

Exegetical Notes – 1 Kings 3:16-28

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1 Kings 3:16-28

Verses 16-18

¹⁶ Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. ¹⁷ One of them said, "Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me. ¹⁸ The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us.

- In the kingdom of Israel during the time of Israel's kings, it was possible for the people of the kingdom to take their legal complaints directly to the king. That is what happened here. The woman made her appeal directly to the king.
- The two women involved were both prostitutes. Both women had babies within a short time of each other. They lived in the same brothel. There was no one there but the two of them.

Verses 19-21

¹⁹ "During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. ²⁰ So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. ²¹ The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had borne."

- During the night, the second woman rolled over on her baby and suffocated him. She then took her dead child and put him in bed with the woman who was bringing the complaint. She took the living child to her bed. So, when the complainant awoke she found the dead child in her bed, but when she looked at the baby she realized it was not her child but the child of the other woman.

Verse 22

²² The other woman said, "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours."

But the first one insisted, “No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine.” And so they argued before the king.

- The second woman claimed that the first was lying. The first woman said the second was lying. Since there were no other witnesses, it was a she said/she said confrontation; a dilemma without a solution.

Verses 23-25

²³ The king said, “This one says, ‘My son is alive and your son is dead,’ while that one says, ‘No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.’”

²⁴ Then the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So they brought a sword for the king. ²⁵ He then gave an order: “Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.”

- Solomon recognized the problem. He called for a sword and ordered the living child cut in two with each woman receiving one-half of the child’s body.

Verse 26

²⁶ The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, “Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!” But the other said, “Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!”

- The first woman, the true mother of the living child, pleaded with the king not to kill the baby but to give him to the other woman. The second woman agreed that the baby should be killed so that neither woman would have a living child.

Verses 27-28

²⁷ Then the king gave his ruling: “Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.”

²⁸ When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

- The king then ruled that the first woman was the mother of the living child and gave the living baby to her.
- When news of this verdict reached the people, they were amazed at the king’s wisdom in resolving the problem. They saw that God had blessed the king with wisdom.

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