

Haftarah

'Solomon your son will follow me as king'



Bathsheeba bowed low before the king, who said: What do you want?

She answered him: My Lord, you swore to me by the Eternal your God that *Solomon your son will follow me as king, he will sit on my throne. And now, look—Adonijah is acting as king, and you, my Lord the king, do not even know it!*

1 Kings 1:16-18

Connection

- In the Jewish calendar, this haftarah reading (1 Kings 1:1-31) accompanies the Torah portion *Hayei Sarah*: Genesis 23:1-25:18.
- In the Torah portion, the aging Abraham organizes for Isaac to marry and inherit his wealth, thus securing the future of his family according to the divine promise. In the haftarah, David, also in his twilight years, ensures that his son Solomon will succeed him as king.

Background

The first Book of Kings begins with the death of King David and tells of the political struggles that follow his death. It takes a view of Jewish history as being judged according to fidelity to the ways of God.

The story

As 1 Kings opens, David has been king for forty years. He intends for his son Solomon to succeed him, but another of his sons, Adonijah, makes a political move to acquire the top job. Nathan the prophet enlists the help of David's favourite wife, Bathsheeba, to convince the king to act decisively and publicly in Solomon's favour.

Things to ponder

- *Adonijah exalted himself...* Adonijah seems very sure of himself in 1:5-6.
- For a prophet, Nathan is sure acting like a politician. Why doesn't Nathan go directly to the king with his concern? Why involve Bathsheeba?
- Examine what Nathan tells Bathsheeba to say, then look at what she actually says: "Adonijah is acting as king, and you, my Lord the king, *do not even know it!*" (1:18). Bathsheeba speaks to the king with particular directness. She confronts David with the bald facts of his fragile state: *You are king but you don't know what's going on in your own kingdom! If you want Solomon to succeed you, you'd better get your act together!*
- Read 1:15. Why might the presence of Abishag (the king's 'nurse') be mentioned in this scene? Also, we have already been told that the king is weakened by age; why the repetition of this detail here?

Reflection

The complexities of both leadership and family life come together in this haftarah reading. Although he is king, David needs a team around him (Nathan the prophet, and Bathsheeba his wife) to function successfully as a leader. Reflect on this in light of your own experience. Have you ever had to negotiate/intervene in a delicate situation for a noble purpose? How did you go about it? What was at stake? How does this reading speak to you?

Bibliography: Goldstein, *The Women's Haftarah Commentary* (Woodstock, 2000); Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996). Scripture quotations: Plaut.