

5. Solomon at his material zenith

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King Solomon would be one of the most influential and richest kings in ancient history. He was blessed beyond measure by the Lord because of his father king David and Solomon's humble request for wisdom to govern the people of God rather than riches and long life. Additionally, the king built the Temple which was his father David's desire and much more.

The Lord heard his prayer at the dedication ceremony of the Temple and did a follow-up visit many years later. That is where we start tonight.

A. GOD'S SECOND APPEARANCE IN SOLOMON'S DREAM

1 Kings 9:1-9 And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he wanted to do, 2 that the Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. 3 And the Lord said to him: "I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. 4 Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, 5 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.' 6 But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, 7 then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 8 And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss, and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' 9 Then they will answer, 'Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore the Lord has brought all this calamity on them.'"

The first time God appeared in Solomon's dream, He gave the new king a blank check to fill out. The Lord appeared to him again after the king's temple dedication prayer. This was some 24 years after Solomon came to the throne. The temple and the palace work at Jerusalem were finished. Now Solomon had to deal with life after completing his greatest accomplishment.

The great prayer of Solomon in 1 Kings 8 meant nothing unless God heard the prayer. The true measure of our prayer is if God in heaven answers the prayer.

This answer seems to have come many years after the actual dedication of the temple. Yet God also gave Solomon an immediate answer of approval at the time of dedication, when the sacrifices were consumed with fire from heaven.

In v3 "*I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever*", we must realize that man builds, but God consecrates it. This co-operation between man and God go through all life. Man performs the outward and mechanical. But God does inward and spiritual. We must be careful to do our part with rev-

erence and godly fear, remembering that God must work in realms we cannot touch and reach because of our limitations.

The positive promise of 1 Kings 9:1-5 is followed by a negative promise. This time God offered him a conditional promise that if he and his sons obeyed the Lord and His precepts, God promised that He would have Solomon's descendants rule Israel forever. He also told him what not to do.

It appears to be this is the same kind of promise God made with Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden and to all of His people. If we follow the Lord, He will take care of us. But if we forsake Him, He will forsake us. It is such a simple concept, yet many of us choose not to follow it.

Genesis 2:15-17 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

A friend of mine has a son who is a born-again. He met this young lady who was not. In spite of all the warnings and advices from his parents and friends, he chose to marry this woman. In a short time later, she had an adulterous relationship with someone else and chose to divorce her husband and it broke his heart. Do you know what he said – "Why does God allow this kind of thing to happen to me?" He completely ignored his own decision which brought this consequence, but in his opinion it is God's fault. The Lord sure takes a lot of garbage blames from us.

B. SOLOMON AND QUEEN OF SHEBA

1 Kings 10:1-9 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. 2 She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels that bore spices, very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart. 3 So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her. 4 And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, 5 the food on his table, the seating of his servants, the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cupbearers, and his entryway 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 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. 8 Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! 9 Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness."

Sheba, also known as Sabea, was where modern day Yemen is today. We know from geography this was a wealthy kingdom, with much gold, spices and precious woods.

This was a long trip – up to about 1,500 miles. She probably came as part of a trade delegation, but there is no doubt that she was highly motivated to see Solomon and his kingdom.

If my recollection is correct, Hollywood made a movie or two about King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba that was somewhat romantic. As a matter of fact, the Ethiopian national history insists that she was pregnant with his child before she came back to her own country. I wouldn't be surprised if that is true since this man showed very little control over his romantic life – having seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. I bet he had a fun time remembering each wife's name, her birthday and wedding anniversary every year. What an idiot!

From what we read in v9, does it mean that the Queen of Sheba became a believer of the God of Israel while she was visiting Solomon? I don't think so. Taken in their context, these may not be more than the queen's response to the astonishing blessing evident in Solomon's Jerusalem.

However, there is something we should learn from this Queen:

- 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

Even Jesus used the Queen of Sheba as an example of a seeker.

Matthew 12:42 The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

If the Queen of Sheba sought Solomon and the splendor 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 judgment with this ungodly generation.

C. THE ROYAL GIFT EXCHANGE

1 Kings 10:10-13 Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, spices in great quantity, and precious stones. There never again came such abundance of spices as the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. 11 Also, the ships of Hiram, which brought gold from Ophir, brought great quantities of almug wood and precious stones from Ophir. 12 And the king made steps of the almug wood for the house of the Lord and for the king's house, also harps and stringed instruments for singers. There never again came such almug wood, nor has the like been seen to this day. 13 Now King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired, whatever she asked, besides what Solomon had given her according to the royal generosity. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.

Today's gold price is \$890.84 per ounce. The amount of the gold she gave to Solomon was 120 talents which is 4.5 tons. It would be \$141,405,554. I guess that was an OK gift for a king.

D. THE ROYAL BUSINESS

1 Kings 10:14-29 The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold, 15 besides that from the traveling merchants, from the income of traders, from all the kings of Arabia, and from the governors of the country. 16 And King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred shekels of gold went into each shield.

17 He also made three hundred shields of hammered gold; three minas of gold went into each shield. The king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. 18 Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. 19 The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round at the back; there were armrests on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the armrests. 20 Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of the six steps; nothing like this had been made for any other kingdom. 21 All King Solomon's drinking vessels were gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Not one was silver, for this was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon. 22 For the king had merchant ships at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the merchant ships came bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys. 23 So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. 24 Now all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. 25 Each man brought his present: articles of silver and gold, garments, armor, spices, horses, and mules, at a set rate year by year. 26 And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen; he had one thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen, whom 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 cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland. 28 Also Solomon had horses imported from Egypt and Keveh; the king's merchants bought them in Keveh at the current price. 29 Now a chariot that was imported from Egypt cost six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse one hundred and fifty; and thus, through their agents, they exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria.

The vast commercial network that Solomon established certainly helped the economy of the nation and brought many influential visitors to Jerusalem, but did it help the king and his people draw near to God?

Solomon received 666 talents of gold which is about 25 tons of gold annually. The current value of that amount is a mere \$785,586,408. By the way, that was just his base salary.

It isn't a sin to possess wealth or to inherit wealth. Abraham was a very wealthy man who gave all his wealth to his son Isaac. Earning money honestly isn't a sin, but loving money and living just to acquire riches is a sin.

We all have to admit that king Solomon had accomplished many things. Even the Book of Ecclesiastes talks about it in chapter 2. He pursued pleasure without holding anything back. He went after one building project after another. He accumulated his wealth beyond anyone's imagination. He did everything as he desired.

If we can compare Solomon to the go-getters of the 21st Century, there is not a person who could compete with what he accomplished. He was a true "Been there. Done that. Bought a T-shirt. Thank you very much" person. Yet, he declared that everything was vanity. Why is it vanity? Didn't he have that feeling of accomplishment? I am sure he did. But it only lasted a short while. Then, that void in his heart returns.

Blaise Pascal, French Mathematician & Philosopher of the early 17th Century said, "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by

any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus." That is why Solomon tried so many things, yet he was empty.

Why did Solomon need five hundred impractical and heavy shields that required 2,525 pounds of gold to make? Why did he need an ivory throne overlaid with gold? Why must he and his guests drink only from golden vessels? To what purpose were the thousands of horses and chariots he assembled? Why did he need seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines? In pursuing each of these goals, Solomon disobeyed the very Word of the Lord!

The Lord warned in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 that Israel's king was not to multiply horses and go to Egypt to get them, nor was he to multiply wives or gold. Solomon not only acquired thousands of horses, but he became a horse dealer himself.

Deuteronomy 17:20 that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

Deuteronomy 17:20 warns the king that he must remain humble before the Lord. It's not difficult to believe that Solomon's heart was lifted up with pride, and pride always leads to destruction and a fall.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) If we follow the Lord, He will take care of us. But if we forsake Him, He will forsake us.

It is such a simple concept, yet many of us choose not to follow it.

2) We need to seek after the Lord with the same or greater diligence than the Queen of Sheba.

3) Earning money honestly isn't a sin, but loving money and living just to acquire riches is a sin.

4) The most important pursuit of our life should be the personal relationship with our God through Jesus Christ.