



What's the most amazing tour you've ever been on? One place I'd love see someday is Graceland. This is billed as "the ultimate Rock 'n' Roll pilgrimage and one of the most popular celebrity home tours; an unforgettable journey that showcases why, after 35 years, Elvis is still the king." You can see the mansion where he lives as well as the rest of his 14-acre estate. You can see his trophy building housing an amazing collection of his gold and platinum records. Elvis loved cars and you can check out over 33 vehicles owned by Elvis, including his famous pink Cadillac. You can step aboard his two custom jets, one of which has 24-karat gold flecked sinks. Then you can end it all at Meditation Garden where Elvis and members of his family have been laid to rest.

1 Kings 10 is like a trip to Graceland. The writer takes us on a tour to the mansion of another king named Solomon. First, he allows us to see Solomon through the eyes of a woman who traveled a long way just to see him and his kingdom. Then he himself takes a few minutes and shows us around, pointing out a few of the most impressive things. It's like he wants us to just stand there and take in the magnificence. Let's start by taking the tour ourselves. When it's over we'll try to understand what we can learn from all of this.

The Queen of Sheba Visits Solomon and is Left Breathless

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord, she came to test Solomon with hard questions (v. 1).

It all started when a woman referred to as the Queen of Sheba began to hear reports about the glories of a distant kingdom. She heard about a king named Solomon in a far off land called Israel. She heard specifically about his relationship with God and she was curious about that. So she decided to see for herself. She traveled across the Middle East and this led to one of the most famous diplomatic encounters in the history of international relations.

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba have a few things in common. They're both royalty. They're both wealthy. But they're also a study in contrasts. Of course, they're of a different gender. And while they're both Middle Eastern, she's an Arab and he's an Israelite. History tells us her name was Balquees and she was from the modern day country of Yemen in Southern Arabia. It was unusual in those days for a reigning monarch to make such a journey in person. Typically, someone like her would send

emissaries to Solomon's court. But she travels more than a thousand miles through the desert just to see Solomon and his court for herself.

There are many myths about this visit. The Qur'an says Solomon welcomed her in a pavilion with a glass floor. She believed the floor was covered in water and raised the hem of her dress to prevent it from getting wet. That's when Solomon saw her legs were much too hairy and taunted her saying, "Madam, your beauty is feminine, but the hair on your legs is masculine." Sheba's pride was hurt and she reacted by testing Solomon with a series of riddles. To her astonishment, he was able to solve them all!

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. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, 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 (verses 2–5).

But let's deal with the real story. She comes with an entourage and many expensive items. Later in v. 10 it says she gave Solomon gifts of gold, spices and precious stones. You can see she was a woman of tremendous intellectual and spiritual curiosity. God had given Solomon the gift of unsurpassed wisdom. She came because she'd heard about that and wanted to see if he was all he was cracked up to be. Verse 1 says she came *"to test Solomon with hard questions."* In v. 2 it says *"she talked with him about all she had on her mind."* In v. 4 it says she *"saw all the wisdom of Solomon."* And at the end of v. 5 it says *"she was overwhelmed"* by all of this. Literally, that means she was "out of breath" or "breathless." Listen to what she says in verses 6–9.

She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. 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. How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! 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."

She testifies that Solomon's wisdom and wealth exceeded even what she'd heard. She's envious of all the members of his court who get to stand around and hear his wisdom all day long. She even praises Solomon's God, recognizing he'd put him on the throne out of his eternal love for Israel to maintain justice and righteousness.

So this is an intellectually and spiritually curious woman who is willing to go to great lengths to discover the truth. Philip Ryken says, "She was a skeptic of the healthiest kind: although she didn't believe everything she heard, she was always open to believing the truth." What a great example she is to us. She reminds me of Thomas. Thomas was one of Jesus' disciples but the first time the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples he wasn't there. They told him all about it but Thomas refused to believe unless Jesus showed up to him and allowed him to reach in and touch his wounds. Thomas was a skeptic, but he remained open and when Jesus appeared to him a week later he knelt and worshipped him as God.

Jesus isn't afraid of healthy skepticism. He welcomes our questions. Lee Strobel was an award-winning journalist. He always assumed "God was merely a product of wishful thinking, of ancient mythology, of primitive superstition." He also assumed all the available evidence showed Jesus was only an ordinary human being. Then, to his dismay, his wife became a Christian. The change in her life was so extraordinary he decided to launch an all-out investigation into the facts surrounding Christianity. He set aside his former prejudices and took a fresh look at the evidence. He read books, asked questions, interviewed experts, studied history, explored archaeology, and, most importantly, studied the Bible. By the time he was finished, Strobel had to admit the unthinkable: Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

Some of you here are on a journey much like the Queen of Sheba. Are you willing to come to him with your questions? Are you really open to the possibility that there is a God and that he revealed himself as a God of love and grace in the person of Jesus Christ?

The Writer Gives Us His Own Tour and is Left Breathless

But the tour isn't done. Next the writer takes a few minutes and shows us around himself, pointing out a few of the things he felt were most impressive. We're not going to read it all but the operative word in this section is "gold." He mentions "gold" ten times. And there was a lot of it. Look at verses 14–15.

The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, not including the revenues

from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the territories.

That's about 20 tons of gold he's bringing in a year; an annual income of \$1.4 trillion at today's rate.

The tour begins in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon where there's a room filled with 200 body-sized shields and 300 smaller hand-carried shields (verses 16–17). All of them are gold-plated. Then he shows us Solomon's throne (verses 18–20). It had ivory inlay and gold overlay. There were six steps leading up to the throne with 12 carved lions on each side. The writer, like the Queen of Sheba, is breathless. He says, "Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom." And then we go into one of the storage rooms where we see goblets and other household items made of solid gold (v. 21). He then stops and tells us about Solomon's fleet of trading ships. With those ships he imported not just gold and silver but also apes and baboons! Later he takes us outside and shows us 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses imported from Egypt (verses 26–29).

We should ask the question, how are we to understand all of this? How does the inspired author want us to view this? Does he describe Solomon's wisdom and wealth with a critical eye or is he impressed? Does he want us to criticize Solomon or to applaud him? I actually think it's the latter. Look what he says in verses 23–25.

King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules.

Just like the Queen of Sheba, Solomon's wisdom and wealth left him breathless. He'd written about God's promise to Solomon in chapter 3:12–13. God said, *"I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings."* So now we see that God certainly has fulfilled his promise.

We Should be Left Breathless Before Our King

But what's the significance of chapter 10 for us? What do we do with this? It seems to me we too should be left breathless. Jesus Christ is the King of all kings. When we consider his wisdom and the riches of his glory we should be overwhelmed just like both the Queen and the writer were.

Enjoy God's blessings

One of the ways we can do that is just by enjoying God's blessings and giving thanks for them. However we feel about it, the reality is that God blessed Solomon with material wealth. If God

has blessed you materially, as he has most of us here, rather than feeling guilty about that it's much better just to give thanks and enjoy those gifts. Some of us read this chapter and cringe over the materialism and the waste. We can always read ahead and see how Solomon went off the spiritual deep end, which must have been due to his crass materialism. But remember, this was all the fulfillment of God's promise to Solomon. Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs. In it he said, "***The blessing of the Lord brings wealth...***" (Prov. 10:22). He also wrote in Ecclesiastes, "***Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God***" (Eccles 5:19).

We may not like those verses because they smack of the prosperity gospel. But that's not what we're talking about here. God hasn't promised to make us rich in the things of the world if we just have enough faith. But whatever we **do** have comes from his hand and we should receive it as such. We know wealth brings responsibility. We're called to be open handed and generous. And there's always danger attached to wealth. Wealth can contribute to our becoming proud, or selfish, or even distracted in our walk with God. And it very well could be that this at least in part led to Solomon's downfall. Someone has said, "It's good to have the things that money can buy, provided you don't lose the things that money can't buy." But let's not denigrate God's gifts. It glorifies God much more to give thanks for them and enjoy them and share them with others.

Appreciate God's wisdom

But really the most impressive thing in this story isn't Solomon's wealth but his wisdom. We should also appreciate God's wisdom. Solomon's wisdom was impressive, but have you considered the wisdom of our great King? The Bible says that in Jesus "***are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge***" (Col 2:3). There's nothing to be known that Jesus doesn't already know. The Bible even says through him all things were created. He knows everything about creation, from the smallest subatomic particle that's yet to be detected by science to the biggest black hole in outer space.

National Geographic recently reported that eight new species of mammals were discovered in Peru. They called it a "new heaven of unknown biodiversity." One of them was a night monkey called the Bushy Bearded Titi Monkey. How could a monkey like that hide for thousands of years of human history? But here's the deal: Jesus has known about them all along! He made that monkey! He thought him up!

Consider also the breathtaking wisdom of his teaching. Can anyone match stories like the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son? Can anyone match the wisdom of the Sermon on the Mount, beginning with the Beatitudes that blow our mind? "***Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are the meek...Blessed***

are the merciful." Talk about breathtaking! And who would have thought that hatred really amounts to murder, and lust really amounts to adultery?

Consider also the wisdom of his saving work. This is a wisdom so high it's considered foolishness to the world. Who would have ever imagined God would visit us in the person of his Son? Who would have ever thought if God did visit us it would be as a poor carpenter living in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire? Who would have ever thought salvation would come through the most degrading form of punishment man has ever come up with? Who would have ever thought through all of this he'd create a community of people from every race and nationality. The Queen said of Solomon's servants, "How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!" In a way, she could have said that about us!

Ultimately, we appreciate his wisdom best when we simply trust him for what he's doing in our lives right now. I recall a time in my life when I was having a hard time doing that. There were some things going on for me I just didn't get, nor did I like. Then somehow I ran across a verse at the very end of Romans. Paul was giving a final blessings and he refers to God as "***the only wise God***" (Rom 16:27). It struck me as I read those words that he's both the **only wise** God and the **wise only** God. In other words, everything he does in my life is wise. I may not always understand his ways, but I can trust him because he's only wise and wise only. His wisdom is breathless!

One of the things I love about this story is we see in it a foretaste of the future homage the Gentile nations will bring to the true King—Jesus. Solomon's wisdom held quite an attraction not only for the Jewish people and for the Queen of Sheba, but for the whole world. Verse 24 says, "***The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.***" In chapter 8 Solomon prayed this would happen. But with the coming of Jesus, the way we share this wisdom with the nations is different than in Solomon's day. In the Old Testament era, God glorified himself largely by blessing Israel so the nations could come and see that the Lord is God. The pattern in the Old Testament is a come-see religion. Israel wasn't sent out to gather the nations; rather, she was glorified so the nations would see her greatness and come to her, as we see in this story. But with the coming of Christ this changed. The New Testament doesn't present a come-see religion, but a go-tell religion. Jesus sent his disciples out and said, "***Go and make disciples of all nations...***" To be breathless over His wisdom today means we're willing to go and tell it to others... (Mt 28:18-20).

Heed God's warning

We should be breathless before this King. This will mean we enjoy his blessings and appreciate his wisdom. But we should also heed

his warning. Did you know that Jesus himself once spoke of the Queen of Sheba? In Matthew 12:42 Jesus was speaking about the unbelief of Israel and its leadership. They'd asked Jesus for an indisputable sign that he was indeed the Messiah he claimed to be. But he refused and then he condemned them with these words, *"The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here."* What's he saying? He's saying the Queen of Sheba had less truth and less privilege than they did. She'd only heard of Solomon's wisdom and wasn't even one of Solomon's subjects, but she came from afar to hear Solomon's words for herself and she left a believer. Not only did she honor his breathtaking wisdom, she also offered her golden treasure.

When Jesus says *"something greater than Solomon is here"* he's talking to us. We have so much more than she had. She only had Solomon; we have Jesus. He has more wisdom than Solomon. He has more riches than Solomon. The riches of his glory far surpass the riches of Solomon's shields and throne and goblets. The Queen of Sheba praised Solomon's justice and righteousness, but Jesus has so much more of that than Solomon. Best of all, he has so much more grace than Solomon. If Solomon sent her off "with all she desired and asked for," how much more will Jesus satisfy us with the riches of his grace?

Visitors have a way of getting us to appreciate the things we have, don't they? It's like when you're a kid and you have friends over and even though your toys seemed old to you, they were

new to your friends and so they played with them with great enthusiasm. They helped you appreciate again the toys you had.

The Queen of Sheba traveled hundreds of miles to visit King Solomon. Her enthusiasm over Solomon's wisdom and riches should not only have helped Solomon's subjects see just how blessed they were; her visit reveals just how blessed we are. Yes, something greater than Solomon is here!

But if the Queen of Sheba were to visit us today, would she see people breathless over the wisdom he gives? Would she witness people eager to hear God's Word or would she instead be left with an impression that we think worshipping him is drudgery?

Don't read 1 Kings 10 and pat the Queen of Sheba on the head. Don't patronize this lady or look on her as a fascinating literary character. Don't look at this story like you do an old movie—with entertainment value but no serious relevance.

Why? Because one day you and I will see the Queen of Sheba at the final judgment. The question is, what will she say about us? Unless we bow breathless before the King of kings, enjoying his blessings, appreciating his wisdom, and heed his warning, we'll see her striding into the judgment hall pointing her finger at us!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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