

Chayei Sarah: I Kings 1:1-31

In honor of the first Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, zt"l

The Book of Samuel presents David's extraordinary life in rich detail. The Book of Kings opens when King David is very old, recounting the rise of his heir, Solomon, to the throne. Solomon's rise features prominently in the Haftarat for Genesis.¹ Just as God's covenant with Abraham passes to Isaac in the Parashah, God's covenant with King David passes to Solomon in the Haftarah. Both transmissions require third parties to surmount challenges. The Parashah tells how Abraham sends his servant to find Isaac a wife, while the Haftarah describes how David's prophet and wife secure Solomon's place on his father's throne. Also, both texts include a single story (Rebecca at the well; Adonijah's rebellion) that is restated, each time with different emphases.

The Haftarah opens as David's servants, unable to warm their ailing king, provide him with the kingdom's most beautiful young woman, Avishag of Shunem². Meanwhile, outside the palace, David's oldest surviving son, Adonijah, escalates royal behavior that David had not previously stopped, now declaring himself king. Gathering support from David's other sons as well as powerful religious and military leaders, some of whom previously clashed with David, Adonijah makes dramatic, public displays of his rule. Adonijah does not seek support from David's loyalists and excludes his far younger brother and likely royal heir, Solomon, as well as the prophet, Nathan. As king, he would likely put Solomon and his mother, Batsheva, to death.

Previously, God told David that Solomon would succeed him; David swore the same to Batsheva; and God told Nathan of His love for Solomon. The Haftarah recounts Nathan's politically savvy plan for him and Batsheva to persuade David to put down the rebellion, secure the throne for Solomon, and save their lives. Batsheva enters the royal chambers where Avishag attends to her husband. She reminds David of his oath to her that her son, Solomon, will succeed him. She tells him that, without his knowledge, Adonijah is instead assembling David's son and others and acting as king; highlights that her and Solomon's lives are on the line; and urges him to publicly declare Solomon as his legitimate heir. Nathan then enters, confirming Adonijah's actions and expressing surprise that David hadn't informed him of this major decision. David rallies, swearing to Batsheva to install Solomon as king.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 1-4: The ailing and dying King David is cold and cannot be warmed. His servants bring the most beautiful young woman in his kingdom, Avishag, to serve and lie with him, but he does not have relations with her.

I Kings 1:1	מלכים א א:א
King David was old, advanced in years. They covered him with garments, but he did not become warm.	וְהַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד זָקֵן וְגָמוֹן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וַיִּכְסֶּהוּ בַּבְּגָדִים וְלֹא יָחַם לוֹ:

Verses 5-10: In a coup, David's son, Adonijah, declares his ascension to the throne with supporters from the royal family and court. His celebration excludes the prophet, Nathan, heir designate Solomon, and others loyal to David.

I Kings 1:5	מלכים א א:ה
Adonijah the son of [David's wife] Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I shall be king!" He set up chariots and horsemen for himself, and fifty men to run before him.	וְאַדְנִיָּה בֶן-חַגִּית מִתְנַשֵּׂא לֵאמֹר אֲנִי אֶמְלֹךְ וַיַּעַשׂ לּוֹ רֶכֶב וַיִּפְרָשִׁים וַחֲמִשִּׁים אִישׁ רָצִים לִפְנָיו:

¹ The others are the Haftarat of [Miketz](#) (when it is not Shabbat Chanukah) and [Vayeichi](#).

² [Haftarah Helper for Parashat Vayeirah](#) provides details about Shunem.

Verses 11-14: Nathan informs Solomon's mother, Batsheva, of the coup and the resulting threat to their lives. Nathan proposes a plan to help her, with his assistance, foil the coup and save their lives.

I Kings 1:13	מלכים א א:י"ג
[Nathan tells Batsheva] "Go, and enter unto King David. Say to him, 'Didn't you, my lord the king, swear to your maidservant [me] saying, "Your son, Solomon, will reign after me, He shall sit upon my throne"? Why[, then,] does Adonijah reign?"	לְכִי וּבְאִי אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד וְאָמַרְתְּ אֵלָיו הֲלֹא־אָתָּה אָדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לֵאמֹתָ לֵאמֹר כִּי־שִׁלְמָה בְּנִי יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּאִי וּמָדוּעַ מֶלֶךְ אָדֹנִיָּהוּ:

Verses 15-21: Batsheva follows Nathan's plan, visiting David as Avishag tends to him. She rouses him to act, stating that Adonijah is acting as king, that David swore that her son would succeed him, and that their lives are in danger.

I Kings 1:20	מלכים א א:כ
[Now] you, my lord the king - the eyes of all Israel are upon you to tell them who shall succeed my lord the king on the throne.	וְאַתָּה אָדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ עֵינֵי כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלֶיךָ לְהַגִּיד לָהֶם מִי יֵשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּאִי אַחֲרָיו:

Verses 22-27: As Batsheva completes her audience with David, Nathan arrives. He supports her account of Adonijah's rebellion and asks how David could have withheld from him the identity of David's successor.

I Kings 1:27	מלכים א א:כ"ז
Can this decision have come from my lord the king, without your telling your servant who is to succeed to the throne of my lord the king?	אִם מֵאֵת אָדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ גִּתְיָה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא הוֹדַעְתָּ אֶת־[עַבְדְּךָ] (עַבְדִּיךָ) מִי יֵשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּאִי אַחֲרָי אַחֲרָיו:

Verses 28-31: David reaffirms his divine vow to Batsheva, confirming that Solomon will become king.

I Kings 1:30	מלכים א א:ל
Indeed, as I [David] swore to you [Batsheva] by the Lord, God of Israel saying, "Surely Solomon, your son, shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my stead," surely, so will I do this day.	כִּי בְאִשְׁרִי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לָךְ בַּה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר כִּי־שִׁלְמָה בְּנִי יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּאִי תַּחְתִּי כִּי כֵּן אֶעֱשֶׂה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

Connections

Maimonides derives the halachically required **respect for Jewish kings, even by prophets**, from the Haftarah.

Mishneh Torah, Kings and Wars 2:5	משנה תורה, הלכות מלכים ומלחמות ב:ה
The king sits on a throne in his palace and places a crown on his head. The entire nation comes to him when he wants, stands before him, and prostrates on the ground. Even a prophet standing before the king prostrates to the ground, as [I Kings 1:23] says, "...behold, Nathan the Prophet. He entered before the king and prostrated to the king."	וְיֹשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ בְּפִלְטְרִין שָׁלוֹ. וּמַשִּׁים כֶּתֶר בְּרֹאשׁוֹ. וְכָל הָעָם בָּאִין אֵלָיו בַּעַת שִׁירָצָה. וְעוֹמְדִין לִפְנֵי וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים אַרְצָה. אֶפְלוּ נָבִיא עוֹמֵד לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אַרְצָה. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מלכים א א כג) "הִנֵּה נָתָן הַנָּבִיא וַיָּבֵא לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַמֶּלֶךְ."

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