Solomon’s Test of Wisdom

Read 1 Kings 3:16-28. Consider why the writer of 1 Kings, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, may have chosen this case to demonstrate how powerfully God answered Solomon’s prayer.

I. THE PARTICIPANTS (verse 16) – Who were they? What do we know about them, and what don’t we know?

Discussion: Consider how a court case involving two women would affect other people who would have been in Solomon’s courtroom or hearing about the case. What would they think when they learned both parties were prostitutes? How might they (and society in general) have viewed the other central figure in the case, a fatherless child? Do you think prostitutes and orphans would have been given a hearing in the courts of most kings of that day? Did “illegitimate” children have a right to justice? How does God’s law view prostitution and the people who practice it?

Relevant passages:

- Prostitution is considered degrading, lewd, and profane (Genesis 38:24-26; Leviticus 19:29 and 21:7-9; Proverbs 6:26, 7:10, 23:27, 29:3).
- Sexual immorality is equally wrong for men as for women (Numbers 25:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:8; Revelation 2:14).
- Prostitution and sexual immorality are punishable by death (Deuteronomy 22:21).
- Prostitution is likened to idolatry and connected with child sacrifice (Deut. 23:17-18; Isaiah 57:3-8; Jeremiah 3:6-25; Ezekiel 16:17,20; Hosea 4:12).
- The children of prostitutes are spoken of with derision (Isaiah 57:3-5; Hosea 2:4).
- In Jesus’ day, known “sinners” such as tax-collectors, the sexually immoral, and prostitutes were believed to be disqualified from God’s kingdom, but Jesus radically transformed that thinking (Matthew 21:31-32; Luke 7:36-50; John 4:1-42, 8:1-11), calling everyone to a life of repentance and forgiveness.

Discussion: How, just by agreeing to hear their case, did King Solomon elevate the value of marginalized people? Are some women (and men) too sinful for our concern? Are there babies whose lives may be so difficult in the future that we shouldn’t extend help to them now?
II. THE FACTS OF THE CASE – 1 Kings 3:17-22

This was a classic case of she-said/she-said. God’s law required two or more witnesses to make a judgment (Num. 35:30, Deut. 19:15-21), but here there were no independent witnesses. Solomon allowed both parties to be heard before the proceedings devolved into a shouting match: “The living child is mine!” “No, he’s mine!” The only thing they agreed upon was that one child had died and one remained alive. Resolution seemed hopeless. Without DNA testing, how could Solomon identify the real mother?

The king had to decide between two competing claims, the most difficult type of case. One witness had to be lying, and the living baby could not speak for himself. Solomon may have wished he could let the case go unresolved, but good government must provide justice and account for every life lost, regardless of the plaintiffs’ position in society (Genesis 9:5-6; Leviticus 19:15; Numbers 35:33; Deuteronomy 1:17 and 21:1-9).

III. THE KING’S EDICT – 1 Kings3:22-25

King Solomon reviewed the case before rendering his verdict: “Bring me a sword. Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.” Stop for a moment and imagine you don’t know the rest of the story. Let the verdict sink in, as though it was the final word.

Discussion: What effect would such a verdict have? What kind of king do you think Solomon would be perceived to be at this point: a wise and judicious king or a barbaric tyrant? What kind of person would applaud this verdict? What kind of person would be horrified by it? If carried out, what would be the effect of such a sentence? Do you think people would continue to bring their cases to the court? Why or why not? Would they have hope of finding justice? Why or why not?

Key points: Raw power—power lacking wisdom, righteousness, justice, or mercy—strikes fear in people’s hearts, especially those without power. They’re silenced into submission. Tyrants believe
they won’t have to answer to God for their rulings, that they can get away with killing innocent people, but the following passages show that God sees everything they do: Genesis 4:10; Psalm 9:12 and 10:11-14.

**ABORTION LINK:** Discuss ways in which abortion is an example of raw power. What problems are “solved” by abortion? Is it ever appropriate to kill a person who is causing problems? Why is it dangerous to think of a person as something that can be divided up (killed) in order to satisfy competing interests? Who holds the power in these situations?

**Caution for discussion leaders:** Please be mindful that members of your class may have regrets over past involvement in abortion. Be sure to remind everyone that, while abortion is a grievous sin, God’s grace is sufficient, abundant, and free. Find biblical support at [www.lifemattersww.org/Need-Help/Find-post-abortion-help/Already-Aborted, “Can Women Who’ve Aborted Be Right with God?”](http://www.lifemattersww.org/Need-Help/Find-post-abortion-help/Already-Aborted)

### IV. THE MOTHER’S APPEAL – 1 Kings 3:26

**Discussion:** Many plaintiffs would have taken King Solomon’s edict as the final word, but not the mother of the living son. Why did she speak up to oppose the king? In what way might this have been a grave risk? What enabled this mother to value her child’s life over her own? What did the second woman’s statement say about her character? Why would she rather see her companion’s baby die too?

**Key points:** The true mother’s plea was strikingly different from the other woman’s. She said “Oh, my lord, give her the living child. By no means put him to death,” while the other woman said, “He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him.” Though their lives were similar, these women had vastly different responses, based on their desires and worldviews. Even though the mother of the living child was a prostitute, sin had not dulled her conscience nor eroded her compassion. She was willing to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of her child, even though it meant he would live with a liar and a cheat. The other woman could only be happy if both of them were miserable.

**ABORTION LINK:** Even people who seemingly have no power can (and should) speak up for those who are more helpless. A simple yet selfless plea can save the life of someone who is precious to God: “**By no means kill the innocent child!**”

Proponents of abortion, on the other hand, echo the second woman’s advocacy of death, saying, in effect, “**By any means kill.**” Indeed, different methods are used to kill unborn babies—drugs, various instruments, and technology—depending on the child’s size and level of development.

Pro-life advocates say it’s wrong to rank a person’s value on the basis of size, level of development, environment, or degree of dependency. Take a look at [The SLED Test](http://www.lifemattersww.org/Need-Help/Find-post-abortion-help/Already-Aborted) below.
## The SLED Test

There is no morally significant difference between the embryo you once were and the adult you are today. Nothing would have justified killing you at an earlier stage of development. **SLED** is a helpful acronym that reminds us of four non-essential differences between people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>You were once very small as an embryo, but body <strong>SIZE</strong> does not make a person more or less valuable. A 7-foot basketball player is not &quot;more human&quot; than a toddler.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>As a fetus you were more developed than you were at the embryo stage, but less developed than you are today. Why should <strong>LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT</strong> matter? Two-year-old girls are less developed than 18-year-old women—should we kill them? Of course not, for the same reason that parents don’t have a greater right to live than their teenage children, even though they’re more developed physically and intellectually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Your <strong>ENVIRONMENT</strong> also has no bearing on what you are. The journey of eight inches down the birth canal does not change the essential nature of the unborn—from someone we can kill to someone we cannot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td><strong>DEGREE OF DEPENDENCY</strong>—Each of us are dependent on sources outside ourselves for survival, to one degree or another. Being more dependent than someone else has no bearing on a person’s value.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From *The Moral Question of Abortion*, by Stephen D. Schwarz (Loyola Press, 1990); see also "How to Defend Your Pro-Life Views in 5 Minutes or Less," by Scott Klusendorf of Life Training Institute ([http://prolifetraining.com/resources/five-minute-1](http://prolifetraining.com/resources/five-minute-1)). See also [https://www.lifemattersww.org/NeedHelp/Questions-about-abortion](https://www.lifemattersww.org/NeedHelp/Questions-about-abortion) for more facts about the human embryo.

---

**V. THE FINAL VERDICT AND AFTERMATH – 1 Kings 3:27-28**

King Solomon revealed he was no tyrant after all. His shocking “edict” had its intended effect: revealing the women’s hidden thoughts. It was not his final word, but only the means to a just end. Justice was Solomon’s great concern, as he had said in his prayer (verse 9). The king echoed the mother’s earnest plea: “By no means put him to death!”

**Discussion:** Why would it be insufficient to simply state a just verdict without proving that the right woman got her son? How did Solomon’s final order of verse 27 reveal his regard for the value of life?
Key points: Solomon’s intent was to protect the child from death and restore him to his rightful mother. The fatherless son of a sinful woman had value in King Solomon’s eyes and in his court, but not in society. It would have been wrong for the king to ignore someone, even if that person might never have known his father, had an education, or achieved any kind of status in society. The child may have indeed gone on to live a miserable life, but killing him would have been the ultimate denial of justice.

ABORTION LINK: Many women consider abortion because they face thorny problems in their pregnancies. They need wise counselors to help them sort through their predicament and lead them to solutions that don’t involve killing a child. God approves of leaders and others who speak up for the weak against the ruthless. Refer to Psalm 82:1-4 and Proverbs 31:4-9.

Conclusion: Why do you think this case was chosen to represent Solomon’s judicial wisdom? If King Solomon upheld the rights of a prostitute and her “illegitimate” son, what do you think others could expect to receive from his court in the future? What was his priority, justice or power? Who might have received encouragement from this outcome, and who might have been discouraged? What can we know about God’s character from this account? How does it reveal what’s important to God?

VI. SUMMARY: The text does not say Solomon was given the answer to this problem in a dream or vision, or through the word of a prophet. God had, however, granted him the wisdom he needed to see which woman was the real mother and to demonstrate that fact to everyone else. Solomon’s wise verdict was eventually perceived by all as being from God for the purpose of rendering justice (verse 28). As the closing statement of the passage, we see it as proof of a direct answer to Solomon’s prayer. James 1:5-8 assures believers that we too can receive wisdom from God about difficult matters.