



First Kings - Chapter Ten

I [1 Kings 1:1-11:43 - The Reign of King Solomon \(continues\)](#)

I.j [1 Kings 9:15-10:29 - Glory Under a Cloud \(continues/concludes\)](#)

Summary of Chapter Ten

The Queen of Sheba had heard of Solomon's great wisdom and wealth so she visited him to see if it was actually true. On questioning Solomon she found that it was not only true but that it far surpassed anything she had imagined. She recognised that this was because of the Lord and she praised him.

The trading ships of Hiram brought great quantities of gold to Solomon and he made great shields of gold to be placed in the Forest of Lebanon. He also built an elaborate throne of ivory, the likes of which has never been seen in any kingdom since. Everything Solomon used was made of gold for silver was not even considered due to the amount of Gold that Solomon possessed.

Solomon's fame spread throughout the world and all the other kings came to him. They all brought him gifts thus increasing his immense wealth. With this he bought chariots and horses from Egypt, selling them on to the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

I.j.iii. [1 Kings 10:1-29 - Visit of the Queen of Sheba](#)

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, (fame due to the name of the Lord), she came to test him with hard questions.

1 Kings 10:1

The queen of Sheba. Sheba, also known as Sabea, was where modern day Yemen is today. It is known from geography this was a wealthy kingdom, with much gold,

spices, and precious woods. History also reveals that they were known to have queens as well as kings. This was a long journey - up to about 1,500 miles or 2,400 km. She probably came as part of a trade delegation (vv.2-5), but there is no doubt that she was highly motivated to see Solomon and his kingdom.

Fame due to the name of the Lord. Solomon's fame spread because it was given to him by the Lord and it was always intended that God would be the reason why the name of his people would be made famous throughout the world, as a later prophet would confirm: *<<Your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of my splendour that I had bestowed on you, says the Lord God>>* (Ezekiel 16:14).

In the same manner the Christian church is famous throughout the world only because it bears the name of the Lord Jesus and the church should always reflect the goodness of that name: *<<Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father>>* (Philippians 2:9-11), *<<And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him>>* (Colossians 3:17), and: *<<To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ>>* (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).

She came to test him with hard questions. It is not only gold that arrives from Arabia, which is one possible location for Ophir in 1 Kings 9:28, but also a queen who comes to examine Solomon's knowledge and wisdom, another theme picked up from earlier in the narrative. She came to Solomon and Israel at their material zenith. The great prosperity, splendour, and wisdom of Solomon's kingdom were internationally famous, confirmed by the worldwide fame of Solomon in 1 Kings 4:29-34, which attracted foreigners to his court. The ease with which Solomon deals with her questions, combined with her own observation of his wealth, leaves her breathless (v.5).

² She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. ³ Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. ⁴ When the queen of Sheba had observed all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ⁵ the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants,

their clothing, his valets, and his burnt-offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her.

1 Kings 10:2-5

She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue. This queen travelled in the manner of queens - with a large royal procession, heavily laden with gifts and goods for trade.

When she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind or her heart. Solomon's kingdom was famous not only for its material prosperity, but also for his great wisdom. The Queen of Sheba had great - and seemingly difficult - questions, and Solomon answered all of them. The hard questions were not just riddles, but presumably included difficult diplomatic and ethical questions. The test was not an academic exercise but to see if he would be a trustworthy business party and a reliable ally capable of giving help.

There was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. Solomon's wisdom, given by God, was unprecedented in the entire world, and it amazes this foreign queen.

When the queen of Sheba had observed all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, there was no more spirit in her. This queen was obviously familiar with the world of royal splendour and luxury. Yet she was completely overwhelmed by the wisdom of Solomon and the glory of his kingdom. What happened to the Queen of Sheba is a natural and not an uncommon effect which will be produced in a delicate sensible mind at the sight of rare and extraordinary productions of art.

⁶ So she said to the king, 'The report was true that I heard in my own land of your accomplishments and of your wisdom, ⁷ but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. Not even half had been told me; your wisdom and prosperity far surpass the report that I had heard. ⁸ Happy are your wives! Happy are these your servants, who continually attend you and hear your wisdom! ⁹ Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, he has made you king to execute justice and righteousness.'

1 Kings 10:6-9

The report was true that I heard in my own land. Not even half had been told me. The Queen of Sheba had heard wonderful things about Solomon and his

kingdom, but upon seeing it with her own eyes she realised it was far greater than she had heard or even imagined.

Happy are your wives! Happy are these your servants. When the authors of 1-2 Kings described the joyful kingdom back in Chapter 4, they stressed the benefits of Solomon's wisdom for all his subjects: <<*Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy*>> (1 Kings 4:20), and: <<*During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees*>> (1 Kings 4:25). The Queen of Sheba, however, refers much more specifically to the blessing that Solomon must be to his wives and his court officials. While Solomon's wisdom and wealth are still remarkable, and are still evidence of God's abundant blessing, it seems that his great wisdom, wealth, and power have begun to distort his moral judgement in the proper use of these blessings. Chapter 10 as a whole in fact focuses on this benefit that wisdom brings to the royal court, and particularly to Solomon himself, rather than on any benefit that might flow out to the people. The influx of food described in Chapters 4-5 has been replaced by an influx of luxury goods that were only beneficial to a minority.

It is a joyful thing to serve a great, wise, and rich king. If it was a joyful thing to serve Solomon, it is a much more joyful thing to serve Jesus.

Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you. The queen immediately recognised that what Solomon had could never have been achieved by human effort alone. She knew that Israel's God was the source of all this magnificence and she praised him. This is an example of what God wanted to do for Israel under the promises of the Old Covenant. God promised Israel that if they obeyed him under the Old Covenant, he would bless them so tremendously that the world would notice and give glory to the Lord God of Israel: <<*If you will only obey the Lord your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth*>> (Deuteronomy 28:1), and: <<*All the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you*>> (Deuteronomy 28:10). God wanted to reach the nations through an obedient and blessed Israel. If Israel did not obey, then God would speak to the nations through a thoroughly disciplined Israel.

The impression made on the queen would have been beneficial to a postexilic community for she recognised that Solomon had been made king by God and that therefore God was the true king of Israel. On their return from Babylonian exile it seems that the people realised that they would never again require a human king on the throne of David. All they need to realise now is that the Messiah has inherited the throne and reigns over all things.

Blessed be the Lord your God. It is fair to ask if this was a true confession of faith, expressing allegiance to the God of Israel. Taken in context, it may not be more than the Queen's response to the astonishing blessing evident in Solomon's Jerusalem. Even though the Queen recognised the almighty power of God it does not mean that she forsook her own gods and turned to him. There have been many in history who acknowledge God but who do not accept his sovereignty over their lives: <<*Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant'*>> (2 Kings 5:15), <<*When that period was over, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me. I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured the one who lives for ever. For his sovereignty is an everlasting sovereignty, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does what he wills with the host of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can stay his hand or say to him, 'What are you doing?'*>> (Daniel 4:34-35), and: <<*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder*>> (James 3:19).

If the Queen of Sheba is taken as an example of a seeker, it can be seen that Solomon impressed her with his wealth and splendour, and also impressed her personally. However, she returned home without an evident expression of faith in the God of Israel. This shows that impressing seekers with facilities, programmes, organisation and professionalism is not enough. Regardless of the result of her search, her seeking can be admired:

- She came from a great distance.
- She came with gifts to offer.
- She came to question and to learn.
- She came and saw the riches of the king.
- She came for an extended period.
- She came telling all that was on her heart.

Jesus used the Queen of Sheba as an example of a seeker: <<*The queen of the South will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!*>> (Matthew 12:42). If the Queen of Sheba sought Solomon and the splendour of his kingdom so diligently, how much more should people today seek Jesus and the glory of his kingdom? She will certainly also rise up in judgement against each subsequent generation that rejects Jesus.

Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, he has made you king to execute justice and righteousness. This statement is especially meaningful because Solomon was not necessarily the most logical successor of his father David. There were several

sons of David born before Solomon. It was God's special act to make him king rather than his elder brother.

¹⁰ Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, a great quantity of spices, and precious stones; never again did spices come in such quantity as that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. ¹¹ Moreover, the fleet of Hiram, which carried gold from Ophir, brought from Ophir a great quantity of almug wood and precious stones. ¹² From the almug wood the king made supports for the house of the Lord, and for the king's house, lyres also and harps for the singers; no such almug wood has come or been seen to this day. ¹³ Meanwhile, King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba every desire that she expressed, as well as what he gave her out of Solomon's royal bounty. Then she returned to her own land, with her servants.

1 Kings 10:10-13

The queen's gift of one hundred and twenty talents of gold, equivalent to 9,000 lbs or 4,080 kg, is a remarkably large amount, yet in context it does not compare with Solomon's great wealth. Solomon was already receiving much more gold than this (notice that her gift is exactly the same size as Hiram's first instalment in 1 Kings 9:14, now superseded by his second in 1 Kings 9:28), as well as unparalleled amounts of valuable almug wood. Solomon was a vastly wealthier person than the Queen, something that is underlined in v.13. What she gives to him pales in relation to what he subsequently gives to her.

Never again did spices come in such quantity as that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. She came from a region rich in spices and skilled in the processing of spices.

King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba every desire that she expressed, as well as what he gave her out of Solomon's royal bounty. To give according to the royal generosity means to give a lot. This description of Solomon's measure of generosity to the Queen of Sheba also describes the measure of God's generosity towards his creation.

According to tradition - fanciful stories, perhaps - the Queen of Sheba wanted a son by Solomon, and he obliged her. Her child was named Menilek, and he became the ancestor of all subsequent Ethiopian monarchs.



Solomon's International Ventures circa 950 BC

Solomon's firm control of important trade routes linking Egypt, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia, i.e. Asia Minor, provided him with incalculable wealth. Partnering with King Hiram of Tyre, Solomon also launched his own trading expeditions to Ophir to acquire valuable and exotic goods. The Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon attests to his great fame throughout the ancient world. Solomon further augmented his wealth by buying horses from Kue and chariots from Egypt, and selling them to the kings of Syria and the Hittites.

Although Ophir is shown in this map as possibly being in East Africa, it could have been in Arabia or India. No one knows for sure.

¹⁴ The weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold, ¹⁵ besides that which came from the traders and from the business of the merchants, and from all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land.

1 Kings 10:14-15

The weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold. This was a vast amount of gold, which came to Solomon annually. The accumulation of gold continues; it is mentioned no fewer than eleven times in vv.14-25. One commentator sets the value of the 666 talents of gold at £217 million or \$281 million. According to the value of gold in 2016, it would be around £750 million or just under \$1 billion dollars. This speaks not only to the great wealth of Solomon, but it also makes him the only other person in the Bible associated with the number 666.

The other Biblical connection to 666 is the end-times world dictator and opponent of God and his people often known as the Antichrist: <<*This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred and sixty-six*>> (Revelation 13:18). In fact, the Revelation passage specifically says that the number 666 is the number of a man, and the man may be Solomon. This is not to say that Solomon was the Antichrist, clearly he was not, or that the coming Antichrist will be some strange reincarnation of Solomon. However, some commentators believe that it may indicate that the Antichrist may not be someone purely evil from the very beginning. Instead, he may be like Solomon - a good man corrupted. The apostle John seemed to understand that the term does not just refer to one individual but to several who oppose God and his purposes: <<*Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour*>> (1 John 2:18), <<*By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world*>> (1 John 4:2-3), and: <<*Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!*>> (2 John 7).

Besides that which came from the traders and from the business of the merchants, and from all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land. Solomon received more than 666 talents of gold a year. The 666 talents was just his initial payment. The writer of 1 Kings provides a warning signal here. He assumes that the reader know of the instructions for future kings of Israel in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. He assumes they especially know the command which

states: <<And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself>> (Deuteronomy 17:17). God blessed Solomon with great riches, but Solomon allowed that blessing to turn into a danger because he disobediently multiplied silver and gold for himself.

¹⁶ King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold; six hundred shekels of gold went into each large shield. ¹⁷ He made three hundred shields of beaten gold; three minas of gold went into each shield; and the king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. ¹⁸ The king also made a great ivory throne, and overlaid it with the finest gold. ¹⁹ The throne had six steps. The top of the throne was rounded in the back, and on each side of the seat were arm rests and two lions standing beside the arm rests, ²⁰ while twelve lions were standing, one on each end of a step, on the six steps. Nothing like it was ever made in any kingdom. ²¹ All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver – it was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon. ²² For the king had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.

1 Kings 10:16-22

King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold; three hundred shields of beaten gold. These shields made beautiful displays in the House of the Forest of Lebanon, but they were of no use in battle. Gold was too heavy and too soft to be used as a metal for effective shields. This shows Solomon had the *image* of a warrior king, but without the *substance*.

Each of the larger shields would have been worth about £92,000 or \$120,000 at late 2016 prices. Therefore, the total value would have been in the region of £18.4 million or \$24 million. Likewise, the smaller shields, worth around £23,000 or \$30,000 each would have a net worth of £6.9 million or \$9 million to be used just for ceremonial purposes!

None were of silver – it was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon. This was a statement of wealth. If taken seriously, it shows the tremendous abundance of Solomon's kingdom. Truly, King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom, and the promises of Deuteronomy 28:1-14 were fulfilled in his reign, especially: <<*The Lord will open for you his rich*

storehouse, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all your undertakings. You will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow>> (Deuteronomy 28:12).

Solomon decorates his palace with gold; overlays the finest throne ever seen with it; and makes household items with it. It arrives in Israel by various means, including the ships of Tarshish, ships capable of a journey to such far-flung ports such as Tarshish, believed to Spain, and to Arabia and possibly also India and the Far East. These ships are said to have sailed to lands so distant that it took three years to return with their extraordinary cargo. These trade missions should also have served as an opportunity to spread the name of God to the other nations: <<*For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. From them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put, and Lud – which draw the bow – to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations>> (Isaiah 66:18-19); instead it seems to only have been for trade and the increase of Solomon’s wealth and fame: <<*Tarshish did business with you out of the abundance of your great wealth; silver, iron, tin, and lead they exchanged for your wares. Javan, Tubal, and Meshech traded with you; they exchanged human beings and vessels of bronze for your merchandise. Beth-togarmah exchanged for your wares horses, war-horses, and mules. The Rhodians traded with you; many coastlands were your own special markets; they brought you in payment ivory tusks and ebony>> (Ezekiel 27:12-15).**

²³ Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. ²⁴ The whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. ²⁵ Every one of them brought a present, objects of silver and gold, garments, weaponry, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.

1 Kings 10:23-25

The whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. This was another fulfilment of the promises of Deuteronomy Chapter 28: <<*The Lord will make you the head, and not the tail; you shall be only at the top, and not at the bottom – if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God>> (Deuteronomy 28:13a).*

So much year by year. The wealth continued to pour into the royal treasury from every corner of the known world.

²⁶ Solomon gathered together chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. ²⁷ The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars as numerous as the sycomores of the Shephelah. ²⁸ Solomon's import of horses was from Egypt and Kue, and the king's traders received them from Kue at a price. ²⁹ A chariot could be imported from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for one hundred and fifty; so through the king's traders they were exported to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

1 Kings 10:26-29

Solomon gathered together chariots and horses; which he purchased with silver. At the end of this great description of Solomon's wealth and splendour, the author provides this dark note. The accumulation of silver and horses, as well as gold, is forbidden by Deuteronomy 17:16-17; refer to the comment made on 1 Kings 4:28.

In comparison to the reign of David, there were few military conflicts during the reign of Solomon, yet he still saw the importance of a strong defence. Perhaps there were few military conflicts because Solomon had a strong defence. As commented on in the previous chapter, the remains of Solomon's fortress and stables at Megiddo can be seen today.

The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones. When Solomon's great wealth is considered, it can be seen that he originally did not set his heart upon riches. He deliberately asked for wisdom to lead the people of God instead of riches or fame. God promised to also give Solomon riches and fame, and God fulfilled his promise. It can also be considered that Solomon gave an eloquent testimony to the vanity of riches as the preacher in the Book of Ecclesiastes. He powerfully showed that there was no ultimate satisfaction through materialism. Christians do not have to be as rich as Solomon to learn the same lesson.

The significant addition to the theme here is the detail that Solomon's import of horses was from Egypt. All but one of the instructions about kingship in Deuteronomy 17:16-17 have thus far been violated by Solomon. That remaining one: *<<he must not acquire many wives for himself>>*, will be taken up in 1 Kings Chapter 11.

So through the king's traders they were exported to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram. This may explain why Solomon broke such an obvious commandment. Perhaps the importation of horses from Egypt began as trading as an agent on behalf of other kings. From this, perhaps Solomon could say, "I'm importing horses from Egypt but I am not doing it for myself. I'm not breaking God's command." Many examples of gross disobedience begin as clever rationalisations.