



Paula L. McGee\*

## DIVINE DIVAS

*When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. 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. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers and burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed.*

*She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. 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. How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! 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."*

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*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.<sup>1</sup>*

I was at a conference a few years ago in Los Angeles where Kenneth Ulmer hosted a Reverend Sister Conference. Renita Weems, the advisor for my master's thesis, chose this text. Stating in her introduction that she was a Ph.D. and scholar and had traveled across the country preaching for some twenty years, she had never heard this text preached nor had she preached it. I sat there realizing that I, too, had been traveling around the country. I was telling women to accept their greatness, but I had never preached this text. Right there in worship, I found myself not only convicted, but spiritually indicted—guilty as charged. But, I have confessed my sins and this morning I want to preach this text and tag it with the title "Divine Divas."

Be careful, because I want to talk about *Divine Divas*—not just "divas." The world has taken this word—diva—made it into someone who thinks she's cute, who has to be put up in certain hotels, and who wears certain clothes. Stay with me, I'm going somewhere. I want to use the adjective "divine" and talk about "Divine Divas." I want to talk about women who know who they are because of what God has given them—the kind of women who aren't afraid to "walk in all of their gifts." They are the kind of women, who, like the women in our past, would use the back door and clean floors for white people all week long. But they would show up in their one dress and one pair of good shoes on Sunday morning. They would walk into the house of God with dignity and grace, like a *Divine Diva*. This is who I am addressing.

I want to do what feminists call "reading against the text." I

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<sup>1</sup>1 Kings 10:1-9,13 NIV.

know that this story is included in the Book of 1 Kings to show the wisdom of Solomon. But, I want to argue this morning that this text also can speak to us about the queen of Sheba and contemporary women. The queen of Sheba stands out among biblical women. The biblical narrator does not tell her story the way other women are portrayed in the Bible.

She's not the mother of; the daughter of;  
 the wife of; or the niece of.  
 She's not barren, broken, bent over, or bleeding.  
 She doesn't even have to be loose.  
 She is not competing to be the mother  
 to the heir of the promise like Hagar or Sarah.  
 She's not competing for the attention  
 of a man like Leah and Rachel.  
 She's not begging God for children like  
 Sarah, Hannah, and Rachel.  
 She's even a different kind of queen.  
 She doesn't rise to power because of her beauty.  
 She doesn't receive her promotion at the  
 demotion of another sister in protest.  
 She doesn't have to deny who she is—  
 her ethnicity—to gain power.  
 She wasn't passing, y'all.  
 She doesn't have to petition a king.  
 She doesn't have Mordecai show up  
 and remind her that she was chosen  
 for such a time as this.

She is a *Divine Diva*. She's the kind of woman who knows that she came to the planet with a purpose. This *Divine Diva*—the queen of Sheba—stands out. I believe that she can teach us

something about contemporary women, about great women. The Bible says, "The queen of Sheba came to test King Solomon with hard questions." We know that she is a wise woman—at least as wise as Solomon. You can only test someone, if you don't have the answers. I believe that *Divine Divas* are the subjects of their own stories and like the queen of Sheba willing to charter their own courses. She heard about his fame. The Bible says, "She came to test Solomon with hard questions because she heard of his fame in relationship to the Lord."

*Divine Divas* are the kind of women who raise hard questions. We are wise women. *Divine Divas* are not silly women. We are the kind of women, my brothers, who are looking for priestly kings. We ask hard questions. We are not impressed with what kind of car you drive, because we know the bank will always give a brother a loan for a car before they give him one for a business. We've got to ask hard questions. We're not impressed with an expensive suit when your shoes say, "Why pay more when you can pay less?" *Divine Divas* are the kind of women who must raise hard questions. We want to know if you will be the one at the altar, praying for your family. We want to know that Daddy will make it to the altar first! The queen of Sheba was moved by Solomon's relationship with the Lord.

And then the text says "she told him all that was on her mind." Tap your neighbor and say, "Girl, have something on your mind." Although I argue this text says something about great women, it also says something about great men who have no problem with great women. I don't know a man who doesn't like having a beautiful woman on his arm. It's nice to have Barbie out in public, but great men have a problem when they take Barbie home and she can't talk about the mortgage. They want a sister who can show up and be beautiful but have something on her mind! She told Solomon everything that was on

her mind. Solomon was able to answer all of her questions. He treated her as an equal.

Next, she said, "I had to come and see with my own eyes." *Divine Divas* see with their own eyes. If you are willing to believe what the media tells you about our brothers—my sisters, you'll miss it. All of our brothers aren't on *Cops*, all of our brothers aren't in jail. God still has some priestly kings who appreciate a *Divine Diva* who has to see with her own eyes. They are willing to trust the vision that God has placed in them. You must be willing to chart your own course—if there are no role models, pat yourself on the back and be your own role model. The reason you have to see with your own eyes is because the text says, "Only the half was told. You have far exceeded the report I heard in my own country."

If you listen only to what the folk are saying, you will never be able to do a great work for God. I promise you I would never be here if I listened to what the folk said. They said, "You won't have any place to preach in the Baptist church." But, ah, when you are a *Divine Diva*, you'll run on and see what the end's going to be. How do I preach for a living? I don't pastor a church, but I have a God who will make a way out of no way. *Divine Divas* are the kind of women who chart their own course and go and see with their own eyes. They're the kind of women who understand they have to have something on their minds. She showed up and saw Solomon's kingdom. And Solomon had it all:

He had a great job.

He was the king.

He had a nice home.

He lived in a palace.

He had a great reputation.

He was also good looking.

How do you know that, Reverend McGee? Well, this is the son of David and Bathsheba, and the Bible says that David was handsome and Bathsheba was so fine that David almost lost the kingdom. There were no ugly genes in that gene pool.

He was wealthy.  
And I argue that he had a little charisma.  
He had a little sex appeal.

Now, how do you know that, Reverend McGee? Well, if you read further in the text, it says he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines; any man with that many women around him, he's got to have a little som'n som'n. It's in the text.

When she saw his kingdom and all of his servants, the NIV says that she was overwhelmed. The literal translation is that there was no more spirit [breath] left in her. In other words, when she saw Solomon, he left her breathless. I don't know if y'all have ever met a brother who leaves you breathless the minute he walks in the room. He is the kind of brother that makes you have a little talk with Jesus.

The queen of Sheba charted her own course and came to test Solomon with hard questions. She saw his wisdom. She even prophesized to him, "God has placed you on the throne." But look how the text ends in verse 13: "King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for"—because *Divine Divas* have no problem asking for what we need. She left and returned with her retinue to her own country.

The hardest challenge for many of us as *Divine Divas* is our relationships. Out of all the women with whom I work—the woman who gives a man her body when he doesn't deserve it—

might be sad—her body will heal. A woman who gives a man all of her money—she can make more money. The woman that is the most devastated and disappointed is the woman who gives a man her dream! Langston Hughes would say it like this:

“What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun or  
fester like a sore and then run?”  
Does it stink like rotten meat or crust  
over all syrupy sugary sweet.  
Maybe it sags like a heavy load or does it explode?”<sup>2</sup>

*Divine Divas* have to make tough choices. A queen who is queen because she is married to a king is one thing. But, a queen that is a queen because of her heritage and her lineage has to be careful. She can't only be bothered with a duke or a lord. She can only hook up with a king—a priestly king. I argue that she came and she saw all that Solomon had to offer and she was overwhelmed. He left her breathless. But, she couldn't give up her dreams and her destiny. Solomon couldn't leave his kingdom. And because she was a *Divine Diva*, she couldn't dare be 701!

You've got to be who God has called you to be because God has positioned you in a place where you can make all the difference for such a time as this. God is trying to move us to a new paradigm. We can no longer try to fit into boxes never designed for us. We were never Ozzie and Harriet; they weren't real either. Black women didn't go to work because they didn't want to stay home. Black women went to work because they had to go to work, because even if a black man were educated with a Ph.D.,

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<sup>2</sup>Arnold Rampersad, ed., *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 426.

he still had to be a porter on trains and shine shoes because there were no places where he could teach and earn a decent living. Black women have always worked in and outside of the home. We have always been able to do whatever needed to be done. God is calling for the kind of relationships where *Divine Divas* will hook up with priestly kings and do a great work for God. God is calling for us to heal our communities. My brothers and my sisters, it is a new day.

This is an old fashioned altar call. We invite every *Divine Diva* to the altar. The second call is to all of the men in the room, who are manly enough to say, "I will support you. I will never ask you to give up your dream so that I can pursue my own." *Divine Divas* are women who are willing to be all that God has called them to be. Make the commitment to "walk in all of your greatness"!