



Introduction

1. Kings I 3:16-28 (JPS 1985 tr., c/o sefaria.org)

Later two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. The first woman said, "Please, my lord! This woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. On the third day after I was delivered, this woman also gave birth to a child. We were alone; there was no one else with us in the house, just the two of us in the house. During the night this woman's child died, because she lay on it. She arose in the night and took my son from my side while your maidservant was asleep, and laid him in her bosom; and she laid her dead son in my bosom. When I arose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was, dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, it was not the son I had borne."

The other woman spoke up, "No, the live one is my son, and the dead one is yours!" But the first insisted, "No, the dead boy is yours; mine is the live one!" And they went on arguing before the king.

The king said, "One says, 'This is my son, the live one, and the dead one is yours'; and the other says, 'No, the dead boy is yours, mine is the live one.' So the king gave the order, "Fetch me a sword." A sword was brought before the king, and the king said, "Cut the live child in two, and give half to one and half to the other."

But the woman whose son was the live one pleaded with the king, for she was overcome with compassion for her son. "Please, my lord," she cried, "give her the live child; only don't kill it!" The other insisted, "It shall be neither yours nor mine; cut it in two!"

Then the king spoke up. "Give the live child to her," he said, "and do not put it to death; she is its mother."

When all Israel heard the decision that the king had rendered, they stood in awe of the king; for they saw that he possessed divine wisdom to execute justice.

2. Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra (Spain, Egypt, Israel 16th century), Responsum 3:634

You asked me to tell you, my beloved friend, of the judgment which King Solomon judged between the two *zonot*... and what was the great wisdom in this judgment. It was only a strategy among strategies, and in our own day we have people who know how to make such strategies and others...

Answer: You have asked well, and Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel preceded you...

Where did the wisdom come from?

3. Kings I 1:49-53 (JPS 1985 tr., c/o sefaria.org)

Thereupon, all of Adonijah's guests rose in alarm and each went his own way. Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went at once [to the Tent] and grasped the horns of the altar. It was reported to Solomon: "Adonijah is in fear of King Solomon and has grasped the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon first swear to me that he will not put his servant to the sword.'" Solomon said, "If he behaves worthily, not a hair of his head shall fall to the ground; but if he is caught in any offense, he shall die." So King Solomon sent and had him taken down from the altar. He came and bowed before King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, "Go home."

4. Kings I 2:6-9 (JPS 1985 tr., c/o sefaria.org)

So act in accordance with your wisdom, and see that his white hair does not go down to Sheol in peace... So do not let him go unpunished; for you are a wise man and you will know how to deal with him and send his gray hair down to Sheol in blood.

5. Kings I 3:4-15 (JPS 1985 tr., c/o sefaria.org)

The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the largest shrine; on that altar Solomon presented a thousand burnt offerings. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and Gd said, "Ask, what shall I grant you?" Solomon said, "You dealt most graciously with Your servant my father David, because he walked before You in faithfulness and righteousness and in integrity of heart. You have continued this great kindness to him by giving him a son to occupy his throne, as is now the case. And now, O Lord my Gd, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David; but I am a young lad, with no experience in leadership. Your servant finds himself in the midst of the

people You have chosen, a people too numerous to be numbered or counted. Grant, then, Your servant an understanding mind to judge Your people, to distinguish between good and bad; for who can judge this vast people of Yours?"

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. And Gd said to him, "Because you asked for this—you did not ask for long life, you did not ask for riches, you did not ask for the life of your enemies, but you asked for discernment in dispensing justice— I now do as you have spoken. I grant you a wise and discerning mind; there has never been anyone like you before, nor will anyone like you arise again. And I also grant you what you did not ask for—both riches and glory all your life—the like of which no king has ever had. And I will further grant you long life, if you will walk in My ways and observe My laws and commandments, as did your father David."

Then Solomon awoke: it was a dream! He went to Jerusalem, stood before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented offerings of well-being; and he made a banquet for all his courtiers.

6. Kings I 10:1-10 (JPS 1985 tr., c/o sefaria.org)

The queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, through the name of the Lord, and she came to test him with hard questions. She arrived in Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels bearing spices, a great quantity of gold, and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she asked him all that she had in mind.

Solomon had answers for all her questions; there was nothing that the king did not know, [nothing] to which he could not give her an answer. When the queen of Sheba observed all of Solomon's wisdom, and the palace he had built, the fare of his table, the seating of his courtiers, the service and attire of his attendants, and his wine service, and the burnt offerings that he offered at the House of the Lord, she was left breathless. She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own land about you and your wisdom was true. But I did not believe the reports until I came and saw with my own eyes that not even the half had been told me; your wisdom and wealth surpass the reports that I heard. How fortunate are your men and how fortunate are these your courtiers, who are always in attendance on you and can hear your wisdom! Praised be the Lord your Gd, who delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel. It is because of the Lord's everlasting love for Israel that He made you king to administer justice and righteousness."

She presented the king with one hundred and twenty talents of gold...

7. Kings I 10:24-25

And all the land sought the face of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which Gd had put into his heart. And each brought his gift, vessels of silver and gold, clothing, weapons and spices, horses and mules, annually.

Further examples of Solomon's wisdom

8. Song of Songs 1:1; Proverbs 1:1, 10:1, 25:1; Ecclesiastes 1:1

The song of songs, of Solomon.

The lessons of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.

The lessons of Solomon: A wise son will gladden the father, and a foolish son is the sorrow of his mother.

These, too, are the lessons of Solomon, recorded by the men of Hezekiah, king of Judea.

The words of Ecclesiastes, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

9. Kings I 5:9-14 (JPS 1985 tr., c/o sefaria.org)

Gd endowed Solomon with wisdom and discernment in great measure, with understanding as vast as the sands on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the Kedemites and than all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was the wisest of all men: [wiser] than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalkol, and Darda the sons of Mahol. His fame spread among all the surrounding nations. He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand and five. He discoursed about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; and he discoursed about beasts, birds, creeping things, and fishes. Men of all peoples came to hear Solomon's wisdom, [sent] by all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

10. Midrash, Pesikta d'Rav Kahana (Mandelbaum ed.) #4

Is it possible to speak to the trees, "from the cedars of Lebanon to the hyssop emerging from the wall"? Rather: Solomon said: Why does this *metzora* become ritually pure with the tallest of the tall and the shortest of the short? If someone

elevates himself like a cedar, he will be struck with *tzara'at*, and once he lowers himself like the hyssop he will be healed with the hyssop.

11. Ecclesiastes 2:8

... I made for myself male and female singers, and the pleasures of people, *shidah* and *shidot*.

12. Talmud, Yoma 14a

If it converts the ritually impure to become ritually pure, then how much more so the ritually pure! What will Rabbi Akiva reply? This is what Solomon said, "I said I would become wise, but it is remote from me. (Ecclesiastes 7:23)"

The dangers of wisdom

13. Kings I 3:1

And Solomon married the daughter of the Egyptian king...

14. Deuteronomy 23:8-9

...Do not abhor the Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land. The children born to him in the third generation may enter the congregation of Gd.

15. Talmud, Berachot 8a

One should always live in his mentor's location, for as long as Shimi son of Gera lived, Solomon did not wed the daughter of the Pharaoh.

16. Talmud, Shabbat 56b

Rav Yehudah cited Samuel: When Solomon married the daughter of the Pharaoh, she brought him one thousand musical instruments. She said, "So they play for this idol, and so they play for this idol," and he did not protest.

Rav Yehudah cited Samuel: When Solomon married the daughter of the Pharaoh, Gabriel descended and stabbed a reed into the sea. Silt accumulated, and on this the great city of Rome was built.

17. Kings I 11:1-6 (JPS 1985 tr., c/o sefaria.org)

King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter—Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Phoenician, and Hittite women, from the nations of which the Lord had said to the Israelites, "None of you shall join them and none of them shall join you, lest they turn your heart away to follow their gods." Such Solomon clung to and loved. He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned his heart away. In his old age, his wives turned away Solomon's heart after other gods, and he was not as wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord his Gd as his father David had been. Solomon followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Phoenicians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was displeasing to the Lord and did not remain loyal to the Lord like his father David.

18. Talmud, Sanhedrin 21b

It is written, "He shall not increase his wives. (Deuteronomy 17)" Solomon said: I will increase and not deviate. And it is written, "And it was in Solomon's old age, his wives turned his heart."

And it is written, "He shall not increase his horses. (ibid.)" Solomon said: I will increase and I will not return [the Jews to Egypt]." And it is written, "And the chariot came from Egypt with six hundred silver, etc. (Kings I 10:29)"

19. Talmud, Sanhedrin 104b

They wanted to list one more [King Solomon]. The image of his father came and bowed before them, and they paid no attention. Fire came from heaven and licked at their benches, and they paid no attention. A small [Heavenly] voice emerged and said, "'Have you seen a man who is quick in his work? He will stand before kings, he will not stand before those who are darkened.' He put My house before his house, and not only that, he built My house in seven years while he took thirteen years to build his house. He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before darkened ones!" And

they paid no attention. A small [Heavenly] voice emerged and said, "Shall you be in charge of payment, such that you can reject it? Shall you choose, not Me? Speak of what you know!"

How wise was Solomon?

20. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Commentary to Kings I 3:24

By knowing the faces of the harlots and from their features when he examined them, and the way of their speech when he heard them, he grasped what was hidden in their hearts and he descended to the truth of the matter.

21. Rabbi Meir Leibush Weiser (Malbim), Commentary to Kings I 3:22

The defendant said it with the language of "My son is the living one and your son is the deceased," and the plaintiff said the opposite, "Your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one." There is a principle in language, that people put first that which is the essence, and postpone that which is subsidiary.

22. Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra (Spain, Egypt, Israel 16th century), Responsum 3:634

King Solomon identified the mother of the child from a few points. First, he recognized that the features of the living child resembled the features of the plaintiff, and the features of the deceased child resembled the features of the woman who held the living child. He also recognized the nature of the plaintiff, that she made small motions, and was energetic and careful, and she did not lie on her child. He recognized that the other woman was the opposite, and he judged that the deceased child was hers...

23. Rabbi Dr. Ephraim Yehuda Weisenberg, *משפט שלמה*, <https://www.herzog.ac.il/vtc/0030840.html>

Her claim against that woman, that in her carelessness she killed her son, "And the son of this woman died, for she lay upon him," has a challenge to it within itself. How could she know this, if she was sleeping?

24. Talmud, Makkot 23b

[Divine inspiration] was in the court of Solomon, for it says, "And the king declared, saying: Give her the living child, and do not kill him; she is his mother." How did he know? Perhaps she was being clever! A small voice emerged [from Heaven] and said, "She is his mother."

25. Samuel I 16:18

I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem; he knows how to play, and he is mighty in *chayil*, a warrior, he speaks with understanding, he is a man of good appearance, and Gd is with him.

26. Genesis 40:8, 41:16

And Joseph said to them: Does Gd not have explanations? Please tell me.

And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying: It is not from me. Gd will answer...

27. Daniel 2:27-28

Daniel declared before the king, saying: The question the king asks, sages and magicians cannot tell the king. But there is a Gd in Heaven, for whom secrets are revealed, and he is telling King Nevuchadnezzar what will be at the end of days...

28. Isaiah 11:1-5 (JPS 1985 tr., c/o sefaria.org)

But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse, A twig shall sprout from his stock. The spirit of the Lord shall alight upon him: A spirit of wisdom and insight, A spirit of counsel and valor, A spirit of devotion and reverence for the Lord. He shall sense the truth by his reverence for the Lord: He shall not judge by what his eyes behold, Nor decide by what his ears perceive. Thus he shall judge the poor with equity And decide with justice for the lowly of the land. He shall strike down a land with the rod of his mouth And slay the wicked with the breath of his lips. Justice shall be the girdle of his loins, And faithfulness the girdle of his waist.