

## **THE FAME OF SOLOMON.**

– NOV. 29. – 1 KINGS 10:1-10,13. –

"Behold, a greater than Solomon is here." – Matthew 12:42.

SOLOMON was in all his glory at the time of the visit of the Queen of Sheba in the twentieth year of his reign, when he was about forty years old. His fame as the most wonderful monarch of earth had not only made him renowned amongst the lesser nations surrounding Israel; but to the extremes of the civilization of that day his fame had spread. The visit of the Queen of Sheba tells of a great appreciation in that day for learning, wisdom and understanding. Herself evidently a more than ordinarily brilliant woman, the Queen wished to prove whether or not it could be the truth that had reached her ears respecting the great King of Israel.

She came to prove him with hard questions, not merely, we may suppose, with conundrums, which were popular in the East, but probably also with questions related to the sciences and arts and probably also with questions relating to wise government. Nor did her inquiries cease with these, but extended evidently to religion, as intimated in the first verse; for not only had she heard of his wisdom, but that in connection with "the name of the Lord." Apparently she rightly associated in her mind Solomon's greatness and wisdom and wealth with some special divine blessing. Perhaps, indeed, the story of Solomon's choice of wisdom and of the Lord's promises to him had spread abroad with his fame.

We have seen in previous lessons that up to this point in his career King Solomon was in favor with God, and that it was about this time that God appeared to him a second time to warn him against the dangers of his high position. The incident of this lesson, the visit of a Queen from the far off South-land to confer with him and to learn something concerning his God through whom this great blessing had come upon

the nation of Israel, should have inspired Solomon with a fresh interest in his God and in his religion, and should have cultivated in him a desire to spread abroad the knowledge of the Lord amongst nations afar off. But, as we have seen, instead of choosing the right path of honoring God, serving his cause, blessing his people Israel, and instructing the nations round about, Solomon chose the wrong path of self-gratification and sin.

Solomon himself seems to have anticipated the coming of people from distant countries, because of the Lord's blessing upon him, and in his prayer at the dedication of the temple he made mention of this and freely ascribed the honor and glory thereof to God, asking a blessing upon "a stranger that is not of thy people Israel, but coming out of a far country for thy name's sake, when he shall come and pray toward this house; for they shall hear of *thy* great name and *thy* strong hand and of *thy* stretched out arm." (1 Kings 8:41,42.) In all this Solomon very beautifully, modestly and properly gives the credit for his wisdom and greatness to God. And yet, so baneful was the influence of prosperity in his case, that, when he had reached the moment of greatest possibility for good, he forsook the Lord and his true wisdom.

(2-5) Sheba, the Queen's home, was in southern Arabia, a land noted at that time for its immense wealth, and particularly for its perfumes. Of these the Queen brought a royal present to King Solomon, adding also spices from India. According to verse ten the quantity of wealth, spices, precious stones and perfumes was immense, the value of the gold alone being [R2067 : page 278] estimated at three million dollars. If this sum of gold seems fabulous for a present, its reasonableness is nevertheless borne out by the historian Rawlinson, who says, "Strabo relates that the Sabeans were enormously wealthy, and used gold and silver in a most lavish manner in their furniture, their utensils, and even on the walls, doors and roofs of their houses."

The zeal of the Queen for wisdom is evidenced by the fact that she brought so valuable a treasure so long a distance upon camels, and to

some extent through a wilderness where she was liable to the attacks of Bedouin robbers. Deservedly her quest for wisdom was rewarded. She communed with Solomon concerning all that was in her heart (mind); and was richly rewarded by having her every inquiry answered, by seeing the temple built to the glory of God, Solomon's own palace just completed, the elaborate arrangements of its cuisine and the remarkable passage way leading from the palace to the temple. (See 2 Kings 16:18.) The last clause of verse five corresponds in meaning with the common expression of our day, "took her breath away," as indicating overwhelming astonishment.

(6-8) Then the Queen confessed that, although she had been somewhat skeptical before coming, and had only half believed what she did hear, yet the half had not been told her of what she now saw and heard, bearing witness to Solomon's wisdom and prosperity; and the summing up of her tribute of praise shows that she appreciated the wisdom of Solomon more even than his wealth and splendor, so that she almost envied his servants, who, continually with him, were blessed by the wise and gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

(9) Her highest compliment and tribute to the King is recorded in verse nine, where she attributes Solomon's excellent glory and wisdom to the Lord's love of Israel; and she shows in this connection that she herself was a wise woman in attributing the Lord's blessing and favor upon Solomon to be for the purpose of showing justice and establishing righteousness with his people Israel. Well had it been for King Solomon had he laid to heart and ordered his life according to these words of wisdom from the Queen of the South.

(10,13) Having concluded her visit, and given her presents, she received again presents from King Solomon; and although the kind and extent of the presents given her is not mentioned, they were probably of as great or greater value than those she brought to him; for it is a custom in oriental countries for kings and princes to give presents to each other

according to [R2068 : page 278] their wealth, and Solomon was no doubt still more wealthy than the Queen.

We cannot apply this lesson of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon better than it has already been applied by our Lord. (Matt. 12:42.) As we have already noticed, our Lord Jesus was "the greater than Solomon" – the antitype greater than the type. He is the embodiment of wisdom, of justice, of righteousness, and in his possession God has placed riches of grace and glory and honor and dominion. When the kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor amongst the nations, all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto him. (Psa. 22:27,28.) And when they shall witness the glory of Christ and the greatness of his kingdom under the whole heavens, the majesty of his Church, the true finished and glorified temple, the grandeur of all of his appointments and the blessings upon all who are his ministers or servants, they, with the Queen of the South, will agree that the half was never told them: that they had never dreamed of so wonderful and excellent a kingdom as that which God will thus establish amongst men, for which we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth," etc. Concerning that New Jerusalem it is written, "The nations shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it;" and as the willing and obedient shall then present their homage and riches and spices and odors (prayers and good deeds), these will be accepted of them; and in return they shall have from the Greater than Solomon the riches of his grace, including divine favor and life everlasting. – 1 Kings 10:24; Rev. 21:24.

We may apply a lesson also (though not as an antitype) to the gospel Church of this age, which by faith looks forward to and anticipates the great kingdom and renown of the Lord Jesus before the time to become joint-heirs with him in that kingdom. We, who were afar off, having heard of God's grace in Christ, have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ through faith, and have heard the "wonderful words of life" and beheld with the eye of faith that which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, – the

things which God hath in reservation for them that love him;" and we have accepted them, and have confessed and do confess that the half was never told us of the riches of divine grace in our Lord. Furthermore, we have presented to him all that we have and all that we are. Our best of desires and intentions, our best efforts, our means, our opportunities, our service. By our covenant we have laid these at his feet, and he has accepted them and made us his stewards to use and distribute them in his name; and, more than this, he has conferred upon us blessings which pertain not only to the life that now is but also to that which is to come.

Having received such grace, let us not faint, but hold fast the confidence of our rejoicing (while suffering with him for righteousness' sake) firm unto the end.

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