

BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

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1 KINGS 10-12 QUEEN OF SHEBA; SOLOMON'S LATER YEARS & DEATH



We are studying the latter part of Solomon's golden reign, that unfortunately, seems to have a tragic end. He had finished the Temple, organized Israel into an efficient state, developed great commercial venues, and not only enriched himself, but his people. Gold became so abundant, that silver was hardly regarded as valuable.

There was one ruler in particular who became intrigued with Solomon's reputation—the queen of Sheba. Who was she, and where did she come from?

The Bible says, "Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions" (1 Kings 10:1).

Expositor's explains, "Sheba was in southwest Arabia, present-day *Yemen*. It is the best-watered and most fertile area of Arabia. By employing an extensive irrigation system, it developed as a strong agricultural economy. But its chief strength lay in its being a center of trade. Its location kept it fairly secure from the power struggles in the Fertile Crescent and at the same time, enabled it to be a convenient trade depot for traffic involving Africa, India, and the Mediterranean countries. It was famous for its trade in perfumes, incense, gold, and gem stones."

Keller tells us, "In Arabia Felix (fortunate),' writes Dionysius the Greek in A.D. 90, 'you can always smell the sweet perfume of marvelous spices, whether it be incense or wonderful myrrh.' South Arabia was even in the ancient world the export country number one for spices and it is still so today...In ancient times, a gigantic dam blocked the river Adhanat in Sheba, collecting the rainfall from a wide area. The water was then led off in canals for irrigation purposes, which was what gave the land its fertility. Remains of this technical marvel in the shape of walls over 60 feet high still defy the sand dunes of the desert. Just as Holland is in modern times the Land of Tulips, so Sheba was then the Land of Spices, one vast fairy-like scented garden of the costliest spices in the world. In the midst of it lay the capital, which was called Marib. For 1,500 years, this garden of spices bloomed around Marib. That was until 542 B.C.—then the dam burst. The importunate desert crept over the fertile lands and destroyed them" (*The Bible As History*, p. 225).

From here, the Queen of Sheba traveled north to meet with Solomon. It is important to understand the phrase, "the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord."

Expositor's explains, "It should be noted that his fame was associated with the name of the Lord. It was well-known that he was an enthusiastic and faithful servant of the Lord and that he humbly attributed his wisdom and success to the Lord."

She came to test his wisdom with "hard questions." *Expositor's* clarifies, "Hard questions (*hidot*) is generally translated 'riddles,' which were enigmatic sayings or questions that cloaked a deeper philosophical, practical, or theological truth. Arabic literature abounds in riddles and proverbs. They were a favorite sport and a way to test one's mettle. It would appear from the following verses that the 'riddles' or 'hard questions' posed by the queen were not mere frivolous tests of mental quickness but a genuine seeking for truths hidden in some of the enigmatic sayings known to her."

When she arrived in Jerusalem, she was given a royal welcome. She interrogated Solomon to find out how wise he really was. She was flabbergasted with his replies, and the splendor of his kingdom.

The Bible says, "So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built...there was no more spirit in her. Then she said to the king: 'It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your 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. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard. Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continuously before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel!'" (1 Kings 10:3-9).

They then set up a mutually favorable trade agreements, and exchanged many gifts and goods. Christ used the example of the great effort the Queen of Sheba made to hear Solomon to chide the Pharisees and scribe for not giving Him a chance to prove Himself as the Messiah (Mt.12:42).

Solomon's commercial successes reached unparalleled heights. His ships brought gold, silver, ivory, apes, monkeys and peacocks from abroad. There is much speculation about where the land of Ophir is situated, from places as remote as South Africa, Malasia, Spain, and even Peru, to closer places as India and Somalia. Most probably, from the goods mentioned, it is the Horn of Africa, with mines of gold, silver, apes, monkeys and peacocks. An Egyptian mural shows such an expedition to this area with the same types of animals and goods.

All this wealth made silver not even be esteemed. "The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland" (1 K. 10:27).

Yet with all this success, the Bible is no respecter of persons, and now has to faithfully record Solomon's spiritual downfall.

"But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh; women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel. 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh...and for Molech...So the Lord became angry with Solomon...Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and have *not* kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David; and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen" (1 Kings 11:1-13).

How could this happen to the wisest man on earth—that had God's blessings and backing?

Expositor's notes, "Solomon was a great man, but he had feet of clay. He was spiritually unable to survive his *disobedience* to God's prohibition in Deuteronomy 17:16-17 on taking *more* than one wife. God frequently warned Israel against intermingling and intermarrying with the Canaanites. Part of the reason was the extreme moral degeneracy of the Canaanites (Gen 19; Lev 18:1-30; Deut 9:5; 12:29-31). Intermarriage inevitably led to toleration and finally observance of Canaanite religious practices (Ex. 34:12-17; Deut 7:1-5). Another danger lay in the fact that there was great similarity in some of the religious terminology; and though the theology behind the terms was radically different, it was very easy to adopt by degrees a comfortable syncretism and ultimately to forget the Lord and to serve idols.

"If anyone should take these warnings seriously, it should be the king, who leads by example. Yet Solomon apparently considered himself *above* the law and paid a bitter price. Though many marriages may originally have been entered into for the cementing of diplomatic alliances and others merely for the purpose of increasing the royal harem to add to the splendor of the king, Solomon 'loved many foreign women and held fast to them in love.' This speaks of strong emotional attachment, which is normal and desirable in a husband. But because Solomon was attached to the wrong women, he was led astray. The seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, though perhaps adding to the splendor of Solomon's kingdom, were his downfall.

"As Solomon grew older, his resistance wore down and he became increasingly vulnerable. His service to the Lord became more and more perfunctory. Notice that his love for the Lord is measured by the standards of David, who, with all his faults loved God with a passion throughout his lifetime.

"The worship of Ashtoreth involved fertility rites. In not only allowing these practices in his own household but participating in them to some degree, Solomon sinned grievously against the Lord (v. 6). Apparently Solomon showed no favoritism but treated all the gods alike, even to the honoring of 'Chemosh,' the Moabite equivalent of the Ammonite Molech or Milcom.

"Solomon's sin was all the greater because of the special privileges he had enjoyed. Two are specifically named. God had singled Solomon out by appearing to him twice. Solomon lacked neither

proof nor evidence of God's love and power. He had abundantly tasted God's love by being chosen, contrary to custom and expectation, as David's successor; in being given the special, personal name "Jedidiah" ("loved by the Lord"); in receiving every benefit imaginable; and in being visited by God twice for encouragement and admonition. He had also abundantly seen the power of God in that he was put on the throne in the face of the power and influence of Adonijah's followers (Joab in particular), he was granted unchallenged power and prestige as king, and he was given success in his endeavors beyond all expectation. This should have created in Solomon a lifelong love and devotion of the deepest kind.

"The second special privilege was his relationship to David and the covenant God made with him. He had not earned it; he was born into it. He had also been thoroughly instructed and trained by David in preparation for the high calling. David had poured into him his own love and passion for the Lord and his dreams for the house that would reflect the glory of the Lord. Solomon threw aside all these privileges when he followed after idols. He frittered away the continued joy and fellowship with God that could have been his for life. The punishment would be in accordance with the terms of the covenant with David. Yet even there God exercised mercy for David's sake. The kingdom was not taken from Solomon during his lifetime, nor was the kingdom to be totally removed from the line of David. One tribe would remain to fulfill God's promise to David."

Eugene Merrill adds, "How could a man so gifted of God be so insensitive to the great issues of the heart and spirit? The answer lies in the nature of biblical wisdom...One should recognize, first, that in Israel and the ancient Near East, wisdom was not synonymous with knowledge or education or science, but [primarily] the ability to live life in a skillful way, an ability possessed only by the individual who knew and feared God. This is why the Old Testament emphasizes the dichotomy between the wise person and the fool (between the righteous person and the sinner)...In the face of his preeminent wisdom, we make the point that it is possible to be wise in the biblical sense of the term and yet to fail to live out the implications of that wisdom. Solomon's sin in multiplying wives and in turning after other gods does not mitigate the fact of his wisdom, but it certainly undercuts any claim on his part that he

ordered his own life and of his kingdom according to its principles" (*Kingdom of Priests*, 313).

As a result of Solomon's disobedience, and especially going against the instructions in Dt. 17, God raised up three adversaries, Hadad the Edomite, Rezon of Damascus, and Jeroboam. Solomon even tried to kill Jeroboam once he found out a prophet said he would eventually rule over the northern 10 tribes of Israel. The Bible says, "Solomon therefore sought to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon" (1 Kings 11:40).

The life of Solomon ends thus, "Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the books of the acts of Solomon? And the period that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. Then Solomon rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place" (1 Kings 11:41-43).

Solomon wrote three books in the Bible. In his youth he wrote *Song of Songs*, in his middle years, *Proverbs*, and in his old age, *Ecclesiastes*. They also reflect his mindset and spiritual state. In the book of *Ecclesiastes*, he no longer seems to have God's spirit, and is a dejected philosopher. In order for this book to not end so negatively, an epilogue seems to be added by an editor where again it focuses on the need to obey God. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that Solomon ever repented of his sins, unless the epilogue of *Ecclesiastes* is his, but written in the third person—so the jury is still out on Solomon—but we shouldn't want to be in his shoes at judgment time! Centuries later, Nehemiah said about Solomon, that "pagan women caused *even* him to sin" (Neh. 13:26).

Merrill adds this, "Finally, after forty years in which he saw Israel rise to heights she had never known before and would never know again, Solomon died. In the mercy of the Lord he died before he was forced to see with his own eyes the fruit of his misguided and disastrous policies [after turning against God]: the rupture of the kingdom into two irreconcilable parts" (p. 313).