

# The King and the Bees

by James Baldwin

One day King Solomon was sitting on his throne, and his great men were standing around him.

Suddenly the door was thrown open and the Queen of Sheba came in.

"O King," she said, "in my own country, far, far away, I have heard much about your power and glory, but much more about your wisdom. Men have told me that there is no riddle so cunning that you can not solve it. Is this true?"

"It is as you say, O Queen," answered Solomon.

"Well, I have here a puzzle which I think will test your wisdom. Shall I show it to you?"

"Most certainly, O Queen."

Then she held up in each hand a beautiful wreath of flowers. The wreaths were so nearly alike that none of those who were with the king could point out any difference.

"One of these wreaths," said the queen, "is made of flowers plucked from your garden. The other is made of artificial flowers, shaped and colored by a skillful artist. Now, tell me, O King, which is the true, and which is the false?"

The king, for once, was puzzled. He stroked his chin. He looked at the wreaths from every side. He frowned. He bit his lips.

"Which is the true?" the queen again asked.

Still the king did not answer.

"I have heard that you are the wisest man in the world," she said, "and surely this simple thing ought not to puzzle you."

The king moved uneasily on his golden throne. His officers and great men shook their heads. Some would have smiled, if they had dared.

"Look at the flowers carefully," said the queen, "and let us have your answer."

Then the king remembered something. He remembered that close by his window there was a climbing vine filled with beautiful sweet flowers. He remembered that he had seen many bees flying among these flowers and gathering honey from them.

So he said, "Open the window!"

It was opened. The queen was standing quite near to it with the two wreaths still in her hands. All eyes were turned to see why the king had said, "Open the window."

The next moment two bees flew eagerly in. Then came another and another. All flew to the flowers in the queen's right hand. Not one of the bees so much as looked at those in her left hand.

"O Queen of Sheba, the bees have given you my answer," then said Solomon.

And the queen said, "You are wise, King Solomon. You gather knowledge from the little things which common men pass by unnoticed."

King Solomon lived three thousand years ago. He built a great temple in Jerusalem, and was famous for his wisdom.

## 1 KINGS 10

### The Queen of Sheba Visits Solomon

1 When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord, she came to test Solomon with hard questions.

2 Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.

3 Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her.

4 When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built,

5 the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed.

6 She said to the king, “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true.

7 But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard.

8 How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!

9 Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness.”

10 And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

11 (Hiram’s ships brought gold from Ophir; and from there they brought great cargoes of almugwood and precious stones.

12 The king used the almugwood to make supports for the temple of the Lord and for the royal palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. So much almugwood has never been imported or seen since that day.)

13 King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country.

Sources:

Baldwin, James. "The King and the Bees." *Fifty Famous People*. Electronic.

The Holy Bible, New International Version. Biblica, Inc., 2011. Electronic.