless. I mean he does not say anything and does not even react forcefully. So I come back to Absalom in a minute.

This is the background in which this behaviour of Adonia has to be seen. The chaos, the political chaos is even greater than you might think because David has no control over his children. And now Adonia is too old to be controlled. And he wants to inherit his father in his lifetime. That's why I call it a "putsch". So what we are told in verse 6, his father has never displeased him by asking: "Why have you done thus and thus?" He was also a very handsome man and he was born next to Absalom. Why is this told? Why is this important? This verse, the most interesting thing is this little word "also". Also like whom? If you say also, it's like somebody else. Now who was the last mentioned handsome person? It was Abishag the Shunammite. And it is no accident that in the next chapter he wants to marry her. As they say: "the handsome goes to the handsome". And so it looks. But when we hear that next he said: he was born after

Absalom, then a bell rings. Because if you remember, Absalom is described in terms that no Biblical hero is described, I mean in terms of his beauty. I read quickly a couple of verses from 2 Samuel 14, describing him: "Now", says the narrator, "in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his beauty as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the top of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he cut the hair of his head, for at the end of every year he used to cut it, when it was heavy on him he cut it. So when he cut the hair of his head he weighed the hair of his head 200 Shekels by the King's weight".

Now this doesn't sound very Biblical. This is a song of praise for beauty. You will find nothing like it through all the Bible. He was really, apparently, he was really a man of extraordinary beauty. But at the same time when we are reading Kings, he is the drama, the dramatic figure in David's history. Because we remember what happened afterwards. I mean, there is this poetic description of his beauty, but then this beautiful young man rebelled against his father, the father who loved him more than he loved anyone else in his life. And there is this terrible description of David running away. David knows his son. And when he hears that he is in Hebron and has declared himself a King, David says: "Let's run!" And the people are following him. So David says: "We must leave Jerusalem and run away for our lives!" And if you haven't read those chapters recently, I strongly advise you to read them. These are the terrible chapters of this great King. He is running away from his capital and followed by the few people who are loyal to him. On the way his enemies curse him and throw stones at him

until he crosses the Jordan river to the other side. There he gathers the people who are loyal to him, the armies from different parts of Israel, and prepares for the attack. In the mean time Absalom comes to Jerusalem. He conquers Jerusalem without any fight because the King has left. He then commits the really incredible act of sleeping with his father's wives on the roof of the palace so that all the people will see that he is the King now. Then there is of course the battle and, as usual, David wins. So Absalom is killed in the battle and there is the story of David's grief and so forth. So the story of Absalom, the name of Absalom, is a trauma in David's court and everyone knows it.

So now, what happens here, Adonia is likened to Absalom, he is analogized to Absalom. Because when he says he was also very handsome, then he is not only handsome like Abishag, but he is handsome like the handsomest man in Israel, his brother Absalom. And once we notice that, we also remember what Adonia did: prepare for himself chariots and horsemen and fifty men to run before him. This, the first to do, was Absalom. So, if you put all these things together, you have a very detailed analogy between Adonia and this beautiful monster Absalom. So, you see the art of indirection. The Bible has said not one word in Adonias disfavour. All it has done is very quietly allow us to draw a likeness in analogy with the past. But if we remember Absalom and what he did, this is a very civil judgment on Adonia. In effect, it means he is not worthy to be King, just like Absalom. And remember, Absalom made himself King. He did not aspire to be a King. He was King for a short while. And so, when you read this, there is this stamp of illegitimacy and

disfavour on Adonia which we have to remember as the story unfolds.

So now, when we read the verse again, he was also a very handsome man and he was born next after Absalom. Again, why is that important? First of all, to link him with Absalom. But it also means that he is the oldest surviving son. And apparently, that is why he thinks that he deserves the throne. But remember, there is no such law of succession. There is no primogeniture in Israel, certainly not in the Kingdom and its succession. And according to God's law the opposite is true. Because according to divine logic it is throughout the Bible the youngest son who gets chosen. That is what the Bible says: that first of all God's logic is not human logic, and second, that God's logic is always stronger than human logic. So according to the art of indirection, the Bible's art of indirection, Adonia is not worthy because he is like Absalom with all the faults. And he is unworthy because he is the eldest surviving son. And this is really an indirection, because the eldest should be the worthiest, right? In most of the world the eldest son is automatically heir. But one doesn't understand the Bible, if one doesn't understand the reversal of human logic by divine logic. And it is not only a matter of succession or inheritance. According to the Bible's logic, small is better than big. For example David, who was the smallest, not only the youngest, the smallest in height. He is described as a boy who is better than his bigger brothers, who are all as tall as Saul was. Again, in battle, for example, in the time of Gideon, in the book of Judges, God tells him: "Send most of the people home!" And he stays with 300 people against an enemy who was numberless. And he

of course wins with God's help because the divine logic works. Small is better than big. Few are better than many. And if we are talking about the book of Judges, look at the Judges! It's very interesting! You find that every judge is in some sense abnormal. That is, he has some quality that in other contexts or in other cultures would automatically disqualify him from being a judge, a judge in a large sense, because a judge is not mainly even a legal position but a position of leadership. So the first judge is left-handed. And we know that for thousands of years the left side is the unlucky side. Next what we have is, heaven forbid, a woman, which is Deborah the prophetess. And if you don't get the point, it is an abnormal situation for a woman suddenly to lead the people to war. She is not a general. The general is Barak. And this general is not ready to go a single step without her holding his hand. When she tells him: "Go out and save the people", he says: "If you go with me, I'll go, if you don't go with me, I won't go!" So here is another abnormality. And you could go on. I mean, you have Jephtha who is the son of a whore and you have Samson who spends most of his time with whores. In short, again it's divine logic at work. God does not work the way that human affairs usually operate.

So, if we return to our case in point, the fact that Adonia is the eldest surviving son works in his disfavour together with his analogy to Absalom, which also means that there is yet no other contender. But according to the Bible's art of indirection, almost any other son is preferable. So if we look forward, the son who will win is of course Salomon. And nothing is said about Salomon in this chapter because he does nothing. As we'll see, the one

who acts is his mother. And so we don't know anything about him. He doesn't do anything. But never the less, the implication is that he is preferable to Adonia. He has no resemblance to Absalom and he is of course a younger son. So in fact, the praise of Salomon is indirect, negative in fact. He is not Adonia, so it's not very high praise. But it is relative praise. Relative to Adonia, he is a reasonable candidate. I hope you see how much indirection the story involves.

So we go on, and Adonia conversed with Joab, the son of Zeruah, and with Abiatar, the priest, two important figures. One is Joab, who is David's cousin and the minister of defence, minister of war. So that's why he conversed with him. He forms a pact with him and with Abiatar, the priest. And Abiatar is not just a priest, he is the high priest. You see, the need for continuity is everywhere. I mean what he needs, Adonia, if there would be a new King: he needs two established figures who are known to the people and who will show that they are with him, so there is a continuity of the old regime. So he conversed with them and they followed Adonia and helped him. But Zadok, the priest, and Benaja and Nathan, the prophet, who are other important figures, are David's mighty men who are not with Adonia, and for some reason he did not invite them.

So I skip verse 9: and then Adonia invites those who are allied with him to a feast, a feast in which he wants to proclaim himself King with their support. So again, there is an implication that we need to draw. What I mean is, in the next chapter you will find Adonia telling his story of what happened after his loss. And the story is as follows:

"The people were with me, but God was with Salomon." In other words, there is "vox populi" and "vox dei". And God wins because he is stronger. So Salomon became King. That's the story. But this is not true. This is a false story. If we look at chapter one, the people are not at all involved. Nobody asked them. It is a court conspiracy by those important figures on the court: Joab, who is in fact the concentration of power as the minister of war, and the holiest man in the Kingdom, the high priest. They are part of the court. They are of David's court and they are David's own supporters. And it is with them that he hopes to proclaim himself King. It's not "vox populi" and "vox dei". God is not with him and the people are neither. So, what I mean, it is another implication which we are supposed to draw. It all happens within the closed circle of the court. It's closed politics.

So we proceed to verse 11: Then Nathan said to Bathseba, the mother of Salomon: "Have you not heard that Adonia the son of Hagid has become King and David does not know it? Now let me give you the counsel that you may save your own life and the life of your son Salomon. Go in to King David and say to him: 'Did you not, my Lord the King, swear to your maid saying: Salomon, your son shall reign after me and he shall sit upon my throne? Why then is Adonia king?' And while you are speaking with the king, I will also come in after you and confirm your words."

Now, as I just said, Adonia arranges a court conspiracy, but the counter force is also part of the court. It is in fact an association of the "uninvited". Nathan, the prophet, was not invited and of course Bathseba and her son. And

Nathan, of course, as an old courtier, knows the meaning of this. He says in a few words that if Adonia becomes King, Bathseba is going to be killed and her son. So he says: "We're not just fighting for power, but fighting for your life and the life of your son." And he coaches her what and how to speak to the King. And the main point of his advice is that she reminds David of the oath he has sworn that her son Salomon will inherit (the throne). And that is very strange because there is no mention of such an oath ever having been sworn. And it would have been mentioned if it had happened. And how would Adonia have been able to rise publicly if it was known that David had promised his Kingdom to Salomon? He might then have plotted but not so openly. So what does it mean? Does it mean that such an oath was never sworn by David? And then maybe Nathan hopes that the King, who is gaga, will not remember? Now this might look a little strange but we saw the situation of the King. I mean he seems to be completely helpless and so maybe there is Nathan, who is fighting for his status, maybe for his life and certainly he wants Bathseba and her son to win and wants to use the weakness of the King, who he knows his memories are gone. So Bathseba was to say: "You have sworn to me". And he (David) was expected to answer her: "Yes, yes, I have sworn!" And now, as usual in the Bible, we have the scenario here in Nathan's words. And next comes the performance. So we go on.

So, Bathseba went to the King into his chamber. Now the King was very old and Abishag the Shunammite was ministering to the King. Why repeat this? I mean, don't we know that he is old?

The opening verses told us in graphic details how old he is, how weak he is, how impotent he is, and Abishag the Shunammite serving him and so forth. Why is this mentioned? But of course in the Bible there is no redundancy. What is redundant on one level proves to be functional on another. That is, as information this is redundant! But in context it is a useful reminder that when Bathseba comes to talk to him, she is talking to a very old man, to a very weak man and, this of course, strengthens the prophecy that the oath *never* happened. But the hope is somehow to pass it on as a fact. So we are reminded of this and then we have her talk. And she said to him: "My Lord, you have sworn to your maid by the Lord your God saying: Salomon, your son, shall reign after me, he shall sit upon my throne." So she has learned by heart what Nathan instructed her. And she goes on: "And now behold, Adonia is King over you, and my Lord the King does not know it! He has slaughtered oxen and made a feast and invited all the sons of the King, Abiatar, the priest, and Joab the commander of the army. But Salomon, your servant, he has not invited. And now my Lord the King, the eyes of all Israel are upon you".

Now this is the performance when she says: the eyes of all the people are upon you to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my Lord the King after him. In other words, she tries to awaken somehow the man from his lethargy to get him to understand that all the eyes of Israel are upon him. This is, of course, not true. David doesn't know that outside there is a fight for the throne. So she tells him: "All the eyes of Israel are upon you to tell them who shall sit on the throne of

my Lord the King after him!" She is his favourite wife but she speaks to him here with unusual respect. "My Lord the King" she calls him, not David. You remember, she is the wife for whom he killed. He killed her husband. You remember the adultery of the story of David and Bathseba that we mentioned before. She shows him respect to give him the feeling that it all depends on him, whereas all the other way around Adonia is trying to usurp his (David's) authority. Because while all the people, according to her, are waiting to hear what the King will say about the succession, he, Adonia, is plotting against the will, not only of the King but of the people. And you realize this is all lies. This is, I mean, what she says, is all lies. The people don't have any idea of what's happening in the court, in the palace. But Bathseba is fighting for her life and the life of her son and of course the kingship of her son. And so the end justifies the means.

And she continues the pressure at the end of verse 21: "... otherwise", that is, if you don't decide in favour of Salomon, "it will come to pass when my Lord the King sleeps with his fathers, that I and my son will be counted offenders". In other words, if you don't declare Salomon King, you are in fact deciding that we both, Salomon and me, will be killed. So, you see again, the Bible doesn't say it but the inference is open for us to draw. It is a fight within the court, it is called "closed politics". They don't appeal outside except as a rhetorical figure. In order to influence the King she says that all the people are waiting on his lips, waiting to hear what he is going to say. But in fact they are all maneuvering within the court. And she is using the only card she has, the King himself. He may

be old, he may be weak, he may be impotent, but he is all she has: either that or death. So that's what she says. And, she's immediately followed by the prophet who, as he promised, comes to confirm her words. And he does confirm her words. We don't have time but he has his own text and he puts pressure again on the King against Adonia - not so much for Salomon as against Adonia. And he plays on the fact that the King doesn't know and so forth. The argument is a little different from that of Bathseba, but the point is, as he said, he wants to confirm her words to complement what she said. But you'll, of course, have noticed that those people speak very much unlike most Biblical characters.

And the King's silence is loud. He doesn't say a word. And this of course arouses a question: How is he going to react? And especially, is he going to say for example "you fools" or "you criminals, how have you dared to invent an oath that I have never given"? So as we read those long speeches of Bathseba and then of Nathan, suspense keeps mounting up: "Will he finally speak?" And finally, he does speak.

Verse 28: Then King David answered. And we must note the term of reference. He is not called David, as sometimes the narrator calls him. He is King David. He speaks in his royal voice. King David answered: "Call Bathseba to me!" In other words, we are not told but we understand from this, that when Nathan came, Bathseba was sent outside so that Nathan can talk privately to the King. So she is brought and the King swore saying: "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel saying: Salomon, your

son, shall reign after me and he shall sit upon my throne instead of me, even so will I do this day!" So he confirms the oath. But we cannot be certain that it took place (before). Because it would have been mentioned if such a thing had happened and it would have saved this whole ugly scene of fight within the court and between sons. I mean we don't know! Is it because he is gaga and she told him "You swore" and he says: "Yes, yes, I swore and I'll keep my oath!" Or does David have another purpose? We don't know. And we find out that this, the last possibility, is the true one as we follow the narrative in order.

Verse 31: So Bathseba bowed with her face to the ground and gave her reverence to the King and said: "May my Lord, King David, live forever!" It sounds a little ironic, right? Because she is speaking about what's going to happen after his death! And she wants her son Salomon to inherit, but of course she wants the King to live forever. And now David acts. And let's see how his action will be.

Verse 32: King David said: "Call me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaja, the son of Jojada." So they came before the King. And the King said to them: "Take with you the servants of your Lord, that is my servants, and call Salomon my son to ride on my own mule and bring him down to Gihon. And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there King over Israel. Then blow the trumpets and say: Long live Salomon! You shall then come up after him and he shall come and sit upon my throne for he shall be King in my stead and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah." And Benaja, the son of Jojada, answered the King: "Amen.

May the Lord, the God of my Lord the King say so. As the Lord has been with my Lord the King even so may he be with Salomon and make his throne greater than the throne of my Lord, King David."

This is the key passage of the whole story. And the biggest surprise is that David who looked old and weak and impotent, suddenly reveals that he is none of these things. We see here David at his best. He is planning a campaign in a way. And he plans this campaign for the anointing of Salomon with great care and great cleverness as in his best days as general. So you need to remember: The main problem is authority. I mean it's a new King. He is unknown. He is even unknown to us. We haven't heard anything about him. We have seen his mother in action. What was he doing? Perhaps hiding under the bed? So it's an unknown. And David knows the main problem is to take this unknown and turn him a King that the people will accept. And this explains what he plans here: the scenario he orders to be performed. If you think it's full of details that are local colour and so forth, you are mistaken. Everything is planned. For example: He takes care to specify that the means of transportation of Salomon from the palace to the place of the anointment is on David's personal mule because this has symbolic power. He has taken over the King's personal property. The same holds true of his command that Salomon shall be led to the throne, his, David's, throne, and sit upon it, another act of enormous symbolic value and I mean symbolic value as legitimation. And the third important part of this legitimation is that the people he appoints are to look after the ceremony and performance.

And here, a very interesting point arises. Because, look at the people he orders to be called to him. He says: "Call me Zadok the priest!" That's understandable. Because Zadok the priest is a rival to Abiatar the high priest who is with Adonia. In other words: If Adonia has one authority, a religious authority figure, then David appoints the other one. And Nathan the prophet, needless to say, is another known and respected figure among the people. So we have the holy priest, we have God's prophet, they are according to David, they are to perform the anointment with the highest pomp and public acclaim. So all this is understandable. But what about the third figure? The third figure is Benaja, the son of Jojada. And I'm almost sure that nobody of you remembers him. Who is Benaja, the son of Jojada? I mean we know who Zadok is. We know who Nathan is. Because they play a role in (the book of) Samuel when they were associated with David. But who is Benaja, the son of Jojada? Why does David call him? And more interesting or even stranger: Why of all these three people who are called it is Benaja who answers? It's not Zadok, the holy priest. It's not Nathan, God's prophet. It's Benaja who says: "Yes, we will perform as you say, my Lord!" And the answer is very simple: Benaja, the son of Jojada, is the commander of the palace guard. And the palace guard is the only military force in Jerusalem. So Joab may be the minister of war but the army is outside Jerusalem. No army is allowed into Jerusalem as in later times no army was allowed in Rome, which means that the only effective military force is the palace guard. Benaja is the leader of the palace guard, which shows that David knows the sad truth. The symbolic power is very well. The mule, the throne, the known people,

but ultimately it's brute power that's going to decide. And Benaja knows it too. And that's why he takes it upon himself to respond for the three. Knowing he is of course the least respected person in the room. But he carries the sword. And so ultimately, when you read the exciting scene that follows: Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaja, the son of Jojada, went down and called Salomon to ride on King David's mule and brought him to Gihon. You see David's orders are in every detail performed because these are David's people. Then Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Salomon. Then they blew the trumpet and all the people said - finally the people are brought in and David knew that the important thing is to bring the people in, because it's the people's support that's needed, not the court's - and all the people said: „Long live King Salomon!" And all the people went up after him. You see the narrator doesn't let this go. He wants to elude us to this point: Went up after him, playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by the noise. In other words: David is actually at his best here. When it comes to a challenge to his power David is ruthless. So he may be old, he may be weak, he may be impotent, but touch his power and he will kill as he did all his life. And he in effect knows that Adonia is going to die because of this. Because just as Adonia would kill Salomon and his mother, so he predicts Salomon would kill Adonia. But those fools made the mistake of challenging David's power. And he will not let go of this power until his last moment.

Now in this light even the oath that he repeats may be simply one of his tricks of giving more legitimacy to his

choice. In other words: Just like the mule and the throne and the holy people and so forth, there is the oath. So this unknown man has God, even the royal word, the royal oath, to support him. So, as often in the Bible, ironically, what really happened is sometimes not so important as the *image* of what happened. We must draw the conclusions for ourselves.

Ultimately how did Salomon become King? By the swords of the palace guard! All else is embellishment, symbolic power. But ultimately it's all in the hands of Benaja, the son of Jojada who is David's personal choice, the closest man to him. They have between them the camaraderie of old soldiers and a lifelong of fighting together. In fact David entrusts the whole ceremony to Benaja's hands, very capable hands, those of Benaja, murderer's hands. Because later we learn how Benaja with his own hands kills Salomon's opponents, including Adonia. Salomon tells him to go and kill him, and he goes and kills him. But this is another story told in the second chapter.

What I want to remind you is what we started with. What we started with is the story of Chronicles which describes David and his line in ideal terms. The original story here in Samuel and, in our case, in Kings, has nothing ideal about it. The Bible has a very realistic view of power and here we see it at its best, which may be at its saddest, because ultimately power depends on power, the power of the sword. But if we think about it in picture of the figures, it's not so much that praise of David and his son Salomon as they are better than the alternative. So maybe Salomon is not ideal. By the way, we don't know anything about him. Maybe

he's not ideal but certainly he is not Adonia, he is not like Absalom and he is not the eldest son, which means that God may be with him. And two chapters later, God addresses him and gives him his blessing. So the law of the victory of the youngest son goes on. And Salomon gets his second foot. I mean, he has the support of the people here, because his father arranged the anointment so cleverly.

And what remains, the second foot is in chapter three, when God comes and says: "What do you want? What do you ask for?" And he says: "I ask for wisdom." And God grants it. And he recognizes him as David's true heir. So in a little tortuous way and a little sad way the right King is finally chosen. Not the ideal King of Chronicles, but the better, as I said, better than the alternative. So here you get in miniature a view of the Bible's handling of politics. And from our point of view the most important thing is the thing we started with. That it is: not the Bible's art of narration as one thing and politics is another thing, but that politics is dramatized and evaluated in terms of the Bible's finest art, of which we saw at work two of the main principles. The art of *silence* and the art of *indirection*.

Thank you very much.

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