

# FIRST KINGS

## Chapter 10

### *The Queen of Sheba Visits Solomon*

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. <sup>2</sup> Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. <sup>3</sup> Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. <sup>4</sup> When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, <sup>5</sup> the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed. <sup>6</sup> She said to the king, “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. <sup>7</sup> But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. <sup>8</sup> How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! <sup>9</sup> Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness.” <sup>10</sup> And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. <sup>11</sup> (Hiram’s ships brought gold from Ophir; and from there they brought great cargoes of almugwood and precious stones. <sup>12</sup> The king used the almugwood to make supports for the temple of the LORD and for the royal palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. So much almugwood has never been imported or seen since that day.) <sup>13</sup> King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country.

**10:1** *Sheba.* Archaeological evidence suggests that Sheba is to be identified with a mercantile kingdom that flourished in southwest Arabia (see notes on Ge 10:28; Joel 3:8) c. 900–450 B.C. (modern Yemen). It profited from the sea trade of India and east Africa by transporting luxury commodities north to Damascus and Gaza on caravan routes through the Arabian Desert. It is possible that Solomon’s fleet of ships threatened Sheba’s continued dominance of this trading business. (CSB)

From southwest Arabia (Yemen) to Jerusalem, a distance of more than 1,000 mi. *Sheba.* Homeland of the Sabians in southern Arabia and nearby Ethiopia. (TLSB)

*his relation to the name of the LORD.* The queen of Sheba recognized a connection between the wisdom of Solomon and the God he served. Jesus used her example to condemn the people of his own day who had not recognized that “one greater than Solomon” was in their midst (Mt 12:42; Lk 11:31). (CSB)

*test.* Hbr is translated “riddle” in Jgs 14:12. (TLSB)

**10:5** *no more breath.* Speechless. (TLSB)

**10:9** *Praise be to the LORD your God.* The queen of Sheba’s confession is beautifully worded and reflects a profound understanding of Israel’s covenant relationship with the Lord. However, it does not necessarily imply anything more than her recognition of the Lord as Israel’s national God in conformity with the ideas of polytheistic paganism (see note on 5:7; see also 2Ch 2:12; Da 3:28–29). There is no confession that Solomon’s God has become her God to the exclusion of all others. (CSB)

The queen attributed Solomon’s wisdom and prosperity to Israel’s God, referring to Him by His own distinctive name, as did Hiram. (TLSB)

**10:10** *120 talents of gold.* See notes on 9:11, 28. (CSB)

Very likely the exchange served to ratify a trade agreement, perhaps the spice trade. (TLSB)

**10:11** *Hiram’s ships.* See 9:26–28. Hiram had supplied the wood, the sailors and the expertise in construction that Israel lacked. (CSB)

*almugwood.* See NIV text note and 2Ch 9:10–11. Its identity is unknown, though some suggest it is juniper. It was apparently available from Lebanon as well as Ophir (2Ch 2:8). (CSB)

Unidentified tree. Hbr name is not translated but merely transliterated. Some think it was reddish and fragrant sandalwood. In 2Ch 2:8; 9:10, the variant form “algum” occurs, suggesting that it was not a Hbr term but a foreign one. (TLSB)

**10:12** *supports.* Hbr word, which occurs only here, is singular. It could denote a decorative railing or inlaid paneling. (TLSB)

**10:13** *all she desired and asked for.* The exchange of gifts between Solomon and the queen may have signified the effecting of a trade agreement (see note on v. 1). There is no basis for the idea sometimes suggested that she desired offspring fathered by Solomon and left Jerusalem carrying his child. (CSB)

**10:1–13** The queen of Sheba’s legendary visit to Jerusalem shows the widespread fame of Solomon’s wisdom. Not only does God bless Solomon with great wisdom, but He also blesses him with a great reputation. May we humbly recognize that the blessings we enjoy—including earthly prosperity and a good name—come to us by God’s undeserved grace in His Son, Jesus. • Everlasting King, teach me to lean not on my own understanding but on the wisdom that abounds in Your Holy Word. For the sake of Jesus, God’s very wisdom, we pray. Amen. (TLSB)

## ***Solomon’s Splendor***

<sup>14</sup> The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, <sup>15</sup> not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land. <sup>16</sup> King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred bekas of gold went into each shield. <sup>17</sup> He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three minas of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. <sup>18</sup> Then the king made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with fine gold. <sup>19</sup> The throne had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them. <sup>20</sup> Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom. <sup>21</sup> All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days. <sup>22</sup> The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons. <sup>23</sup> King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. <sup>24</sup> The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. <sup>25</sup> Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules. <sup>26</sup> Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. <sup>28</sup> Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue—the royal merchants purchased them from Kue. <sup>29</sup> They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans.

**10:14–25** Solomon's wealth required two additional notes to elaborate on his source of income and his lavish use of gold (vv 14–22) and to explain the acclaim that his riches and wisdom brought him from “the whole earth” (vv 23–25). (TLSB)

**10:14** *666 talents*. C 25 tons. (TLSB)

**10:15** *revenues from ... Arabian kings*. Tribute from Bedouin sheiks for passage of their caravans into Israelite territory. (CSB)

*explorers*. Intriguing reference to Israel's curiosity and entrepreneurship. (TLSB)

*governors of the land*. See 4:7–19. (CSB)

*kings of the west*. The Phoenicians were trading as far west as Spain, and Israelite traders may have joined such ventures. (TLSB)

**10:16** *large shields*. Rectangular shields that afforded maximum protection (in distinction from the smaller round shields). These gold shields were probably not

intended for battle but for ceremonial use, symbolizing Israel's wealth and glory. They were probably made of wood overlaid with gold. Shishak of Egypt carried them off as plunder in the fifth regnal year of Solomon's son Rehoboam (see 14:25–26). (CSB)

**10:17 shields.** Hbr word is different from the one used in v 16. Shields apparently were carried by a royal honor guard on ceremonial occasions (cf 14:27–28). C 6 lb of gold went into the larger kind (v 16); c 2 lb into the smaller ones. (TLSB)

**10:18 ivory throne.** Probably inlaid with plaques of ivory, as was Ahab's house (22:39). (TLSB)

**10:20** Perhaps similar to King Tutankhamun's lion-throne. (TLSB)

**10:22 fleet of trading ships.** See NIV text note; 2Ch 9:21. The same fleet is referred to in v. 11; 9:26–28. "Ships of Tarshish" are not necessarily ships that sail to Tarshish (see note on Jnh 1:3) but can designate large trading vessels. (CSB)

Likely, ships large enough to sail to Tartessus in Spain. However, the word "Tarshish" may be a common noun denoting the smelting of ore, in which case the name would mean they were capable of carrying a heavy cargo of ore or they sailed to ports where ore was exported. (TLSB)

**10:25 his present.** Likely a tribute payment. (TLSB)

**10:26 chariots and horses.** See note on 4:26. Accumulation of chariots and horses by the king was forbidden in the Mosaic law (Dt 17:16). (CSB)

Units were strategically located in "chariot cities." Large stable complexes, excavated at Megiddo, could accommodate hundreds of horses. (TLSB)

**10:27** Solomon had the resources to acquire and maintain his chariot divisions. (TLSB)

*sycamore of the Shephelah.* Great trees in the foothills going down to the plains of Philistia. (TLSB)

**10:28** Details of this horse trade are unclear. Sitting astride the north-south trade routes, Solomon likely acted as the middleman in profitable transactions between Egypt and Kue in Asia Minor. (TLSB)

**10:29 exported them.** Through his agents Solomon was the middleman in a lucrative trading business. It appears that he acquired horses from the north (Muzur and Kue in Asia Minor; see NIV text notes on v. 28) and sold them in the south, while at the same time acquiring chariots from the south (Egypt) and selling them in the north. See inset to map No. 4 at the end of the Study Bible. (CSB)

Solomon's horse traders extended their business. (TLSB)

*Hittites.* Indo-European people of mountainous region of southeastern Asia Minor (Anatolia). (TLSB)

*Syria*. Country northeast of Israel. Solomon's "delight ... in the strength of the horse" (Ps 147:10) violated the divine prescription that the king was not to have "many horses" (Dt 17:16). (TLSB)

**10:14–29** Solomon's fabulous wealth matches his great wisdom; he "excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom" (v 23). We often complain about not having enough of this world's goods, yet God daily and richly forgives us and continues to shower material blessings upon us. How great is His undeserved goodness! Such is His great love toward us in Christ—becoming poor, that we might be rich. • Almighty Lord, Ruler of earth and sea, all things on earth are Yours. We praise You for Your all-surpassing greatness. Amen. (TLSB)