

Sunday 26th February 2012, Evening Service - 2 Chronicles 9:1-12

In this passage we hear about the visit to Solomon's palace by the queen of Sheba. Compared to Israel her realm is enormous and her wealth is vast. Despite her power and riches though, she is still seeking more – there is something missing in her life. She has questions that need answered.

She travels something like 1500 miles with a large retinue over many months to see for herself whether the things she has heard about Solomon are true. We are told the queen was 'overwhelmed' – not just by the wealth and splendour of Solomon's possessions but especially by the wisdom of his answers to her numerous questions. She has come to test him and has had a long journey during which to think of all the questions she needs to ask.

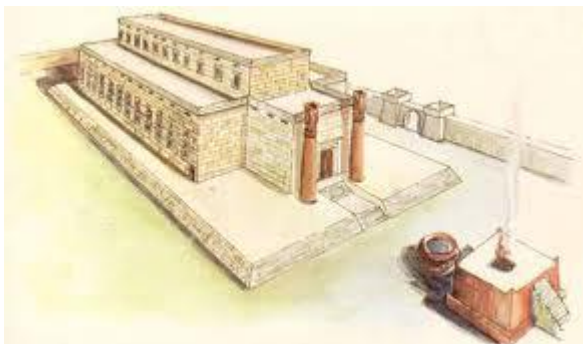
Solomon doesn't disappoint her. He listens and responds not only with wisdom but clearly with patience and she is impressed by his answers. She perceives that this wisdom comes from Solomon's God and she praises the God of Israel for the blessings that have been heaped on Solomon and the land of Israel.

Imagine what a difference there would be in our country if our leaders were to seek the wisdom of God and follow God's laws when making decisions and in their dealings with one another and with the governments of other countries!

But we are not told that Sheba is converted. She comes to Solomon as a seeker after the truth. She hears and even recognises the truth of Solomon's answers but she does not become a follower of the God of Israel. As a Christian church we must be aware that it isn't enough to impress seekers with expensive facilities and slick programmes or even faultless knowledge of Scriptures. Unless their hearts are opened and surrendered to Jesus they will leave, at best, *knowing about* God without actually *knowing* him or following him.

Sheba lavishes gifts on Solomon as was traditional when one monarch visited another's domain but he not only reciprocates but his gifts to her are even more generous than hers to him. This reminds us that when we come to Jesus and give ourselves to him he gives us everything we need and more.

Sunday 19th February 2012 Evening Service – 2Chronicles 8



In chapter 8 we take a whistle-stop tour of Solomon's achievements over his 20 year reign so far. We find him doing what kings of that era do – building his infrastructure, expanding his territory, leading his people, administering justice and above all building the temple. He is very successful and his reign marks the period of Israel's greatest prosperity and most extensive geography.

In future times the Israelites would look back on these as the halcyon days, a golden age. In material terms this is certainly true and it's true too, initially at least, in terms of spiritual commitment. We are told that all the king's commands were carried out. Carrying out these plans gained the support of the people – it was undoubtedly the 'in thing' to be part of.

We too have a tendency to look back nostalgically on the former 'glory days' of the church in Scotland, a time when the kirks were full with standing room only at some services. We should perhaps remember that many of those who flocked to Scottish churches in the past did not have a sincerely deep, sustained faith. The kirk was 'the only show in town' and the 'in' place to be. Material success and impressive numbers are not necessarily a reliable gauge of spiritual development and maturity.

We learn also that Israel had destroyed its enemies but that there remained several other peoples living in

the land. These Solomon enslaved and used as labour to carry out his impressive works. No attempt is ever made to convert these aliens to the God of Israel. In the Christian church we must never forget what is our purpose – to take the Gospel out into the community where we live and bring souls to Christ.

Solomon achieved so much and a concern for worship befitting the God of Israel was his first priority. Despite this he makes a politically advantageous marriage to an unbeliever, the Pharaoh's daughter, and thus begins his drift away from the Lord's commands. He will over time allow his predilection for foreign wives and concubines to turn him towards their gods and away from the one true God.

Because God was with them the Israelites were able to 'punch above their weight' in global terms. Nowadays Israel remains a country small in geography but large in history, still with significant influence in the global arena. It was, after all, the land of Jesus' birth and the place and people to whom God chose to reveal his path to salvation. God was guiding the Israelites long before the barbarians in Scotland were to learn about him and his Son, Jesus. But now we 'know how the Book ends' and as Scottish Christians our mission and purpose must ever be to win back Scotland for the Lord.