



A Brief Overview

“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised” (SOS 8:6-7).

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION**The Title**

The title of the book and its author are given in the first verse: “The Song Of Songs, Which Is Solomon’s”.

The title “The Song Of Songs” is a way of expressing the superlative, making this *the best or most excellent of songs*. It may mean the most excellent of songs in all of time or, since Solomon actually wrote 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), the best out of his collection or “the cream of the crop”, as we would say.

By the time this book was written, Solomon’s harem consisted of 60 queens, 80 concubines, and many virgins (SOS 6:8).

The Author

The author is King Solomon, not only because the book is ascribed to him, but because of the additional internal and external evidence.

A. Internal Evidence:

1. The book is ascribed to Solomon (1:1).
2. Six other verses in the book refer to Solomon by name (SOS 1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12).
3. The writer is referred to as the “king” (SOS 1:4, 12; 3:9, 11; 7:5).
4. There is considerable similarity between vocabulary and syntax between Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes which was also written by Solomon.
5. The author’s correspondence with natural history corresponds to the report about him (1 Kings 4:33; cp. SOS 1:14; 2:1). He mentions twenty-one varieties of plant life, fifteen species of animals, and his interest in cavalry (SOS 1:9; cp. 1 Kings 10:28).
6. The book speaks of royal luxury and abundance which Solomon would have enjoyed (SOS 1:12, 13; 3:6, 9); and imported goods such as cosmetic powders, silver, gold, purple, ivory, and beryl, his expensive carriage (SOS 3:7-10), his royal chariots (SOS 6:12).
7. The geographical references favor a date prior to 930 B.C. Archer writes, “The author mentions quite indiscriminately localities to be found in both the Northern and Southern kingdoms: Engedi, Hermon, Carmel, Lebanon, Heshbon, and Jerusalem. These are spoken of as if they all belonged to the same political realm. Note that Tirzah is mentioned as a city of particular glory and beauty, and that too in the same breath with Jerusalem itself (6:4). If this had been written after the time when Tirzah was chosen as the earliest capital of the Northern kingdom in rejection of the authority of the dynasty of David, it is scarcely conceivable that it would have been referred to in such favorable terms. On the other hand, it is highly significant that Samaria, the city founded by Omri sometime between 885 and 874, is never mentioned in the Song of Solomon”.

Judging from internal evidence, then, the author was totally unaware of any division of the Hebrew monarchy into North and South. This can only be reconciled with a date of composition in the tenth century, prior to 931 B.C. Even after the return from exile, no Jew of the province of Judea would have referred so indiscriminately to prominent localities in the non-Jewish areas of Palestine which were by this time under Gentile or Samaritan overlordship. It is true that this whole area was reunited under the rule of the Hasmonean kings, John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jamnaeus, but the evidence of the Qumran fragments from Cave IV indicates that Canticles (a hymn or chant) was already in written form at least as early as the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt in 168 B.C.

B. External Evidence:

1. Solomonic authorship has been the unified tradition of the Christian church until modern times.
2. Recently Franz Delitzsch, Sea Raven, John Steimmueller, and Edward J. Young have all held to Solomonic authorship.

The Setting Of The Song Of Solomon

Commentators tend to agree that the Song Of Solomon was written during Israel’s “golden age”; during the reigns of king David and king Solomon. Within the book:

(i) the peaceful settings in the royal court and throughout the countryside suggest a period of peace and tranquility, and (ii) the mention of various mountains, cities, and other areas throughout Israel suggest a time of peace before the division of Israel.



Fifteen geographical locations are mentioned in the book:

- Kedar (1:5).
- Senir (4:8).
- Egypt (1:9).
- Hermon (4:8).
- En Gedi (1:14).
- Tizrah (6:4).
- Sharon (2:1).
- Heshbon (7:4).
- Jerusalem (2:7).
- Damascus (7:4).
- Lebanon (3:9).
- Carmel (7:5).
- Mount Gilead (4:1).
- Baal-Hamon (8:11).
- Amana (4:8).

The bride in this Song is not named and we refer to her as “the Shulamite” or simply “she”. The name “Shulamite” appears only in SOS 6:13.

“Return, return, O Shulamite; Return, return, that we may look upon you! What would you see in the Shulamite - As it were, the dance of the two camps?” (Song Of Solomon 6:13).

The word is likely derived from the place called Shunem, which is located just north of Jezreel, near the plain of Megiddo.

Some believe that the Shulamite is actually Abishag: “The year is 971 B.C. and they search all of Israel for the most beautiful young virgin to be King David's nurse on his death bed (1 Kings 1:1-3). Abishag, a Shunammite from the town of Shunem, 90 km north of Jerusalem, has been chosen. After David dies, his son, 29 year old King Solomon begins to reign. One year later, in 970 B.C., Solomon's older brother Adonijah, asks Solomon through Bathsheba to have Abishag as his wife and Adonijah is executed for insurrection. Abishag moves back home to Shunem begins working as a peasant farmer and falls in love with a poor shepherd boy. Three years later, Solomon, the wisest, richest and most powerful man on earth, begins to build the temple in Jerusalem in the 4th year of his reign in 967 B.C. (1 Kings 6:1). That same year (967 B.C.), Solomon travels north to view one of his royal vineyards at Baal-Hamon and sees the beautiful Abishag working in the vineyard...” (Steve Rudd).



Unique Characteristics Of The Song Of Songs

In the past thirty-seven years I have never heard a sermon based on the Song Of Solomon or known a Bible class on the Song Of Solomon. Indeed, a much neglected book!

The Song Of Solomon is, perhaps, one of the most misunderstood books in the Bible. After all, it was written over 3000 years ago and set in a culture with whose customs and language we are unfamiliar. Also, some of the book's unique features obscure one's understanding:

- None of the speakers are identified by name, which has been the cause of various interpretations.
- There is only one reference to God in chapter eight and verse six. Some versions have this reference (AMPC, ASV, ESV, FLS [French translation], ISV, MKJV, NASB, WEBA, YLT) and some do not (ACV, AKJV, Brenton LXX, CEV, ERV, KJV, NKJV, NLT).

“Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as Sheol; the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of Jehovah” (SOS 8:6 ASV).

“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame” (SOS 8:6 NKJV).

- There is no mention of sin, religion, or the Law of Moses.
- There are no quotes or allusions from this book in the New Testament.

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON

As we have mentioned, the plot, backdrop, and speakers of this great song are not named. This is why we come across various interpretations. We can, though, draw some conclusions based on the setting, the tense of the words, the gender of the pronouns, and even the overall feel of the Song.

There are various interpretations of the Song Of Solomon, but these are the four most widely accepted:

1. An Anthology Of Love Songs

Some believe that the Song Of Solomon is actually an anthology or collection of shorter love songs. John D. Hannah’s Bible Outlines sets out thirteen songs.

“Song of Songs is a short anthology of love poems of various lengths, sung by the bride, the bridegroom, and their friends” (Charles Pfeiffer).

2. An Allegory¹

Some believe that Song Of Solomon is an allegory; a story in which the characters represent some higher spiritual truth.

“An allegory is the description of one thing under the image of another. In an allegory we use the concrete to enforce the abstract, represent one thing in pictures or narrative in order to consider something else...” (William Elliot Griffis).

- Jewish scholars interpret the Song as setting forth God’s love for Israel as symbolized in other passages (**Isaiah 54:5-6; Jeremiah 3:1; Ezekiel 16:1-14; Hosea 1-3**).
- A popular view resounded by Origen of Alexandria among Christians was that the Song prophetically represented Christ’s love for His church (**Ephesians 5:22-33; 2 Corinthians 11:1-2; Revelation 19:6-9; 21:9**). The details of the Song are subject to extravagant interpretations.

3. Typical

It is said that this view bridges the gap between more extreme views. This view says that the Song is historical, yet is a type, with the marriage of Solomon and the Shulamite foreshadowing the relation between Christ and the church in only a few conspicuous points. This explanation justifies the inclusion of an otherwise secular book in the canon of scripture.

- “The songs should be treated then, first as simple and yet sublime songs of human affection. When they are thus understood, reverently the thoughts may be lifted into the higher value of setting for the joys of the communion between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God, and ultimately between the church and Christ” (G. Campbell Morgan).

¹ A story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one. "Pilgrim's Progress is an allegory of the spiritual journey". Synonyms: parable, analogy, metaphor, symbol, emblem.

4. Literal

This view accepts the Song as an historical, real life account representing human love without any higher complicated meaning.

There are two opinions regarding the principle characters:

1. There are **two principle characters** – Solomon and the Shulamite woman. Solomon woos and wins her love and then becomes his true love above all his other wives.
 - “The song of Solomon deals with a love affair – I would guess, the one great love affair of Solomon’s life. Such an experience will be understandable if we assume that it took place when Solomon was yet a young man and before he glutted himself with wives and concubines” (L.A. Mott).
2. There are three principles characters – Solomon, the Shulamite woman, and her shepherd lover. Solomon attempts to charm her away from her shepherd lover with flattery, wealth, and power. She is tempted but her heart remains loyal to her one true love. Thus the Song is made to address the triumph of pure love over lust.
 - “The poem is God’s commendation of true mating love and his condemnation of Solomon’s polygamy... Three principles lead me to accept this view: (i) The Bible is a complete book, and as such it must deal with all aspects of human experience. Mating love is a strong factor in life and unless this poem deals with it, it is omitted from God’s book. (ii) The very structure and evidence of the poem. (iii) If such a virtuous girl’s marriage to Solomon was the theme, then Solomon’s polygamy would be tacitly endorsed” (Homer Hailey).

The view we take in this study is the **literal view**. We also follow the view that there are **three principle characters** – Solomon, the Shulamite, and her lover.

James Coffman believes the Song is an allegory and sees Solomon as a type of Satan, the maiden as the church, and the shepherd as the Christ. Those of you who have read Coffman’s commentaries know that he is a no-nonsense type of guy and not given to wild speculations and fanciful interpretations. So I have included his allegorical thoughts exactly where he has them placed in his commentary - the middle of chapter four.

For further explanation of this view, see Interpretation Of The Poem (page 43).

INTIMACY

Some people believe that a book emphasizing passion and sensuality cannot be inspired of God and ought not to be included in the canon of scripture². Tommy Richards says, “I am a born again believer in God's Word for 20 years and I've read Song of Solomon many times and it never felt like the Word of God to me. And none of the verses ever came to mind by the Holy Spirit within me. And I contend Song of Solomon is not God breathed or inspired by God. And that it is corruptible seed! (The opposite of Peter's definition of God's Word in 1 Peter 1:23)”. Indeed, Mr Richards describes portions as “Pure perverted filth!”³

Such are the views of those that do not see the true beauty and purity of all God's creative acts, which includes the sexual act between married couples (cp. **Hebrews 13:4**).

- “Although the poetic images are almost completely alien to modern tastes, the composition is never lewd or obscene, even by the standards of western civilization. In fact, Canticles reflects the traditional canons of sexual morality contained in the Mosaic Law, and never countenances anything which could be described on such a basis as immorality. It reflects the traditions of Genesis 2:24... and its discussion of the whole range of the emotion of lovers is conducted at a high level of sensitivity and morality. The purity and beauty of human love as a divine gift is the dominant theme of the book” (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia Of The Bible).
- “The notion that Christianity views the body as evil and sex as nasty is traceable to religious folk who have mistakenly advanced such ideas and not the Bible itself. The Bible has a very positive view of sexuality. It speaks candidly of the sexual nature of God's human creatures (**Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18-25; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Hebrews 13:4**). Song Of Solomon encourages the cultivation of an exclusive (**Song 4:12**) and unconquerable (**Song 8:6-7**) attachment of two people to each other within legitimate marriage. It endorses physical love within this setting and makes sensuality and infidelity appear hateful” (Rubel Shelly).

² The Song Of Solomon is not the only book to have its inclusion in the canon of scripture challenged!

³ <https://spirituallysmart.com/song.html>

TRUE LOVE TESTED

1:1-4:16

Chapter One

(1:1-4)

The opening scene is set in Solomon's palace. An unnamed Shulamite girl has just been introduced into the royal harem; she is there against her will; a captive (6:11-12). She is at once the object of observation by all the daughters of Jerusalem, and, presumably following instructions, seek to excite the Shulamite's admiration for their lord and master. The Shulamite girl is distressed and she calls on her true love to come and take her away. The women are unsympathetic and finish their ode on the charms of Solomon.

"Daughters Of Jerusalem"

These are the ladies of the court, the wives of Solomon's political marriages, potential brides for future arrangements, as well as the wives of Solomon's noblemen who attend him at court.

Throughout this booklet each speaker or speakers is indicated by a different color:

Blue = Solomon

Pink = The Shulamite

Indigo = The daughters of Jerusalem or ladies of the harem

Green = The shepherd (The Shulamite's beloved)

Black = The villagers of the Shulamite's and beloved's home

Plum = The Shulamite's brothers

The Daughters Of Jerusalem***Praising Solomon***

²Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth - For your love is better than wine [your love is more intoxicating than wine].

³Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth [your name is as refreshing and soothing as oil poured upon wind-burnt skin]; therefore the virgins love you.

The Shulamite***Longing To Be Home***

⁴Draw me after you, let us make haste [She has been "brought" to the king's chambers, but she longs for her beloved. She pleads "make haste" before the king defiles her]. The king has brought me into his chambers [The "us" in this place refers to the Shulamite's true shepherd lover; and the third person reference to the king in the same breath means that the king is not her beloved].

“ Draw me after you, let us run ”

The Daughters Of Jerusalem

All The Virgins Love The King

[The following is all speaking of Solomon] We will run after you. We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than wine. Rightly do they [i.e., The virgins] love you.

(1:5-8)

Perhaps becoming aware of the contempt in their countenances, the Shulamite notices the contrast between her rustic and dark appearance and the pale complexions and pampered products of palace seclusion. She acknowledges her dark complexion but insists she is yet “lovely”. She explains that her dark complexion is due to working in the vineyards because her brothers forced her to do so. Her thoughts then turn to her true love: Where is he? Where is he feeding his flock? Where is he resting at noon? This provokes mockery from the women: they address her as “O most beautiful of all women” and bid her to go and find him herself.

The Shulamite

She Explains Her Dark Complexion

⁵[In response to their contemptuous, jealous looks she says] I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.

⁶Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept [I have not kept up the care and cultivation of my own beauty].

⁷Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions [The Shulamite's true lover was a shepherd, not king Solomon. Her shepherd lover is absent and feeding his flock in some place unknown to her. Solomon was not absent; he was not feeding a flock, and his place was well known to everyone in Jerusalem. Solomon is not in this at all]?

The Daughters Of Jerusalem

Mockingly Telling Her To Go Find Her Beloved

⁸If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents [They are mocking her!].

(1:9-17)

Here is a reminder of the view we take regarding the Song: “The view we take in this study is the **literal view**. We also follow the view that there are **three principle characters** – Solomon, the Shulamite, and her lover.” It is in this section that we encounter the most serious difficulty to this particular view; this is because the dialogue appears to be between Solomon and the Shulamite who addresses him in terms of the utmost endearment, which is incompatible with the view we are taking.

If the passage stood by itself, then there would not be any difference of opinion about it and everyone would accept it as a conversation between the two lovers. But the passage does not stand by itself and we are not to give up the unity of the book and allow it to contradict the whole course of the Song.

We propose, then, that the young maiden is taking refuge from the importunity of Solomon's flattery by turning aside to an imaginary, dream-like conversation with her absent lover; her true love.

Solomon now appears on the scene and seeks to win the love of the young damsel with flattery and the promise of ornaments of gold and studs of silver. The Shulamite does not fall for his flattery and promises because her heart is set on another. The language is spoken of one whom she is familiar and long been in her affections, not Solomon, but her shepherd lover. The maiden has resisted the charms of finery, but what woman can stand against the admiration of her beauty? Thus Solomon compliments her on her fairness and the beauty of her eyes. But even this is to no avail, and her mind turns again to her true love.

Solomon

Flattery And The Promise Of Riches

⁹I have compared you, my love, to my filly among Pharaoh's chariots.

¹⁰Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with chains of gold.

¹¹We will make you ornaments of gold with studs of silver.

The Shulamite

Her Heart Is Set On Her Beloved

¹²While the king is at his table [conducting the affairs of state], my spikenard sends forth its fragrance.

¹³A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts.

¹⁴My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi.

Solomon

Expressing His Desire

¹⁵Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes.

The Shulamite

Remembering Home

¹⁶Behold, you are handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant! Also our bed is green.

¹⁷The beams of our houses are cedar, and our rafters of fir.

Questions

1. How do the women of Solomon's harem feel toward Solomon (1:2-3)?
2. For what does she long, and what might be a major concern (1:4a)?
3. What prompted her to become conscious of her appearance, and what is her explanation (1:5-6a)?
4. What does she mean by, "I have not kept my own vineyard" (1:6b)?

5. As she wonders out loud where her beloved might be (1:7), how do the ladies of the harem answer her (1:8)?
6. How does she respond to Solomon's further attempts to flatter her, and what does it reveal about her attitude (1:9-17)?

Chapter Two

(2:1-7)

The maiden is transported away in her reverie⁴ far from the royal palace to scenes such as Shakespeare presents in *The Forest Of Arden* (*As You Like It*). Some think she is describing herself as “the rose of Sharon” and “the lily of the valleys” (common flowers), and like these her natural habitat is the open country, not the stifling court in the palace of Solomon. Others think it is Solomon saying that his style of loving affection shines like a lily among the thorns.

She ignores this and continues: if Solomon is like the tender rose of Sharon or the lily of the valley, then her shepherd lover resembles the apple tree at the foot where the flower grows; she is fainting for his comfort and hungers for the refreshment that grows on the tree, i.e., his love; she longs for his embrace once again. The charge in verse seven is aimed at the daughters of Jerusalem – I think the best explanation is given by John MacArthur: “This refrain (3:5; 8:4) explicitly expresses her commitment to a chaste life before and during marriage. She invites accountability to the daughters of Jerusalem”. The purpose of the refrain may be her resistance to their attempts to move her loyalty away from her true love.

Solomon

Solomon Complements Himself

“ I am a rose of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys. ”

¹I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.

²Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

The Shulamite

She Contrasts Her Beloved, Her True Love, With Solomon

³[Notice the past tense of the following: “I sat down”, “his fruit was sweet”, “he brought me,” etc. While it is true that Solomon is wooing the Shulamite, it is also true that she is recalling loving experiences with her true lover that occurred in the past. She is rejecting the king!] Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

⁴He [i.e., her beloved] brought me to the banquet house, and his banner over me was love [A “banner” was a standard of protection such as those used in battle; it was a rallying-point and guide to give encouragement and confidence to those on a weary march or those amid extreme conflict. The Shulamite has been taken captive and is separated from her beloved, but she finds support, safety, and comfort in known attachment she has with her beloved⁵].

⁵Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick.

⁶His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me.

⁷I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases [The purpose of the refrain may be her resistance to their attempts to move her loyalty away from her true love].

⁴ A state of being pleasantly lost in one's thoughts; a daydream.

⁵ See Fredrick Charles Cook's commentary.

(2:8-17)

The young maiden remembers her beloved upon the mountains and hills, and then imagines him behind the wall of Solomon's harem and crying out to his imprisoned love. She sings him this little ditty⁶: "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes". J.R. Dummelow says, "Any song, on any theme, would have pleased him, and short poems that seem to have no special relevance to the occasion are still in common use amongst the peasants and the Bedouin."

The Shulamite

Her Beloved Comes To Rescue Her

⁸The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

⁹My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice.

¹⁰My beloved spoke, and said to me:

The Shepherd

He Carries Away His Beloved

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

¹¹For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

¹²The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

¹³The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!

The Shulamite

The Lovers Living Happily

¹⁴O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.

¹⁵"Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes."

¹⁶My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feeds his flock among the lilies.

¹⁷Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether.

Questions

1. How does Solomon describe himself (2:1-2) and, in her response, how does she describe her beloved (2:3-4)?
2. What does she recall about her beloved (2:4a), and what does "his banner over me was love" mean (2:4b)?
3. What is the effect of separation on her health (2:5)?

⁶ A "ditty" is a short simple song.

4. What charge does she give to the daughters of Jerusalem, and what does it mean (2:7)?
5. What does she imagine about herself and her beloved, and what does this tell you about how she feels being held captive (2:8-17)?

Chapter Three

(3:1-5)

The Shulamite has a dream with a happy ending. She had lost her beloved and went out into the night looking for him. She asked the watchmen if they had seen him, but they were unable to help. After searching diligently she finds him and brings him safely home to her mother's house. There then follows the refrain we saw and on which we commented earlier (see 2:7).

The Shulamite

A Dream With A Happy Ending

¹By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him.

²I will rise now, I said, and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love. I sought him, but I did not find him.

³The watchmen who go about the city found me; I said, Have you seen the one I love?

“ I will seek him whom my soul loves. ”

⁴Scarcely had I passed by them, when I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me [What is said here substantiates our belief that the Shulamite's beloved is a shepherd, not king Solomon. We cannot believe she would have taken king Solomon into her mother's bedroom, not even in a dream].

⁵I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases.

(3:6-11)

The scene now changes and the young maiden now stands at the gates of Jerusalem where she can see Solomon and his entourage approaching. Some think this is describing the time when Solomon came and took her captive, and others that the king is approaching from the wilderness and is returning from a royal progress or tour of his kingdom. Personally, I favor the latter. Despite this scene of exceptional magnificence, the young maiden doesn't seem to be impressed by his attempt to overawe her and win her love.

The Shulamite

Solomon's Display Of Magnificence

⁶Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders?



This is just one of many designs of palanquins

⁷Behold, it is Solomon's couch, with sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel.

⁸They all hold swords, being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night.

⁹Of the wood of Lebanon Solomon the king made himself a palanquin:

¹⁰he made its pillars of silver, its support of gold, its seat of purple, its interior paved with love by the daughters of Jerusalem.

¹¹Go forth [She herself is not going out to see him!], O daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon with the crown with which his mother [Solomon's mother was Bathsheba] crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day of the gladness of his heart.

Questions

1. In this dream she finds her beloved (3:1-4), and in another dream she does not find him and she even suffers physical harm (5:2-7). What might account for the happy ending in the first dream and the unhappy ending in the second dream?
2. How does verse four substantiate that her beloved is a shepherd and not Solomon?
3. What is possibly being described in these verses (3:6-10)?
4. How would you describe her reaction to all this magnificence (3:11)?

Chapter Four

(4:1-7)

Two separate and dramatically different pictures appear in these two love songs: (1) that of Solomon (4:1-8), and (2) that of the maiden's true lover, the shepherd (4:9-15). In the former, Solomon compares the Shulamite to animals. In the latter, her true lover mentions no animals, but sweet smelling spices, fountains, gardens, honey, orchards and "all the chief spices." Solomon's love song suffers greatly in this comparison. Indeed, James Burton Coffman says, "How can we account for this on any other thesis than that which assumes that Solomon looked upon every woman as merely an animal?"



How Solomon describes the Shulamite

Solomon is now in the presence of the young maiden, and with all the extravagant language of courtly flattery he lavishes praise upon her: her dove like eyes, voluminous black hair, rosy lips, noble brow, towering neck, and tender bosom.

The maiden's beloved who is necessarily away with his flock, Solomon, too, will leave her "until when the day blows, and the shadows flee away, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" (4:6). This is very similar to the phrase used by the Shulamite of her beloved: "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether" (2:17). Of course, Solomon has no pastoral duties to which he must attend. While Solomon's delicate balancing and assimilation of the phrase and idea is gracefully manipulated, there is one slight change: he will go to "the mountain of myrrh" and "the hill of frankincense" to make his person more fragrant, and so, he assumes, more agreeable and welcome. His final words of flattery: "You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you" (4:7).

Solomon

Solomon's Love Song To The Shulamite

¹Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead.

²Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them.

³Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like a piece of pomegranate.

⁴Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.

⁵Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies.

⁶Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense [see 2:17].

⁷You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you.

(4:8-16)

We are treating this section as we did 2:10b-13, i.e., an imaginary scene of our dreamy heroine. These are not the words of the king, but of her rustic beloved – he does not have flowery compliments, high-flown imagery, and wearisome lists of the charms of the maiden he loves.

While such language reflects the finished manners of the court, they are no match for the genuine outpourings of the heart of her rustic lover. The language suggests a close relationship, and he is obviously intoxicated with her love. Does king Solomon have such a close relationship with all the women in his harem? I think not! She replies with words of welcome, bidding the north and south winds that the fragrance of which her beloved has enthusiastically resounded may flow more richly than ever. For the sake of her beloved she would be all the more sweet and loving. All she possesses is for him; let him come and take possession of his own. Note that the term “my spouse” occurs five times in this section.

The Shepherd

His Appeal To His Beloved

⁸Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.

⁹You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace.

¹⁰How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices!

¹¹Your lips, O my spouse, drip as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

¹²A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

¹³Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard,

¹⁴spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices –

¹⁵A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

“How much better is your love than wine”

As I said in the “The Interpretations Of The Song Of Solomon”, I am reproducing here James Coffman’s allegorical understanding of the book. This is the place he has inserted it in his commentary.

This writer [James Coffman] is supremely grateful for this chapter; because it reveals what is undoubtedly the true interpretation of the Song of Solomon. What is it? The intuition of countless thousands of students and scholars for thousands of years is absolutely valid in finding an allegory here. Otherwise, the Song makes no sense at all.

THE TRUE ALLEGORY

SOLOMON IS SATAN

This truth is so big and overwhelming that the scholars of many ages have simply overlooked it. How could any mortal, much less a Christian, see in Solomon a type of God, or of Christ?

Solomon: that old slave-driver was the leading debauchee of a thousand years, a builder of pagan temples, a strutting old peacock who probably thought of himself as the greatest stud in human history, who saw every beautiful woman on earth as merely an animal. He desecrated the very Temple that he erected with twelve images of the pagan bulls of the god Baal in the twelve "oxen" (as he called them) that supported the laver, and the images of lions that decorated the steps of his throne, every one of them a violation of the Decalogue, Commandment II. He even erected two pagan phallic symbols, Jachin and Boaz, in front of the Temple itself - could such a man as this have been a valid representative of Christ? A million times NO!

What fruit did he have of all those women, how many sons? The Bible mentions only one, Rehoboam the fool. He lost most of Solomon's empire in a week's time, and later surrendered Jerusalem to Shishak king of Egypt who plundered it, and looted the Temple.

The very Temple he erected was contrary to God's will as was also the Jewish monarchy, of whom Solomon was the most conspicuous specimen. His oppressive taxation ruined Israel and eventually destroyed the kingdom. He was even an adulterer (with the Queen of Sheba); can anyone imagine a thing like that on the part of a man who already had a thousand women at his disposal? This man a symbol? He certainly was: HE WAS A SYMBOL OF THE DEVIL! Once this fact is understood, this whole Song of Solomon is clear.

Solomon represents worldly power, fame, and glory. He represents pride, ostentation, wealth, physical splendor, the pomp and glitter of the world and all of its allurements. He represents the persuasion and allurements of sensual indulgence, lasciviousness and fleshly gratification - in short, he represents in this allegory all of the temptations that assail the child of God.

THE SHULAMITE MAIDEN

She is the bride, not of Solomon, but of the Shepherd. She is the true Israel of both the Old and the New Covenants. Note, that her lover is never present with his bride, except in the Incarnation, when he rescued her from Satan (Solomon) and conferred upon her a marvelous citizenship in another kingdom (**Philippians 3:20**). That is the reason that the bride in this chapter is represented as living beyond the domain of Solomon.

Both the dreams in this Song stress the absence of the Shepherd. And in Song of Solomon 4:9-15, the Shepherd's love song is not delivered by the Shepherd in person. She receives it in his absence; just as the Church today has her message from The Good Shepherd as it has been delivered to us by his holy apostles. That is why the Shepherd does not appear in person in these verses. Nevertheless, the validity of the message is just as genuine as the sacred words of the New Testament.

THE SHEPHERD WHO LOVED THE MAIDEN

The Shepherd can be none other than Almighty God in his own person or in that of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. “The Lord is my Shepherd” (**Psalms 23:1; John 10:11. etc.**). The notion that the Wolf Solomon was the shepherd of Israel is repugnant. But neither God nor his Son Jesus Christ is personally present on earth with their servants and followers. That is why the maiden's lover in this Song is always absent (except in the rescue scene standing for the Incarnation). Where is the Shepherd? He is in “the far country” (**Matthew 21:33; 25:14; Mark 12:1 and Luke 20:9**).

In this understanding, the item by item discussion of the spices, the orchards, the fountains, the gardens, the honeycomb, the sweetness, beauty, purity and holiness of the Shepherd's love song (**Song of Solomon 4:9-15**) becomes totally unnecessary, in fact, irrelevant. All of them stand for the precious revelation of the Good Shepherd's matchless love and concern for his holy bride the Church of Jesus Christ, as found in the sacred New Testament.

The item by item interpretations of Song of Solomon 4:9-15 are, for the most part, too fanciful to have any value. The locked garden and the sealed fountain appear in the eyes of Jewish interpreters as, “The modesty of Jewish women, whether married or unmarried; and the Christian scholars related them to the Bride of Christ, or to the Virgin Mary.”

The Shulamite

The Shulamite's Response To Her Beloved's Appeal

¹⁶Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits [She prays for the wind to carry the message of her love to her absent lover].

Questions

1. By what term does Solomon call her at the beginning and end of his flattering speech (4:1, 7)?
2. Her beloved refers to her five times as what (4:8, 9, 10, 11, 12)? Why does he refer to her so?
3. Is it right for Solomon or any man to use such terms and descriptions of another man's wife or fiancé (4:1-7)? What can we say about the character of such a man?
4. For what does she pray after hearing her beloved's appeal (4:16)?

LOVE UNQUENCHABLE

5:1-8:14

Chapter Five

(5:1)

This verse properly belongs to the end of chapter four; it is the shepherds reply to his beloved's invitation. She had said, "**Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits**" (4:16). He cannot, of course, refuse such an invitation from his beloved, and so he enters his garden, gathers his myrrh and spice, eats his honey and drinks his wine and milk; he also calls on his friends to feast and drink with him. This seems to point to their marriage and the wedding feast. We cannot suppose the wedding took place at this time because the royal courtship continues in the following passages. It is more likely that this is a reminiscence of an earlier time. This means, then, that the couple had been married long before the story began. Thus, in the present circumstances, we can understand the intensity of the love and the bitterness of the separation apparent throughout the Song.

This would mean that Solomon's officers had abducted a young bride and brought her to his harem! Can we believe that Solomon could have committed such an outrageous crime? Certainly the conduct of his father and mother had gone a long way in setting an example for the violation of the marriage tie. Whatever the case, we are not going to let this sidetrack us.

The Shepherd***The Celebration***

¹I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones! [An account of the wedding between the Shepherd and the Shulamite maiden].

(5:2-7)

Now, suddenly, we are transported to an entirely different scene in which the Shulamite recites a second dream. This is similar to the first dream (3:1-4), but more vivid and intense, and it has a sad ending. The Expositor's Bible Commentary says, "The circumstances of it will agree more readily with the idea that she is already married to the Shepherd" and the Pulpit Commentary says of this dream: "... the second part certainly is more from the standpoint of married life than the first". Her beloved knocks on the door of her chamber; standing there soaking wet; perhaps having come from tending to his flocks. She responds with a playful protest. But when the latch is moved she jumps up and opens the door to him, but he is gone! She then goes out into the streets searching for him, but all to no avail. In fact, the watchmen of the city struck her and tore off her veil. What could be the meaning of this dream? It may just be a nightmare brought on as a result of her separation from her beloved. If after their reunion, it may be the expression of the fear of losing him again.

James Coffman has this to say about her dream: “The Church is indeed married to Christ; but the Bridegroom has been taken away (**Matthew 9:15**); this is beautifully symbolized here by the absence of the Shepherd. The mistreatment of the maiden stands for the persecutions, hatred, and bitterness of the world against the Bride of Christ (His Church). Her being wounded speaks of the martyrdoms of the faithful. The maiden's crying after her beloved speaks of the fidelity of the Church to the Christ in his absence. We hardly need to be reminded that, ‘We must with many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God’ (**Acts 14:22**)”.

The Shulamite

The Nightmare!

²I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying,

The Shepherd

Calling her to open

Open for me, my sister, my love, My dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.

The Shulamite

The Nightmare! (continued)

³I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?

⁴My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him.

⁵I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock.

⁶I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.

⁷The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me.

(5:8-16)

Her distress over this nightmare is apparent as she addresses the ladies of the harem: she adjures them to tell her if they have found her beloved, and they respond with a sneer, “What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us?” (5:9). Their mocking response provokes the Shulamite to extol the beauty of her beloved.

The Shulamite

Extolling The Beauty Of Her Beloved

⁸I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick!

The Daughters Of Jerusalem

They Scorn Her Charge

⁹What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us?

The Shulamite

Extolling The Beauty Of Her Beloved (continued)

¹⁰ My beloved is white and ruddy, chief among ten thousand.

¹¹ His head is like the finest gold; his locks are wavy, and black as a raven.

¹² His eyes are like doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set.

¹³ His cheeks are like a bed of spices, banks of scented herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh.

¹⁴ His hands are rods of gold set with beryl. His body is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires.

¹⁵ His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold. His countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.

¹⁶ His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!

“This is my beloved
and this is my friend. O
daughters of
Jerusalem.”

Questions

1. How does her beloved respond to her invitation (5:1)? Do you think this is a wedding day celebration or a celebration of their reunion?
2. How does this dream (5:2-7) compare with her first dream (3:1-4)? What circumstances brought on these dreams, and why is the second dream so tragic?
3. Waking from her dream, what charge does she give the daughters of Jerusalem (5:8)? How do they respond (5:9)? How does she answer their question (5:10-16)?

Chapter Six

(6:1-3)

The first three verses of this chapter belong to the end of chapter five. The ladies of the harem have heard the Shulamite extol the beauty of her beloved, and now ask where he is and offer to help her look for this paragon or model of excellence.

This is said in a mocking tone. She knows he hasn't really deserted her as in her dream; she knows he is likely working and feeding his flocks.

The Daughters Of Jerusalem

Their Desire To Help Seek The Shulamite's Beloved

¹Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you? [The fact that the ladies of the harem desired to seek him with her shows that this is not Solomon].

The Shulamite

Her Beloved Is Tending To His Flocks

²My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

³I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. He feeds his flock among the lilies.

“ I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine ”

(6:4-7)

Solomon once again appears on the scene, not to resume his laudation of the Shulamite, but to admit defeat. It is hard to describe his attitude toward her – perhaps a mixture of awe and fear. It could be that he finds her purity and indifference to his flattery humiliating, and some have suggested that his conscience is pricked because of his own infidelities.

Solomon

He Admits Defeat

⁴O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners! [Solomon is rebuked by the maiden's purity – she has rejected his artificial flattery].

⁵Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me [He cannot look such a pure and faithful maiden in the eyes]. Your hair is like a flock of goats going down from Gilead.

⁶Your teeth are like a flock of sheep which have come up from the washing; every one bears twins, and none is barren among them.

⁷Like a piece of pomegranate are your temples behind your veil [Notice again this pathetic flattery, comparing her to animals and fruit].

(6:8-9)

As we said in the introduction, some believe the whole poem is, more or less, an interaction between Solomon and his future bride, but “It is almost impossible to reconcile this theory that Solomon is the one and only lover referred to throughout” (Expositors Bible Commentary).

Solomon has kidnapped the Shulamite; torn her away from her husband, and has sixty queens, eighty concubines, and many virgins. Solomon has set aside God's law for kings regarding the accumulation of many wives (**Deuteronomy 17:14-17**), which, in the end, turned his heart away from the Lord (**1 Kings 11:4**). It is bearing these things in mind that we cannot believe that the following words can be attributed to Solomon, but they are the words of the Shulamite's beloved. Again, we believe that her purity has struck his conscience and made him realize how far he has fallen.

Who is the speaker in verses 8-9? If Solomon is the speaker, he mentions his sixty queens, eighty concubines, and many virgins, and assures the Shulamite that she is special. Really! If anything, he ought to put away all his wives, concubines, and many virgins and turn back to the wife of his youth and remain faithful to her alone. "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?" (**Proverbs 5:18-20**). We believe, then, that the Shulamite is a wise woman in resisting the King's flattery and charms. The speaker, we believe, is her beloved shepherd. It is unlikely that he is present at this scene and so we must fall back on the idealizing character of the poem.

"In this figurative way the true lover expresses his contempt for the monstrous harem at the palace; he is content with this one ewe lamb; nay, she is more to him than all Solomon's bevy of beauties; even the ladies of the court are now constrained to praise the noble qualities of his bride" (Expositor's Bible Commentary).

The Shepherd

His Beloved Means More To Him Than All The Women In Solomon's Harem

⁸There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number.

⁹My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

(6:10-12)

Solomon's expression of awe for the Shulamite is repeated, and then she relates the account of her capture. It was while working in the nut garden that she was pounced upon by the king's men and whisked away in a chariot.

Solomon

Solomon's Awe Of The Shulamite

¹⁰Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?

The Shulamite

Recalling Her Capture

¹¹I went down to the garden of nuts to see the verdure of the valley, to see whether the vine had budded and the pomegranates had bloomed.

¹²Before I was even aware, my soul had made me as the chariots of my noble people [A study of the book of Esther seems to indicate that young women taken into the harem were, in fact, conscripted. Their consent was not sought; they were not courted or solicited by the king; they were merely commanded].

(6:13)

This verse ought to be the first verse of chapter seven. The Shulamite is now retreating and, perhaps, about to make her escape! The ladies of the court call her back to gaze upon her. Her modest answer is, “Why do you desire to gaze at the Shulamite, as at the dance of Mahanaim?” There then follows a description of this dance (see chapter seven).

The Daughters Of Jerusalem

Their Call For The Shulamite To Return

¹³Return, return, O Shulamite; Return, return, that we may look upon you!

The Shulamite

Her Refusal To Return

What would you see in the Shulamite - As it were, the dance of the two camps?

Questions

1. What do the daughters of Jerusalem’s questions prove about the identity of the Shulamite’s beloved (6:1)?
2. In her dream or nightmare it seemed like her beloved had deserted her, but where would he be most likely (6:2-3)?
3. Why has Solomon appeared once again (6:4-7)? What language does he use that suggests this to be the case?
4. What comparisons is her beloved making between Solomon and himself (6:8-9)?
5. After a brief word from Solomon, what does the Shulamite relate (6:11-12)?
6. Who is calling back the Shulamite and how does she reply (6:13)?

Chapter Seven

(7:1-9)

“The Dance of Mahanaim” was “a well-known sacred dance, taking its name from the locality in which it originated (**Genesis 32:2; Joshua 21:38**). Some, taking ‘Mahanaim’ to be an ordinary designation for ‘The Angels’ or ‘Angelic Hosts,’ render here ‘a dance as it were of angel-choirs,’ i.e., one of special grace and beauty. The former of these interpretations is to be preferred” (Barnes). We can hardly believe that this modest maiden from the countryside would degrade herself before a corrupt court in such a shameless manner. It is more likely that this is a professional dancer from among the women of the harem. This conclusion is justified because Solomon address the dancer as a “Prince’s Daughter”, i.e., the daughter of a noble, which is not true of the Shulamite. The purpose of this description and the glimpse of the manners of the palace are to strengthen the contrast of the innocent, simple country life in which the maiden delights.

Some, though, see this as simply further flattery of the Shulamite by Solomon. “Once more we have Solomon's flattery, but there can be little wonder why the maiden rejected it. As plainly evident in what he said, he looked upon her, as he looked upon every woman, as something to be eaten or consumed, simply a means of satisfying his appetite (lust). He saw her body as a goblet of mixed wine (**Song of Solomon 7:2**), her breasts as clusters of dates in the palm tree (**Song of Solomon 7:7**), like clusters of grapes (**Song of Solomon 7:7**). Her breath smelled like apples (**Song of Solomon 7:7**), and her kisses were like wine. All of this says in tones of thunder: ‘You look delicious, and I’m ready to eat you!’” (James Coffman).

Solomon

He Renews His Flattering Appeal

¹How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter! The curves of your thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skillful workman.

²Your navel is a rounded goblet; it lacks no blended beverage. Your waist is a heap of wheat set about with lilies.

³Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.

⁴Your neck is like an ivory tower, your eyes like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus.

⁵Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel, and the hair of your head is like purple; a king is held captive by your tresses.

⁶How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights!

⁷This stature of yours is like a palm tree, and your breasts like its clusters.

⁸I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches. Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples,

⁹and the roof of your mouth like the best wine. The wine goes down smoothly for my beloved, moving gently the lips of sleepers.

“ How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! ”

(7:10-13)

From this point forward neither Solomon nor the daughters of Jerusalem take part in any of the dialogue, and the scene has shifted from the royal dwellings to the Shulamite's home in the country. It would appear, then, that she had made her escape – perhaps while everyone was enraptured with the lovely dancer.

The Shulamite

Her Final Rejection Of The King

¹⁰I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me [She once again rejects the king's flattery and insists that she belongs to her beloved].

¹¹Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field; let us lodge in the villages.

¹²Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, whether the grape blossoms are open, and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love.

¹³The mandrakes give off a fragrance, and at our gates are pleasant fruits, all manner, new and old, which I have laid up for you, my beloved.

Questions

1. To what does Solomon compare the Shulamite's features (7:1-9)?
2. From chapter seven and verse ten neither Solomon nor the daughters of Jerusalem are mentioned – what does this seem to indicate?
3. After all the king's flattery, what is the Shulamite's reaction (7:10)?
4. What terms are used that reveal a country setting rather than a city setting?

Chapter Eight

(8:1-4)

Her beloved had addressed her as “my sister” (5:1) and now she reciprocates with the address “my brother” (8:1). This longing to be brother and sister is simply an expression of a desire that their relation to one another be of the highest, purest, and most permanent possible – this brotherly and sisterly relation is not merely one of affection, but of blood. “The bond between husband and wife may be broken by the caprice and weakness of human feeling, but nothing can destroy the bond of blood” (The Pulpit Commentary). The lovers simple and passionate devotion to each other helps to sharpen the contrast between what passes for love in the royal harem and the true passion experienced by our true lovers, which is unsullied by the corruptions of the royal court – illustrating its sweet intimacy and perfect purity. She would lead her beloved to her mother’s house and enjoy simple home-made drinks.

Interestingly, though far from the royal court, she repeats, quite superfluously, the refrain: “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases”. She adjures the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken any love for Solomon in her, but to leave love to its spontaneous course. David Collins says, “Perhaps this is now a kind of victory cry”.

The Shulamite

Her Desire For The Closest Intimacy

¹Oh, that you were like my brother [This is simply a way of expressing a desire for the closest intimacy], who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I should find you outside, I would kiss you; I would not be despised [The background of this is that in the East brothers and sisters might show their affection in public, but not so with husbands and wives].

²I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, she who used to instruct me. I would cause you to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate.

³His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me.

⁴I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases [It is not clear why this refrain is repeated here. David Collins suggests it could be a kind of “victory cry”].

(8:5-7)

The scene now changes and she sees her beloved coming up from the wilderness. The opening question seems to be asked by the people of the couple’s village. The couple indulging in an enjoyable recollection of the time they first met or perhaps the when they first fell in love. Her beloved remembers that it was under an apple tree where their love was first awakened. It sounds like her mother gave birth to her under the apple tree, which is possible.

Another explanation is to imagine her beloved pointing first to the apple tree and saying, “I awakened you under the apple tree” and then pointing to the nearby house and saying, “There your mother brought you forth; there she who bore you brought you forth”.

The Believer's Bible Commentary says of verse six and seven: "The Shulamite suggests renewing their vows. In words of great beauty that have been widely quoted, she affirms that there is no rival for her love. It is as strong as death, unquenchable, and beyond price."

The Friends Of The Lovers

They See The Happy Couple Arriving

⁵Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

The Shepherd

Sweet Memories

I awakened you under the apple tree. There your mother brought you forth [the reference is to his beloved's home]; there she who bore you brought you forth.

The Shulamite

Statements Of True Love

⁶Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame.



“ Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm ”

⁷Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised.

(8:8-14)

The speakers here are the Shulamite's brothers. They might be defending themselves against the charge of negligence in allowing their sister to be kidnapped, or vowing to be more careful in the future. Taking up the metaphor of a "battlement" they had used, she knows she is safe now; like a wall well embattled. Indeed, she has found peace in the love of her husband. Others believe they are expressing their concern for her purity when she was only a young girl: will she remain virtuous when she becomes a woman (a wall) or will she lose her virtue (a door). I tend to favor this latter view.

Solomon may have a vineyard in her neighborhood from which he makes a profit, but that is nothing to her because she has her own vineyard. This vineyard was mentioned at the beginning where she says of it, "my own vineyard I have not kept" (1:6). In that place it seems to represent the upkeep of her person. Here it may be that the image represents her shepherd lover.

The poem closes with her beloved calling to her and her bidding him to come to her. And so we leave this scene of happy union of our two young lovers.

The Shulamite's Brothers

Concern For Their Sister

⁸We have a little sister, and she has no breasts [Referring to the days of her childhood]. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is spoken for [They were concerned about guarding her purity until she was old enough to marry]?

⁹If she is a wall [i.e., strong enough to remain virtuous], we will build upon her a battlement of silver; and if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.

The Shulamite

I Was A Wall

¹⁰I was a wall [She remained pure and virtuous despite being separated from her beloved and despite all of Solomon's charms and flattery], and my breasts like towers; then I became in his eyes as one who found peace.

¹¹Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; he leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand silver coins.

¹²My own vineyard [Speaking of her beloved] is before me. You, O Solomon, may have a thousand [speaking of Solomon's "vineyard" with his harem], and those who tend its fruit two hundred [the eunuchs in charge of it].

The Shepherd

He Calls For His Beloved To Speak

¹³You who dwell in the gardens, the companions listen for your voice - Let me hear it!

The Shulamite

She Beckons Her Beloved

¹⁴Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.

Questions

1. What is she expressing in this monologue (8:1)?
2. Compare 3:6-10 with 8:5a. What differences do you see?
3. About what are the Shulamite's brothers concerned and when was it (8:8-9)?
4. What did her brother's mean "if she is a wall" (8:9) and what does she mean by "I was a wall" (8:10)?
5. What does she mean by her "vineyard" and what are Solomon's "thousand" and "those who tend to it" (8:12)?

The predominant question in this book is, "Who is the Shulamite's lover, Solomon, or a shepherd?" I believe that we are correct in identifying him as the shepherd.

This, of course, does not answer all our questions, solve all the mysteries, nor fit every single verse in the Song. We pray that God will forgive our errors and any solutions which we have overlooked.

Conclusion

A young, very beautiful, maiden is kidnapped and brought to Solomon's harem. Solomon makes many attempts to woo her, but she is married or perhaps espoused to her beloved and resists all his charms and lures. She finally escapes and is reunited with her beloved. True love endures.

Regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves and regardless of the trials we are called to endure, let us remain faithful to our spouse, and, likewise, true and faithful to the Lord.

INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM

Orville Vaughn

Introduction

How is God's Word to be interpreted? When are the words to be taken literally and when are the words actually symbols representing other things? How can we, as students of the Bible, know?

Daniel spoke of an image made of various metals and clay: literal or symbolic?

Ezekiel spoke of dry bones rising up: literal or symbolic?

Revelation contains various beasts, and dragons: literal or symbolic?

Christ spoke of loving one's enemies: literal or symbolic?

Christ spoke of believing and being baptized: literal or symbolic?

Most passages in the Bible lend themselves to reasonable interpretation to the serious Bible student. That is, through a study of the text and context, consideration of the overarching theme of the Bible, and a little use of common sense, one can determine with reasonable certainty whether a verse, chapter, or book is to be taken literally or as an allegory, metaphor, or analogy of something else. Using allegories or analogies for teaching usually happens when the teacher wants to make a clear comparison to something commonly understood so that their application is reinforced through symbolism, e.g., the parables of Christ.

What about the Song of Songs? Why has it been widely interpreted as an allegory? Why not read it as a poem about romantic love between a man and woman?

Jewish Allegory

Using allegories in Hebrew teaching was quite popular.

"The Jewish interpretation, perpetuated under some differences of form, all along the traditions of the rabbins, consisted of regarding the Canticle as a figurative description of the mutual love between Jehovah and the chosen people. It was held to be a prediction of the final deliverance of Israel" (Albert Réville).

The Jewish Rabbis were very guarded in their teaching of this book. A man was not allowed to read the book until he had reached 30 years of age. This was not to protect his young mind from its sensual images (as one might suppose), but rather it was intended to give the young man time to mature in his studies so that he might properly interpret the book. Apparently "properly interpret" meant to see it as an allegory and not to simply read it literally as a poem on love.

"It is a love-poem. But why such a minne-song in the canon? This question gave rise in the first century, in the Jewish schools, to doubts as to the canonicity of the book. Yet they firmly maintained it; for they presupposed that it was a spiritual and not a secular love-poem. They interpreted it allegorically. The Targum paraphrases it as a picture of the history of Israel from the Exodus to the coming of the Messiah. The bride is the congregation of Israel... But 'Solomon' is an anthropomorphic representation of Jahve Himself. And all the instances of the occurrence of the name, with one exception, are therefore regarded as an indirect allegorical designation of the God of peace" (Franz Delitzsch).

Christian Allegory

Using this interpretation, Solomon is Christ and the Shulamite maiden is the church.

“Origen... stereotyped in the church the interpretation which became traditional. The mutual love between Christ and the Church is the essential datum” (Albert Réville).

“The Song has consequently not only a historico-ethical, but also a typico-mystical meaning... But because Solomon is a type of the spiritual David in his glory, and earthly love a shadow of the heavenly, and the Song a part of sacred history and of canonical Scripture, we will not omit here and there to indicate that the love subsisting between Christ and His church shadows itself forth in it” (Franz Deilitzsch).

“Luther, who detested allegory... could not prevent himself from lapsing into allegory. The Canticle was, according to him, a song of praises where Solomon thanked God for the gracious gift of the obedience of the people” (Albert Réville). “In the Roman Church the allegorical interpretation also preponderates, and the only phenomenon worthy of remark, is that, very quietly, the Virgin Mary is substituted for the Church, under the traits of the betrothed of the Canticle” (Albert Réville).

“Grotius contributed to, a great extent, to confirm the reasoning which so long maintained the allegorical interpretation, after having given rise to it. The Canticle interpreted literally is immoral. If so, there is an immoral book in the Bible. Such a conclusion is impious. It is therefore necessary, if its literal interpretation be immoral, to interpret it allegorically” (Albert Réville).

Literal Interpretation As A Poem

“Others hold the view that the song depicts the efforts of Solomon to woo a country Shepherd-lass from Shunem who is in love with a Shepherd; and that Solomon fails and true love triumphs” (Homer Hailey).

“Upon the modern view the idea of the poem, the triumph of plighted love over the seductions of worldly magnificence, is one of real ethical value” (Driver). “It is the contest between the fidelity which is inspired by true love and the allurements of flattered vanity that the interest of the drama consists” (Albert Réville).

“If interpreted according to the popular idea, that the Canticle was written by Solomon, and that in it he represents himself as a lover and bridegroom, then the book is an endorsement of polygamy, or at least does not rebuke it. Whereas we hold that the Canticle is an implicit condemnation of the polygamous old king, and a paean in praise of virtue and the love of one man to one woman” (Griffis).

“Three principles lead me (Homer Hailey) to accept this view.

1. The Bible is a complete book, and as such it must deal with all aspects of human experience. Mating love is a strong factor in life and unless this poem deals with it, it is omitted from God’s book.
2. The very structure and evidence of the poem.
3. If such a virtuous girl’s marriage to Solomon was the theme, then Solomon’s polygamy would be tacitly endorsed” (Homer Hailey).

Additional Factors Which Support A Literal Interpretation

1. If the poem is an allegory between Christ and the church, why is it never referenced by Christ or by any of His Apostles? Christ often taught by using allegories (His parables) and He and His Apostles referenced the Old Testament writings numerous times, but no reference to this poem, even once. If it is a stand-alone poem addressing romantic love, then there would be no need for Him to reference it, but if it is teaching something so important as His Church and His relationship to it, would He not at least mention it?
2. Interpreting scripture as an allegory should only happen if there can be no literal interpretation, or if the literal interpretation has no apparent meaning or teaching. This poem can easily be read literally and the lessons it teaches are clear, powerful, and much needed for God's people.
3. To interpret the poem as an allegory requires much effort and not a little contortion of images, people, phrases, etc. Over the centuries, there have been many "allegorical interpretations." The Jews, of course, chose not to interpret it as Christ and the Church. They wanted it to apply directly to themselves so they made the images and people fit their allegory. Even in the "Christian Allegory" there are many variations which have led to people becoming so confused (since it is hard to follow all of the symbols), and frustrated, that they are convinced it cannot be understood so they simply do not read it or study it. This is not what God intended.
4. When in doubt, ask "why?" Why was this poem written included in the Holy Scriptures? What makes it unique? What is its central theme? The theme of romantic love shouts from every page. Does it need to be cloaked in an allegory? Or is romantic love between a man and a woman, the central theme that clearly answers our imploring "why?"

THE BEAUTY OF LOVE

Rob Harbison

Praise Of Fidelity

King Solomon had hundreds of wives and concubines, but he was not able to buy real love. With all his being he sought to win the love of a young maiden and induce her to leave her beloved, but failed (SOS 8:7b). He was not himself able to experience true love. But he learned about it from the young maiden.

- “It is the contest between the fidelity which is inspired by true love and the allurements of flattered vanity that the interest of the drama consists” (Reville).
- “The Song does celebrate the dignity and purity of human love. This is a fact which has not always been sufficiently stressed... It comes to us in this world of sin, where lust and passion are on every hand, where fierce temptations assail us and try to turn us aside from the God-given standard of marriage. And it reminds us, in particularly beautiful fashion, how pure and noble pure love is” (Young).

Censure Against Lust

Solomon ignored God’s law forbidding many wives and he suffered dire consequences. The Song Of Solomon was produced a censure against polygamy, lust, and infidelity. The heroin of the Song teaches Solomon the beauty of monogamous love.

Teachings About Love

The Song Of Solomon sets forth the divine model of human love. Life is a rollercoaster of ups and downs, and joy and sorrow. One of the ups and joys of life is love and marriage (Ecclesiastes 9:9). Love and marriage are blessings of God and sexual intimacy is to be enjoyed. Those that pursue sexual relations outside of marriage will be judged (Hebrews 13:4).

- Love is spontaneous (SOS 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). As Solomon discovered, true love cannot be stirred by flattery, compliments, and expensive gifts. True love “just happens”.
- Love is based on mutual satisfaction (SOS 2:16; 6:3; 7:10). The love of the husband supplements the love of the wife, and serves to exclude the love of all others.
- Love is a powerful force (SOS 8:6-7). Love is an unconquerable force; its hold on a person is as strong as the grip of death; it is an unquenchable fire that burns in the heart.

CHRIST IN THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Rob Harbison

Since the scriptures speak of Christ (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39), is there some higher fulfillment of the Song in Christ?

“The book may be regarded as a tacit⁷ parable. The eye of faith, as it beholds this picture of exalted human love, will be reminded of the one Love that is above all earthly and human affections – even the love of the Son of God for lost humanity” (Young).

“But if the Song is primarily a love song, and not an allegory, what reason is there for its inclusion in the sacred Canon? In answer we should say that God has placed this Song in the Canon in order to teach us the purity and sanctity of that estate of marriage which he himself has established. When we read the Song of Solomon, our hearts will be purer, and we shall realize all the more the heinousness of that temptation which would lead to unfaithfulness among those who are married. Since the purpose of the book is not mere entertainment, but is ethical and didactic, we may understand why God has given it to us. For even the faithful servant of the Lord is tempted to break the seventh commandment. In the polygamous ancient world and in the sophisticated modern world, unfaithfulness may easily be regarded as something light and trivial... So long as there is impurity in the world, we need, and need badly, the Song of Solomon” (Young).

⁷ Understood or implied without being stated.

Song Of Solomon

by

David Cambridge