



## WOMEN'S DAY

### LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

**Sunday, September 27, 2009**

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**Lection – 2 Chronicles 9:1-9** (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 1) When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions, having a very great retinue and camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she discussed with him all that was on her mind. (v. 2) Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from Solomon that he could not explain to her. (v. 3) When the queen of Sheba had observed the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, (v. 4) the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, and their clothing, his valets and their clothing, and his burnt-offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit left in her.

(v. 5) So she said to the king, “The report was true that I heard in my own land of your accomplishments and of your wisdom, (v. 6) but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes saw it. Not even half of the greatness of your wisdom had been told to me; you far surpass the report that I had heard. (v. 7) Happy are your people! Happy are these your servants, who continually attend you and hear your wisdom! (v. 8) Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on his throne as king for the LORD your God. Because your God loved Israel and wished to establish them forever, he has made you king over them, so that you may execute justice and righteousness.” (v. 9) Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, a very great quantity of spices, and precious stones: there were no spices such as those that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

#### **I. Description of the Liturgical Moment**

The idea and purpose of Women's Day was presented by Nannie Helen Burroughs, a courageous, visionary and bold dreamer, devoted to assisting black women and girls in developing their biblical and technical skills. Burroughs tied education and skill preparation to improving possibilities for gainful employment. She presented her plan for

Women's Day to the National Baptist Convention in Memphis, Tennessee in September 1906.

Burrough's work, to which she attached the theme "Know and Grow," eventually led to the purchase of several properties and the founding of a series of training schools for women and girls in Washington, D.C., in 1907 and 1909. Today, the Burroughs school boasts 125 students with instruction in biblical studies and an impressive core curriculum.<sup>1</sup> This lone woman's tireless efforts and determination created an enterprising legacy of economic empowerment, educational scholarship and social influence for future generations.

Women's Day in the African American church became a metaphor for women trained for public speaking, authentic leadership and, participation in the activities and programs of the black church. Burroughs' simple proposal for a special day has had profound untold impact, inspiring women and broadening the reach of the black church.

## **II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: 2 Chronicles 9:1-9**

### **Part One: The Contemporary Context of the Interpreter**

Historically, Women's Day within African American churches has been an annual day of celebration. A day when women dressed uniformly in white confidently demonstrated their ability to conduct worship services and raise money. I can vividly recall the starched white dresses or the linen white suits of the women with corsages neatly pinned over their hearts. Suddenly, women viewed exclusively as homemakers led the worship service with great pride and equivalent pomp. Often, Women's Day included a rally or stewardship component where the women sought to exceed the funds raised on Men's Day. Women's Day Services, in their original as well as in their modern form, tangibly point to the equality of persons in the family of God.

In today's context, the fact that women seek and receive the endorsement of the two main political parties for top offices in the country and numerous mainstream church denominations have officially endorsed and elevated women to top ecclesiastical positions has an undeniable bearing on how this passage is viewed. The sense of destiny and leadership for women is evident, whether reading about Nannie Burroughs' work, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice or the Queen of Sheba, each of whom epitomizes Burroughs' motto, "Know and Grow." Each is best viewed as more than a single woman; each represents a world of giftedness and treasure. A world of possibility awaits those who prepare and pursue learning even when it leads them through unfamiliar venues.

Burroughs and the Queen of Sheba mirror the same type of passionate pursuit which reaps a world of wisdom and increase for future generations. The text reveals a tenacious sense of personal responsibility in the face of extraordinary obstacles. The Queen of Sheba had to travel a great distance with her caravan in order to quench her thirst for wisdom. Her desire to see and hear Solomon with her own eyes and ears is commendable. Consequently, she reaps a harvest of influence. The queen both questioned and observed

Solomon's kingdom. Using these methods, she tested his reputation and confirmed that his wisdom far exceeded its reputation.

## **Part Two: Biblical Commentary**

2 Chronicles 9:1-9 provides information and numerous themes that can be explored. The text underscores the importance of diligent seeking and study, responsible inquiry, and generosity. The queen is independently wealthy, but explores the kingdom of a more renowned leader, taking him gifts of spices and precious stones. As with any leader, she must bring value to the table and, in exchange, gains access and new wealth and knowledge. The queen was a Gentile who was welcomed and received by the covenant Israelites.

She returned to her own country armed with more than financial wealth. The myths surrounding this queen abound. However, it is reasonable to surmise that the queen was a conduit who carried the teachings of Judaism back to her homeland.<sup>2</sup>

This passage encourages people, and particularly women, not to be confined to traditional borders but to venture in search of new wisdom and relationships. This Gentile queen is celebrated in the Old and New Testament and presented as a model of those who listen rather than reject instruction. This occurs because Solomon is willing to share his wisdom. Like Solomon, the Church should be generous in sharing its principles and its wisdom.

Some have suggested that the text was predictive of the Magi who would later come bearing similar spices for the Christ child. The analogies are nearly endless, as each level of review is rich with instruction for wealth accumulation. This wealth, which includes education and power is to be shared. The feature which most needs to be emulated is the Queen of Sheba's willingness to seek wisdom and the absolute necessity of wisdom as a quality of progressive leadership. Burroughs said it best, "Know and Grow."

The text emphasizes the queen's coming followed by repeated actions, "...she came to Jerusalem to test him... ." The imagery is rich with movement; e.g., camels bearing spices, and gold and other precious stones. The dialogue between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba has depth. Her observations were not limited to any one sphere of Solomon's kingdom. The queen observed the far-reaching and shaping influence that wisdom had on the many levels of life and conduct. Solomon's house, his meals, his affiliations, those in his employ, their clothing, conduct, values, and worship were all evidence of Solomon's faith and God-given wisdom. The implication is that one's faith and spiritual wisdom should inform every aspect of one's life and the lives of those who come under one's influence.

The text also suggests that the queen's witness of Solomon's wisdom was transformative. The passage paints an atmosphere of cooperative exchange rather than competitive envy-leaving both parties and countries enriched by the dialogue and collaboration.

The people themselves are also worth further exploration by those who would preach and teach this text. Sheba was a wealthy country which had developed longstanding trade routes. The people were believed to be tall, coarse-haired, and straight-haired and possible descendants of the Cushites from Cush of the Bible.

The text is heavily laden with useable themes for Women's Day. The most obvious theme is to draw parallels between what Nannie Burroughs intended by creating her, "Know and Grow" plan, which encouraged women to nurture leadership in each other; and the Queen of Sheba, who is a ready example for women in leadership whose participation has traditionally been questioned. The text is equally valuable as a tool for strengthening the presence and role of men and boys in the family because of the complementarily way in which the two monarchs related. Folklore has it that the bond between the two was a lasting and enduring one. The strengthening of male and female roles is ultimately aimed at strengthening the life of the family.

This passage suggests that, although the Queen of Sheba had a strong sense of enterprise and obvious savvy about cultures, travel, and politics, these skills are insufficient without an adequate faith base which contributes to the wholeness and health of an individual and his or her faith community. It is also important to underscore the fact that the queen did not arrive empty-handed. Quality leadership must be equipped to negotiate and have something to offer as well as be able to receive from others. Leadership ideas are prominent in this text. The queen was not fearful of questioning and she clearly commanded the respect and attention of Solomon. One has the impression that they met monarch to monarch not superior to subordinate. Artificial barriers were overcome, and the two exchanged tangible and intangible wealth.

This text may prompt those church venues which have not embraced women in equal roles to re-examine their prejudices. The Queen of Sheba is even remembered by Jesus. He references the Queen of Sheba in the New Testament and memorializes her in perpetuity. The Queen of Sheba is mentioned as the "Queen of the South" in Matt. 12:42 and Luke 11:31, where Jesus indicates that she and the Ninevites will judge the generation of Jesus' contemporaries who rejected his message.

## **Celebration**

The Good News is that, in Jesus Christ we have one who is greater than Solomon. He bids us to tell him all of our heart – to bring to him all of life's riddles. There is no searching his understanding, and he is altogether lovely, nothing more could be desired of him. We do not have to travel far like the Queen of Sheba; we merely have to open our hearts and minds and we too will find that the half has never been told. If you give Christ the treasure of your life, he will become the treasure of your heart. He will give us more than we have to give him – eternal life, and eternal joy. He is the King who reigns forever and is faithful to reward those who diligently seek him.

## **Descriptive Details**

The descriptive details in this passage include:

**Sights:** Gold, frankincense, and myrrh; the Queen of Sheba traveling with her great caravans; plush silks and robes; elaborate clothing; endless rows of officials and militia belonging to Solomon's court; adoring crowds of people getting a glimpse of the king and queen; long caravans loaded with treasures from Ethiopia or Yemen; coronet players accompanying the parades through the streets;

**Sounds:** The trampling of camels hoofs; the interchange of the king's merchants and the queen's people as they exchange precious stones and wood; the sound of music; and feasting as Solomon shows off his kingdom and his wealth; and

**Smells:** Fragrant spices; baking bread; roasting meats; and the odor of perfumes.

### III. Additional Information for Preaching and Teaching

- (a) The text is a marvelous springboard for challenging women from their homes or traditional settings to explore new ventures and to use their learning for the betterment of others. Women can testify to how the wisdom of women in their lives has blessed them just as all of those in Solomon's Kingdom were happier or blessed because of his wise leadership.
- (b) Wisdom scriptures say, "Wisdom has built her house." The pillars of wisdom highlight characteristics of the Queen of Sheba: prudence, persistence, courage, honesty, patience etc.
- (c) Sermon Ideas:
  - Compare and contrast the Queen of Sheba with the Ninevites.
  - Compare the Queen of Sheba with the woman in Song of Solomon using folklore references.

### Notes

1. Gantt, Alice. "Women's Day." Permission granted for use by the Black Congregational Ministries Committee, NCCCUSA. Copyright October 1995.
2. For details on myths and legends of the Queen of Sheba see, Pennacchietti, Fabrizio A. Three Mirrors For Two Biblical Ladies Susanna and the Queen of Sheba in the Eyes of Jew, Christians, and Muslims. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006; and Gartmer, Rosanne. Meet the Queen of Sheba. Valley Forge, PA. Judson Press. 2001. pp.29-38
3. On the Internet, information can be found at the following sites:  
Bird, Jerry W. "In the Queen of Sheba's Footsteps." Africa Travel Magazine. [http://www.africa-ata.org/holyroute\\_3.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/holyroute_3.htm); "Exhibition: Treasures From Ancient Yemen." Joseph Hotung Great Court Gallery:British Museum. London WC 9. June-October 2002. Online location: <http://www.al-bab.com/yemen/data/sheba2002.htm>

[accessed 3 March 2009](http://hope-of-israel.org/dynmoses.htm); “The Dynasty of Moses and the Queen of Sheba.” Hope of Israel Ministries. (Eccleasia of YEHOVAH). <http://hope-of-israel.org/dynmoses.htm>

Additional Reference:

Budge, E. A. Wallis. The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek (I); Being the ‘Book of the Glory of Kings’ (Kebra Nagast) a Work Which Is Alike the Traditional History of the Establishment of the Religion of the Hebrews in Ethiopia, and the Patent of Sovereignty Which Is Now Universally Accepted in Abyssinia As the Symbol of the Divine Authority to Rule Which the Kings of the Solomonic Line Claimed to Have Received Through Their Descent from the House of David. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2007.