

Succession | Good News from Bad Kings

“Solomon, the Great”

First Kings 10.1-14; Luke 11.29-31
9.24.23

(1 Kings 10.1-14) Now when the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with difficult questions. ² So she came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels carrying spices and very much gold and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart. ³ Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was hidden from the king which he did not explain to her. ⁴ When the queen of Sheba perceived all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ⁵ the food of his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his waiters and their attire, his cupbearers, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit in her. ⁶ Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. ⁷ "Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard. ⁸ "How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom. ⁹ "Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness." ¹⁰ She gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and a very great amount of spices and precious stones. Never again did such abundance of spices come in as that which the queen of Sheba gave King Solomon.

¹¹ Also the ships of Hiram, which brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir a very great number of almug trees and precious stones. ¹² The king made of the almug trees supports for the house of the LORD and for the king's house, also lyres and harps for the singers; such almug trees have not come in again nor have they been seen to this day.

¹³ King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire which she requested, besides what he gave her according to his royal bounty. Then she turned and went to her own land together with her servants.

¹⁴ Now the weight of gold which came in to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold...

(Luke 11.29-31) As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. ³⁰ "For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. ³¹ "The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

We're looking at King Solomon in the "Age of the Monarchy" in ancient Israel. (app 1,000-600BC). King David has passed from the scene and the son of David, Solomon, has succeeded him.

At the start, God gave Solomon a blank check, *carte blanche*: "Ask of Me and I'll give you the ends of the earth as your inheritance" (Psalm 2.8) i.e., "ask whatever you wish, and I will give it." And the son of David wisely asked for wisdom, that he might rule God's special people with understanding and justice. And God

was pleased by that request and gave him NOT ONLY wisdom but everything Solomon didn't request as well. *Solomon the Wise*.

He went on to build a kingdom and a government that was *marked* by truth, beauty and goodness. He built the walls of Jerusalem, a grand palace *and most famously, the Temple* – “*the axis mundi*” – the center of the world, where Heaven and Earth touch. *Solomon, the Builder*.

And today we see him in all his splendor as God's anointed king (מְשִׁיחַ מֶלֶךְ) , a messiah-figure, unprecedented and unrivaled for his wealth among all the kings of Israel in the time of the monarchy. *Solomon, the Great*.

Today, Solomon receives a mysterious visitor from some 1,500 miles away (like from here to New York), a queen from the South, from what is today called Yemen and in the Bible is called the “Land of Cush”, the Queen of Sheba. She's a fascinating figure. She shows up in the Quran (as *Belquis*) and even in the lore and legends behind *Rastafarianism* (for our Jamaican brothers and sisters).

What could motivate her to come so long a distance? Why would she “drag” this great caravan all the way from Yemen/Ethiopia through the desert to Jerusalem? And, in fact, what motivates people to do stuff like that? Birds migrate great distances and we chalk up their motivation to *instinct*. Why can't I pray for 30 mins a day or kick a nasty habit or be more generous or worry less or stop being so self-conscious – where can I find that motivation? That's our interest today – the Mysterious Queen of Sheba and the Mystery of Motivation. Let's look at:

1) The Mystery of Motivation

2) The Allure of Glory

3) The Mysterious, Surpassing Glory of Self-Sacrificing Love

Here's this queen in the southern-most tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen/Somalia/Ethiopia and she's somehow very, very wealthy. In her attempts at foreign relations and trade, she apparently keeps hearing about a far-away kingdom that's achieved what EVERY kingdom wants to achieve – greatness, peace, prosperity, order, safety – everything that's in that Hebrew word, “*Shalom*” (1st Kings 4.20 and 25!).

And apparently the reports of this distant kingdom and its grandeur have grown to the point that the queen is intrigued. She's begun to think that there may BE something to these rumors.

But rumors wouldn't get you to fly to New York...would they? I mean, if you heard they were giving away money, would you fly to New York? If that rumor was confirmed by a few friends, would you leave your house (with all your little snacks) take time off work, book tickets, reserve a hotel room to get a suitcase full of hundred-dollar bills?

Would you go to California if you heard they found “gold in them thar hills”? Some people did in the 1849 *Gold Rush* ... What would it take to MOTIVATE you to drive to New York? How about to WALK to New York.?

Because even THAT isn't a fair comparison! Her caravan walked NOT on paved roads but through the desert. What moves or motivates people to make big changes?

My guess is that she was more than curious and more than just interested in a new trade partner but thirsty for something MORE. She wanted truth and significance and meaning and purpose. She wanted to know the purpose of life. Her quest wasn't simply to see a king but the God behind that king, the King behind the king and isn't that what we read in verse one? *"Now when the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of YHWH, she came to test him with difficult questions."* The fame of Solomon concerning the name of YHWH (the Lord).

My informed guess is that this queen had to be NOT simply curious or interested in Solomon and his God but ... desperate, obsessed, consumed with hope that there's someone out there who seems to have figured it out – the reason for life. There's someone who has tapped into the Source and the state of this king's kingdom (which is apparently ALL THAT!) the glory of this ruler's kingdom will tell me whether this is just a smart and benevolent monarch OR if there's a divine Presence behind him.

So she arrives... 1,500 miles across the Arabian Desert. When she's with Solomon, she dished – said ALL that was on her heart and was amazed that he had real answers for her. She senses, right away, that something is going on here. She starts to add it up: (vv. 4-5) *"When the queen of Sheba perceived all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his waiters and their attire, his cupbearers, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit in her."*

That simply means, it took her breath away – it knocked the wind out of her. The "stairway" (lit. ascent) is probably a reference to Solomon's ascent to worship – maybe a great processional of people accompanying the king going up to meet with God, maybe they carry the 500 gold shields we read about later in this chapter. What a sight!

She hoped to see great things, but she admits she was sure the rumors and reports must be exaggerated but now she sees that those reports did no justice to the reality of what she's seen: *"the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity beyond the reports."*

And then she offers an almost ecstatic outburst of a conclusion (v.9): *"Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness."*

And finally, as if Solomon didn't have enough already (Luke 19.26) she showers him with enormous amounts of gold, gems and spices (lots of spices – loads of spices – sooooo many spices!). She's breathless!

This is the City set on a Hill, Jerusalem is sending out light and truth to the nations, the LORD is in the midst of her (Psa 46). The nations are streaming into the Holy City to see the dwelling of God and the

representative OF God whom God has enthroned in Jerusalem. Solomon controls the trade routes. He has a NAVY (Israel isn't known as a seafaring people but NOW THEY ARE!)

Jerusalem is a vortex and people are being drawn there from all over the world. The kings of the earth are bowing to Solomon and to His God. Kings are paying tribute – gigantic, ridiculous amounts of gold so plentiful that silver was treated like stones. They came from all over the world – even Spain – bringing (22-23), *“gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks. So, King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.”* It was like the Garden of Eden and Solomon, a new Adam.

One year Solomon's total receipts of gold were 25 tons! But the way: it's worded “666 talents” (6 is the number of a man – maybe a little foreshadowing there!)

But for NOW – Solomon presides as a messiah-figure in the “City on a Hill” (Matthew 5.14) Everything's being drawn into this grace/truth whirlpool – the people of Abraham, the Land of Promise, the Holy City, the Temple, the Holy of Holies, the Arc of the Covenant where God was enthroned above the cherubim and where everything said “glory” (Psalm 29.9).

Glory was alluring the nations to His people and to Himself – God's glory, His presence, His blessing was like a giant magnet motivating, moving people to come from the ends of the earth. This is the pinnacle for the Mission of God in the times before Christ's birth.

And... of course... Solomon is a type. He was a living symbol. He was a messiah (i.e. anointed along with the prophets and priests so the kings of Israel were anointed, messiah-figures).

The One True and Final Messiah would also be a King of kings. In fact, even before Jesus Christ had achieved anything, kings from the East (a long way off) visited Him bringing exotic spices and gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2). God, the Father, would give the Beloved Son a gift... a little token of the Father's delight in the Son – we call it the Universe (Colossians 1.15-20). As He got older, but still a Child, He amazed the scholars in the Temple by His wisdom (Luke 2.46-47). He, like Solomon, is *“Son of David”*.

AND in the Messiah-figure, Solomon, we see not only similarities but ALSO contrasts with Jesus Christ. Solomon listens as the Queen tells her whole heart; Jesus Christ meets a questioning woman (at a well) and HE REVEALS her whole heart (John 4. 29).

In Solomon, people are attracted to an outward, visible display of glory they find breathtaking but in Jesus Christ there is *“no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him”* (Isa. 53.2). No wonder they were outraged when they asked for a sign and Jesus replied, *“NOPE! Only the sign of Jonah.”* And, of course, that meant that He, like the runaway prophet, would be cast into the angry sea of justice to die and would then, three days later be raised (as Jonah was rescued by a great fish as if resurrected).

“So”, says the true Messiah – “something greater than Jonah is here and something greater than Solomon.” And they must have thought, “YOU are homeless! How can You possibly say that You are greater than the greatest King we’ve ever had? You have no place to lay Your head and He had a navy and a gigantic government and tons and tons of gold – where’s YOUR glory? – YOU’RE no Son of David! We’re not even sure WHO your father is!”

And Jesus Christ says, “I’m telling you – My glory – infinitely greater than Solomon’s – My glory is to be thrown into the sea of wrath, the raging whirlpool of justice my people deserve. My glory is death and resurrection – the sign of Jonah. My throne is not like Solomon’s, made of ivory and covered in gold – My throne is the awful tree made of rough wood and covered, not in gold but in blood.

My glory is self-sacrificing love. Solomon’s glory faded (*“Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.”* Luke 12.27) but LOVE never fails (1st Cor 13.8) – never fades. The glory of Jesus Christ is to live FOR sinners, to die for SINNERS, to be RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY (like Jonah) for SINNERS and to stand in the Presence of the Father, praying for SINNERS.

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, *“Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You”* (John 17.1) That glory surpasses Solomon’s glory like a spark is “out-gloried” by the Sun. “Something greater than Solomon’s gold is here” – it’s the infinite, enthralling beauty of self-sacrificing love. “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw (drag) all people to Myself” (John 12.32) The hideous spectacle of bloody death is greatest beauty when you see your need.

If you are desperate and dissatisfied; if you are longing for LIFE and true shalom – peace with God, the Judge, forgiveness, inward peace, a new family and a river of HOPE (“Hope is to the soul as oxygen is the physical body”) If you have questions – even if you're worried it may be too good to be true (like the Queen of Sheba doubted) – I’m here to tell you: it IS too good to be true and yet it IS true. And you’ll really only know it if you come and trust Him.

There are riches in Jesus Christ that make 25 Tons of gold look like chump-change! You think you have to give up your sin and give up thinking you're a good person who deserves to go to heaven – AND YOU DO. But the motivation you need is the glory of redeeming love. It will thrill you, enthrall you; it will supplant, unseat, overthrow, squeeze out of your heart all other illicit loves.

You’ll find yourself saying to Jesus Christ, not once but daily, what the Queen of the South said to the Messiah-figure in her day (v. 9), *“Oh, Messiah King, blessed be the LORD Your God who delighted in You to set You on the throne of the World; because the LORD so loved the World, therefore He made You King, to do justice and righteousness.”* Come Lord Jesus rescue and rule my life.

Pray that prayer, whether for the first time or the one-millionth time and receive and revel in the life-changing glory of Jesus Christ and His redeeming love.

Q U O T E S

It was my mother who first mentioned the Queen of Sheba.

The royal name is one of my earliest memories. When someone annoyed her, I'd wait for my mother to mutter, "Who does she think she is—the Queen of Sheba?"

The Queen of Sheba is the Greta Garbo of antiquity. A glamorous, mysterious figure immortalized in the Bible and the Quran, celebrated in an oratorio by Handel, an opera by Charles Gounod, a ballet by Ottorino Respighi, and depicted in paintings by Raphael, Tintoretto, and Claude Lorrain, she remains tantalizingly elusive to the inquiries of historians. Across swathes of modern-day North Africa her legend lives on, despite—or perhaps because of—the fact that no one knows for sure if she existed, or if she did, where she lived.

No one, that is, but the Ethiopians, to whom this queen is very real: They consider her the mother of the nation, the founder of the Solomonic dynasty that would last three millennia until its last ruling descendant, Haile Selassie, died in 1975. It was from this palace, they believe (and archaeologists dispute), that their Queen of Sheba set out for Jerusalem around 1000 B.C.

- Stanley Stewart; "In Search of the Real Queen of Sheba"
(National Geographic UK Edition Online; Dec 5, 2018)

We only cease to be the slave of one appetite because another taste has brought it into subordination. A youth may cease to idolize sensual pleasure, but it's only because the idol of material gain has gotten the ascendancy. There is not one personal transformation in which the heart is left without an object of ultimate beauty and joy. Its desire for one particular object may be conquered, but its desire to have some object is unconquerable. The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one.

-Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection"
(sermon on First John 2.15: "*Do not love the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*")