

July 17, 2022

“Solomon Judges with Wisdom and Justice”
Lesson 3 of Unit

1 Kings 3:16-28
2 Chronicles 9:8

Intro

Solomon, in following his father David as king, had a high bar set for him. David also made many steps to prepare the kingdom for Solomon becoming king, such as plans for building the temple and arranging various groups of officials to serve him. Solomon had been given much, and much was expected from him.

Solomon recognized how much he needed help by his response to his dream encounter with God. When God tells him to ask for what he wants and he will receive it, Solomon asks for wisdom “to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.” God grants Solomon the wisdom he asks for, and it is needed in the incident at the center of today’s lesson.

Read 1 Kings 3:16-28

1. vs. 16: Two prostitutes bring a case before Solomon

Prostitution, though against the Law of Moses (Lev. 19:29) is tolerated in Israel

Lev. 21:14, Josh. 2:1, Prov. 6:26, Hosea 4:13-14, Matt. 21:31-32)

These women have little social standing to be able to come into the king’s presence

They may have had their case heard by elders or judges

Perhaps no decision has been reached yet

However it occurs, these women get to have the king decide what is just in their case

2. vs. 17: One woman begins the account

The two live together

This woman had a baby, and the other was present at its birth

3. vs. 18: The other woman has a baby 3 days later

No one else was with them in the house

This detail is important—there is no other witness available to tell what happened

4. vs. 19: These women do not have a crib or bassinette to lay their children in

The newborns sleep with their mothers

The second woman, according to the first’s account, accidentally smothered her child, a son

5. vs. 20: The woman’s story is that the 2nd woman exchanged babies after killing her own

It’s a serious charge; we can see why this case has come before a wise king

If true, the 2nd woman’s actions seem cold and harsh

The one telling the story calls herself “your servant” to Solomon

This shows she is dependent on the king for help

6. vs. 21: The storyteller discovers the next morning a dead child, and that it's not her own
This is a strong detail—a mother knows her own child intimately
It's not told how much time has passed since this incident occurred
If lower officials / judges have been consulted, it could have been several days
Several days is a lot for the concerns of a mother to reach maximum frustration
7. vs. 22: The 2nd woman contradicts the story just told
The storyteller insists that her story is true
The last part of the verse reads, "And so they argued before the king"
Solomon lets them argue for a little bit, not stopping them
Hearing what people say and watching their body language can be instructive
8. vs. 23: Solomon summarizes the story rather than make an immediate decision
Doing this shows both women that he has heard what each has said
This lends credibility to what he will later do—he has fairly listened to both
9. vs. 24: Solomon asks for a sword to be brought
No doubt, everyone there (especially the two women) was wondering about this action
How can a sword solve a child custody case?
10. vs. 25: Solomon orders the child to be cut in two, with half given to each woman
Technically, it's a fair solution
Each woman claims the child to be hers
There's no evidence to support either claim over the other
The only thing wrong with this "fair" solution is that it kills the child
There's more at work here than first appears
11. vs. 26: This verse is the key to this story
After hearing the king's solution, the two women respond very differently
The storyteller was "filled with compassion" for the child, referred to as "her son"
She asks Solomon to give the child to the other woman so he might live
These are the actions of a true mother
Concern and protection of her child, even at her own loss, is paramount
The 2nd woman supports Solomon's solution, but her reasoning shows coldness
"Neither I nor you shall have him."
Both women will now have a dead child; they will be on equal footing
12. vs. 27: Solomon's wisdom is now shown
"Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother"
He doesn't explain his ruling here, but the thinking seems obvious
Only a true mother would protect the child through self-sacrifice
A woman not his mother would be content to let the child die
13. vs. 28: This case and Solomon's decision cause Israel to hold Solomon in awe
The verse says "All Israel heard the verdict"
This case is unusual, and Solomon's process is equally unusual
The nation sees that his wisdom is "from God"

Read 2 Chronicles 9:8

8. vs. 8: This verse records what the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon
She notes that God has put Solomon on the throne and given him amazing wisdom
She has come to visit Solomon because she has heard of his wisdom
In 1 Kings 10, she asks him hard questions and is amazed at how wise he is

All Israel recognized Solomon's wisdom as coming from God
The leader of a foreign country saw Solomon's wisdom in action, and saw it coming from God

Application: Solomon's decision in this passage reveals both compassion and justice. His proposal to cut the child in two worked, revealing the love of the true mother and the bitterness of the false one. Compassion saw that the child was returned to the mother; justice saw that the liar was exposed for who she was.

We, as both individuals and as a church, are sometimes faces with challenging circumstances in deciding if someone is telling the truth or not. There's a lot of scammers and con artists around today, and we as God's people need wisdom in dealing with both the honest and the scammer.

How do we deal both justly and compassionately? If we have to err on one side or the other (and we will make mistakes from time to time), is it better to err on one side or the other? Each person and each congregation has to look carefully at the circumstances to best address the situation. Prayer for wisdom, like Solomon asked, seems like a good, if not the best, starting place.

One thing to be aware of is the fear of being used, so that it stops us from doing anything. If we are uncertain, then speaking with others we trust spiritually would be wise. Whatever we choose to do, we will make mistakes sometimes. But a larger mistake would be choosing not to do, or try to do, anything at all.

Prayer: Father God, we are called to be wise as serpents but gentle as doves. Help us to maintain that balance as we minister to a broken world. Help us to represent Christ well with His perspective, to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus' name, Amen.