

1 Kings Chapter 10

Verses 1-9: The “hard questions” (perplexing questions, riddles), for Solomon from the “queen of Sheba” (modern Yemen), probably pertained to the mysteries of life and must have weighed heavily on her heart. She came with an astounding show of “retinue” (wealth), to give to Solomon in esteem and appreciation (10:10).

“There was no more spirit in her” is like the modern idiom “took her breath away.” Even as a pagan, she credited “the Lord with giving Israel such a wise “king.”

Verses 1-29 (see 2 Chron. 9:1-28).

1 Kings 10:1 "And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions."

“Sheba”: Sheba was located in southeastern Arabia, about 1,200 miles from Jerusalem.

“Concerning the name of the Lord”: The primary motive for the queen’s visit was to verify Solomon’s reputation for wisdom and devotion to the Lord.

“Hard questions”: Riddles designed to stump the hearer (Judges 14:12).

The fame of Solomon had become apparent in the world of that day. The great wealth he had accumulated, along with all of the cities he built, had been widely known. His greatest achievement in building the temple to the LORD was also widely known. His palace was also of astounding beauty. The Queen of Sheba comes to see for herself, if all of this is really true or just a fable. We do know that her wealth was great. She was rich in gold, jewels, and spices. She had come to see for herself this greatness. She had been told of his great wisdom as well. She had many questions to ask him, to see if he was truly wise.

1 Kings 10:2 "And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart."

The “spices” of Arabia were famous in all ages. Sheba is mentioned (in Ezekiel 27:22), as trafficking with Tyre “in chief of all spices, and precious stones, and gold.” The spices of “the incense bearing sands” of Arabia are constantly dwelt upon, both in Greek and Roman literature. Frankincense especially was imported from Arabia into Palestine (see Isaiah 60:6; Jeremiah 6:20), although now it comes chiefly from India. Myrrh also was in ancient times drawn chiefly from Arabia. Cassia is a product of Arabia and India. Of all spices, the frankincense for sacrifice and the myrrh for embalming the dead would be most in request.

“Gold, and precious stones”: These may have been native products of Sheba, or have been brought from the farther East. Gold is not now known to exist in Arabia, nor any precious stones

except the onyx and the emerald. But in ancient times it was commonly believed to produce both gold and precious stones largely.

The items she brought would indicate that she was an Arabian. Yemen is the country best known for spices. At this time, there appeared to be much gold there as well. One writer said there were huge nuggets of gold found in that area. The onyx, emerald, and turquoise were plentiful. This caravan of camels was loaded down with gifts for Solomon. He received her as royalty, and she talked with him at length to get her questions answered.

1 Kings 10:3 "And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not [any] thing hid from the king, which he told her not."

The queen of Sheba's hard "questions (verse 1), were typical of Arabic thinking. The literature of Arabia is filled with many riddles and proverbs. Apparently, her questions were not merely mental gymnastics but were born out of a sincere desire to learn (verse2).

It seems Solomon held nothing back. He answered all of her questions. It appeared that her questions were not easy ones. They had been of great interest to her, for her to make this long trip by camel.

1 Kings 10:4 "And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built,"

Verses 4-7: "The queen of Sheba" was impressed not only by "Solomon's great intelligence and knowledge, but by the practical end to which his "wisdom" had been applied.

1 Kings 10:5 "And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her."

"No more spirit in her": Literally the experience "left her breathless".

When she saw and heard all of Solomon, she was overwhelmed. She saw Solomon's palace, and all of the beautiful cedar of Lebanon it was built with. The temple of the LORD she saw just from the outside. She could not believe the lavish way they lived. They had abundance of meat to eat. They had lavish clothing as well. Solomon had hundreds in attendance to him in his palace. This is far more than she had even heard. The ascent speaks of the burnt offering.

1 Kings 10:6 "And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom."

These words (repeated almost word for word in (2 Chron. 9:5-8), are clearly from some contemporary document. They breathe at once the spirit of Oriental compliment, and a certain seriousness of tone, as of a mind stirred by unusual wonder and admiration. It is worth notice that they touch but lightly on external magnificence and prosperity, and go on to dwell

emphatically on the wisdom of Solomon. With a wisdom enabling him to do judgment and justice; and as a gift from Jehovah, his God.

"It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom": Which she was ready to call in question when she first heard it. At least she thought it was greatly exaggerated, but now she found it was strictly true.

She had heard before she came, of the power, prestige, and wisdom of Solomon. Nearly every time a person hears a story such as she had heard, it was an exaggeration. She told Solomon that it certainly was no exaggeration in this case. It was all true; she had seen it for herself.

1 Kings 10:7 "Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen [it]: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard."

That is, she did not believe the whole of what was related to her. Somewhat of it she credited, and supposed there was something grand and extraordinary in it. Or she would never have taken such a journey; but she did not believe that all could be true; she thought things were too much magnified.

"And, behold, the half was not told me": Of what she now saw and heard.

"Thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard": The inward endowments of his mind, and the outward magnificence of his court, exceeded the relation of them to her. They were beyond expression; they were so great that reporters could not hyperbolize upon them. Or even come up to them in their account of them, and in which yet men are apt to exceed.

She admits to Solomon that she did not believe it, until she saw it with her own eyes. Not only was it all true, but it had been understated. Notice, she placed his wisdom before his prosperity.

Verses 8-9: The queen recognized that all Solomon was and had, as possibly Solomon himself had testified, was from "God".

1 Kings 10:8 "Happy [are] thy men, happy [are] these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, [and] that hear thy wisdom."

The men of Israel that had a king over them that was so wise, so great, and so good.

"Happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom": Who were now present, and to whom she pointed, and may respect not his nobles and courtiers only, but his menial servants, who had an opportunity of often hearing the wise sayings which dropped from his lips. And which no doubt were means of greatly improving their knowledge and understanding in things natural and divine.

The happiness of his men was also a surprise to her. She could not believe the loyalty and respect that even the servants had for Solomon.

1 Kings 10:9 "Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice."

“The Lord thy God”: The queen was willing to credit Solomon’s God with giving him wisdom that resulted in just and righteous decisions. Though she recognized the Lord as Israel’s national God, there was no confession that Solomon’s God had become her God to the exclusion of all others. There is no record that she made any offering to God at the temple.

The queen was pretty smart herself. She immediately realized that all of this had come from the LORD, Solomon's God. She said you are blessed with all of this, because the LORD loves you. She adds that the LORD had always loved Israel. The judgment and justice of Solomon were gifts from God. He judges righteously. She was very impressed with Solomon, and even more impressed with Solomon's God.

1 Kings 10:10 "And she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon."

“A hundred and twenty talents” (about 3.5 tons).

This is a very large amount of gold. The spices were in great abundance as well. The stones have no number or amount, but we can assume they were great in number also. Solomon was the richest man in the world, and from these gifts of gold from the Queen of Sheba and from Hiram, we can understand why.

1 Kings 10:11 "And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones."

“Almug Trees”: Probably the strong, long-lasting sandal-wood, which is black on the outside and ruby red inside.

"Almug" was probably sandal-wood which is beautiful for carving. It would have been suitable for making musical instruments. Again, we see gold and precious stones. Ophir was a prominent gold producing land in the days of Solomon.

1 Kings 10:12 "And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the LORD, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers: there came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day."

Or terraces, (as in 2 Chron. 9:11), causeways. And means the ascent or causeway he made from his own house to the temple. The pavement of which, as Jarchi interprets the word here, was made of the wood of these trees. Or the supports of it, or rather the rails on each side, on which

men might stay themselves as they passed along, as Ben Gersom. And since this ascent was admired by the queen of Sheba, it is particularly observed what wood it was made of, and from whence it came.

"Harps also, and psalteries for singers": These musical instruments were made of the same wood. Josephus says of amber, and that their number was 400,000.

"There came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day": Not in the land of Israel, neither before nor since (see 2 Chron. 9:11).

"Unto this day" (see note on 8:8).

This was beautiful wood used for fine woodworking. These pillars were as much for beauty as for strength.

Verses 10-13: Solomon expressed royal hospitality and esteem for the queen by giving her tangible gifts. The "almug wood" brought by Hiram's ships was an exotic, expensive commodity that testified to the stunning wealth of Solomon's kingdom.

1 Kings 10:13 "And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside [that] which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants."

Some curious things she saw, and was desirous of, she asked for, and had them.

"Besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty": Of his own good will and pleasure, without asking.

"So she turned and went to her own country": The country of Sheba in Arabia Felix.

"She and her sergeants": The train or retinue she brought with her, which was large (1 Kings 10:2).

We are not told what Solomon gave her. We do know that he would not send her back with nothing, after she had lavished such gifts upon him. We may safely assume that the things he gave her were things not plentiful in her country.

1 Kings 10:14 "Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold,"

This verse records the amount of gold Solomon received annually as 666 talents. This annual income was "besides that from the traveling merchants, traders, kings and governors (10:15).

In a sense, the rest of this chapter is an attestation to Solomon's God-given wisdom in action.

This is speaking of 666 talents of gold, which is 49,950 pounds (at 75 pounds per talent).

1 Kings 10:15 "Beside [that he had] of the merchantmen, and of the traffic of the spice merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country."

Gold also came to Solomon from tolls and tariffs from traders, revenues from loyal administrators, and taxes from Arabian kings who used caravan routes under Solomon's control.

The ships were possibly, used for personal trade by Solomon. The merchantmen were traders for him.

Verses 16-17: "Shields": From his gold revenues, Solomon made 200 large shields, containing about 7.5 pounds of gold each, and 300 small shields, having 3.75 pounds of gold each, that were ornamental in design and restricted to ceremonial use.

1 Kings 10:16 "And king Solomon made two hundred targets [of] beaten gold: six hundred [shekels] of gold went to one target."

Which were a larger sort of shields, which covered the whole body; and these were made of gold beaten with the hammer, or drawn into plates, being melted like wax; so the Poeni or Carthaginians made shields of gold.

"Six hundred shekels of gold went to one target": Which is to be understood not of the weight, but of the price or value of them.

A shekel is a half-ounce of gold. This means there were 300 ounces of gold in each target.

1 Kings 10:17 "And [he made] three hundred shields [of] beaten gold; three pound of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon."

For "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (see the note on 7:2-8).

There were 36 ounces of gold in each shield. All of this shows the extreme wealth of Solomon and the Israelites. This sort of thing would be classed as an extravagance.

Verses 18-23: In Solomon's vast wealth, all of his gold made "silver" seem of comparatively little value ("as nothing"). The "apes and peacocks" may have been pets that were in vogue at the time. God allowed for the normal blessings that would accrue to a king, but He specifically warned against accumulating riches for personal gain because He knew it would prevent wholehearted devotion (Deut. 17:17).

1 Kings 10:18 "Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold."

To sit on and judge his people; and ivory being white, may denote the purity, justice, and equity with which he judged. The white throne (in Revelation 20:11), may be an allusion to this; the ivory he had from Tarshish (1 Kings 10:22).

"And overlaid it with the best gold": For the greater splendor and majesty of it; not that he covered it all over, for then the ivory would not be seen, but interlined it, or studded it with it, whereby it appeared the more beautiful and magnificent. Such a throne of gold and ivory was decreed to Caesar by the Romans.

We do not know if this chair was solid ivory or just ivory overlaid. Whatever was the case, the ivory was covered with gold. This was an extravagant throne, as was everything else in the palace.

1 Kings 10:19 "The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne [was] round behind: and [there were] stays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays."

Up to the footstool of the throne, which was of gold (2 Chron. 9:18), and was high, that everyone in court might see him, and the better hear the sentence he gave.

"And the top of the throne was round behind": Had a semicircle at the top of it, like an alcove.

"And there were stays on either side on the place of the seat": Or "hands", such as the arms of a chair, to lean and rest upon.

"And two lions stood beside the stays": Which were not only ornamental, and for support of the stays, but expressive of majesty, and of undaunted courage and resolution to do justice. And of the danger such expose themselves to, who oppose magistrates in the discharge of their office. And in which Solomon was a type of Christ, the lion of the tribe of Judah. And for the same reasons were the like portraits on the steps, as follows (in verse 20).

The lion is a symbol of power. Perhaps that is why they were at either side. These sound like intricate carvings on the throne. The steps were possibly, carved wood as well. The lions were possibly, wood overlaid with gold.

1 Kings 10:20 "And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom."

There was a lion on each side of every step, a symbol of royal power, as before observed. So the Egyptians placed lions under the throne of Orus.

There was not the like made in any kingdom": For the matter and form of it, for its grandeur and magnificence. There was none at least at that time, whatever has been since; for this is the first throne of ivory we read of.

There was a carving of a lion at each end of each step.

1 Kings 10:21 "And all king Solomon's drinking vessels [were of] gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon [were of] pure gold; none [were of] silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon."

"House of the forest of Lebanon" (see note on 7:2-5.)

"Silver": To show the wealth of Solomon's kingdom, the writer explains that gold was so plentiful that the value of silver dropped to nothing.

This is speaking of the very lavish living conditions of Solomon. This gold was not alloyed with silver, it was pure gold. This was the most lavish palace in all the world.

1 Kings 10:22 "For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks."

"Navy of Tharshish": These were large, all-weather cargo vessels designed to make long ocean voyages.

"A navy of Tharshish" (or "Tharshish ships") probably designates a type of merchant ship designed to carry ore and precious commodities. Various ports in the ancient world were designated by similar names, such as Tartessus in southern Spain and a spot near Nora on the island of Sardinia. Isaiah connects "Tharshish" with Greek seafaring commerce (Isa. 23:1; 66:19; Gen. 10:4). Some have attempted to link similar trading enterprises to such faraway places as the western Mediterranean seaports, the Atlantic seaboard, or the western hemisphere. Solomon's Tharshish ships put out from Ezion-geber (9:26; 2 Chron. 8:17-18). The Hebrew word traditionally translated as "peacocks" is probably better rendered "monkey" or "baboon."

We can easily see that these ships were gathering even more wealth for Solomon. It seemed to take three years for each voyage. There was so much wealth being brought in, that silver was not thought of too highly. Gold is generally, 15 to 20 times as valuable as silver by the ounce. Solomon preferred the most valuable for his palace.

Verses 23-25: The experience of the queen of Sheba (verses 6-7, 10), would be multiplied often. For Solomon's "wisdom" (see the notes on 3:12; 4:32 and 10:14).

1 Kings 10:23 "So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom."

The chief emphasis is laid on the wisdom of Solomon, acknowledged as the gift of God (see note on 1 Kings 4:29), and being a moral and religious at least as much as an intellectual power. In this higher character, it was the type of the kingdom of the true Son of David. In which he was an eminent type of Christ (see Eph. 3:8).

In this, rather than in wealth and power, lay its true glory; and the falling away from this in the later days of Solomon brought at once decay and ruin.

1 Kings 10:24 "And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart."

For it was all of God, a peculiar gift of his. By "all the earth" is meant the inhabitants of it, and only them. And of those the more principal; who came from the several parts of it, hearing the fame of his wisdom, to know the truth of it, and to improve themselves by it.

This leaves no doubt that Solomon, truly, was the richest man in the world. His wisdom had helped him attain this great wealth and keep it. It was all because the blessings of God were upon him. The wisdom of Solomon was a gift the LORD had given him, because he asked for it to rule his people fairly. The wealth was also, a gift from God, because he did not ask for wealth.

1 Kings 10:25 "And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armor, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year."

"Silver ... gold ... horses": The wisdom God had given to Solomon (verse 24), caused many rulers, like the queen of Sheba (verses 1-13), to bring presents to Solomon as they sought to buy his wisdom to be applied in their own nations. These gifts led Solomon to multiply for himself horses, as well as silver and gold. Precisely that which God's king was warned against (in Deut. 17:16-17). Solomon became ensnared by the blessings of his own wisdom and disobeyed God's commands.

Whether this is tribute levied every year, or whether these are just gifts of gratitude, we are not told. The fact they are done yearly would indicate a tax. The word "present" makes them appear to be offerings of their own free will.

Verses 26-29: Once again, this reflects a disregard of God's command for Israel's king to abstain from acquiring great numbers of "horses" for himself (Deut. 17:16), a show of wealth and military strength.

Apparently "Solomon" was a merchandising middleman between "Egypt" to the south and "Syria" and Anatolia (modern Turkey), to the north (4:26; 2 Chron. 1:14, 17; 9:25, 28). The phrase "and linen yarn" was rendered as a place name in the ancient Greek and Latin versions. In a recently found Syrian inscription from the ninth century B.C., a land in southern Asia Minor known as Kue (or Que), was mentioned, a name that reflects precisely the reading of the Hebrew text. Accordingly, modern interpreters and recent translations have adopted the reading "from

Kue." Kue was probably the same as the Cilicia of classical and New Testament Literature (Acts 6:9).

1 Kings 10:26 "And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem."

Both for war, though it was a time of peace. He provided against the worst, lest an enemy should come upon him suddenly, and when unprepared.

"And he had one thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen": Of the latter (see 1 Kings 4:26).

"Whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem": Some of the horsemen were quartered in the cities where the chariots were placed, and some of them in Jerusalem, to be near the king's person, and to be a guard to him on occasion. Josephus says, half of them were in Jerusalem about the king, and the rest were dispersed throughout the king's villages.

With all of this wealth he would have had to have an army to keep what he had. They had a large standing army, but they were well equipped as well, with the chariots and horses. Solomon was a man of peace, but the best way to have peace was to be very strong militarily.

1 Kings 10:27 "And the king made silver [to be] in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he [to be] as the sycamore trees that [are] in the vale, for abundance."

By the vast quantity he received from Tarshish; this is a hyperbolic expression.

"And cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are the vale for abundance": Not by the growth of them, but by the importation of them from the dominion of Hiram. This is said in the same figurative way; of the sycamore trees, Rauwolff says. They are what the Moors and Arabians call "mumeitz"; which he describes to be as large and as high as white mulberry trees. And having almost the same leaves, but rounder, and their fruit not unlike our figs, only sweeter, and no little seeds within, and not so good. And are therefore not esteemed, and are commonly sold to the poorer sort. And that they grow in all fields and grounds (see Amos 7:14).

There was so much silver that came in, that it was not thought of as great value. The abundance of it made it seem almost worthless. There were so many cedars used in the buildings of the temple and the palace that they seemed to be more plentiful than the native trees. We remember they were floated down the river for use in the building of the temple and Solomon's palace.

1 Kings 10:28 "And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price."

To mount his horsemen upon, and to draw his chariots; which seems contrary to the command (in Deut. 17:16).

"And linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price": Or rather linen itself. Or linen garments, as Ben Gersom; linen being the staple commodity of Egypt (see Isa. 19:9). But no mention is made of yarn (in 2 Chronicles 9:28), and the word rendered "linen yarn" signifies a confluence or collection of waters and other things. And the words may be rendered, "as for the collection, the king's merchants received the collection at a price". That is, the collection of horses, a large number of them got together for sale; these they took at a price set upon them.

The wealth of many nations had been congregated in Jerusalem. Israel had been an army on foot primarily. Now, it seems, they have imported horses.

1 Kings 10:29 "And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred [shekels] of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring [them] out by their means."

"Chariot ... six hundred shekels": About 15 pounds of silver.

"Horse for a hundred and fifty": About 3.75 pounds of silver.

"Hittites": The majority of Hittites lived in Anatolia (Asia Minor). From 1720-1200 B.C., a unified kingdom ruled over the Hittites. These kings spread the influence of the Hittites throughout the ancient Near East. The Hittite empire reached the peak of its power in 1380-1350 B.C. When the Hittite empire collapsed, 1200 B.C., many Hittite city-states developed, each with its own king. These rulers were called "the kings of the Hittites" and were scattered in Solomon's day throughout Anatolia and northern Aram (Syria).

"Syrians": (at that time called Arameans). The geographical area within the bounds set by the Taurus Mountains in the north, the western bend of the Euphrates River and the edge of the desert in the east, the Litani River to the south and the Mediterranean Sea to the west, had as its major city, Damascus. Later known by the Greek term "Syria", the land was known in Old Testament times as Aram.

A shekel was a half-ounce of silver. The chariot cost 300 ounces of silver. A horse cost 75 ounces of silver. The horses and chariots were primarily to ward off attack by the Syrians and the Hittites. They must show strength to keep from going to war.

1 Kings Chapter 10 Questions

1. What did the Queen of Sheba do, when she heard about Solomon?
2. What had been Solomon's greatest achievement?
3. Why did she ask him questions?
4. What did she bring to Jerusalem with her?

5. What were some of the gifts she brought Solomon?
6. What did Solomon tell her?
7. When she had seen his wisdom and all that he built, what effect did it have on her?
8. What did she notice about his servants?
9. What did she say to the king in verse 6?
10. What does she admit to Solomon?
11. In verse 9, who does the Queen of Sheba bless for all of this?
12. How much gold did she give Solomon?
13. The navy of Hiram brought gold from _____.
14. What kind of wood is "almug"?
15. What did Solomon make of the almug tree?
16. What did Solomon give the queen of Sheba?
17. What was the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year?
18. What were the 200 targets made of?
19. How many shields did he make of beaten gold?
20. How much gold was in one shield?
21. What was Solomon's throne made of?
22. How many steps did the throne have?
23. What was on each step?
24. What were Solomon's drinking vessels made of?
25. How often did the ships come with more wealth?
26. What did all the earth seek Solomon for?
27. In verse 25, what makes this seem like a tax?
28. How many chariots did Solomon have?
29. Where did he get his horses?

30. How much did each chariot cost Solomon?