

## **Haftarat Miketz מִקֵּץ**

**Torah: Genesis 41:1–44:17**

**Haftarah: 1 Kings 3:15–4:1**

### **Asking the Right Question**

#### **General Overview**

The haftarah, Kings 3:15–4:1, is one of the best known stories in the entire Tanakh. It is the story of the two women who each claimed to be the mother of the same child. They brought the child to King Solomon because they heard that he was just and wise. In order to ascertain who was the real mother, Solomon ordered the child to be cut in half. At that point, one of the women volunteered to give the child to the other woman rather than see the child killed (which Solomon was not really going to do!). The other mother, however, was more willing to see the child die than give up her claim to him. Solomon decided in favour of the woman who voluntarily gave up the baby so that he could live no matter who the mother would be. The story implies that this was, indeed, the genuine mother of that baby.

#### **Connection to the Parasha**

Both the haftarah and the Torah portion speak of royal dreams. In Parashat Miketz, Pharaoh had a dream that affected the entire future of his people, as well as that of the children of Israel. Joseph was used by God to not only interpret Pharaoh's dream but he also used His God-given wisdom to apply the dream to real life. It is the same way in the haftarah. Solomon, the king had a life-changing dream. God gave him the interpretation and the wisdom necessary to carry out the dream.

#### **Exposition**

If one were to label the contents of this passage, certainly the topic of wisdom would stand out. In that light, our outline will look like this:

- I. The Need for Wisdom (3:1–3)
- II. The Desire for Wisdom (3:4–9)
- III. The Source of Wisdom (3:10–15)
- IV. The Manifestation of Wisdom (3:16–27)
- V. The Rewards of Wisdom (3:28–4:1)

In this excerpt of the commentary on Haftarat Miketz, we will look at portions of the second, third, and fourth sections of the outline. Having established in section one the dire need that Solomon had for true divine wisdom does not necessarily mean that Solomon would pursue such wisdom. Many a leader knows that he needs wisdom, yet often fails to either pursue it, or he pursues the wrong kind of wisdom. What would this young king do?

There is an important statement in the text about Solomon, which provides the key to really knowing him and what he would do. Despite his flaws, “Solomon loved the Lord” (1 Kings 3:3). This is such a simple statement. Since he loved the Lord his God, we can assume that Solomon followed the right path to the right kind of wisdom. Accordingly, we are told what he did in 1 Kings 3:4–9.

Solomon knew that he needed to hear from the Lord. So, he went to Gibeon in order to make a grand sacrifice of 1,000 offerings to the Lord. At night time, when he finished his grand offering, the Lord gave Solomon a dream. Only this was not just an ordinary dream one might usually have during the course of a night's sleep. The great Jewish commentator Abarbanel compares Solomon's dream to the prophecy of Jacob, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, indicating that this was a prophetic dream. God really did come to him in a very real and significant way.

The Holy One knew what was on his mind. Consequently, it was God who took the initiative and spoke to Solomon. When He spoke, God asked Solomon what He could give to this new king of Israel. Here God was forming a test. He wanted to test Solomon's priorities. Solomon could have asked for anything. However, since Solomon's mind was turned toward the Lord, the only thing he asked from the Almighty was for wisdom. This request, in fact, gave the Lord great joy to give it to him (1 Kings 3:10).

Actually, to be more specific, verse 9 tells us exactly what it was that Solomon requested from God. The Hebrew tells us that he asked for a *lev shomea* (לֵב שׁוֹמֵעַ), or, literally, “a heart [mind] that listens.” This is quite a remarkable request. Our point here is that, in essence, what Solomon desired was to be wise. Not only did he see the need, he followed through on it and asked for it.

What Solomon did was perfectly compatible with what the Bible teaches elsewhere about gaining wisdom. Ya'akov, whom many consider to be like another Solomon, in his letter (James 1:6–8), plainly states, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God...but let him ask in faith without any doubting.” There was no hesitance with Solomon. He could have asked for the world, but instead, his immediate request was for God's wisdom. Solomon was not a double-minded person. He knew that God would never reproach him if he asked for that which God deeply desires to give to all of His children — wisdom.

What specifically was Solomon given and from where did it come? This is spelled out for us as we read 1 Kings 3:10–15. In order to understand Solomon's request better, we should note that, in reality, there are two types of wisdom. There is a false wisdom. The ultimate source for this kind of wisdom is the evil one himself. For example, Proverbs (a great part of which Solomon wrote, tells us, “There is a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). The essence of this verse would teach us that Man has his own version of what is wise. In many ways there is a measure of truth to man's wisdom. But in the end, man's wisdom — false wisdom — always falls short of the glory of God and its ultimate fruit is death.

The other kind of wisdom is that which God gives. In 1 Kings we see that He is the ultimate source for wisdom. Wisdom from Him is always life giving. James

1:5 also tells us that if we desire wisdom “let him ask of God.” Then he says that when we do ask God for wisdom, He gives it to all people “generously and without reproach.”

We come now to the actual haftarah section itself. It is a simple passage with a straightforward story of a significant event in Solomon’s life, when he ordered the child to be cut in half. The situation is perfectly set up in order to reveal the awesome wisdom that God bestowed on Solomon. For one, it involves those with whom many judges would not even bother. Second, there is no witness to what happened, no one who can at least tell what he thought he saw (1 Kings 13:18). Moreover, it is also a case with great emotional involvement — there is a death, a death of a baby to boot! Emotions often tend to cloud people’s thinking and hinder the righteous wisdom from being applied. Finally, with no witness, it is also a case where two people are telling the exact opposite of each other. Someone is either right or wrong, there is no middle ground. These are extremely difficult cases to judge. Thus, this situation will afford us a perfect moment to see whether or not Solomon has the necessary wisdom for a just decision.

The situation is very straightforward. The two harlots were in the same house. There was apparently no man present. They both had babies at approximately the same time. However, when they were asleep one of the women accidentally laid on the baby, perhaps because she was nursing him, and crushed him to death. In her dismay, she secretly brought him to the other woman and exchanged babies with her during the night. The other woman, therefore, woke up with the first woman’s dead baby with her. But she knew in her heart, that this dead baby was not hers, so they both went to court.

We are not sure how this case ended up with King Solomon unless all of the lesser courts did not have the wisdom to find a solution to their demands. When they finally approached Solomon, they both argued that the living baby was their baby.

What was Solomon’s solution for their problem? At first, Solomon’s answer seems rather adventurous and barbaric. What judge in his right mind would ever order a person to be killed in order to solve a case?

On the surface, it appears like there seemed to be one thing on Solomon’s mind — finding out who the true mother was. But judging by the king’s solution, apparently Solomon discerned something even deeper. Perhaps the real issue was envy or jealousy. The untruthful mother revealed her real nature when faced with the crisis that Solomon was purposely creating. As one writer said, “It was this underlying motive (envy) that was the target of Solomon’s startling edict.”<sup>i</sup>

The proof of this assessment is the reaction of the lying woman. The real mother of the living child was perfectly willing to give up the child to the other woman rather than see it cut into two, as Solomon was proposing. However, the lying mother did not really care about the child’s well being. Instead, she just did not want the other mother to have the child.

There is one last observation about Solomon's solution. Solomon did no moralizing here. There is no rebuke for the women being harlots, nor for them having babies out of wedlock. In addition, there is no moralizing about the lying woman's response to Solomon's decision to kill the baby. The reason this whole incident was recorded in the Scriptures seems to be because it illustrated the extent of Solomon's wisdom, and the fact that God took heed to his prayer for wisdom.

Indeed, Solomon did become wise. His proposed solution was quite risky and courageous. Suppose that the righteous woman (righteous in terms of legal responsibility in this case) did not come forward to stop the sword! Somehow Solomon knew that she would do just what she did because part of his wisdom was that he had a mind that was in a place of hearing from God.

Thus, Solomon, because of his humility, asked God for wisdom. The amount of wisdom God gave him earned him the reputation that we read of him in 1 Kings 3:12, "there was none like you before you, nor after you shall any arise like you."

That is certainly true as far as mere men are concerned. But in the fullness of time there came a most unique man, the most unique one who was ever born — The Son of God, Yeshua, of whom it was said that, "something greater than Solomon was here" (Matthew 12:42).

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<sup>i</sup> Herman J. Austel, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 4: 1 Kings*, p. 48