



The Queen of Sheba
1 Kings 10:1-13

Sheba. A name associated with richness, luxury, extravagance, class. That was the reputation of the land of Sheba. It was a land of spices and jewels. And it was from Sheba that its queen came to visit Solomon. The Bible gives us a pretty factual account of what we would expect of a royal visit. It was rather like a modern royal visit. The royals exchange fine gifts that reflect their wealth and power. This was even more extravagant than usual. Why? Because the queen was a powerful monarch from a rich land.

Her visit was at the zenith of Solomon's power. For her to come meant that Solomon had arrived as a world power. Most states Solomon dealt with were vassal states such as Tyre, but Sheba was more distant and powerful.

The enigmatic Queen of Sheba is stuff of legend. In fact, there is much legend from other cultures and traditions we still know so little about her. We don't even know exactly where it was. Traditionally we think of it being Ethiopia, but it could equally be Yemen – or both as they are either sides of the Red Sea! Other traditions suggest Sheba had control over an area that included far distant places such as Armenia and Kenya. There are Sheba traditions in many societies and central to them is this powerful queen – an oddity in male-driven ancient society. [there were however queens in ancient Ethiopia which is the foundation of Ethiopian claims.

Actually they may all be made up to give people a link to Israel and Solomon. As I've said, the Biblical account is more like a court report for a visiting dignitary.

Some traditions say more fanciful things. The Ethiopian tradition suggests they had an illegitimate child. The Ethiopian royal line is traced to this child. We know that there was an Ethiopian Jewish tradition – the Falashas- but I think that most historians would put them down to the influence of the Jewish diaspora of the period of the Exile onwards. Jews who wanted to be free of the Babylonians are recorded in scripture of fleeing to Egypt and from there it was a natural progression to move south into Nubia and Ethiopia and proselytise.

Of course the movie Solomon and Sheba is even more fanciful, but in Hollywood never let it be said that the truth got in the way of a good story!

Why do we find the account of the Queen of Sheba in the Bible? Because she represents

the zenith of Solomon's power and influence. It shows us he had everything and could give anything. He was the equal of the world's great rulers at the time.

It reminds us again of the grace of God. Because Solomon asked for wisdom not riches or power, he got the lot. In this story we see how Solomon used what God had given him to constructive ends, and maybe gives us some hint of how we should conduct our relationships as God's people with the world around us.

- he used what he was given to make friends

Sheba was shown Solomon's palace and way of life. In one sense it was all to impress but she got a taste of who Solomon was. He was generous to her and gave her everything she asked. It should be our model for dealings with the world. Solomon didn't turn his nose up because she was different and a heathen, he welcomed her to his kingdom. He developed a friendship. As friendships go, he gained something as well as her- influence. Sharing Christ means making friends. Sometimes it's temporary acquaintances – people we meet at functions or on the street or on holiday. Sometimes it's people we work with, or are neighbours. Sometimes it's deep lifelong friendships. Sometimes they are grace relationships where we give more than we ever get. Sometimes we receive more than we give. Such is friendship. The whole of our fellowship and witness is based on friendship because our relationship with people should reflect our relationship with God.

Solomon had received much as a result of God's grace and he used what he had to show grace to others. The Queen of Sheba was a foreigner – someone who should have been held a bit at arm's length, but Solomon welcomed her as a friend. His grace to her reflected the grace that had been shown to him.

- he was open with her and shared his knowledge and faith

6 “What I heard in my own country about you and your wisdom is true! 7 But I couldn't believe it until I had come and seen it all for myself. But I didn't hear even half of it; your wisdom and wealth are much greater than what I was told. 8 How fortunate are your wives! And how fortunate your servants, who are always in your presence and are privileged to hear your wise sayings! Praise the Lord your God! He has shown how pleased he is with you by making you king of Israel. Because his love for Israel is eternal, he has made you their king so that you can maintain law and justice.”

Solomon's wisdom wasn't just good earthly wisdom, it was God given. The queen tested him with hard questions and ended up praising God because of it. She came with hard questions. She ended it all praising God. There is a sense in which Solomon needn't have bothered being friendly as she came with the intention of asking the questions. We don't know how far they led her to God. In the Ethiopic tradition, she was the one who originally brought Judaism to them and their monarchy. That's probably not true but Solomon's words made an impact on her. But again, it wasn't just the words, but the fact they were brought with the testimony of how God was blessing him. Words are important, but they come best with testimony of changed lives and there is no greater testimony of Jesus being alive is them seeing Him in us through our friendship or even just as acquaintances.

Has God blessed us? Of course He has. In Christ we have the hope of glory. In Christ we have forgiveness. In Christ we have the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Through Christ we can look back at our lives and our faith and see God's blessing. IN Christ now, we are recipients of God's blessings although sometimes we take them lightly.

If that's the case, there are family, friends, neighbours, workmates, the world around that don't know Jesus, have never known Him. They need Him. Do they see Him in us. The Queen of Sheba arrived in Jerusalem out of fascination about the stories she was told. She found them justified.

When people look at us, what do they see? What's our reputation? It would be one that draws people to us and they should find even more than what fascinates them.

I've been reading a book recently about what other people's perceptions should be of us as a church – quite important as we explore that as a church in the next few weeks as Tim Lovejoy comes to us.. What's our reputation? What do people associate with us? Are they fascinated? Do they want to know more. And if they are drawn to us, what will they find – more or less?

These challenges come to us from over 3000 years of history but they are still fresh today as we look at our own relationship with God and as we share Christ with a world that desperately needs Him!

Preached by Mark Reid

MRBC Felixstowe 12/10/12

(c) Mark Reid 2012 Some rights reserved cc-by-nc-sa