

# Leader guide

## In this lesson:

### SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 9-10

### CORE PRACTICE: POSSESSIONS

Possessions (Luke 16:11-12): I seek to maintain an eternal perspective on money and possessions, realizing God has given me all that I have, and that he expects me to manage it wisely for His glory.

### TAKE HOME TRUTH

God's love to Israel wasn't conditional upon the past, present, or future, but rather foundational to all three, and was ultimately displayed in the person of Jesus Christ.

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## The Rise and Fall of Solomon, Part 1



### OVERVIEW

**opulence** (op-yuh-luh ns) *noun* – wealth, riches, or affluence. abundance, as of resources or goods; plenty. the state of being opulent.

That's the word that comes to mind when we study the life of Solomon this week. Opulence. In many ways, 1 Kings 7-10 is the BC version of Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous. But this is unlike any lifestyle we have ever seen before. So opulent was Solomon's life, which when the Queen of Sheba traveled halfway across the world to visit him, he literally "took her breath away" (1 Kings 10:5 CSB).

Solomon didn't measure his gold in ounces; he measured in the **tons per year**. You can tell that even the biblical narrator is searching for words to help describe the wealth and riches of Solomon. In many ways, Solomon becomes the very pinnacle of worldly wealth.

When describing the Lillies of the field and their simple beauty, Jesus used Solomon as a point of contrast when he said, "Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these" (Matthew 6:29).

For Israel, Solomon was the tops. This is the zenith of world fame and recognition for both Solomon and Israel at this point in history. In many ways, it is unfathomable when you consider the short trajectory of the nation at this point. Israel was only 80-some years into its history as a monarchy when Solomon became only its third king. During his lifetime, Israel became the envy of the world. Everyone wanted an audience with Solomon. Everyone wanted to trade with Israel and be on friendly terms with Israel.

In this lesson, we will look at Solomon's fame and riches and ask some fundamental questions: what can we learn from the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon? Is it wrong to have a lot of money? Was money the reason Solomon fell into sin? Do we consider ourselves wealthy or not? How should we view our possessions?

As Christians, these are important questions to ponder. Much of who we are today is shaped by our theology of possessions and how we view ourselves within God's economy.

**MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS WEEK**

1 Kings 10:23-24—Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. 24 And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.

**INTRODUCTION**

**If you received a free "all expenses paid" trip to visit the most talked about person or place in the world, who would you like to visit and where would you go?**

**In your opinion, how much money would you need to be considered wealthy?**

**Looking back at your notes from this week's sermon, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?**

*Make sure you ask this question this week. It gives people the opportunity to discuss questions or issues that come up beyond the written questions. People's responses can often lead into one of the questions in the "Digging Deeper" section. Also, some weeks this question will result in a lot of discussion, other weeks, not so much.*

**READ THE TEXT**

Solomon's rule brought peace, prosperity, and respect from the nations. Israel was a preview of the even greater blessings King Jesus will bring God's people. Solomon worshipped God by using time and wealth to build God's dwelling- place, the temple. But he also spent much time and money

Horizontal lines for taking notes.

## NOTES

on his palace Solomon prayed, confident that God would keep on keeping His promises because He'd always kept His promises in the past. Read 1 Kings 10.

### DIGGING DEEPER

*In this section, feel free to develop your own questions to help guide your group's discussion. Below are some suggestions. Remember, if you are hearing from everyone in your group, chances are you won't have time to discuss every question. You may start with one that catches your attention so you don't run out of time. For example, it's not odd to start with Question #6, then go to Question #5 and if you have time come back to Question #4.*

#### **How would you describe Solomon's kingdom from the words of 1 Kings 10?**

*I love how the commentator Ralph Dale Davis describes Solomon's kingdom from 1 Kings 10:*

*The Queen of Sheba was no slouch—witness the inventory of her wares (v. 2a). She found Solomon fully up to his reputation in wits and wisdom (vv. 1–3), but she found Solomon's lifestyle literally breath-taking (vv. 3–5). Such class she had never seen.*

*The narrator pushes us on. In verses 14–22 his operative word is 'gold' (ten times). On the way to the shield exhibit, he informs us that Solomon takes in up to twenty tons of gold in a year (v. 14)—though, of course, that figure doesn't include it all (v. 15). Ah, here we are at the House of the Forest of Lebanon. Look at these shields—two hundred body-sized shields (v. 16), three hundred smaller, hand-carried shields (v. 17). Gold-plated—with about seven and a half pounds of gold per body shield, three and three-fourths for a smaller one. Look awfully spiffy on state occasions. Now this throne (vv. 18–20)—ivory inlay, gold overlay; note the steps, the lions. Nothing like it anywhere. As we pass one of the storage rooms our host points out the gold drinking containers. Note (he says), no silver—it doesn't amount to anything in Solomon's regime (v. 21). He concludes the tour with a few remarks about Solomonic commercial ventures. Joint Israelite-Phoenician shipping periodically returns laden with gold, silver, ivory, and even apes and baboons (v. 22, njb, niv). (The latter specimens shouldn't surprise us—apparently Solomon simply had a passion for zoology very like some Assyrian kings of the 12th–9th centuries bc.) Moreover, Solomon through his merchants acts as middleman in a thriving import-export trade in chariots and horses (vv. 28–29). Egypt in the south and Kue (Cilicia) in the northwest are his sources, while Hittite groups in the north and Aramaeans to the northeast constitute his market. (Solomon was not abetting the arms trade. These chariots were likely deluxe models for royal, ceremonial (not military) use—hence the relatively high prices v. 29).*

*The tour ends. Of course there was no e-mail or fax machine in all Solomon's kingdom. But no matter—it was massively impressive. Folks walked away from tours exclaiming (like the Queen of Sheba), 'Well, I never ...!'*

#### **Why did the Queen of Sheba visit Solomon?**

*The purpose of the queen's visit was to test Solomon, to seek answers to the great questions of life (1 Kings 10:1). Within diplomatic circles of that day, it was the practice to test the wisdom of an official by posing hard questions to him. But in the Queen's case, her purpose far exceeded this mental com-*

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bat. Note what the verse said: she had heard about Solomon’s fame and his relation to “the Name of the Lord.” This reference to the Lord and the statement of Jesus Christ in Matthew 12:42 strongly indicate that she was seeking spiritual insight from the wisdom of Solomon. Seeking the answers to the great questions of life obviously aroused a hunger in her heart to know the truth.

The great caravan of the queen included camels carrying large quantities of spices, gold, and precious jewels (1 Kings 10:2). Note that Sheba was a country some 1,500 miles from Israel, located in southwest Arabia or modern-day Yemen. For a woman to travel by chariot or camel on a journey of 1,500 miles in the ancient world, even if she was a queen, was a staggering event, perhaps unheard of in the ancient world. Whatever the case, this is a strong indication of the deep, spiritual hunger within her soul. If all she wanted was intellectual combat, no doubt she could have found challenging diplomats much closer to her home. Keep in mind also that the queen was not the wife of a king who was ruling the nation Sheba: she herself was the ruler.

In her own words, the queen’s discovery far exceeded anything she could have imagined: Solomon excelled in wisdom (1 Kings 10:2-5). She discussed all that was on her mind. As pointed out, she was obviously seeking truth and insight, answers to the great, perplexing questions of life. No doubt, the questions included those asked by every generation: What is the source, purpose, meaning, significance, and end of life? Or, to state it another way:

- Who are we?
- Where did we come from?
- Why are we here?
- Where are we going?

Solomon answered all of her questions, and nothing was too hard for him to explain to her. She was overwhelmed with the wisdom of Solomon and the splendor of everything she saw, including:

- the royal palace
- the banquet feast
- the organization of the officials, the government, the servants, and their royal clothing
- the magnificence of the entryway by which the king entered the temple.

Overwhelmed, the Queen of Sheba admitted to Solomon that the report of his achievements and wisdom was certainly true (1 Kings 10:6-8). Prior to her coming, the report had been difficult to believe. But now, since she had come, she saw for herself. In fact, half was not known: Solomon’s wisdom and wealth far exceeded any report she had ever heard (1 Kings 10:7). Thereupon she exclaimed how happy the officials of his court must be because of their great privilege, the privilege of being continually exposed to his wise counsel and understanding (1 Kings 10:8).

Then note what the Queen of Sheba did: she gave praise to the Lord God of Solomon (1 Kings 10:9). She was declaring that Solomon’s God, the Lord Himself, deserved to be honored for three reasons:

- for choosing Solomon to rule the Israelites

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- *for the Lord's eternal love for Israel, a love demonstrated in the covenant relationship that He established with the Israelites*
- *for establishing Solomon as king for the purpose of maintaining justice and righteousness within Israel*

*Note how the Queen of Sheba acknowledged that God had established a very special covenant relationship with Israel, that He had chosen them to be His people because of their faith in Him. Keep in mind that King Hiram had also acknowledged the Lord's hand upon the Israelites. Both of these rulers acknowledged a fact that King Solomon and the Israelites were soon to forget.*

*The Queen of Sheba gave King Solomon a number of gifts that were of enormous value: 120 talents or 9,000 pounds of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious jewels (1 Kings 10:10-12). In fact, she gave more spices than Solomon ever received on any other single occasion. Spices were of great value in the ancient world and were used for seasoning food and drink as well as for providing a fresh and pleasing fragrance for the home, worship services, and places of business. They were also used in embalming bodies.*

*The queen's desires and requests were met by Solomon (1 Kings 10:13). He gave and traded whatever she wanted. Afterward, she returned home with her caravan.*

### **What comparison does Jesus draw from the story of the Queen of Sheba in Matthew 12?**

Jesus' reference to the Queen of Sheba (referred to in Matthew 12:42 as the Queen of the South), comes at the conclusion of two long chapters that underscore the tragedy of Israel's apostasy. He uses the queen as an example of a truth seeker, someone so hungry for true wisdom that she traveled "from the ends of the earth" to hear Solomon. Yet, sadly, Jesus notes, there stood in front of the Jews one far greater than Solomon, and they could care less.

This is a stinging indictment of the Jews of the Jesus' time. At the same time, it can be applied to the modern-day church in a similar manner.

Is the church today so hungry for the real truth and wisdom of Jesus (shared through His Word, the Bible) that when we find it, our response is as the Queen of Sheba: "Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you King to do justice and righteousness" (v. 9). Or, are we like the Jews of Matthew 24 who stand as witnesses of all of the Lord's glory and majesty, and ask, "so, if you're really who you proclaim to be, show us another sign" (Matthew 12:38).

The church (e.g., the called out saints of Jesus Christ) are to be a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Woe is us if we should become so calloused in our religion and traditions that we fail to be the modern-day versions of the Queen of Sheba, who went to great lengths to discover real truth, and when she found it, she worshipped the true God. Jesus is this truth.

## What conclusions should we draw from Solomon's phenomenal wealth?

I think, given the context, that it would be easy to oversimplify 1 Kings 10 and let 1 Kings 11 become the conclusion to the story of Solomon's wealth. Yet, that is a false conclusion. Davis observes that if we are to be true to the text, we must accept that the writer's intention is to describe Solomon's splendor in all of its grandeur and luxury.

Because riches can often be viewed in a bad light by Christians, it may be easy to assume that 1 Kings 10 is just underscoring this negative fact for us in clear language. Yet, again, looking carefully at the text, we can see that Chapter 10 can be divided into two major sections:

- Verses 1-13, in which the testimony of the Queen one of complete admiration to the point of being overwhelmed, and
- Verses 14-29, where the narrator himself declares, "So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom" (v. 23).

Based on this understanding of the text, Davis draws the following conclusion:

*In light of what we have just said in the preceding section, we can say that 1 Kings 10 speaks a word of testimony, namely, that the prosperity of the people of God is always a gift of Yahweh's goodness, which (I would think) demands of us both gratitude (lest we idolize the gifts in place of God) and joy (lest we despise God's gifts as though they were sinful).*

This drives at the very heart of what it means to be a steward of the Lord's resources. Everything we have (our family, our jobs, our homes, our intelligence, our wealth, our food, everything!) comes from God. We are just stewards in His plan and work.

Moreover, keep in mind that it was not his wealth that caused Solomon to fall into apostasy, it was his marriages to foreign women (1 Kings 11:4).

## How should we view wealth and possessions today?

If you will notice, we don't talk a lot about money and giving at First Family. That doesn't make us better; it just makes us different from many other churches.

When I mention to fellow pastors that we don't take an offering, they cannot believe it. "How do you survive?" Is often the question.

It's pretty simple, that's how we started at FFC. Everyone is accustomed to merely dropping their offering in the box at the end of the service as they leave or giving online. It's baked into the DNA of FFC.

Still, money and the topic of money is often a challenge for Christians, and it is a topic the Bible devotes more verses to (about 2,350) than to the topics of faith and prayer combined! Jesus talked more about money than he did both heaven and hell. While we do not talk a lot about money, we are unafraid to do so when the Bible talks about money!

When it comes to reviewing the life of someone like Solomon, the word that comes to mind is opulence. Solomon was unbelievably wealthy.

Few of us would consider ourselves wealthy. We look at the ultra-rich, and in comparison, we seem more poverty stricken than wealthy. We don't live

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in multi-million dollar homes, or own dozens of cars, or travel the world in our own private jet. When compared to the world’s standards, however, we are wealthy. Every one of us. Consider the following questions. If you can answer “Yes” to any of these questions, then you are indeed not wealthy, you are poor.

- Have you ever watched your child die because of lack of food?
- Have you ever watched your child die because a simple medication was not available?
- Have you ever considered selling one of your children into a life of sexual servanthood (for as little as \$50) to feed your remaining children?
- Have you aborted a child because you knew you would be unable to feed another mouth?

These are real-life issues for millions of people who live in true poverty. We are wealthy.

Wealth in and of itself is not wrong, but without an eternal perspective, how we use our wealth can become a sinful pattern in our life. In fact, how you use money points directly to what you believe about God and eternity. Money can cause us to become self-reliant and judgmental of others. Money can corrupt our sense of values and lead to an inner place of pride. Randy Alcorn, in his book, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* states,

*Far too many evangelical Christians have succumbed to the heresy that this present life may be lived disobediently without serious effects on their eternal state. Never have so many Christians believed the lie that their money and possessions are theirs to do with as they please. Never have so many thought that as long as they affirm with their lips a certain doctrinal statement, they may live their lives indifferent to human need and divine command, and all will turn out well in the end.*

Alcorn then states emphatically, “The principle is timeless: There is a powerful relationship between our true spiritual condition and our attitude and actions concerning money and possessions. If Christ is not Lord over our money and possessions, then he is not our Lord.”

If you were to turn over your finances to a third party, would they conclude based simply on your spending patterns that God is a priority in your life, that you understand and accept the identification of a steward, that all you have is God’s to use as He pleases because it is His money?

## **BECOMING A HOUSE OF PRAYER**

*“Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices; Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.” – Isaiah 56:7.*

Prayer Focus for the Week of February 25

- Spend time praying for the poor and oppressed in our world. How could God use you to ease their burden?
- Pray for the estimated 20.9 million victims trapped in human trafficking globally. What can you do to ease their pain?

