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September 19th: 1 Kings 10 & Hebrews 9:15-28

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Alastair Roberts

The visit of the Queen of Sheba. The sacrificial inauguration of a new covenant.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Kings 10. Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold and precious stones.

And when she came to Solomon she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all her questions. There was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her.

And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more breath in her. And she said to the king, The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, but I did not

believe the reports until I came and my own eyes have seen it. And behold, the half was not told me.

Your wisdom and prosperity surpassed the report that I heard. Happy are your men, happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom. Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel.

Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness. Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones. Never again came such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon.

Moreover the fleet of Hiram, which brought gold from Ophiah, brought from Ophiah a very great amount of almugwood and precious stones. And the king made of the almugwood supports for the house of the lord, and for the king's house, also lyres and harps for the singers. No such almugwood has come or been seen to this day.

And king Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all that she desired, whatever she asked besides what was given to her by the bounty of king Solomon. So she turned and went back to her own land with her servants. Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold, besides that which came from the explorers and from the business of the merchants, and from all the kings of the west, and from the governors of the land.

King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold. Six hundred shekels of gold went into each shield. And he made three hundred shields of beaten gold.

Three miners of gold went into each shield. And the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. The king also made a great ivory throne and overlaid it with the finest gold.

The throne had six steps, and the throne had a round top, and on each side of the seat were armrests, and two lions standing beside the armrests, while twelve lions stood there, one on each end of a step on the six steps. The like of it was never made in any kingdom. All king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold.

None were of silver. Silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon. For the king had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram.

Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth, in riches and in wisdom. And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.

Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year. And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen. He had one thousand four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities, and with the king in Jerusalem.

And the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the shepherd. And Solomon's import of horses was from Egypt and Kuwait, and the king's traders received them from Kuwait at a price. A chariot could be imported from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for one hundred and fifty.

And so through the king's traders they were exported to all of the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of Syria. The rise of Solomon's glorious kingdom reminds us of the Garden of Eden, and of its glories. Solomon builds a magnificent garden palace for the Lord, overlaid with gold, and filled and surrounded with images of palms, pomegranates, cherubim, lilies, springs of water, and other such imagery.

Solomon, as a new Adam, dwells alongside his Heavenly Father, in his house near the Lord's own house within the temple complex. The gold from the outlying lands is being brought in on fleets of ships. There is peace on all sides, and the land and its people are entering into a great Sabbath rest.

Now at the zenith of Solomon's glory, the woman is brought to the new Adam. The Queen of Sheba inspects the glorious labors of Solomon. Many historians identify Sheba with the land of the Sabaeans in South Arabia, around the area of modern-day Yemen.

The Queen of Sheba had heard of all of Solomon's wealth and his wisdom, all of his fame, and she comes to test him with riddles, wanting to see whether his wisdom was all that it had been rumoured to be. Perhaps we should imagine something similar to what we see in Judges 14, when Samson tested the Philistines at his wedding feast with his riddle. The fame of Solomon is concerning the name of the Lord.

It is a fame that redounds to the Lord's glory. Solomon, insofar as he is faithfully serving the Lord, and ruling as the Lord's son, displays the glory of God himself to the nations around about. The Queen of Sheba arrives in Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with riches, exotic spices and treasures.

The arrival of Sheba is also a fulfilment of the Lord's promises concerning the fame that Israel would gain among the nations, being famed for the Lord's blessings and for the wisdom that he has given them. What really amazes the Queen of Sheba the most is the glorious order and splendour of Solomon's feasts and his court, and the extravagance of his sacrifices. The author of the books of the kings has already highlighted the importance of the attention that Solomon gave to good order.

Solomon's kingdom is glorious in its wealth, but also has the dignity of wise order. Solomon is not just a powerful potentate. He is a great man, a man with unrivalled breadth of mind, who surrounds himself with majesty, whose court is one of splendour and dignity.

He is a refined and civilised man, a man with an eye for the details, a man who is learned and wise. Such great spectacles are one of the ways in which rulers, whether ancient or modern, could maintain their power. Or inspiring spectacle, the architectural grandeur of great public buildings, beautiful works of art, costly and magnificent clothing, the pomp and the circumstance of state occasions, bountiful feasts, courtly manners, grand processions and all these sorts of things, are each of them ways that rulers capture and hold the gaze and admiration of their peoples and their neighbours.

Royalty almost always has an element of theatre and pageantry to it, and Solomon's kingdom was exemplary in this regard. Sheba responds to Solomon's glory with delight and wonder. She had heard the rumours of Solomon's greatness, but they did not do justice to the reality.

She recognises that the glory of Solomon is a glory that had been given to him by the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord. The visit of Sheba is an example of the riches of the Gentiles coming into Zion. Her visit seems to be recalled in texts such as Isaiah 60 verses 4-14.

Lift up your eyes all around and see, they all gather together they come to you, your son shall come from afar, and your daughter shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nation shall come to you, a multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah, all those from Sheba shall come, they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaoth shall minister to you, they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house.

Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? For the coastlands shall hope for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from afar, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the Lord your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because He has made you beautiful. Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you, for in my wrath I struck you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you. Your gates shall be opened continually, day and night they shall not be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession, for the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish, those nations shall be utterly laid waste, the glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the Cyprus, the plain, and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious.

The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised

you shall bow down at your feet, they shall call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. In this chapter the age of Solomon is described quite literally as a sort of golden age, it's a high water mark of the fortunes of the people, and they will look back on this in the future and see it as a glorious anticipation of the time when the riches of the Gentiles will come flooding into Zion. Treasures and resources are being brought into Jerusalem as gifts, tribute, and through trade, exploration, and labour.

Solomon constructs a remarkable throne with ivory and gold, imposing with lion guardians and steps. Hearing of his wisdom and wealth, people from all over the earth come to Solomon with presents. Solomon starts to develop a large standing army of chariots and horsemen.

He becomes an arms trader in the region, acting as a go-between for his father-in-law Pharaoh and exporting them to Syrians and others. In Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 14-20 the Lord had given instructions concerning the appropriate behaviour of the king when Israel was established in the land. When you come to the land that the Lord your God has given you, and you possess it and dwell in it, and then say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me, you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose, one from among your brothers you shall set as king over you.

You may not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother, only he must not acquire many horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, you shall never return that way again. And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests, and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel.

In chapters 10 to 11 of 1 Kings, Solomon disobeys these instructions. In chapter 10 verses 14 to 27, there is a mind-boggling accumulation of silver and gold by Solomon. In verses 28 to 29, we discover that not only was Solomon returning to Egypt for horses and chariots, he was also establishing Israel as Egypt's chief trading partner and avenue to the various other nations in the region.

Indeed, while he built a war machine for Israel, he was also helping to export chariots and horses to the Syrians, who would later turn against Israel. Solomon's wisdom isn't forsaking him here. He is a shrewd political mind, and such a mind would readily see the advantage in such trading and alliances and in developing such a strong military.

However, these were actions that, while wise by human wisdom, rejected the instruction of the Lord, and as a result, they would come to nothing. A question to consider, what might we learn from such a chapter about the dangers of wisdom? Hebrews chapter 9 verses 15 to 28. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established, for a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.

And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all, at the end of the ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

The author of Hebrews concludes chapter 9 by comparing and contrasting the deaths by which the old and the new covenants were inaugurated. Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, a new order of affairs between God and humanity. His death redeems those who have been called, from their transgressions under the first covenant, and the judgment that had been upon them.

Christ isn't just the broker of some new agreement, he is a redeemer. Verses 16-17 are extremely challenging. The key question is whether the word translated as will in the ESV, *diathēke*, should be translated as will or testament, or whether it should be understood as covenant.

In verses 15 and 18 the word clearly refers to covenant. Of course, it is entirely possible that the author of Hebrews is engaging in some wordplay in these verses. Both a

covenant and a will involve death on some level.

There are many leading commentators that lean in both directions. However, Scott Hand's treatment of the passage in a 2005 paper has tipped many commentators in favour of the covenant reading. There are a number of other difficulties or questions raised by these verses.

For instance, the word translated as be established in the ESV or be proven in some other translations in verse 16, in order to make sense of the reading as testament or will, is not the most naturally read in this manner. The translation be born might be a better one. Verse 16 then could be rendered, for where there is a covenant, in the context clearly a broken covenant, the death of the covenant maker must be born.

This develops the point of verse 15, the transgressions of the people under the first covenant had to be dealt with in order for the covenant to be established. Verse 17, which literally refers to deaths, not just a singular death, a detail that causes some problems for reading the text as a reference to testaments or wills, then relates to the way that the covenant is not in force until it is enforced. The deaths of covenant breakers, or deaths bearing their sins, needed to occur before the covenant could be enforced.

As long as the covenant breakers remained alive, the covenant was not truly in force. The author of Hebrews describes the inauguration of the old covenant in the covenant ceremony of Exodus chapter 24 verses 4 to 8. And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people.

And they said, All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient. And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words. If blood was needed to deal with the breach of the covenant, it was also needed for its inauguration.

In the covenant ceremony, the blood of the burnt offerings and peace offerings were placed upon the altar and the people. Various parts of the tabernacle were also purified with blood. Without shedding of blood, forgiveness of sins is not possible.

Some party needs to die to release people from the judgment lying upon their sins, purifying them. In verses 23 and 24, the author of Hebrews returns to the theme of the

sanctuary. Christ is a minister of the heavenly, not the earthly sanctuary.

He is a minister in the true and the archetypal sanctuary, not the humanly constructed earthly replica that corresponds to it. The rites of the earthly sanctuary, the shedding and placing of animal blood and the like, purify the copies of the heavenly realities. They symbolize the greater sacrifices that are necessary in the heavenly realm.

The need for better sacrifices to deal with the realities of heavenly sanctuaries underlines the importance of the greater sacrifice offered by Christ, our glorious high priest. There is an analogy between the operations of the heavenly sanctuary and the earthly sanctuary. However, the heavenly sanctuary is the greater of the two, and the earthly sanctuary and its sacrificial rites therefore point to the need for better sacrifices than it is able to perform itself.

The earthly sanctuary needed cleansing on account of the sinfulness of the people, enabling access on their behalf to God's presence. The work of Christ objectively changes the situation of humanity relative to the greater sanctuary of heaven itself, removing the barrier of our sins that once prevented our access. Christ deals with the problem of our sins, not simply in the replica of the heavenly, a limited representation of much higher and more mysterious things.

Rather, he enters the very reality that they only symbolized, entering not merely into an earthly most holy place or inner sanctuary, but into heaven itself. Nor was this a process constantly to be repeated year on year, without ever being completed, like the high priest's annual entrance into the most holy place on the day of atonement with sacrificial blood of some animal. If this were the case, Christ's work would be an endlessly recurring cycle of entering and re-entering from the foundation of the world until its end.

No, the sacrifice of Christ by which he enters is decisive and complete, is a once-for-all event that need not be repeated, an entrance achieved by his own blood. We should probably recognize that the point of the blood of Christ here is not the mere physical cleansing provided by the blood of animals, for which animals of a certain kind were largely interchangeable. Rather, the blood of Christ that saves us is not so much a physical bodily fluid as such.

It is the offering of his uniquely faithful life, symbolized by the pouring out of blood. He has been poured out to death for us, an offering applied to us and into which we are included. Christ's sacrifice is not a constant cyclical movement.

It is a definitive passage from one age to another. Christ deals with sin decisively at the end of the ages, sin in its singular form, sin as a dominant and determinative ruling force in the world. There is still sinfulness in the world, but the ruling power of sin has been nullified and we need no longer live in its thrall.

In Christ it no longer excludes us from God's presence. In Christ the condemnation no longer lies upon us in the same way. Christ's dealing with sin is a sort of a last days appearance.

It is the great apocalyptic event that the recurring day of atonement always awaited and anticipated. As human beings we die once and judgment occurs after death. Christ's work corresponds with our need.

He bears the death due to us in his first coming, so that in his second coming, his coming in judgment, he might deliver us into enjoyment of God's promise, rather than having to deal with our sins once more. A question to consider. How does Hebrew's contrast between the copies of the heavenly things and the heavenly things themselves help us better to understand how the earthly tabernacle and temple worked?