



Chayei Sarah: I Kings 1:1-31

In honor 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 Haftarot 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 Shunem. 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 1:1-4: 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 בָּא בַּיָּמִים וַיִּכְסֶהוּ בַּבְּגָדִים וְלֹא יָחַם לוֹ:

Verses 1:5-10: David had not previously stopped his son, Adonijah, from seeking the throne. Adonijah now declares his ascension to the throne with supporters from the royal family and court. His celebration excludes the prophet, Nathan, the true heir, 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 לְאֹמֶר אֲנִי אֶמְלֹךְ וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ רָכָב וַיַּרְשִׁים וְחַמְשִׁים אִישׁ רָצִים לְפָנָיו:

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

Verses 1:11-14: Nathan tells Solomon's mother, Batsheva, of Adonijah's actions and the resulting threat to their lives, adding that David does not know about them. Nathan proposes a plan for her, with his assistance, to have David stop Adonijah 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?"	לָכִי וּבֹאִי אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד וְאָמַרְתְּ אֵלָיו הֲלֹא־אָלַף אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאִמְתְּךָ לֵאמֹר כִּי־שָׁלֵמָה בְּנֵךְ יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יָשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּאִי וְיִמְדוּעַ מֶלֶךְ אֲדֹנָיָהוּ:

Verses 1:15-21: Following Nathan's plan, Batsheva visits David as Avishag tends to him. She states that despite David's oath that Solomon would succeed him, Adonijah is now celebrating becoming king with support from David's court, thereby threatening her and Solomon's lives after David's death.

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 אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ עֵינֵי כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלֶיךָ לְהַגִּיד לָהֶם מִי יָשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּאֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲרָיו:

Verses 1:22-27: As Batsheva completes her audience with David, Nathan arrives. He supports her account of Adonijah's actions 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 have come from my lord the king, that you did not inform your servant who will succeed him on the throne of my lord the king?	אִם מֵאֵת אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ גִּתְּהָ הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא הוֹדַעְתָּ אֶת־[עַבְדְּךָ] [עַבְדֶּיךָ] מִי יָשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּאֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲרָיו

Verses 1:28-31: 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 בָאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לָךְ בַּה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר כִּי־שָׁלֵמָה בְּנֵךְ יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יָשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּאִי תַחְתָּי כִּי כֵּן אֲעֲשֶׂה 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 his 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 בְּפִלְטְרֵינֵי שָׁלוֹ. וּמִשִּׁים כְּתָר בְּרֹאשׁוֹ. וְכָל הָעָם בָּאִין אֵלָיו בְּעַת שִׁירְצָה. וְעוֹמְדִין לְפָנָיו וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים אַרְצָה. אֲפֵלוּ נָבִיא עוֹמֵד לְפָנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אַרְצָה. וְשָׁנְאָמַר (מלכים א א כג) "הִנֵּה נָתַן הַנְּבִיא וַיָּבֵא לְפָנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְמֶלֶךְ."

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