

## 1 Kings 10:1-29

### Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

(The story is also related in **2 Chronicles 9**)

**1 Kings 10:1** - "And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions."

"Sheba" is probably the kingdom of the Sabaeans in what is now Yemen in the Arabian peninsula. There were Sabaeans also in Ethiopia and Eritrea, in the area that later became the realm of Aksum. In **Psalm 72:10** they are mentioned together: "the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts."

Josephus says she was "a queen of Egypt and Ethiopia."

The visit by the Queen of Sheba is mentioned by Jesus:

- **Matthew 12:42** - "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."

Because of this, the Queen of Sheba has been seen by Christians as a representative of the Gentiles who "come from the uttermost part of the earth," drawn by the Gospel to Jesus - the "greater than Solomon." Also, Sheba was the source of frankincense and many other spices, and frankincense was brought by the wise men at Jesus' birth.

Also, her skeptical questioning and testing are a good guide for anyone confronted with sweeping claims. In the end, she admits "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me." (verse 6) And eventually we can also say of Jesus: "Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice."

This was a fulfillment of a prophecy:

- **Deuteronomy 28:1,10, 12** - "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth... Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you....The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow."

In Psalm 72 - "a Psalm for Solomon" - the "gold of Sheba" is mentioned as part of depicting Solomon as the Messianic "Righteous King":

- **Psalm 72:13-15,17** - "He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight. And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised....His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed."

Jewish legend proposes a "marriage" between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who had converted to Judaism, which produced a child when she returned to her home. The child Menelik according to Ethiopian legend founded the dynasty that ruled Ethiopia until recent times.

The Song of Solomon has also been seen as a depiction of the Bridegroom and the Bride - a Shulamite who was "very dark, but comely." Was this a reference to the Queen of Sheba? If so, she would be a type of the Bride made up of Jews and Gentiles.

The most elaborate account of the queen's visit to Solomon is given in the Targum Sheni to Esther:

A hoopoe bird informed Solomon that the kingdom of Sheba was the only kingdom on earth not subject to him and that its queen was a sun worshiper. He thereupon sent the bird to Kitor in the land of Sheba with a letter attached to its wing commanding its queen to come to him as a subject. She thereupon sent him all the ships of the sea loaded with precious gifts and 6,000 youths of equal size, all born at the same hour and clothed in purple garments. They carried a letter declaring that she could arrive in Jerusalem within three years, although the journey normally took seven years. When the queen arrived and came to Solomon's palace, thinking that the glass floor was a pool of water, she lifted the hem of her dress, uncovering her legs. Solomon informed her of her mistake and reprimanded her for her hairy legs. She asked him three (Targum Sheni to Esther 1:3) or, according to the Midrash (Prov. ii. 6; Yalk. ii., § 1085, Midrash ha-Hefez), more riddles to test his wisdom.

## Riddles

In the midrashic account, the Queen of Sheba heard of King Solomon's great wisdom and declared: "I will go and see whether he is wise or not, and I will come to test him with riddles." She came to Solomon and said to him: "You are truly wise, now I will ask you something, and we shall see if you are capable of answering me," to which he responded: "For the Lord grants wisdom; knowledge and discernment are by His decree" (**Proverbs 2:6**). The Queen of Sheba asked: "What are the seven that issue and nine that enter, the two that offer drink, and the one that drinks?" Solomon answered: "The seven that issue are the seven days of menstrual impurity. The nine that enter are the nine months of pregnancy. The two that offer drink are the breasts, and the child is the one who drinks"

She asked him a second riddle: "How can a woman say to her son: 'Your father is my

father; your grandfather, my husband; you are my son, and I am your sister?" Solomon replied: "The two daughters of Lot" (who became pregnant by their father and bore sons).

There are 19 riddles in all, scattered among different midrashic versions of this story.

The Rabbis compare the Queen of Sheba with Jethro and with Rahab, two important Gentiles who sought to adhere to Israel. The queen's visit to King Solomon is a fulfillment of **Jeremiah 16:19**: "To You nations shall come from the ends of the earth and say: Our fathers inherited utter delusions, things that are futile and worthless." The queen came from the ends of the earth and, as a result of her stay with Solomon, came to believe in the Lord (Exodus Rabbah 27:4). This midrash of the queen's conversion may have led to the development of a literary tradition that appears in a later midrash, according to which Solomon married the Queen of Sheba and she bore him a son named Ben Sira (Alphabet of Ben Sira, in Ozar ha-Midrashim [Eisenstein], p. 35, para. 1).

- <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/queen-of-sheba-midrash-and-aggadah>

There is an alternate tradition that sees the visit of the Queen of Sheba in a darker light. These midrash stories say Solomon should not have given her "all she desired" (a child from him) and that her conversion was not sincere, and the descendant of her offspring by Solomon was Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the Temple Solomon had built.

[Another midrash in this tradition proposes that the descendant from the marriage of Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter led to the founding of the Roman Empire, which destroyed the Second Temple.]

This alternate tradition faults Solomon for his later fall into idolatry because of his foreign wives.

### **Contrasting Types - Christ and Antichrist**

On one hand, the depiction of Solomon's wisdom and his building of the Temple show him as a type of Christ whose kingdom will last eternally.

**1 Kings 10:18** - "Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold." The great white throne in **Revelation 20:11** may be an allusion to this white ivory throne of Solomon. The listing of precious stones brought by the queen correspond to the jewels in the New Jerusalem in **Revelation 21**.

The physical riches described here of Solomon's kingdom correspond to "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (**Ephesians 3:8**) which are spiritual.

The "dark side" of Solomon is hinted at by this turning away from God to idols in his old age as well as the mention in **verse 14** of "six hundred threescore and six talents of gold" that came to Solomon every year. (666 is the sign of the Beast in **Revelation**

**13:17)** Israelite kings were told not to multiply wives or gold or horses to themselves, and Solomon did all that.

- **Deuteronomy 17:16-17** - "But the king must not acquire many horses for himself or send the people back to Egypt to acquire more horses, for the LORD has said, 'You are never to go back that way again.' He must not take many wives for himself, lest his heart go astray. He must not accumulate for himself large amounts of silver and gold."

Solomon did go astray. He started out asking only for wisdom, not riches or power. And in Ecclesiastes he clearly saw the vanity of all things. But he was a complicated character and his actions were a paradox.

The ability to reason more sensibly about someone else's problems than one's own is known in psychology as Solomon's Paradox. He was blind to his own weaknesses.

Jesus mentions Solomon again just after telling us that "you cannot serve God and mammon."

- **Matthew 6:25-30** - "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Notice the echo of Ecclesiastes there? Jesus is sort of reminding Solomon of his own words.

No parable or type is perfect. But we can rest and rejoice in knowing that with Jesus "a greater than Solomon is here."