

## *Rise and Fall: Wisdom's Scorecard*

June 13, 2021

**Sermon Text:** 1 Kings 10:1-13

Supporting Texts: 1 Kings 9:11-12; Jeremiah 22:13-16; Luke 9:58

### **INTRODUCTION**

We all want to be wise. So we learn, we take mistakes into account, we invest our time and energy in new ways, all so the next time something happens, we're prepared. Rather than losing, we'll win.

The way we exercise wisdom is determined by our scorecard. Everyone has a scorecard.

### **GOD**

#### **1 Kings 10:1-13**

The Queen of Sheba is from modern day Yemen or Ethiopia; we do not have concrete evidence as to the location of Sheba. Sheba had an advanced culture with trade in the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, and India. Merchants of Sheba were renowned in Israel. They traded in gold, gems, and incense and myrrh.<sup>1</sup>

She has come after his palace has been built. The temple was completed in 959 BC, and the palace took 13 years to build after that. So it was built by 946 BC.<sup>2</sup> This means she visits in the latter years of his reign (970-930 BC).

Solomon passes her test verbally (v. 3). But she wants to see more. Wisdom is ultimately seen in our actions, in the way we behave around other people, in the way our lives are arranged, etc.

At first glance, all is well. She has given him well-deserved praise and she even praises God. But if we look a little more closely, a different picture emerges. Walter Brueggemann comments that there are restrictions on the happiness of verse 8. He says the Hebrew has "men," rather than "people," which may mean a royal entourage. So what she is reporting is a well-maintained and ordered palace clique.<sup>3</sup> Solomon's wisdom has impact that only stretches out so far. Once it gets to the palace walls, it stops.

She praises the Lord because "he made you king to maintain justice and righteousness." And this is precisely what the luxury of the palace didn't include. Justice was missing. So was righteousness for the people.

Justice and righteousness are two words which get used as a pair by the prophets. In fact, this is what Jeremiah says about King Shallum, the son of Josiah in Jeremiah 22:13-16, who reigned only 3 months in 609 BC.

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<sup>1</sup> "Sheba, Queen of." Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary.

<sup>2</sup> Merrill, Eugene. Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel. p. 313.

<sup>3</sup> Brueggemann, Walter. 1 & 2 Kings. Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary. p. 133.

She sees Solomon's scorecard in verses 4-5.

His palace is extravagant (v. 4)

His table is full of food (v. 5)

His officials all have proper places to sit (v. 5)

His servants who attend him, even down to their wardrobe (v. 5)—such a minute detail!

His cupbearers (v. 5)

The way he makes burnt offerings at the temple of Yahweh (v. 5)

His scorecard is not like another King we know.

Rather than an extravagant palace, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

Rather than a table full of food, he wouldn't turn stones into bread after 40 days of not eating. And when he did multiply bread and fishes or turn water into wine, it was so great crowds of people could eat.

Rather than officials in their proper places to sit, he rebukes disciples who think that to be close to Him means getting a place at his right and left in the kingdom.

Rather than servants who attend him dressed to the hilt, he disrobes and washes his disciples feet. He is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, who comes not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

Rather than cupbearers making sure he has the choicest wine, he gave his disciples to drink from the cup which represented his blood. His heavenly Father was his cupbearer, not taking away from him the cup of suffering and death on the cross.

Rather than being able to offer the best animals as burnt offerings in the temple of his God, he himself was the offering without blemish, given once and for all.

In this light, we find that Solomon's scorecard is quite different from Jesus', and therefore quite different from what ours should be.

Thomas Aquinas wrote, "Prudence is knowing what to want and what not to want."<sup>4</sup> It is evident from these two lists that Solomon and Jesus both wanted different things.

## **APPLICATION**

1. Make a scorecard.
2. Compare your scorecard with your spouse or someone in your Sunday School class or small group. Let the other person sharpen your scorecard.
3. In your desire for wisdom, which king are you emulating? Solomon or Jesus? Who is benefitting from your scorecard? Only the people closest to you? Only you?

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<sup>4</sup> Aquinas, St. Thomas. In *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, p. 376. Timothy McDermott, ed.