

FIRST KINGS 10:1–9. (EHV)

The Queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's fame, which was connected with the fame of the LORD, so she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great entourage—with camels carrying spices and a large quantity of gold and precious stones. She came to Solomon and told him everything that was on her heart. Solomon answered all her questions. There was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. The Queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon, the house which he built, and the food on his table. When she saw the council meeting of his officials, the careful attention of his ministers, as well as their attire, his cupbearers, and the whole burnt offerings which he offered at the House of the LORD, it took her breath away. She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your accomplishments and your wisdom is true. I did not believe the report until I came and saw it with my own eyes. The truth is, not even half of it was told to me! Your wisdom and wealth surpass the report which I heard. Blessed are your men, blessed are your servants, who stand before you continually hearing your wisdom! May the LORD your God be blessed, who was pleased to put you on the throne of Israel. Because the LORD loves Israel forever, he made you king to administer justice and righteousness."

I once heard a comedian joking about a trip he took with his family to Disney, and how things that were breathtaking at the beginning of the trip had become commonplace by the end of the trip. He said they stayed in a hotel where they could see giraffes right outside their window. But by the end of the week he found himself looking out the window and thinking, "Huh, same old giraffes."

Do you realize what you have here? Does it take your breath away? Or has it become commonplace?

Just like with the Wise Men from the East, there is a lot of mystery that surrounds the Queen of Sheba. The People's Bible Commentary doesn't appear to have its finest moment here. It suggests that the Queen of Sheba might be the female Pharaoh Hatshepsut of Egypt. Besides the fact that a queen of Egypt would have been called a queen of Egypt, there is no serious Egyptian chronology out there that puts Hatshepsut's reign close to Solomon's reign. In the New Testament, Jesus simply refers to the Queen of Sheba as "the Queen of the South," and says that, from the Jews' perspective, she came "from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom." This helps us a little bit. It is likely that she was the queen of a territory that could be accessed by sailing south on the Red Sea, perhaps modern-day Ethiopia or somewhere on the Arabian Peninsula, or perhaps even farther south. But there's a lot of guesswork. Ultimately, we only know she was a queen who came from far to the south to visit Solomon.

Solomon was already renowned for his wisdom by this time, which had been demonstrated not only in his justice, like in the case of the two prostitutes and their infants, but also in his proverbs, songs, lectures on plant and animal life, and his two big construction projects—the temple of the Lord and his own palace. Solomon's fame spread far and wide, and his fame was connected with the fame of the Lord, the God of Israel.

The Queen of Sheba was one of those who heard about Solomon's fame and the fame of his God. So she came with a very large entourage and very expensive gifts to test Solomon with hard questions and to see him and his kingdom for herself.

When the Lutheran musician Michael Praetorius was appointed to be the court music director for the Duke Heinrich Julius of Brunswick in 1604, his certificate of appointment said that he was not only responsible for the sacred music at court church services and for cheerful and lighthearted songs and instrumental music at the duke's table, and in whatever chamber he happened to be in, when he requested it, but Praetorius was also to make sure that it all took place very smoothly and respectably. That included making sure that the members of his ensemble lived a sober, restrained life, practiced regularly, and also conducted themselves respectably in general. In other words, Praetorius was to conduct himself and supervise the members of his ensemble in such a way that, whenever the duke, his wife, or their other distinguished guests saw Praetorius and his ensemble going about their business, they would be impressed and pleased.

We get the impression that Solomon not only had similar rules and duties in place for all his servants and ministers, but also that the men he appointed as his servants and ministers were all of the highest caliber, integrity, and work ethic. We get that impression because wherever the Queen of Sheba turned her head, she was impressed and pleased. Solomon's wisdom was not only on display in his insightful answers to all her questions and her other interactions with him, but also in all his palace affairs. The way his palace was designed and constructed, the food he ate and the way it was served, the way his officials conducted their meetings, the careful attention of his ministers and the way that they dressed, his cupbearers, the whole burnt offerings he offered at the temple, and 2 Chronicles also mentions the passageway by which he went up to the temple from the palace—it all took her breath away. To use the apostle Paul's words, everything in Solomon's life and worship was conducted in a fitting and orderly way.

Sometimes great expectations can make the actual experience a disappointment. Perhaps you've had friends return from a movie and tell you that you need to go see it: "It's the greatest movie I've seen in years!" Or they tell you that you need to go to a certain restaurant: "It's the best food I've ever had!" So you go to the movie or to the restaurant expecting every second to be an unforgettable experience, and as a result you are disappointed because it was good, but not as good as the hype. But the Queen of Sheba told Solomon that in his case her expectations based on the hype weren't even half of the reality.

The EHV has a pretty good translation of her reaction to everything she saw and heard: "it took her breath away." The original Hebrew is a little more interesting: "Breath was not in her any more." Sometimes that expression can be used of a temporary situation. But here it seems to be indicating that she never got that breath back. That is, she was never the same again. Beholding Solomon and his kingdom changed her life forever. Jesus confirms this when he says that she will stand up on Judgment Day and participate in the condemnation of certain unbelievers; that participation is a privilege that only believers will have, which means that this visit to Solomon's kingdom resulted in her conversion to the true faith in the one true God. We have this beautiful testimony from her own mouth: "Blessed are your men, blessed are your servants, who stand before you continually hearing your wisdom! May the LORD your God be

blessed, who was pleased to put you on the throne of Israel. Because the LORD loves Israel forever, he made you king to administer justice and righteousness.”

Solomon’s kingdom was one to take your breath away.

Now keep in mind that Solomon was a son of David. As such, he was a type or foreshadowing of *the* Son of David, Jesus the Messiah. In 2 Samuel 7, when the prophet Nathan prophesied to David about the Messiah, some of his prophecies came true in David’s son Solomon and some would only come true, or would come true to their fullest extent, in David’s greater son, Jesus Christ. Solomon built a house for the Lord, the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus founded *the* house of the Lord, the holy Christian church. Solomon was the wisest man ever to live...until Jesus, who is wisdom incarnate.

So if you read this account and think of Christ when you hear about Solomon, it fits remarkably well. Jesus’s fame is connected with the fame of the Lord, because he is the Son of God and exists to make him known. Jesus fields our hard questions and listens to everything that is on our heart. There is nothing that Jesus cannot explain to us. Sure, there are questions that arise when we become familiar with his word that he does not answer, such as: Why did God create the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the first place? How did Noah and his sons make room for and take care of all the animals on the ark? Who exactly were the Wise Men? Where did they come from? What was the star that they saw that stood over the place where Jesus was? But Jesus has answers for all the questions of the type that the Queen of Sheba had, who was unfamiliar with God’s word before her visit. Who is God? What is truth? Why are we here? Why is there evil? What happens when we die, and how do we avoid eternal punishment?

Not only that, but think of the way Jesus’s house is run. Think of the way his house is run in heaven. Think of the meetings of Jesus’s angelic officials and the careful attention of his angelic ministers. Think of the way Jesus’s house is run on earth. Granted, this side of heaven, the church is run imperfectly. But in spite of that, find a congregation where God’s word is held in high regard and is taught purely and watch how that congregation’s meetings are generally conducted, with good order and listening ears and brotherly discussion and common sense. Watch how that congregation’s ministers generally conduct themselves when presiding at services and when they are conducting ministry outside of church, including the way that they dress. Look at the thoughtfully chosen and thoughtfully positioned furniture and decorations and artwork and use of color. Look at the food on Jesus’s table—simple, physical food miraculously coupled with his own body and blood that feeds our souls and forgives our sins. Look at and listen to the offerings that they give—not just their monetary offerings, but also their musical offerings. And don’t just listen to the music; listen to the content of what they’re singing.

Then listen to the Queen of Sheba’s words at the end and imagine her talking to Jesus: “Your wisdom and wealth surpass the report which I heard. Blessed are your men, blessed are your servants, who stand before you continually hearing your wisdom! May the Lord your God be blessed, who was pleased to put you on the throne of Israel. Because the Lord loves Israel forever, he made you king to administer justice and righteousness.” What was true in a limited way and for a time in Solomon is true perfectly and eternally in Jesus.

This is why the Queen of Sheba is basically used in Psalm 72 and Isaiah 60 as a type or foreshadowing of us and of all Gentile believers who come to visit Christ from the ends of the

earth, so to speak. Through faith in Christ, through contact with his holy word and sacraments, we have the blessing and privilege of drawing on his eternal wisdom, wisdom infinitely higher and deeper than Solomon's. Jesus administers a justice and righteousness that far surpasses even Solomon's. Through his birth, life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection, God's just wrath over our sins is completely satisfied, and through his means of grace we are not only clothed with his righteousness but also given the ability to put it into practice in our lives, from our hearts.

Christ's kingdom is truly one to take our breath away. When we encounter it with heart and soul, we are never the same again. It changes our lives forever, both here and hereafter. May Christ's name be blessed, and may we continue to be blessed through him and assured by him that the true God of heaven and earth loves us forever. Amen.