

# Journeys to Jerusalem

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Article 32 of 47 **Short Meditations**

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The journey of the Wise Men of the East, as we read it in Matthew 2, and the journey of the Queen of the South, as we have it in 2 Chronicles 9, shine with something of kindred beauty and significance before us. They, all of them, go to Jerusalem — but the Wise Men of the East began their journey under the sign or preaching of the Star; the Queen of the South began hers simply on the ground of a report which had reached her in the distant land. For, at times the Lord has visited and guided His elect by signs, visible tokens, dreams, voices, angelic visits, and the like — at times He has simply caused them to hear a report, as in the case of this illustrious lady. But let Him address us as He may, faith is cognizant of His voice, as in these cases. "My sheep hear my voice — and they follow Me."

The Wise Men went to worship, and took offerings with them: the Queen of the South went to inquire at wisdom's gate, and to learn lessons of God; and trafficking for that which was more precious than gold or rubies, she took with her of the choicest treasures of her kingdom.

The journey of the Wise Men is rich in illustrations of the life of faith. But Jerusalem did not satisfy them. They had to go on to Bethlehem to reach the object of their faith. In the earlier journey of the Queen of the South, Jerusalem answered all expectations. In it we may find some striking moral characteristics, which carry several healthful and significant admonitions to our own souls.

In the first place, I observe, that the report which had reached her touching the King in Jerusalem, at once makes her dissatisfied with her present condition, wealthy though it was, and honourable in no common measure. For she sets out immediately — leaving behind her, her own royal estate, with all its advantages in the flesh and in the world. The fact of her journey bespeaks the uneasiness and dissatisfaction which tidings about Solomon and Jerusalem had awakened.

This speaks in our ears. It tells us of the operation upon our hearts, which the report that has gone abroad about a greater than Solomon, should produce. In like spirit, to this day, the quickened soul, under the report it has received about Jesus, is convicted, and made restless in that condition in which nature has left us, and this report has found us. We have been upset by it — turned out of all the ease and satisfaction which we before may have taken in ourselves and our circumstances or our character.

But again. As soon as this elect lady reached Jerusalem, she set herself to survey all the estate of the King there. She came on that business, and she does it. She is not idle. She acquaints herself with everything. She put her hard questions to the King, listened to his wisdom, and surveyed his glories. The very sitting and apparel of his servants did not escape her — and surely not, the ascent by which he went up to the house of God.

This again speaks in our ears. When we reach Jesus, our souls make Him their object. We learn Him, we talk of Him, we search the secrets of His grace and glory. We carry the sense of this one thing, that our business is with Him. He is our object.

But thirdly. After this stranger-queen had acquainted herself with all that belonged to the King in Zion, she was satisfied. Her soul was satiated as with marrow and fatness. She knew not what to make of herself. She did not understand her new condition. The joy was overwhelming. The half had not

been told her, she says; and Solomon exceeded the fame that had reached her about him. There was no more spirit in her. She returns to her land and to her people, filled. She left him, as the Woman of Sychar left Jesus; emptied of all beside, but filled and satisfied with her new-found treasure.

Such had been her wondrous path. Her journey had begun in the *restless, uneasy sense of need*; all her former fair surface of flattering circumstances being broken up. She had *acquainted herself with the vast, mysterious treasures of the place where her journey had led her*; she had done this carefully, with a heart only the more engaged and interested as she went onward in her search. She ended her journey, or returned to her own land, as one *filled to the very brim of all her expectations and desires*.

The journey from the south to Jerusalem, recorded in the New Testament, has much the same characters. I mean that of the Eunuch of Ethiopia, in Acts 8.

He begins his journey as with an unsettled conscience. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship — but he left that city of solemnities, that city of the Temple and service of God, with its priesthood and ordinances, still unsettled — and we see him an anxious inquirer on his way from Jerusalem to the southern Gaza. Nothing in that centre of religious provisions and observances had given rest to the soul. He was dissatisfied with the worship he had been rendering there. His conscience was not purged. He had as yet no answer for God. There was no rest in his spirit. Jerusalem, I may say, had disappointed him, as it had the Wise Men.

But if, like the Queen of Sheba, he were at first, on starting on his way, uneasy and dissatisfied, like her he was deeply engaged with what God was providing for him, through His witnesses and representatives. The Word of God was addressing his soul. The Prophet Isaiah was taking him out of himself. He started not at the surprise of the Stranger's voice in that desert place. All he cared for, all he thought of, was the secret of the Book. He was inspecting that witness of God's grace, as the Queen had once inspected Solomon's estate, the witness of glory. And Philip let him into the secret that he was searching.

And then, he is satisfied. His heart, like hers, is filled with what had now been discovered to him. He pursues the second stage of his journey, from Gaza to Ethiopia, "rejoicing." Philip may leave him, but he can do without him. The woman of Sychar may again leave her water-pot, and find Jesus everything to her. With a soul satisfied as with marrow and fatness, he can go on his way. Another returns to the south, to Sheba or Ethiopia, with a heart rich in the discoveries he had made on this his visit to Jerusalem.

These kindred characteristics are easily traced in these narratives. But it was rather *conscience* that set the Eunuch on his journey; it was *desire* that moved the Queen. And she came in contact with *glory*, in the Court and estate of Solomon; he with *grace*, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah. But whether God address us with a revelation of His grace or of His glory; whether He address the conscience or the heart, it is His high and divine prerogative, to satisfy us — as He does these two distinguished individuals. He satiates the soul with a manifestation of Himself, let that manifestation take what form it may, or adapt itself to whatever exigency or demand of the soul it please. And such satisfaction we get differently, but very blessedly, exemplified in these two cases.

And let me add one other feature that is common to both. Their spirit was free of all grudging. The Queen surveyed the glories of Solomon, and she could look on his higher, more eminent and excellent estate, without the stir of one single jealous, envious movement. She was too happy for that. She could congratulate the King in Zion, and his servants that waited on him, and his people who heard his wisdom, and return home as one that was privileged only to visit him; but she begrudged them not the richer portion they were enjoying. Her own share of blessing filled her, though her vessel was

comparatively small. And so the Eunuch, I am full sure. He was willing to be a debtor to Philip — to know that it is the less that is blessed of the better: Be it so, his spirit would say. He was happy, he was filled; and if there was no void in his spirit, so we may assure ourselves, there was no grudging there.

What joy there ought to be, as we look at such samples of Divine workmanship! The soul disturbed by reason of its own condition — fixed in earnest searching after Christ — satisfied by the discovery of Him — and then, too happy to dwell amid the tumults and jarrings of that nature that lusteth to envy! And how noiselessly the process is conducted! It goes on in the spirit of a man by the power that works after the pattern of the wind that blows where it lists, but whence it comes and whither it goes we know not.

I have, however, another thought upon this subject of the journeys to Jerusalem.

At times we find, as in the case of the Queen of Sheba, that that great city answered all the expectations that had been formed by the heart respecting it. What was there deeply and fully satisfied her, as we have seen. But Jerusalem has at times grievously disappointed the heart. It did, as I may say again, the Wise Men of the East, who went there looking for the King of the Jews. They had to pass it, and put themselves on another journey, down to Bethlehem in the south. It disappointed the Eunuch also, as I have also observed. He had gone there to worship — but he left it unsatisfied in spirit, and searching for that rest which, as we saw, all the religious provisions of that city of the Temple and the Priesthood did not, could not, give him. And I may add, it disappointed the Lord Jesus likewise. Instead of finding His welcome and His place there, He had to weep over it and to pronounce its doom, and meet there in His own person what we may here rather remember than mention.

It will, however, in the last days, as it were, revive, and take again the character that it fulfilled in the first days. It will answer all the richest expectations of those multitudes who will then, like the Queen of the south, go up there to see the King in His beauty. The highways will then be thronged with joyous visitors, and the hearts of the thousands of the nations will repeat again what they have found in the holy city. "All nations shall flow unto it," as we read; "and many people shall go and say, Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob: and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." And again we read: "It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year, to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles." And again: "I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord: our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together, whither the Tribes go up; the Tribes of the Lord unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." These are among the Divine, inspired witnesses of the satisfying virtue of these journeys to the city of the great King in the day of the Kingdom, when the pledge which the journey of the Queen of Sheba has given us shall be blessedly redeemed in the joy of the hearts of the thousands of the nations who, in the coming day of Zion's restoration, shall wait there to do willing service to the Lord of the earth.

The sequel, then, is simply weighed. Journeys to Jerusalem either satisfy or disappoint; and it is the Lord Himself that has to determine which. His glory was at that time displayed or reflected there, and therefore her visit satisfied the Queen of Sheba; His grace was not then ministered or testified there, and therefore his visit disappointed the Eunuch of Ethiopia. And thus the value of that city of solemnities was to be measured by the presence of Christ there.

And so, let me say, of all ordinances and services. Jerusalem is but "a city of the Jebusites," if Jesus be not the life and glory of it: it is "the joy of the whole earth," if He be. Like Mount Sinai or

Horeb. It is but "Mount Sinai in Arabia," or it takes the dignity of "the mount of God," according as the Lord adopts it or not. The ordinances of the law were "shadows of good things to come," the furniture of God's "beautiful house," or mere "beggarly elements," as Christ used them or disowned them.