



CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

EXHORTATION

Date: 18th October 2020

SECTION LEADER:

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Readings: **2 Chronicles 9, Ezekiel 44, John 11**

A Blessing for Everyone

God's promises made to Abraham offered something to benefit all nations, not just the Jews. The very first promise made that clear: "...in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (**Genesis 12:3 AV**). But it also explained that the blessing would come through the Jewish nation, for the words "in thee" make it clear that salvation would come in that way, and that way alone, as the Lord Jesus would later explain to the Samaritans. Salvation was to be "of the Jews" (**John 4:22**).

About a thousand years after Abraham, the nation of Israel had finally become important in the Middle East. Less than 200 of Abraham's descendants had migrated to Egypt at a time of famine but there were over 600,000 men, plus women and children, who finally left with Moses. The books of Exodus to Samuel detail their development as a nation and then as a kingdom. God was working with them to make them the people that He wanted, just as He is working in our lives to prepare us for His kingdom. Israel was to be a nation that would teach the nations round about them about the only true God, and thus encourage them to worship Him rather than their false gods. In that way they would indeed be "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (**Exod 19:6**). That challenge has now been passed to us, that in the way we live we might teach people about the living God (**1 Peter 2:9**).

After the confused reign of King Saul, it was King David who unified the nation, successfully fought wars with near neighbours, like the Philistines, and expanded Israel's territory. The nations around would have taken note, but such warlike activity might have acted as a deterrent. They probably decided to keep well away. But King Solomon went about things differently, being a peaceful monarch who reached out to other nations by trade and through diplomatic initiatives. The result was that people came to discover the secret of his success. In the process they learned about the God he worshipped, just as they were meant to do. The inspired record says that: "all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom that God had put in his heart" (**2 Chronicles 9:23**). To illustrate, we get a detailed account of the visit of the Queen of Sheba and are told that this was much more than a trading mission, even though she brought spices, very much gold and precious stones (**9:1**).

The Queen came to probe and test Solomon's understanding about the deep issues of life: "she came to prove Solomon with hard questions ... she communed with him of all that was in her heart" (**9:1**). The King had once been asked by God what gift he would like and had replied that he wanted wisdom and knowledge to enable him to govern the nation (**2 Chronicles 1:10**). God's reply was that because he had made that choice: "Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like" (**2 Chronicles 1:12**).

So when the Queen of Sheba conversed with Solomon the answers she was given were much more than the musings of a statesman, or the product of human philosophy and worldly thinking. He shared with her wisdom that had been given him by God and, in addition, he demonstrated the way that wisdom was being applied in the way he governed and the way he worshiped. **2 Chronicles 9:4**, ends with the words "... and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her." It seems that they worshiped together and that she may have become a believer in the God of Israel, for the Lord Jesus said of her that: "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost

parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Luke 11:31). If she is to be raised from the dead and summoned to the judgement seat, it seems that she had heard and understood the law of the Lord. When Jesus said that she would condemn the men of his generation, he was thus indicating that her response to what she heard and learned was better than theirs.

We get an indication of her growing understanding from her response to Solomon's teaching (2 Chronicles 9:5-8) which includes this insight into her appreciation of the part Israel was then playing in the purpose of God: *"Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on his throne, to be king for the LORD thy God: because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made he thee king over them, to do judgment and justice"* (2 Chronicles 9:8). And her use of the memorial name of God is another important detail.

These things are written for our education. Now the wisdom of God has been shared with us, for He has revealed Himself in the Word of truth and in the saving work of our Lord. We are now the people of God, through our faith in Jesus, and when we meet others day-by-day, the way we live, the things we say and do, and our general demeanour should encourage others to ask why we are different. Of course, the pressures of life and the need to accumulate riches, for ourselves and our families, might result in our behaviour being much the same as that of everybody else. As things worked out, it was a bit like that for Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba didn't just come to Jerusalem with questions. She brought: *"...gold, and of spices great abundance, and precious stones: neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon"* (2 Chronicles 9:9). And that was true for all the surrounding kings who came to visit: *"...they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and raiment, harness, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year"* (2 Chronicles 9:24). Add in the overland and overseas trading enterprises and you can see why Solomon became so rich that silver was as common as stone in Jerusalem (v27). As his riches increased and his influence grew, it was understandable that other nations wanted to ally themselves with this wealthy nation. Marriage with a lady of influence, even a princess, was often a way of establishing an alliance and, as Solomon was something of a collector, he collected wives and concubines as well as: *"...gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks"* (9:21). That led to his downfall, but you would not know from the words of the Chronicler, for his task is to describe the progress of God's kingdom and, in terms of influence and outreach, Solomon's forty-year reign was a success. The nation was acting in the way God had always wanted: it was offering a blessing to everyone, if they came to know and worship the God of Israel. It's the inspired writer of the 1 Kings account that reminds us that whilst the nation was fulfilling its remit (1 Kings 10:23-25), Solomon was endangering his relationship with God. There we have a stark warning that however successful we might be in life, and however good our relationship with God might be, we need to remain faithful unto death. For the writer of Kings says: *"when Solomon was old ... his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father"* (1 Kings 11:4).

Notice the comparison with the One who said of himself *"Behold, a greater than Solomon is here"*. Jesus was the very embodiment of divine wisdom; he was *"the Word made flesh"* (John 1:14). He was the Son of God, the recipient of God's power as never before, able to heal, to transform lives and to raise the dead. Yet he never sought to profit from those wonderful actions. *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9). For all of Solomon's God-given wisdom, his riches, his influence and his inspired writings, it is the Lord Jesus Christ that we now remember in bread and wine. It is through him that we can now receive the God-given blessing of forgiveness that is available to everyone.