

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The queen of Sheba visits Solomon, and brings rich presents; and tries him by hard questions, which he readily solves, 1 Kings 10:1-3. She expresses great surprise at his wisdom, his buildings, his court, etc.; and praises God for placing him on the Jewish throne, 1 Kings 10:4-9. She gives him rich presents, 1 Kings 10:10. What the navy of Hiram brought from Ophir, 1 Kings 10:11, 1 Kings 10:12. The queen of Sheba returns, 1 Kings 10:13. Solomon's annual revenue, 1 Kings 10:14, 1 Kings 10:15. He makes two hundred targets and three hundred shields of gold, 1 Kings 10:16, 1 Kings 10:17. His magnificent ivory throne, 1 Kings 10:18-20. His drinking vessels all of gold, 1 Kings 10:21. What the navy of Tharshish brought every three years to Solomon, 1 Kings 10:22. His great riches, numerous chariots, and horsemen, 1 Kings 10:23-27. He brings chariots and horses out of Egypt, 1 Kings 10:28, 1 Kings 10:29.

Verse 1

When the queen of Sheba heard - As our Lord calls her queen of the south, (Matthew 12:42), it is likely the name should be written Saba, Azab, or Azaba, all of which signify the south. She is called Balkis by the Arabians, but by the Abyssinians Maqueda. See the account at the end of this chapter, 1 Kings 10:29 (note).

With hard questions - חֲדָשִׁים (bechidoth); Septuagint, ἑρμηνείαι, riddles. With parables and riddles, says the Arabic.

Verse 2

She came to Jerusalem with - spices, etc. - Those who contend that she was queen of the Sabaeans, a people of Arabia Felix, towards the southern extremity of the Red Sea, find several proofs of their opinion:

1. That the Sabaeans abounded in riches and spices.

India mittit ebur, molles sua thura Sabaei

India furnishes ivory, and the effeminate Sabaeans their frankincense.

Virg. Geor. i., ver. 57.

And again: -

Divisae arboribus patriae: sola India nigrum

Fert ebum; solis est thurea virga Sabaeis.

Geor. ii., ver. 116.

All sorts of trees their several countries know:

Black ebon only will in India grow;

And odorous frankincense on the Sabaean bough.

Dryden.

- Ubi templum illi centumque Sabaeo Thure calent arae.

Where to her fame a hundred altars rise,

And pour Sabaean odours to the skies.

Pliny (Hist. Nat. lib. xii., c. 17) observes,

Non alia ligni genera in usu sunt quam odorata;

cibosque Sabaei coquunt thuris ligno; alii myrrhae.

The Sabaeans use odorous wood only, and even use the incense tree and myrrh to cook their victuals.

2. All ancient authors speak, not only of their odoriferous woods, but of their rich gold and silver mines, and of their precious stones. See Pliny, Hist. Nat. lib. xxxvii., c. 6, etc.

3. It is also well known that the Sabaeans had queens for their sovereigns, and not kings. So Claudian, in Eutrop. lib. i.

- Medis levibusque Sabaeis Imperat hic sexus,

reginarumque sub armis Barbariae pars magna jacet.

By this is meant, says Mr. Bruce, the country between the tropic and mountains of Abyssinia, the country of shepherds, from berber, a shepherd. And he contends that these Sabaeans were a distinct people from the Ethiopians and the Arabs, and that Saba was a distinct state.

Verse 3

Solomon told her all her questions - Riddles, problems, fables, apologues, etc., formed the principal part of the wisdom of the East; indeed they use and delight in them to the present day. See the case of Samson and his friends, Judges 14:12 (note), Judges 14:14 (note), and the notes there.

Verse 4

Had seen all Solomon's wisdom - By the answers which he gave to her subtle questions.

And the house that he had built - Most probably his own house.

Verse 5

The meat of his table - The immense supply of all kinds of food daily necessary for the many thousands which were fed at and from his table. See 1 Kings 4:22-23 (note).

And the sitting of his servants - The various orders and distinctions of his officers.

The attendance of his ministers - See the account of these and their attendance, 1 Kings 4:1, etc.

And their apparel - The peculiarity of their robes, and their splendor and costliness.

And his cup-bearers - The original *šāḥānā* (mashkaiv) may as well be applied to his beverage, or to his drinking utensils, as to his cup-bearers.

And his ascent by which he went up - It seems very strange that the steps to the temple should be such a separate matter of astonishment. The original is *šāḥānā* *šāḥānā* *šāḥānā* *šāḥānā* *šāḥānā* which all the versions have translated, And the holocausts which he offered in the house of the Lord. The Vulgate, Septuagint, Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic, all express this sense: so does the German translation of Luther, from which, in this place, we have most pitifully departed: And seine Brandopfer, die er in dem Hause des Herrn opferte; And his burnt-offering which he offered in the house of the Lord.

There was no more spirit in her - She was overpowered with astonishment; she fainted. I have seen precisely the same effect produced; a lady who was herself an artist, viewing some exquisitely finished oriental paintings, was so struck with astonishment that she twice nearly fainted, and was obliged to leave the room. What happened to the queen of Sheba is a natural and not an uncommon effect which will be produced in a delicate sensible mind at the sight of rare and extraordinary productions of art.

Of the profusion of Solomon's sacrifices we have already had proof, 1 Kings 8:63; 1 Kings 9:25.

Verse 8

Happy are thy men - All these are very natural expressions from a person in her state of mind.

Verse 10

A hundred and twenty talents of gold - The worth of these one hundred and twenty talents of gold, according to Mr. Reynolds, is equal to £843,905. 10s. 4 3/4d. of our British sterling. But the spices and precious stones might have been yet of more value. After this verse the 13th should be read, which is here most evidently misplaced; and then the account of the queen of Sheba will be concluded, and that of Solomon's revenue will stand without interruption.

Verse 11

Great plenty of albug trees - In the parallel place, 2 Chronicles 9:10, 2 Chronicles 9:11, these are called albug trees, the *šā* (mem) and the *š'* (gimel) being transposed; probably the latter is the more correct orthography. What the albug trees were we do not exactly know. The Vulgate calls it ligna thyina, the thya or lignum vitae wood; and Mr. Parkhurst thinks that the original *šāḥānā* (albugim), comes from *šā* (al), not, and *š'* (gem), to fill; because the lignum vitae is of so close a texture that it can imbibe no water, and cannot be affected by wet weather. The Septuagint translate it *ἰσῆ* *ἰσῆ* *ἰσῆ* *ἰσῆ* *ἰσῆ*, pine timber; the Syriac (kaise dakisothe), probably cypress wood, or what the translators render ligna brasilica; the Arabic translates coloured wood, and subjoins a paraphrase, for that wood was by nature painted with various colors. Perhaps the Arabic comes nearest the truth; wood shaded of different colors, such as the rose wood and such like, which are brought to us from various parts of the East Indies. The whole passage as it stands in the Arabic is this: And the ships of Hiram brought gold from the land of Hind, (India), and they carried also much coloured wood, (but this wood is naturally painted of various colors), and very precious jewels. And Solomon put some of that same painted wood which was brought to him in the house of the Lord, and in his own house; and with it he adorned them. And for inlaying and veneering nothing can be finer than this wood.

Verse 13

All her desire whatsoever she asked - Some imagine she desired progeny from the wise king of Israel; and all the traditions concerning her state that she had a son by Solomon called Menilek, who was brought up at the Israelitish court, succeeded his mother in the kingdom of Saba, and introduced among his subjects the Jewish religion. See at the end of the chapter, 1 Kings 10:29 (note).

Verse 14

The weight of gold - was six hundred threescore and six talents - This would amount in our money to £4,683, 675 12s. 8 1/2d. sterling.

This seems to be what he got annually of bullion; but independently of this, he had tribute of all the kings of Arabia, duties from merchantmen, and the traffic of spice merchants; see 1 Kings 10:25.

Verse 16

Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold - I have already conjectured that the *tsinnah* might resemble the Highland targe or target, with a dagger projecting from the Umbo or center.

Verse 17

He made three hundred shields - The *magen* was a large shield by which the whole body was protected.

Mr. Reynolds computes that the two hundred targets, on each of which were employed three hundred shekels of gold, were worth £28,131 16s. 9 1/2d.

And the three hundred shields, in forming each of which three pounds of gold were employed, were worth £210,976 7s. 7d.

Verse 19

The throne was round behind: and there were stays on either side - This description seems to indicate that the throne was in the form of one of our ancient round-topped, two-armed chairs. This throne or chair of state was raised on a platform, the ascent to which consisted of six steps. What we call stays is in the Hebrew *yadoth*, hands, which serves to confirm the conjecture above.

Verse 22

A navy of Tharshish - For probable conjectures concerning this place, and the three years' voyage, see at the end of this, 1 Kings 10:29 (note) and the preceding chapter, 1 Kings 9 (note).

Apes - *kophim*; probably a species of monkey rather than ape.

Verse 23

Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches - Mr. Reynolds, stating the yearly tribute of Solomon, 666 talents of gold, at about four times as much as his father left him, hence reckons that he had £4,909,371 8s. 8d. each year, £94,410 19s. 9 1/4d. per week, £13,487 5s. 8d. per day, taking each day, week, and year, one with another.

Verse 25

They brought every man his present - This means tribute; and it shows us of what sort that tribute was, viz., vessels of gold and silver, probably ingots; garments of very rich stuffs; armor, for little of this kind was ever made in Judea; spices, which doubtless sold well in that country; horses, which were very rare; and mules, the most necessary animal for all the purposes of life.

Verse 26

He had a thousand and four hundred chariots - See the note on 1 Kings 4:26.

Verse 27

Made silver - as stones - He destroyed its value by making it so exceedingly plenty.

As the sycamore trees - He planted many cedars, and doubtless had much cedar wood imported; so that it became as common as the sycamore trees, which appear to have grown there in great abundance. This is considered to be a tree that partakes of the nature of the fig tree, and of the mulberry. Of the former it has the fruit, and of the latter the leaves; that is, the fruit had a considerable resemblance to the fig, and the leaf to that of the mulberry tree: hence its name sycamore, from the Greek *ŭfŭ*...*ŭfŭ* 1/2, a fig, and *ŭfŭ* 1/4 *ŭfŭ* 1/2, a mulberry tree.

Verse 28

Horses brought out of Egypt - It is thought that the first people who used horses in war were the Egyptians; and it is well known that the nations who knew the use of this creature in battle had greatly the advantage of those who did not. God had absolutely prohibited horses to be imported or used; but in many things Solomon paid little attention to the Divine command.

And linen yarn - The original word, מִקְוֶה (mikveh), is hard to be understood, if it be not indeed a corruption. The versions are all puzzled with it: the Vulgate and Septuagint make it a proper name: "And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and from Coa, or Tekoa." Some think it signifies a tribute, thus Bochart: "They brought horses to Solomon out of Egypt; and as to the tribute, the farmers of this prince received it at a price." They farmed the tribute, gave so much annually for it, taking the different kinds to themselves, and giving a round sum for the whole.

Some suppose that Mikveh signifies the string or cord by which one horse's head is tied to the tail of another; and that the meaning is, Solomon brought droves of horses, thus tied, out of Egypt.

Rabbi Solomon Jarchi, in his comment on the parallel place, 2 Chronicles 1:14, says that מִקְוֶה (mikveh) signifies a collection or drove of horses, or what the Germans call stutte, a stud. He observes on that place, "That he has heard that there was a company of merchants in Egypt, who bought horses from the Egyptians at a certain price, on condition that no person should be permitted to bring a horse out of Egypt but through them." Houbigant supposes the place to be corrupt, and that for מִקְוֶה (mikveh) we should read מִרְכָּבָה (mercabah), chariots: "And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and chariots; and the king's merchants received the chariots at a price: and a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver," etc. This makes a very good and consistent sense; but none of the versions acknowledged it, nor is there any various reading here in any of the MSS. yet collated.

If we understand it of thread, it may refer to the byssus or fine flax for which Egypt was famous; but I do not see on what authority we translate it linen thread. Bochart's opinion appears to me the most probable, as the text now stands; but the charge contended for by Houbigant makes the text far more simple and intelligible.

Verse 29

A chariot came up - for six hundred shekels - This was the ordinary price of a chariot, as a hundred and fifty shekels were for a horse.

Kings of the Hittites - These must have been the remains of the original inhabitants of Canaan, who had gone to some other country, probably Syria, and formed themselves into a principality there. It seems that neither horses nor chariots came out of Egypt but by means of Solomon's servants.