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A Wise Ruling
First Kings 3: 16-28

A wise ruling DIG: Why should the new king worry about a dispute among prostitutes? What does Solomon know about mothers and babies? What kind of court system did Isra'el have (Second Samuel 12:1-6 and 14:4)? How would this case have been settled in a modern court? What do you believe about the power of the government? For what quality was Solomon testing the women? Why not test them for honesty? Why do you think Isra'el was so impressed?

REFLECT: Do you pursue wisdom (James 1:5)? How? In what ways did you pursue wisdom this week? What has been your toughest decision this year? What prevailed? Your feelings? Other's advice? Circumstances? Are you considered compassionate? What brings that quality out of you? What closes your heart towards others? Have you ever had the attitude, "If I can't have it (him or her), then nobody can!" What is your story behind that attitude?

Yeshua is the King, and He will see that justice will be done.

Divine inspiration is on the lips of the king, Proverbs 16:10 tells us, **so his mouth must be faithful when he judges.** Quite so. For **the king** is the hub around which the whole legal process revolved. **He** heard the toughest cases. **He**

was the highest court of appeal and the foundation of all administration and **justice**. To invent a proverb: If the core is rotten, then there is no hope for the apple. We now see how the new divine **wisdom Solomon** had just received from **ADONAI** made all the difference in **his** ability to **discern between good and evil (First Kings 3:9)** and **to administer justice (1 Kings 3:11)**. In this passage **Solomon** is much more of **a wise king** than **he** was before: **winnowing out all evil with his eyes (Proverbs 20:8** and **26)** and **searching out** things that were concealed **(Proverbs 25:2). He** was, in fact, the model **king**, whose **wisdom** is talked about so many times in the Bible.[89]

A difficult dilemma (3:16-22): The context of this difficult dilemma and its simple solution is the extraordinary gift that **ADONAI** had given to **Solomon** – the gift of **wisdom**. **Solomon** knew that he was not up to the task of governing the treasured and numerous people of **God**. So, when **he** asked **God** for **wisdom**, **He** was pleased with **Solomon's** request and promised to give **him** exactly what **he** asked for: **A wise and discerning mind (First Kings 3:12).**

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, tough decisions. How to best solve the problem? What is the heart motivation? Praise **You** that **You** are Almighty, all-wise Eternal **Father**. Nothing is too hard for **You** to figure out because **You** know the heart of everyone and **You** know every detail of each situation. It is such a comfort to me that I can trust in **Your** strong arm to protect and to guide me. **Be still before ADONAI and wait patiently for Him. Do not fret over one prospering in his way, over one carrying out wicked schemes (Psalms 37:7)**.*

*While the wicked may seem to get what they want and it appears that they are happy and content – yet in the end they will have nothing! **For the arms of the wicked will be broken, while ADONAI upholds the righteous. ADONAI knows the days of the blameless – their inheritance endures forever. . . For the wicked will perish, and the enemies of ADONAI will be like the beauty of the fields – they will vanish – vanish like smoke (Psalms 37:17-18,20).** Praise **Your** awesome promise to always be there for me! No matter where I am, no matter the time of day or what else is happening, **You** dear Loving and all-wise **Father** are right by my side to help and to guide me. **For God Himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you," so that with confidence we say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What will man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5c-6).** What a joy **to remember You on my bed, I meditate on You through the night watches. For You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy (Psalms 63:7-8).** In **Yeshua's** Holy name*

*and Power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

As Philip Ryken relates in his commentary, soon the **wisdom** of **Solomon** was put to the test, in the form of a legal dispute over the custody of a **baby**. Like most other matters that made it all the way to **the king**, this famous judicial case was as difficult as they come. No one else in the entire kingdom could decide what to do. There were no lawyers involved in this case, or other legal representatives – just one **woman** against another: **two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him (First Kings 3:16a).** The Bible lets **the women** tell **their** own story, in **their** own words. **The first woman** was the plaintiff, and here is the testimony **she** gave: **My lord, I and this woman live in the same house; and when she was in the house, I gave birth to a baby. Three days after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were there together; there was no one else with us in the house except the two of us. During the night this woman's child died, because she rolled over on top of it. So, she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from next to me, while your servant was sleeping, and put it in her arms; and she laid her dead child in my arms. When I awoke in the morning to feed my child from my breast, there it was, dead. But when I took a closer look later in the morning, why, it wasn't my son at all – not the one I gave birth to (First Kings 3:17-21)!**

Once heard, this story cannot be forgotten. **The first woman** describes a scene of sinful and pitiful squalor. In lurid detail, **her** testimony takes us inside a whorehouse somewhere in the red-light district around Jerusalem. There were no clients that night, **she** said, just two lonely hookers and **their** newborn **sons**. The following morning, **she** received the horrible shock: **the baby** at **her** breast was dead. But a **mother** always knows **her** own **child**, and on closer inspection in the morning light, **she** discovered that it was not **her baby**.

Then **the woman** realized the awful truth. Even though **she** was not awake at the time, it was obvious what had happened. Sometime during the night, **the** other **woman** had carelessly rolled over on top of **her** own **baby** – an awful case of accidental death. Then, with bitter and desperate envy, **the** grieving **woman** had switched **the babies** in the dark, taking **the** living **baby** to her own breast and handing **the** other woman a corpse.

At that point **the second woman** interrupted. **She** wanted to tell **her** side of the story. **She** didn't dispute **the first woman's** account of events, but stubbornly insisted that **she** had the right **baby**. **"No! The living one is my son, and the**

dead one is your son!” Then the trial degenerated into a shouting match. **The first one said, “No! The dead one is your son and the living one is my son!” Thus, they spoke before the king (1 Kgs 3:22).**

The whole situation was pitiful, in the sense that everyone in the story deserves our pity. Surely, we pity **the woman** whose **son** was stolen in the middle of the night and who was then desperate to get **him** back. In **her** desperation, we see every **mother’s** longing for a lost **child**. Yet, we can also commiserate with **the woman** accused of the heinous crime of **child**-snatching. What a horror it must have been to wake up in the middle of the night, only to realize that **she** had smothered **her son**.

Then there was **King Solomon**, and **he** too deserves our sympathy. Ordinarily, the testimony or an additional witness would have been required to reach a verdict. According to the Torah **One witness alone will not be sufficient to convict a person of any offense or sin of any kind; the matter will be established only if there are two or three witnesses testifying against him (Deuteronomy 19:15).** But in this particular case, there was no other witness. **The** two **women** had been alone that night, so it was one **woman’s** word against the other. It was a “**she** said, **she** said.”

Anyone who has ever tried to resolve a dispute without any witnesses knows how hard it can be to determine exactly what happened. Parents often face this difficulty when trying to figure out an argument between two siblings. Teachers have this trouble in school when two students get into a fight. Employers sometimes struggle to resolve a dispute in the workplace. Counselors find it hard to discern the truth about a family conflict or some other broken relationship. There are times when it seems like the only **Person** who really knows the truth is **ADONAI Himself**.[90]

Solomon’s simple solution (3:23-28): In this case, **Solomon** didn’t know that truth yet either. But **the king** listened carefully to **their** testimony; therefore, **he** was able to give an accurate summary of the facts of the case: **This woman says, “The living one is my son; your son is the dead one,” while the other says, “No, the dead one is your son, and the living one is my son” (3:23).** Which **woman** was telling the truth? This was a serious test of the gift that God had promised. Did **Solomon** have enough **wisdom** to discern between **good** and **evil** in this case? Could **he** determine the truth and render a just verdict?

No sooner had **the king** summarized this royal dilemma than **he** began to put **his**

simple solution into action. First, **he** said: **Bring me a sword.** We can only imagine how startled **the** two **women** must have been by **his** command. **They brought a sword to the king.** Then **Solomon** gave **his** deadly command: **Cut the living child in two; give half to the one and half to the other (First Kings 3:24-25).**

There was a kind of equality in that legal compromise, but also a horrible cruelty. It was a brutal decree. Those present must have looked at **Solomon** with absolute astonishment. They must have thought, "This isn't **wisdom**. It was foolishness!" Yet, there was a method to **the king's** apparent madness. For **Solomon** never intended his command to be carried out. Rather, **he** was staging a trial by ordeal that would reveal each **woman's** heart.

Immediately, **Solomon's** dreadful decree had its desired effect. **The first woman** responded with all the passion and compassion of a **mother's** heart. **At this, the woman to whom the living child belonged addressed the king, because she felt so strongly toward her son, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child. You mustn't kill it" (First Kings 3:26a)!** As soon as **the** true **mother** heard what **Solomon** intended to do with **his sword, her** maternal instincts took over. **She** had bonded with **her** newborn son, and **she** would do anything . . . anything . . . to save **him**. **She** would even give **him** up to **her** enemy, if that would save **his** life. Tear out **her** own heart, if you must, but **she** would save **her son**. So **she** cried out for **the king** to spare **her child's** life.

The first mother made the kind of loving sacrifice that some women make when they put their child up for adoption. Unable to care for children very well themselves, they are willing to suffer the loss of a son or daughter to give the child a better chance in life. Good fathers and mothers make similar sacrifices every day: instead of doing what they want for themselves, they do what is best for their children.

But the other woman had a very different response to the threat of **Solomon's sword**. Callously and heartlessly, **she** said: **It will be neither yours nor mine. Divide it (First Kings 3:26b)!** In the bitterness of her grief, she could only look at the other mother with hate and envy. If **she** couldn't have **her** own **son**, well, then, no one else would have a **son** either. With the horrible cruelty of heedless rage, **she** told **the king** to go ahead and use **his sword**. **She** was willing to take **her** half of **the child**.

At that point, the hearts of both **women** had been revealed, and **Solomon** knew everything **he** needed to know to resolve the dilemma, with or without **witnesses**. **He** could tell which woman was **the** true **mother** by **her** maternal compassion. So **he** calmly **answered** both **women's** pleas for life and death by saying: **Give the living child to the first woman, don't kill it, because she is its mother (3:27).**

It was a simple solution to a difficult dilemma. With gifted insight and **wise** discernment, **Solomon** had devised the test that would reveal each **woman's** heart. As they witnessed **the king's wise** resolution to this case, the people in the royal throne room must have been astonished. The looks on their faces must have turned from horror to wonder as they watched **the** rightful **mother** reunited with **her** beloved **son**. **Justice** had been done; **the king** had reached the right verdict. Of course **he** had! It seemed so simple now: **the** true **mother** was **the one** who would do absolutely anything to save **her child**. In that way, **Solomon** had spared **the child's** life and put **him** back into the arms of **his mother**. Brilliant.

Word of what **the king** had done spread like wildfire. **People** were amazed by the **wise** and simple way **he** had solved that difficult dilemma. The story was repeated over and over again all over the City and throughout the surrounding countryside. **And all Isra'el heard of the decision the king had made and held the king in awe, for they saw that God's wisdom was in him, enabling him to render justice properly (First Kings 3:28).** If **Solomon** could settle that case, then **he** had the **wisdom** for anything that might come up. This proved that **his** prayers had been answered. **The king** had been given an understanding mind to govern the people, just as **he** had prayed for (**to see link click As – Solomon's Wish**). The people recognized his wisdom as nothing less than divine. So they honored their **king** for having the **wisdom** of **God**.[91]

Wise justice: Solomon's verdict was a remarkable confirmation that **he** had received the gift of divine **wisdom**. It also proved that he was the right man to rule over **Isra'el**. However, there is a question we still need to ask. What does this story have to do with us and our need for the Gospel of **Messiah**? **All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth . . . and training for righteousness (Second Timothy 3:16).** Furthermore, everything in the Bible points to **Yeshua Messiah (Luke 24:26-27)**. So how do we make those life and Gospel connections? How does life and the Bible meet here in these scriptures?

Whenever we consider **King Solomon**, we need to remember that **Yeshua**

described **Himself** as someone **greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42)**. Thus, the kingdom of **Solomon** always points us to the greater Kingdom of **Messiah**. What is **greater** about **Yeshua** in this case is **His** superior **wisdom** for doing **justice**. In **First Kings 3:38** we read that **God's wisdom was in him, enabling him to render justice properly.** We can apply this statement directly to the person and ministry of **Yeshua** because **God's wisdom was in him, enabling him to render justice properly.**

Messiah has promised us **justice**, and we long for **justice** to be done. This is a fallen world, where we see so much injustice that sometimes we wonder when, or even if, everything will be made right. Wrongs go unpunished, including wrongs done to babies. People seemingly get away with dark deeds in the middle of the night. It is hard to know what the truth is. One person says one thing, another person says another. But who is telling the truth? When someone comes with the **sword** to do justice, he proposes a compromise; the baby gets **cut** in half and still **justice** is not done.

In a world of injustice, we may pray the way that **Solomon** prayed: **God, give the king your fairness in judgment, endow this son of kings with Your righteousness (Ps 72:1).** This prayer is for the wise justice of **the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5).** We pray for **Him** to discover what evil has been done and to put things right. We want the sinner who has lied, stolen, and advocated murder to be found out and brought to **justice**. We want the innocent **child** to end up in the arms of the right **mother**. We want **Yeshua** to do what is **just**.

Sometimes we see **justice** done in this life but most of the time we don't, but **justice** will be done in the end. **The wisdom** of **God** is in **Yeshua** to do **justice**, and one day **He** will make everything right. The Bible describes that day of **judgment** as a day when **God will pass judgment on people's most innermost secrets (Rom 2:16).** At the final **judgment**, what happened to **the second woman** will happen to all the enemies of **God** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fo – The Great White Throne Judgment**). But for believers we will never be **judged for there is no longer any condemnation awaiting for those who are in union with Yeshua (Rom 8:1).**

People sometimes wonder whether justice will be done. In our frustration and anger, sometimes people blame **God** for what is wrong with the world, especially all the terrible evils that seem to go unpunished – the genocides and murders of a fallen race. But Satan is ultimately the one to blame, not **ADONAI**, who is never on the

side of injustice. He will make this abundantly clear at the Great White Throne, when every wrong will be righted, every evil deed will be punished, and every unrighteous sinner will be brought to **justice**. **Yeshua** is **the King**, and **He** will see that **justice** will be done.

This will all be to the praise of **God** and the glory of **Yeshua Messiah**. If people held **Solomon** in **awe** for reaching the right verdict in the one difficult dilemma, imagine how much honor and glory **Yeshua** will receive for righting every wrong in the history of the world! And at the Great White Throne, when we see the wise **justice** of **God** in **Messiah**, we will stand in **awe** of our **King**. The book of **Revelation** declares that when **the LORD** executes **His** final and terrible **judgment** against sin, **His** people will cry out: **Halleluyah! For the victory, the glory, and the power of our God! For His judgments are true and just (Revelation 19:1-2a).**[92]