Research: Judgment of Solomon (two women and child)

*I Kings: 3*  Solomon was king over all Israel.

“By this and other instances of the wisdom with which God endued him, Solomon had great reputation among his people. This was better to him than weapons of war; for this he was both feared and loved.” (Mathew Henry’s Commentary).

I Kings 3:16–20, 22 (to 1st .), 24–28

“The celebrated “judgment of Solomon,” given here as a specimen of his wisdom, is simply an instance of intuitive sagacity, cutting the Gordian knot of hopeless difficulty by the appear to maternal instinct—an appeal which might, of course, fail, but which was, under the exceptional circumstances, the only appeal possible. It is in the knowledge how to risk failure rather than be reduced to impotence, and how to go straight to the heart of a difficulty when the slow, regular approaches of science are impossible, that we recognize what men call “a touch of genius,” and what Scripture here calls the “wisdom of God.” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

16 Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him.

“. . . they were unmarried persons, and so guilty of fornication, seems most probable, both because there is no mention of any husbands, whose office it was, if there were any such, to contest for their wives; and because they lived a solitary life in one house” (Matthew Poole’s Commentary).

“*Unto the king —*Probably they had presented their cause to the inferior courts, and as they could not determine it, they now bring it to the king as the supreme magistrate, and famous for wisdom. *And stood there before him —*Desiring and expecting his sentence in the case.” (Benson Commentary).

17 And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house.

“*I was delivered of a child with her*] In the narrative of Josephus the two children are said to have been born at the same hour of the same day. The LXX. renders ‘we were delivered of children in the house,’ making ‘with her’ equivalent to ‘I as well as she.’” (Cambridge Bible).

18 And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house.

“*On the third day — this woman was delivered also —*So that the children could not be distinguished by their age. *No stranger was with us in the house —*Therefore there was no witness on either side; and although there might be some difference distinguishable by an exact observer between the features of the two children” (Benson Commentary).

“Emphasis is laid on this fact, as showing the possibility of the fraud and the impossibility of producing proof. Hebrew women have always required but little assistance in childbearing. That which is written in [Exodus 1:19](http://biblehub.com/exodus/1-19.htm) is true to this day” (Pulpit Commentary).

“that this woman was delivered also; of another child; and being both of the same sex, both sons, as afterwards appears; and being so nearly of an age, it was difficult to distinguish them;

“and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house,

“save we two in the house; so that in this trial no evidences could be produced on either side” (Gill’s Exposition).

19 And this woman’s child died in the night; because she overlaid it. 20 And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom.

“And this woman's child died in the night,.... Whether the same night following the day it was born is not certain;

“because she overlaid it; or laid upon it, being heavy through sleep, and not knowing what she did, turned herself upon it, and smothered it; because it had no previous illness, or any marks of any disease it could be thought to die of, and perhaps there might be some of its being overlaid” (Gill’s Exposition).

22 And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son.

“It is somewhat difficult to account for the pertinacious claim to the child, preferred even before the king by the pretended mother. The most probable explanation is, that having taken the child in the first instance on the spur of the moment, in order to avoid the reproach of having killed her offspring by her clumsiness and neglect, she found it difficult to draw back from her false position - which indeed she could not do without owning herself both child stealer and liar - and so she put on a bold face and maintained the imposture even before the monarch himself. That she did not really care for the child is evident from ver. 26” (Pulpit Commentary).

24 And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king.

“And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a [Heb. **the**; the sword, **i.e.**, of the executioner, or the sword for which he asked] sword before the king” (Pulpit Commentary).

25 And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.

“He said this with seeming sincerity and earnestly, though with a design far above the reach of the two women or of the people present, who probably with admiration and horror expected the execution of it (Matthew Poole’s Commentary).

“And the king said,.... To one of his officers:

“divide the living child in two; not that he meant it should be actually done, though it might at first be thought he really intended it, and so strike the minds of some with horror, as it did, however, the mother; but he ordered this, to try the affections of the women, and thereby come to the true knowledge of the affair; though, some think he knew it before by their countenances and manner of speech, but that he was desirous all present might see it, and be satisfied of it:

“and give half to the one, and half to the other; since both claimed it” Gill’s Exposition).

26 Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.

“*her bowels yearned*] It was believed that some of the viscera were the seat of the emotions. Hence this expression is very common both in the Old and New Testament for the keenest and strongest feeling. The verb *yern*, cognate with the German adverb *gern* = ‘eagerly’, ‘gladly’, implies intense desire. The literal sense of the Hebrew verb is ‘to grow excessively warm.’ We speak of the heart *burning* within any one.

*“in no wise slay it*] The mother’s love comes out. She could be content if it only lived and she might see it, though it were called the child of another.

*“divide it*] In this word she addresses those who stand ready to execute the king’s sentence, ‘divide (ye) it.” (Cambridge Bible).

“The Hebrew is strikingly concise, **"divide."** We have here by far the greatest difficulty in the story. When the pretender, who has clamored for the child, is at last offered it by its mother, she refuses the gift and heartlessly urges that it shall be cut in two. We can only account for her strange conduct on the supposition that. she caught eagerly at any way of escape from the dilemma in which she had placed herself, and thought, no doubt, that to accept his decision would be to flatter and please the king” (Pulpit Commentary).

“Then spake the woman, whose the living child was, unto the king,.... In haste, and with great vehemency, lest the executioner should at once dispatch it:

“(for her bowels yearned upon her son); not being able to bear to see his life taken away:

“and she said, O my lord: or, "on me, my lord"; let the sin, the lie that I have told, be on me, and the punishment of it; she rather chose to be reckoned a liar, and to endure any punishment such an offence deserved, than that her child should be cut asunder:

“give her the living child, and in no wise slay it; being willing to part with her interest in it, rather than it should be put to death:

“but the other said, let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it; for as she knew it was not her own, she had no affection for it, nor desire to have it; chose rather to be clear of the expense of keeping and nursing it, and would, by its being put to death, be avenged of her adversary, who had brought this cause before the king” (Gill’s Exposition).

27 Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof.

“*Give her the living child*] Not referring to the woman who had last spoken as the sequence of the clauses might lead us to expect. The king no doubt pointed to the mother who was desirous at all cost to keep the child alive” (Cambridge Bible).

“Then the king answered and said, give her the living child,

“and in no wise slay it,.... That is, to her who desired it might not be slain, but rather be given to her who had no right to it:

“she is the mother thereof; which might be strongly concluded from her compassion for it, her eagerness and earnestness to have its life spared, and from the indifference of the other, yea, from her cruelty and barbarity in moving to have it divided” (Gill’s Exposition).

28 And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.

“*hey feared the king*] As having a power beyond what they had seen in any other to detect wrong, and to find out truth and falsehood, and so to make certain the punishment of evildoers. There was no escape from such a judge.

*“the wisdom of God*] i.e. Wisdom which God had given, and which made the king skilful in trying the very thoughts of those who came before him. A superhuman discernment had taken up its home within him” (Cambridge Bible).

“And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged,.... In the above case; the decision of it was divulged throughout the land, and the fame of it was spread everywhere:

“and they feared the king; reverenced him as a wise, judicious, and faithful king, and feared to do anything of a criminal nature, as perceiving that he was so sagacious and penetrating, that he would discover it quickly, and bring them to shame and punishment:

“for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment; that God had put more than ordinary wisdom into him, to make a right judgment in causes that came before him, and finish them in the most just and equitable manner.