Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 35.2%

Weekly Readings will cover: Song of Solomon 1 through 8
Sunday & Monday: Introduction to the book
Tuesday & Wednesday: Song of Solomon 1 & 2
Thursday & Friday: Song of Solomon 3 & 4
Saturday & Sunday: Song of Solomon 5
Monday & Tuesday: Song of Solomon 6
Wednesday & Thursday: Song of Solomon 7
Friday & Saturday: Song of Solomon 8

Current # of email addresses in the group: 617

Hello everyone,
This next reading covering all of the book of Song of Solomon is a very long and extensive reading week, after organizing it, I realized that it may be too much to cover even a chapter a day due to the extensive write up from the UCG reading program. I would rather cover this over two weeks and allow you to glean from the research versus go through it at a pace that makes everyone either fall behind or have to skim to keep up.
The introduction will only include UCGs introduction for part 1 and about half of part 2 and then also part 11. I will only include the introduction links to Part 2 (for the 2nd half) through part 10 for those interested in spending more time diving into the various interpretations of this book. Additionally, each chapter's UCG writeup is extensive. By allowing two days for each, I'm hoping it's a good pace. I chose to read this reading through the New Living Translation (NLT) for its plain language. The daily commentaries can be a little tough to read, because it bounces between different theories/interpretations that can be confusing if you are not well versed in those various ideas. If you aren't gleaning enough from the commentaries, simply read God's Word.

Website archive location for audio files & PDFs:
https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/posts/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep-dive-reading-program-circa-2022-2025-903711

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 59

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 386 & 387 – SUNDAY & MONDAY: March 10th & 11th

Introduction to Song of Solomon
Daily Deep Dive:

Introduction to the Book:

The UCG reading plan states: “Following the book of Psalms we come to another song within the Writings division of the Old Testament—a rather obscure yet beautiful love song known as the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon. In the arrangement of the Hebrew Bible, this is the fourth book of the Writings, following Psalms, Proverbs and Job. It is the first of the series of five books known as the Megilloth (“Scrolls”)—denoting the festival scrolls (the others being Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther). As such, the Song of Songs was read during the Passover season, eventually fixed in Jewish liturgy to the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. This association may have arisen from the springtime setting of the Song and perhaps something deeper, as Jewish interpreters read it as a historical allegory beginning with the Exodus and ending with the coming of the Messiah, as we will later examine.

Almost immediately, the Song of Solomon turns conventional expectation of scripture reading as staid, religious musing right on its ear, opening after the title in verse 1 with the words “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (verse 2). Is this the Bible or a romance novel? The Song is certainly different from other biblical books. And the surprises keep coming. The early Catholic theologians “Origin and Jerome tell us that the Jews forbade it to be read by any until he was thirty years old” (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, introduction to the Song of Solomon). For maturity was deemed necessary to appropriately handle its apparent focus on sexual intimacy. A hint at perceived early misuse comes from a rebuke by Rabbi Akiva (or Aqiba) around A.D. 100, as recorded in the Tosefta, a supplement to the Jewish Mishnah or Oral Tradition: “Whoever sings the Song of Songs with tremulous voice in a banquet hall and (so) treats it as a sort of ditty has no share in the world to come” (Sanhedrin 12:10).

Akiva held the Song in the highest regard. On the notion of a question about its place in the Bible, he retorted: “God forbid! No man in Israel ever disputed about the Song of Songs, [saying] that it does not render the hands unclean [i.e., that it is not canonical—referring either to the need for ritual cleansing before approaching Scripture scrolls or, as some suggest, to the Scripture scrolls themselves being declared defiling to keep scribes from eating while copying, as crumbs would bring rodent damage]. For all the ages are not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies” (Mishnah, *Yadayim* 3:5, quoted by Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 1990, *Hermeneia Commentaries*, p. 6). Why such a lofty view of love poetry, especially as there is no indisputable reference to God in the book?

This raises the question of the book’s purpose. Why is it in the Bible? That our introduction to it is much longer than that for other biblical books is not uncommon. As T*he New International Commentary on the Old Testament* points out: “It is interesting to note the tendency toward length of Song of Songs commentaries when compared with other books of the Bible. This highlights the importance of the decisions about genre [i.e., what kind of literature the Song is] in the interpretation of individual passages as well as the convoluted history of the interpretation of the book” (Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, 2001, p. 21 footnote).

In many ways the book is an enigma, and interpreters have been all over the map in trying to unravel it. The 10th-century Jewish sage Saadia wrote: “Know, my brother, that you will find great differences in interpretation of the Song of Songs. In truth they differ because the Song of Songs resembles locks to which the keys have been lost” (quoted by Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs*, 1977, *The Anchor Bible*, p. 89). We must be careful to not quickly jump to conclusions as we read the

Song—and hold lightly those opinions about which we cannot be dogmatic.

Title and Authorship—Solomon or Someone Else?

The names Song of Songs and Song of Solomon are both taken from the first verse of the book, which is evidently a superscription, such as that appearing before many psalms. In Hebrew it reads: *Shir haShirim asher l'Shelomoh* (meaning literally "Song [of] the songs, which [is] of Solomon"). In Hebrew Bibles the heading of the book is written simply as *Shir HaShirim*, typically rendered in English as "The Song of Songs." The Latin form of this name is *Canticum Canticorum*, from which derives another popular name for the book, *Canticles* ("Songs"). Some see in the name Song of Songs a general superlative—the best song. Others take it with the rest of verse 1 to mean the best of *Solomon's* songs, as he wrote many others—or Solomon's favorite song. Or this could just mean "A song of the songs of Solomon." Still others see the phrase Song of Songs as signifying a song made up of shorter songs.

The title used in the King James Version and a number of English versions since, probably the most familiar English title, is the Song of Solomon—also derived from the first verse, as stated above. Though the book is traditionally ascribed to Solomon on the basis of this verse, there is dispute over the phrase *l'Shelomoh* or "of Solomon." This can mean "by Solomon," in the sense of authorship, but it could also signify "about Solomon." Countering the latter idea is the fact that the Song does not seem to really be about him—at least primarily. Though he is named in the book seven times symmetrically—twice in the opening section (1:1, 5), three in the middle (3:7, 9, 11) and twice at the end (8:11-12)—and may be the male lover in the story (though there is dispute about that, too), the book really revolves around the female

lead, referred to in Song of Solomon 6:13 as the Shulamite (sometimes written as Shulamith).

As commentator Tom Gledhill points out: "The first voice that we hear in the Song is that of the girl. There is a surprising preponderance of her speech in the Song. Athalya Brenner [in *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative*, 1985, pp. 46-50] has worked out that the female voices constitute 53% of the text, male voices 34%, the chorus 6%, and headings and dubious cases 7%. Certainly the girl bares her emotions much more than the boy. She voices her yearnings, her anxieties, her fears and her delights in a much more colourfully expressive way, and more frequently than her lover does. She is the one who invites him to intimacy, she is the one who so often takes the initiative. As a result, a number of commentators speculate on the possibility of the writer…being a woman" (*The Message of the Song of Songs*, 1994, *The Bible Speaks Today*, p. 93). This is possible, though a thoughtful man intent on portraying the woman's perspective throughout the story of the Song could have written it, especially as inspired of God—as every book of Scripture is (2 Timothy 3:16).

It is conceivable that the phrase "of Solomon" means the Song was of Solomon's court, written by someone else *for* the king. Alternatively, it could mean that the Song was among compositions of others that Solomon compiled as a collector and patron of wisdom poetry—the poet in such case being necessarily a contemporary of the king, given the mention of Solomon in the Song.

Of course, Solomon himself, blessed as he was with wisdom and insight from God, is certainly a viable candidate for having written the book. We are elsewhere told that he wrote 1,005 songs and had extensive knowledge of the natural world (1 Kings 4:32-33), which the author of the Song demonstrates, referring to 21 species of plants, some from

far-flung lands, and 15 species of animals. Furthermore, the poet displays a familiarity with royal luxuries, such as exotic spices, gilded work, alabaster, ivory and jewels, and employs literary styles and motifs from surrounding cultures—particularly Egypt, with which Solomon had close ties—along with a wide and cosmopolitan vocabulary. The structure of the Song, as we will see, is complex and ingenious, pointing to a brilliant and remarkably skilled wordsmith.

Among those who accept the biblical testimony of Solomon as a real historical monarch of the 10th century B.C., rejection of Solomonic authorship typically rests on the grounds of either a supposed late date for the language of the book or the perceived difficulty of a man who amassed a harem of 1,000 women in defiance of God's will (1 Kings 11:1-3) waxing eloquent about the joys of monogamous love. We will consider both these matters in turn.

Date—Early or Late?

Regarding a supposed late date for the book, *The New American Commentary* notes in its introductory comments on the Song: "Some have dated the book very late on the basis of Persian and Greek loan words, Aramaic influence, and certain Hebrew forms alleged to be late. An example is the word for 'palanquin' [or 'carriage,' *appiryon*] (Song of Solomon 3:9), said to be based on a Greek original. The word may in fact not be Greek but a derivative from ancient [Indian] Sanskrit. The Hebrew word for 'orchard' [or 'park,' *pardes*] (Song of Solomon 4:13) is said to be based on a Persian if not a Greek original [the Persian *pairi-daeza* or the Greek *paradeisos*, from which derives our word 'paradise']. Again, however, this approach is misleading since Sanskrit and Assyrian analogies [i.e., linguistic parallels] have been found" (Dr. Duane Garrett, 1993). *The NIV Archaeological Study Bible* adds, "Solomon's commercial projects (see 1 Kings 5; 1 Kings 9:26-28; 1 Kings 10:22) involved numerous international contacts, a possible

explanation for the international vocabulary" (2005, "The Authorship of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs," p. 1021).

The New American Commentary continues: "Alternative interpretations of alleged Grecisms [i.e., words of Greek origin] are also possible. The vocabulary of frequently sung folk music often changes in the course of time, and the Song of Songs may also have experienced such revision. If so, its present vocabulary would provide no reliable information regarding the original date of composition. In addition, some words once thought to have been borrowed *from* Greek now appear to have been borrowed by the Greeks" (pp. 348-349). Regarding editorial revision, the Mishnah says that "Hezekiah and his colleagues [ca. 700 B.C.] wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes" (*Baba Bathra* 15a). With the exception of Isaiah (the prophet being a colleague of Hezekiah), "wrote" here probably refers to scribal and editorial work in scriptural compilation and transmission (compare Proverbs 25:1). And editorial updating of the Song's text could have been done as late as Ezra during the Persian rule of Judea.

Furthermore, commentator Dr. Lloyd Carr remarks: "The so-called 'Aramaisms' in the language do not necessarily indicate a late date. Aramaic became the common language of the Jews after their return from Babylon in the sixth century, but the Aramaic language itself was in use at least as early as the ninth century BC, and probably goes back to the nineteenth century" (*The Song of Solomon*, 1984, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, p. 19). Moreover, Scripture attests that Aram, or ancient Syria, was absorbed into David's empire, which Solomon's inherited.

In short, "linguistic evidence is not conclusive. Attempts to date the book from vocabulary and grammar are inherently weak because of our limited knowledge of the history of the Hebrew language…. Assertions about the history and dialects of Hebrew are tentative, to say the least.

In addition, the possibility that the present text of Song of Songs has been revised complicates further the possibility of dating the text on linguistic grounds" (*NAC*, pp. 349-350).

Yet there is much to support composition in the time of Solomon. As the *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* notes: "It is improbable that both Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs were written during the postexilic period, when Jerusalem was a poor, backwater town among the nations of the world, by no means awash in exotic spices and precious stones. The mention of [the city of] Tirzah in parallel with Jerusalem in Song of Songs 6:4 reflects a period before Tirzah's selection as the early capital of the northern kingdom (c. 930 B.C.) [and before it was eclipsed by Samaria as the northern capital in the early ninth century]. In the tenth century B.C. Tirzah was beautiful and could easily have stood alongside Jerusalem as one of Israel's two grand cities. In the post-exilic period, when many claim the Song was written, Tirzah no longer existed. Also, mention of localities in both the north and south (e.g., Jerusalem, En Gedi, Heshbon, Carmel, Hermon and Lebanon) suggest that the Song preceded the divided kingdom" (p. 1021).

Another "issue in discussions of the date of Song of Songs is the similarity between the biblical book and Egyptian love poetry of ca. 1300-1100 B.C. A number of these poems have been recovered…. These poems are remarkably like Song of Songs. Common formal elements and common literary motifs…strongly indicate that the biblical work was written by someone who was familiar with Egyptian poetry and who lived when the motifs common to both collections were current and appreciated. Indeed, the Song of Songs is most reasonably interpreted as being in the same genre as the Egyptian poetry. This again agrees with the supposition of Solomonic authorship since he would have had sufficient knowledge of Egyptian literature to compose a love song in this style. Members of his court, however, may also have possessed such knowledge. On the other hand, it is difficult to

see how an obscure Jewish songwriter in the Levant, working almost a millennium after this kind of love poetry was produced in Egypt, could have written a work of this type" (*NAC*, p. 350).

The Problem of Solomon's Polygamy

Regarding the undeniable problem of Solomon's abysmal record in his own love life, this in itself, though presenting an incongruity, does not preclude him from having written the Song—just as his flauting of wisdom culminating in his plunge into idolatry does not mean he did not write Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Some tackle the problem by attributing the Song to his early years as king—before he was corrupted through polygamous excess. "The Midrash Rabbah [in its commentary on the Song, dating from before the mid–ninth century A.D.], for instance, talks of the three main contributions of Solomon—Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes—as belonging to three phases of his life, with the explanation that 'when a man is young he composes songs; when he grows older he makes sententious remarks; and when he becomes an old man he speaks of the vanity of things.' Thus, the Song is thought to be composed by Solomon in his youth, not only when his sexual energy was high, but also before his apostasy, which was motivated in large part by illegitimate lust [see 1 Kings 11:1-10]" (Longman, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 3).

A verse that may speak against such a conclusion is Song 6:8: "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines." These are said to praise the woman of the Song (verse 9). Many take this to be a reference to Solomon's harem—before it reached its later extent of 700 wives and 300 concubines. If Solomon already had 140 women when he wrote the Song, then it was well after his descent into debauchery had begun. The problem is compounded in trying to see a polygamous Solomon as the male lover in the story. Some, however, contend that the 60 queens and 80 concubines represent women of the courts of surrounding

nations in non-specific terms (60 and 80 being three score and four score respectively, as in the King James Version)—their praise of the woman of the Song being imagined or occurring during a visit to Jerusalem. If the women here are not Solomon's harem, then a composition early in his reign is certainly possible.

Yet even if the 140 women do represent Solomon's harem, it could still be that he wrote the Song—not likely in the midst of his years of depravity (though some think this) but perhaps, as may be the case with Ecclesiastes, late in life after realizing the worthlessness of life apart from God and His ways. His hard-knocks schooling in the vanity of polygamy could have helped him to appreciate the value of committed monogamy—and might even have impelled him to write the Song to mitigate the damage of his horrible example. Consider the instruction in Ecclesiastes 9:9: "Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun." Still, it is hard to imagine that the Song, as full as it is of youthful vigor and zest for life, was written by Solomon late in his ruined life.

In any case, while interpreting the 140 women to be Solomon's harem would not rule him out as the book's author, it *would* seem to rule him out from being the ideal lover described in it. Nevertheless, a common conception is that Solomon, jaded with his harem—most of his marriages being political—at last for a brief period found true love with a country maiden he married and wrote the Song in celebration in the same period. There are, however, manifold difficulties with this idea. For starters, it ignores the many concubines having nothing to do with political alliances, these collected women being meant instead for physical gratification and as a show of power and prestige. Moreover, it would not have been considered godly or acceptable to cast away or neglect former legitimate wives to shower love and marital privileges

on a new wife. Why would this be a scriptural example of God-approved love and marriage, which the Song appears to portray? On top of that, a polygamous setting is contrary to the exclusivity implied in Song of Solomon 2:16 and Song of Solomon 6:3, the latter stating, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." And furthermore, this scenario presents the sad spectacle of a naïve bride thinking she is something special, the "only one" (Song of Solomon 6:9) and a seal on her husband's heart bound to him in the jealous commitment of love Song of Solomon 8:6), while she pines away among a vast harem of unhappy wives that grows larger every year. Surely that is not what God intended to convey in placing this book in the Bible.

The next section of introductory comments will cover comprehending this difficult book and the unified, poetic framework of the Songs."

A Difficult Book To Comprehend

This brings us to the issue of how we are to understand the Song of Songs. Let it be said up front that this is not a simple matter. Indeed, though short, this may well be the most inscrutable book in the entire Bible. It is hard to know who the characters are, who is speaking (the notes to that regard in modern Bible versions are not in the original), what is being said (translations are sometimes uncertain), what the plot is (if there is a plot), how to interpret the book (whether as precise historical narrative or drama, evocative semi-fictional love poetry, allegorical or typologically prophetic illustration of the relationship between God and Israel or Christ and the Church, or a combination of such perspectives), and just what the underlying message of the book is. Let's consider these issues further.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary states in its introductory comments on the book: "Several problems confront the modern reader in the study of the text of the Song of Songs that make certainty in understanding and interpretation difficult to achieve. One of these is

the matter of language. Ancient Hebrew is a primitive tongue. The syntax is quite different from ours. Verb tenses are different so that time sequences are more difficult to establish. Word order can raise problems. There is an economy of language that can be tantalizing. And then it is poetry. There is a succinctness of style that makes it almost telegraphic. The result is that the text is often more suggestive than delineative, more impressionistic than really pictorial. Much is left to the imagination of the reader rather than spelled out for the curious modern, who wants to know the specific meaning of every detail. Added to the preceding problems is that of vocabulary" (Dr. Dennis Kinlaw, 1990).

Regarding the last item here, Dr. Lloyd Carr (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*) explains: "Although the Song is a relatively short book of only 117 verses, it has an unusually large number of uncommon words. Of the approximately 470 different Hebrew words it contains—a very high number for such a small book—47 occur only in the Song (some only once) and nowhere else in the Old Testament. Of the words which do appear in other parts of the Old Testament, 51 occur five times or less, 45 occur between six and ten times, and an additional 27 between eleven and twenty times, leaving about 300 common words in the Song. There is wide distribution of these [170] less common words. All but eighteen verses scattered through the Song have at least one of these unusual words; several have six or seven such words. Fifty verses contain at least one word not used outside the Song, and an additional twelve verses contain words which occur not more than three times in the whole Old Testament. In other words, more than one third of the words in the Song occur so infrequently [in the Old Testament] that there is little context from which accurate meanings can be deduced, and two thirds of the [Song's] verses have uncommon words. Hence, many of the proposals made in the various translations and commentaries are, at best, educated guesses; particularly in the case of

those words which are unique to the Song, they may well be incorrect" (p. 41).

A further difficulty lies in the Song being full of similes and metaphors. As *Expositor's* goes on to explain: "Another problem is that the imagery used was a normal part of a culture that is very different from our modern world. The scene is pastoral and Middle Eastern. So the references to nature, birds, animals, spices, perfumes, jewelry, and places are not the normal vocabulary of the modern love story. The associations that an ancient culture gives to its vocabulary are difficult, if not impossible, for us to recapture. The list of plants and animals is illustrative: figs, apples, lilies, pomegranates, raisins, wheat, brambles, nuts, cedar, palms, vines, doves, ravens, ewes, sheep, fawns, gazelles, goats, lions, and leopards. So is that of spices and perfumes: oils, saffron, myrrh, nard, cinnamon, henna, frankincense, and aloes. The place names carried connotations some of which are undoubtedly lost to us: Jerusalem, Damascus, Tirzah, En Gedi, Carmel, Sharon, Gilead, Senir, and Heshbon. We understand the overtones of 'bedroom,' but when the lover refers to 'the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside' (Song of Solomon 2:14), to gardens, parks, fields, orchards, vineyards, or valleys, we are aware that the places of rendezvous were different for lovers in that world than in ours.

"The terms of endearment cause us problems. The metaphors used are often alien. When the lover likens his beloved to a mare in the chariot of Pharaoh (Song of Solomon 1:9), we are surprised. 'Darling among the maidens' (Song of Solomon 2:2) or even 'dove' (Song of Solomon 2:14; Song of Solomon 5:2; Song of Solomon 6:9) is understandable, or 'a rose of Sharon' (Song of Solomon 2:1). 'A garden locked up' (Song of Solomon 4:12), 'a sealed fountain' (Song of Solomon 4:12), 'a wall' (Song of Solomon 8:9-10), 'a door' (Song of Solomon 8:9), 'beautiful...as Tirzah' (Song of Solomon 6:4), and 'lovely as Jerusalem' (Song of Solomon 6:4) are not our normal metaphors of love. Nor are our

heroine's references to her lover as 'an apple tree' (Song of Solomon 2:3), 'a gazelle' (Song of Solomon 2:9, Song of Solomon 2:17), 'a young stag' (Song of Solomon 2:9, Song of Solomon 2:17), or 'a cluster of henna' (Song of Solomon 1:14)."

As to who is saying what, *Expositor's* continues: "To further complicate matters, it is not always certain who is speaking. One of the most difficult tasks is to determine who the speaker is in each verse. It is not even completely clear as to how many speakers there are. Our best clues are grammatical. Fortunately, pronominal references in Hebrew commonly reflect gender and number. In some cases, however, the masculine and the feminine forms are the same." Of course, English translations do not show all these grammatical distinctions. The King James Version does not note changes in speakers, which makes it difficult to follow. The New King James Version and many other modern versions do include notations as to who is supposedly speaking, though they may be in error in some cases.

Regarding the characters themselves, there are major questions as to whether there are two lovers (the man and the woman), whether these are Solomon and his bride or another couple, or if there are three principle characters involved in a love triangle, as some maintain (the woman, the man, often seen as a shepherd, and Solomon as the antagonist trying to woo the woman away from the shepherd). Some even think completely different couples are represented in different parts of the Song, the idea being that these segments were originally disconnected poems—an unlikely proposition, as we will see. There is evidently a female chorus singing as the "daughters of Jerusalem"—some deeming them Solomon's harem and others viewing them more generally. And there may be a male chorus as well. We will later examine the possible characters and consider the pros and cons of the various views.

Expositor's further notes: "Nor are we fully comfortable with the literary genre of the whole or the parts. Is Song of Songs a single composition from a common source, or is it a collection of songs that originally circulated independently? Is there a progression of a story line in the material? Is it a drama? All these questions affect interpretation. Some of the text seems to be 'stream of consciousness' material where the dialogue takes place as it might in dreamlike material. Or is it all to be taken as actually occurring in normal consciousness? We do not know enough about Hebrew literature in the second millennium to answer all these questions dogmatically. For this writer the Song does contain an inherent unity that causes him to see it as a body of material from a single source. There is a bit of a story line. In chapter 4 the lover begins to speak of his beloved as his bride. In ten verses (4:8–5:1) he calls her his bride six different times. This is climaxed in Song of Solomon 5:1, which seems clearly to be a euphemistic account of the physical culmination of the relationship. It seems, furthermore, that much of the material represents the world of wonder in the imagination of the maiden rather than actual happenings. Thus a time line on the progress of the relationship is very difficult. But it all fits together to make a whole. The passages starting at Song of Solomon 3:1 and Song of Solomon 5:2 may represent dream sequences. No theory answers all the questions."

I ended this introduction just before the section "Unity & Poetic Framework of the Song". To read the rest of this sections introduction, you can read it here:

https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/bible-commentary-introduction-to-song-of-solomon-part-2

Part 3 through 11 of the introduction dealing with many of the different views and interpretations of the book can be found here:

Part 3:

https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/bible-commentary-introduction-to-song-of-solomon-part-3

Part 4:

https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/bible-commentary-introduction-to-song-of-solomon-part-4

Part 5:

https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/bible-commentary-introduction-to-song-of-solomon-part-5

Part 6:

https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/bible-commentary-introduction-to-song-of-solomon-part-6

Part 7:

https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/bible-commentary-introduction-to-song-of-solomon-part-7

Part 8:

https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/bible-commentary-introduction-to-song-of-solomon-part-8

Part 9:

https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/bible-commentary-introduction-to-song-of-solomon-part-9

Part 10:

https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/bible-commentary-introduction-to-song-of-solomon-part-10

Part 11:

"An Evocative, Entertaining Tutorial in Love

Though some books on practically applying the Song to courtship and marriage can be helpful (see the bibliography), *The New International Commentary* properly notes: "In much recent writing, the Song has been correctly understood as love poetry but incorrectly used in order to promote specific dating or sexual practices. It is important to remember that the Song is not a dating guide or a sex manual. It is not a 'how-to' book, but rather poetry intent on evoking a mood more than making mandates to the reader concerning specific types of behavior. Nonetheless, the Song's passionate and intimate descriptions of sensual touch may serve the purpose of freeing married couples to experiment and experience a physical relationship they wrongly thought proscribed by their Christian commitment" (p. 60).

The evocative nature of the Song is in some ways like that of watching a good romance movie. Frankly, such a movie wouldn't be very good if all it did was quote maxims and principles about how to love. It would certainly have poor entertainment value—but consider that it would also have poor educational value in teaching the principles of love. For there would be no feelings engendered and no illustration through dialogue of how love is supposed to operate—how those in love are to interact.

Like a great romantic movie or play or love song of modern times, the Song of Songs is in a certain sense entertainment. Dr. Fox gives such an assessment: "To call the Song 'entertainment' is not to trivialize it. Great music has been composed and great literature written to serve no social or religious function other than entertaining audiences. It is possible to entertain people by arousing finely nuanced and complex emotions, engaging their intellects, conveying new insights, and promulgating significant ideas [—all of which are present in the Song]. Still, we should not exaggerate the gravity of the Song's aims. It is full of fun, erotic allusions, sensual word-paintings of the lovers and their worlds, and heart-warming sentiments. It diverts the mind from everyday cares by inviting the audience to share the fresh, sensuous world of the young lovers and their erotic adventures" (p. 247).

He has a point here. While there is certainly instructive value in the Song, the more we press the point of its instructional nature, the less we experience its intended enjoyment. Those who would stress the Song as a deep theological treatise—whether on human or divine love—are really missing the boat. For consider your own marriage if you are married or have been—or what you want married life to be if you are still single. Can you imagine romance and lovemaking to be some solemn, weighty endeavor? That is not the goal by any means. And if it becomes that, you will never experience romance.

Certainly the Song has instructive messages for us—but one of the main ones is to impress upon us that marital love and sexual relations are good and wholesome and intense and, yes, enjoyable. Is it right in studying the Bible that you could be entertained? Think on this: Is it right in the sacred duty of love to your spouse that you could derive enjoyment? These factors go hand in hand. That is why we must be careful, as Fox properly notes, to not exaggerate the gravity of the Song's aims. It has been placed in Scripture to make us *feel* good about

sex in a marital context—countering Satan's attempts to make us feel dirty about it.

On the other hand, the point is not to merely be entertained by reading of amatory encounters. The marital context is important, as is the emotional side of sexuality. Murphy points out: "What this poetry celebrates is not eroticism for its own sake, and certainly not ribaldry or promiscuous sex, but rather the desires of an individual woman and man to enjoy the bond of mutual possession (Song of Solomon 2:16; Song of Solomon 6:3; Song of Solomon 7:10…). It is all the more striking, therefore, that even when nuptial motifs come into view (Song of Solomon 3:11; Song of Solomon 4:8–5:1) no reference is made to the important familial 'business' of Israelite marriage—contractual arrangements, dowries, child-bearing, inheritance, and the like. The poetry allows us to suppose that these are matters for others to attend to and on other occasions. For the moment we, as audience, are invited by the poet to appreciate the qualities of tenderness, joy, sensual intimacy, reciprocal longing and mutual esteem, all of which are socially desirable and beautifully mysterious dimensions of human sexual love" (pp. 97-98).

There is, of course, a focus on physical pleasure within the relationship but not exclusively. And this is handled in rather delicate, picturesque language. As Murphy observes: "Although the poetry is explicitly erotic in its appreciation of sexual love, it never becomes prurient or pornographic. What the poet depicts for us so vividly are the emotions of love, not clinical acts of love-making" (p. 102). Often points of sensuality are conveyed through "shades of meaning that attach to certain words or actions. This may be termed double entendre in the best sense of the term. The language of love is precisely that by its very nature. But it is important to preserve the double entendre, and not destroy it by a clinical translation or paraphrase" (p. 102 footnote). This is a wise prescription.

The main focus of the book is not so much on sexual acts as it is on romance. Indeed, this is what people need to be taught. For once the goodness of marital sex is established, as it needs to be and is in the Song, jumping into sexual acts is all too easy. Commitment and romance, though, don't come as naturally. In presenting some lessons and concepts that may be derived from the book, *The New American Commentary* says this first: "Song of Songs is not stark eroticism but is indeed a highly romantic book. The point is so obvious from the imagery and language of the book that it might be thought hardly worth mentioning, but it is often ignored. Note that the lovers speak to and of each other frequently and in great detail. They relish their pleasure in each other not only with physical action but with carefully composed words. Love is, above all, a matter of the mind and heart and should be declared. The lesson for the reader is that he or she needs to speak often and openly of his or her joy in the beloved, the spouse. This is, for many lovers, a far more embarrassing revelation of the self than anything that is done with the body. But it is precisely here that the biblical ideal of love is present—in the uniting of the bodies and hearts of the husband and wife in a bond that is as strong as death. Many homes would be happier if men and women would simply speak of their love for one another a little more often" (p. 379). This is certainly valid, although we should remember that the Song is poetry, which in itself demands carefully composed words. Still, a little poetry in love never hurts!

Another point to take away from the Song is that of monogamous marriage as the only acceptable context for sex. We earlier noted reasons to understand the couple in the Song as being married in at least the passages concerning sexual intimacy—such as the mentions of "spouse" or "bride" in chapter 4. *The New American Commentary* here adds: "It is hard to imagine anything more likely to blemish the romantic yearnings of the lovers for each other than the notion that they may have an 'open relationship.' 'I belong to my lover and his

desire is for me' (Song of Solomon 7:10) [or 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine' (Song of Solomon 6:3), as was noted earlier], if it means anything at all, means that the two belong to each other exclusively. More than that, as demonstrated previously, there is adequate evidence to assert that the theme of the Song is the love felt between a man and a woman as they approach and experience their wedding. The ideal of marriage, exclusive love, is everywhere present. [As was also noted previously, exclusivity would seem to rule out a polygamous setting for the Song.] In the same way, the text speaks against other forms of sexual behavior (homosexuality, etc.) not by decree but by example. The Song of Songs portrays how the sexual longings of man and woman ought to be fulfilled" (p. 379).

The Song, then, teaches the beauty, excitement and delight in exclusive, monogamous, heterosexual love—as God intended. In the words of Roland Murphy: "Human sexual fulfillment, fervently sought and consummated in reciprocal love between woman and man: Yes, that is what the Song of Songs is about, in its literal sense and theologically relevant meaning. We may rejoice that Scripture includes such an explicit view among its varied witnesses to divine providence" (p. 103).

Illuminating the Relationship Ideal—Both Human and Divine

"But," Murphy then asks, as we should too, "does the marvelous theological insight that the Song opens up have broader significance?… Having reappropriated the literal meaning [after centuries of wildly errant allegorical imaginings], can we still give any credence to those who have heard the poetry speak eloquently…of divine-human covenant as well as male-female sexual partnership, of spiritual as well as physical rapture?…. [For in] scriptural expression is the recognition that human love and divine love mirror each other" (pp. 103-104).

Indeed, even if we reject the Song as being an allegory or extensive typological representation of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church, that still does not rule out some typology and *application* of the Song to Christ and the Church. After all, human marriage is but a type of that higher marriage. So if we have a Song in Scripture that applies to ideal human marriage, it is natural to assume that it would apply—in at least some respects—to the perfect divine marriage relationship and the spiritual courtship and betrothal leading up to it. And such application would not be mere coincidence, but part of God's overall intent to begin with.

Lloyd Carr quotes Reformed theologian John Murray, who stated this thought well: "I cannot now endorse the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon. I think the vagaries of interpretation given in terms of the allegorical principle indicate that there are no well-defined hermeneutical canons [i.e., interpretive rules] to guide us in determining the precise meaning and application if we adopt the allegorical view. However, I also think that in terms of the biblical analogy the Song could be used to *illustrate* the relation of Christ to His church. The marriage bond is used in Scripture as a pattern of Christ and the church. If the Song portrays marital love and relationship on the highest levels of exercise and devotion, then surely it may be used to exemplify what is transcendently true in the bond that exists between Christ and the church. One would have to avoid a great deal of the arbitrary and indeed fanciful interpretations to which the allegorical view leads and which it would demand" (pp. 23-24, from *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland,* March 1983, p. 52).

Gledhill concurs while raising a caution noted earlier: "There is…considerable biblical evidence to show that the human marriage relationship can be used as a vehicle to illustrate spiritual realities. Although no New Testament writer quotes or uses the Song of Songs in this way, many commentators have felt that they have sufficient

biblical precedent to pursue a spiritual interpretation. It is argued with some justification that reflection on human love and intimacy leads inevitably to reflection on the ways of God with humankind. Thus various commentators have seen in the relationship of the two lovers in the Song an illustration of the relationship between God and Israel, or between Christ and the church, or between God and the individual believer. The many differing behaviour patterns of the lovers have been used as illustrations of the spiritual walk of the believer: the desire for and the consolations of intimacy, the articulation of praise, the pain of absence, the clouding of fellowship, the restoration of communion and so on. But we must be rather careful in our use of such analogies. For the believer's relationship with Christ is never at an erotic level. The language used may be that of love, but it must be remembered that whilst God is eternal spirit, we are earthly bodily creatures. To speak of rapture and consummation and so on uses the vocabulary of love, but the metaphysical relationship between the believer and Christ is at an entirely different level from that between two lovers. To confuse the two types of relationship can lead to heretical notions and spiritual disaster" (p. 33).

There do indeed seem to be parallels between the relationship development in the Song and that of Christ and the Church—in the wooing, the romance, the longing, the tenderness, the commitment, the anxiety, the wedding, even the sublime joy of intimacy and consummation in a general sense. Paul, as we saw earlier, even compared becoming one flesh in sexual union to becoming one spirit with the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:16-17). Again, however, we must not press the analogy too far in eroticizing the Christ-Church relationship, for that is not the point here. Yet it would certainly help all of us in our walk with Christ to think of our relationship with Him as an intimate "romance" of sorts. Consider all the musing, daydreaming, thoughtfulness, caring, time together and incessant communicating

that is involved in human romance. How much more ought these things to be involved in the higher romance?

As we understand human courtship and the marriage relationship to typify our relationship with Christ, so the Song of Songs, which celebrates marital love, can contribute in some respects to how we live out our affectionate spiritual romance with Him. In this regard, perhaps one lesson of the intimacy in the Song is that we need to be very receptive, yielding, and responsive to Jesus Christ's wooing, initiatives, influence and leadership as He comes into our hearts and minds through the Holy Spirit. Another lesson would be, as Gledhill pointed out, to articulate praise—to say great things about Jesus Christ, both in prayer as we speak to Him (along with the Father) and as we speak to others about Him.

None of this is to say that such a use for the Song was Solomon's (or another human author's) intent at all. Yet this is God's intent with any good marriage—so it would seem to be with this story of one in His Bible as well (perhaps even particularly).

The New International Commentary sums up this issue well: "Earlier we criticized an allegorical approach to the Song that read a theological meaning onto the surface of the book, and in its place we argued support for the idea that the Song is…[intended to] celebrate and caution concerning human love. However, we now come full circle in order to affirm the legitimacy of a theological reading of the book. Read within the context of the canon, the Song has a clear and obvious relevance to the divine-human relationship. After all, throughout the Bible God's relationship to humankind is likened to a marriage…. The allegorical approach was not wrong in insisting that we read the Song as relevant to our relationship to God. The more we understand about marriage, the more we understand about our relationship with God. More than any other human relationship marriage reflects the divine-

human relationship…. The allegorical approach erred in two ways, however. First, allegorists suppressed the human love dimension of the Song, and, second, they pressed the details in arbitrary ways in order to elicit specific theological meaning from the text…. As with any metaphor, the reader must observe a proper reticence in terms of pressing the analogy. Nonetheless, from the Song we learn about the emotional intensity, intimacy, and exclusivity of our relationship with the God of the universe" (pp. 67, 70).

Still, as valuable and helpful as this aspect of understanding the Song is, we must not concentrate on it so much that we lose sight of the Song's obvious intent to glorify physical, human love and marriage. Gledhill properly states regarding his own commentary: "In this exposition, the main emphasis is on the natural interpretation of the Song as a warm, positive celebration of human love and sexuality in the context of marriage. I do not pretend that this exhausts the meaning of the Song, but I do maintain that this is its primary emphasis" (p. 33). And indeed, this should also be our focus.

Glickman sets up the book well: "The lovers of the Song help us see not just what our partners should *be* like, but what our relationships should *feel* like: the role of emotion, longing, and sexual attraction; the foundation of friendship, respect, and commitment; the experience of intimacy, certainty, and forgiveness. The lovers put flesh and blood on these words in their unforgettable romance. Love broke through, and the artist captured it! Whether viewed simply as great art or great art that rises to the level of sacred art, the Song of Solomon is a love song for all time. It can touch our hearts, awaken our deepest longings, and provide ideals to guide us. Ideals like the stars in the sky, by which we, like mariners of the sea, may set our course" (p. 14).

With all this as background, we are now better prepared to read through this most remarkable and mysterious book of Scripture, the

Song of Songs. You will observe that our comments on the reading sections of the book, though a bit long in themselves in some parts, are relatively short compared to our lengthy introduction. Yet it is best that we have sufficiently examined the important interpretive issues up front, instead of getting bogged down with them in going through the Song. Before getting into the book, we first offer some resource recommendations to those interested in further individual study." [END]

Day 388 & 389 – TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY: March 12th & 13th

Song of Solomon 1 & 2

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: "Introductory Note

First, if you have not read the Beyond Today Bible Commentary's introduction to the Song of Solomon, we highly recommend that you read that to start with to better understand this verse-by-verse commentary. Second, realize that we at times mention proposed interpretations that cannot be correct because they are in conflict with God's teachings in other parts of the Bible. These are presented so that you will be aware of them--particularly if you pursue further study of the Song in other resources. Wherever those erroneous interpretations are mentioned, we hope our disagreement with them is clear.

"Your Love Is Better Than Wine"

1:1: After the title in Song of Solomon 1:1 (explained in our introduction), the Song opens in Song of Solomon 1:2 with words of the woman--the Shulamite (though she is not so named until Song of Solomon 6:13). Expressing sensuous desire for the man, it is she who broaches the issue of physical love in the song. We are being told here and throughout the Song that female sexuality is good--in contrast to the repression various cultures have imposed.

1:2: That the woman is speaking of the man in Song of Solomon 1:2 is understood from the use of "him" and "his" and the "your" being masculine singular in the original Hebrew. And in most modern Bible versions, the speaker (or singer, recalling that this is a song) is noted prior to the actual text translation. Realize, however, while reading through the book that the notations as to who is speaking do not appear in the original Hebrew text. As the New King James Version margin notes on 1:2: "The speaker and audience are identified according to the number, gender, and person of the Hebrew words. Occasionally the identity is not certain"--though context can help. Discerning the identity of the man in different passages of the Song--whether speaking or being addressed--depends on whether the Song is viewed as a two-character or three-character progression (i.e., the shepherd hypothesis). As you have no doubt noticed, we are taking no position in our comments on the identity of the man the Shulamite loves--whether Solomon, a shepherd or a generic husband--as the matter is uncertain and highly debatable, as explained in our introduction.

Regarding the notations as to who is speaking, it is certainly easier to read a translation that includes these (unlike the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible, which do not). However, it must be borne in mind that these notations are not always necessarily correct. We should also note differences in these notations in different Bible versions, which can cause confusion. For instance, observe that the NKJV uses "The Shulamite" for the woman and "The Beloved" for the man--the latter based on the woman's repeated references to the man as *dodi,* which the NKJV translates as "my beloved" (the chorus referring to him in response to the woman as "your beloved"). In the New International Version speaker notations, however, "Beloved" refers to the *woman,* while the man is referred to as "Lover" (the latter being consistent with the NIV translating *dodi* in the Song lyrics as "my lover"). The woman is labeled "Beloved" in the NIV because she is the

object of the love of the male lover. In Hebrew, the man refers to her as *ra'yati,* which the NKJV renders as "my love." More precisely, though, as this word is related to *re'eh,* meaning "friend," it denotes "dear/darling companion." The NIV actually translates *ra'yati* in the Song lyrics as "my darling," so it is inconsistent in using "Beloved" as a distinction for the woman in its speaker notations--though it is not completely inaccurate, given the broad meaning of "love" in English. The NKJV's designation of the chorus as "The Daughters of Jerusalem" is taken from that label as explicitly found in the Song's lyrics. The NIV's use of "Friends" is more of an assumption.

Some have seen in the shift from "his" to "your" in verse 2 a change in speaker or addressee--and others have seen an error in need of text emendation to make these the same. Neither of these notions is valid. As Dr. Lloyd Carr (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries,* No. 17) notes: "Some commentators have argued that the first colon, which is in 3rd person forms, is a statement of the beloved to her friends (4b), and the second colon, in 2nd person masculine forms, is the response of those friends to the lover. This necessitates a shift of speakers again in v. 3 when the beloved [woman] addresses her lover directly. Such a series of shifts is possible but very awkward, and with no compelling need. The shift from *kiss me* to *his mouth* to *your love* appears awkward to us, but such a sequence of shifting pronouns is a common phenomenon in biblical poetry (*e.g.* Amos 4:1; Micah 7:19; *cf.* Song of Solomon 4:2; Song of Solomon 6:6), and is also known in Phoenician and Ugaritic. Similar shifts are evident in some of the Sumerian Sacred Marriage texts" (*The Song of Solomon,* 1984, p. 72, note on 1:2). Commentator Roland Murphy concurs: "Such shifts (enallage) are well attested in Hebrew poetry (e.g., Psalm 23:1-3, Psalm 23:4-6), and elsewhere in the Song (Song of Solomon 1:4; Song of Solomon 2:4, etc.)" (*The Song of Songs,* 1990, *Hermeneia Commentaries,* p. 125, footnote on 1:2).

The word translated "love" in verse 2 is *dodim,* the plural form of *dod,* the word used for the lover in the Song. "Loves" here evidently connotes loving acts. The Hebrew plural is used in Proverbs 7:18 and Ezekiel 23:17 to refer to physical lovemaking. Coupling this with the fact that the woman expresses knowledge of the man's "loves" in Song of Solomon 1:2, many argue that they have already been sexually intimate with one another prior to the start of the Song. But the matter is not so cut and dried. For just as the English term love can denote sex (as in lovemaking) yet also apply more broadly, so can the Hebrew term *dodim.* Consider that the name David (Hebrew *Dwd*, "Beloved") is derived from this word--as is the second name of Solomon in 2 Samuel 12:24-25, Jedidiah (*Y^{e}dyd-Yah,* "Beloved of the Eternal"). The word can also apply to a close relative, such as an uncle (see 1 Samuel 14:50). Clearly there is no sexual connotation in these uses. So perhaps the plural form in Song of Solomon 1:2 should just be understood as "affections." Some translate the word here as "caresses," yet this creates a problem in verse 4, where a multiplicity of women say they will celebrate the man's *dodim.* Thus "affections" or "loving acts" (in a general sense) would probably be better. Yet even if "caresses" is intended, this, as with "affections" and "loving acts," would not imply that the man and woman have already consummated their relationship at this point.

Yet a loving relationship with strong sexual attraction does already exist at this point, as is clear from the woman's desire to be passionately kissed. This is a problem for those who view chapter 1 of the Song as the initial meeting of the woman and her love or the mere beginning of their courtship. Things have clearly progressed beyond that at the very commencement of the Song.

The woman desires the man's kisses and affections more than wine with its delectable taste, celebratory use and intoxicating effects. The man says basically the same of the woman later in Song of Solomon

4:10. A parallel is found in the love songs of Egypt, where love's effect are compared to those of the favorite drink there, beer. Number 23 in the Cairo Love Songs collection says: "I embrace her, and her arms open wide, I am like a man in Punt [a place scholars today identify with Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan or Yemen that was conceived of as a mystical wonderland], like someone overwhelmed with drugs. I kiss her, her lips open, and I am drunk without a beer" (in William Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt,* 1973, pp. 310-311-this passage is renumbered as 20F and 20G by Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs,* 1985, p. 33).

1:3: Song of Solomon 1:3 contains some wordplay in the Hebrew, given the alliteration in the words for "fragrance" (*rayak*) and "poured forth" (*turak*) and the similarity between the words for "ointment" (i.e., "oil" or "perfume"- *shemen*) and "name" (*shem*). Some interpreters, especially those who understand the opening chapters of the Song as a manual for courtship, take "name" here in its sense of reputation and character--as to say that we should only be interested in someone as a future spouse who has a reputation for good character. Yet, while that is certainly true in any case, it may be a stretch to say that this is the point of verse 3--which seems merely to say (in parallel to affections as wine in the previous verse) that just the mention or thought of the man's name is to the woman's mind like sweet perfume is to the nose. It is just a joy to think about him.

There is an issue of reputation here, though, in that the man, as noted at the end of verse 3, is evidently known among the "virgins" for his loving tenderness-prompting their statement about remembering his "loves" later in verse 4. The shepherd hypothesis typically labels these young women as members of Solomon's harem who have experienced his "loves" firsthand. Yet the impression from the word translated "virgins" is that these are young, unmarried women. It may simply be,

then, that they have witnessed some of his loving affections toward the woman of the Song and desire the same for themselves.

1:4: In Song of Solomon 1:4 the New King James Version notes a shift in speakers that is probably unwarranted. It shows "Draw me away!" as the words of the Shulamite and "We will run after you" ("you" here being masculine singular, thus the man) as the words of the daughters of Jerusalem. The Hebrew order of these words is "Draw me / after you / we will run." The NKJV has taken the first slash here as a sentence break, so that "After you we will run" is an intrusion by the chorus. Yet other translators, probably correctly, take the second slash to be the break--so that the woman is saying to the man, "Draw me after you; let us run together!" (compare NIV, NASB), in which case there is no choral intrusion.

The next sentence in verse 4, "The king has brought me into his chambers" in the NKJV, could also be "Let the king bring me into his chambers" (NIV). Those who follow the shepherd hypothesis and accept the first translation here see it either as the Shulamite speaking of being inducted into Solomon's harem against her will or another harem girl speaking of having been taken into Solomon's bedroom. Those who follow the shepherd hypothesis and accept the second translation see it as another harem girl expressing her desire to be taken into the king's bedroom.

Many who adhere to a two-character progression accept the second translation and see the woman longing to be taken into her lover's bedroom--on condition of an impending marriage it is typically assumed. (The lover here is deemed by many two-character advocates to be Solomon, yet others see the lover as merely extolled as "king" in the woman's eyes even though he is not one literally.) Others, accepting the first translation, see "chambers" here as a general word for quarters or rooms, and simply take this to be a visit to the lover's

home--or to Solomon's royal chambers in his palace, including his audience hall, if he is the lover. Some who accept the first translation take this to mean that the woman has been taken into the bridal chamber with her lover because the two have just wedded. And a few would say that the woman is Abishag the Shunammite, having been taken into King *David's* bedroom as his nursemaid and to keep him warm, though she longs to be with her lover, whether Solomon or a shepherd.

The NKJV is correct in ascribing the next two lines in verse 4 to the women of the chorus. They first say to the Shulamite, "We will be glad and rejoice in you"--the "you" in this line being feminine singular. Many view the women here as other members of Solomon's harem. Yet we have noted in our introduction the difficulty of such a view if the two-character progression is embraced. The statement itself is difficult if attributed to harem women, whether a two-character or three-character progression is accepted. As James Burton points out in *The Believer's Commentary* (a.k.a. *Coffman's Commentary*), "Such love in a king's harem for a new member of his seraglio seems to this writer totally contrary to the mutual hatred among the women, such as that which we have always understood to be characteristic of such godless places" (1993, p. 157, note on verse 4). Thus he deems the sentiments expressed here as feigned.

Yet if the daughters of Jerusalem are here representative of the woman's friends or attendants or the young women of Jerusalem generally, the sentiments could well be genuine. Or perhaps the meaning is that they are, in a sense, living vicariously through her--imagining her experience to be their own. That could explain the statement that is then made to the man, which we noted earlier: "We will remember your love [*dodim,* affections] more than wine," the "your" here being masculine singular. ("More than wine" clearly recalls the woman's own words in verse 2.) However, Dr. Craig Glickman

in *Solomon's Song of Love* notes that the word translated "remember" here literally means "cause to be remembered" and translates it as "celebrate" (2004, p. 191)--indicating that through their singing they will perpetuate this love story for all time. Indeed, both of the statements here in the middle of verse 4 could simply be a general approval of the two lovers of the Song and their story placed into the mouths of a chorus by the Song's composer.

After the women speak of remembering or celebrating the man's loves, the Shulamite responds at the end of verse 4, "Rightly do they love you"--"you" here being masculine singular.

1:5-6: In Song of Solomon 1:5-6, the woman addresses the daughters of Jerusalem about her dark skin as a result of her working outside in the sun. (Some adherents of the shepherd hypothesis think this is the first appearance of the Shulamite at the court of Solomon. Yet it seems far more likely that earlier speech in the Song should be attributed to her.) Based on the woman's statement to the Jerusalem girls, it is not clear whether they have shown her actual disdain or whether she self-consciously imagines that they do. In any case, it is evident that being tanned in that society was not a mark of high-class beauty but of the low station of being a field hand. In her case, her brothers ("mother's sons" being an indication that her father must have died) sent her out to be a vineyard keeper--for which reason she did not keep her "own vineyard," meaning her own person and appearance. Some take her vineyard here to represent her sexuality, in parallel with "gardens" later in the Song, and consider that her brothers were angry with her because she had not remained a virgin. Yet there is nothing to indicate such an interpretation at this point in the Song. That she is speaking of her appearance is clear.

1:7: In Song of Solomon 1:7 the woman addresses her beloved. Some see this as a private soliloquy, speaking to him in her thoughts since he

is not actually there. Others contend that he is present and she is speaking to him directly, seeking to arrange a midday meeting with him. She wants to know "where you feed *your flock,* where you make *it* rest at noon." The italicized words here represent words not actually in the Hebrew text. They are interpolated. The fact that the word for "feed" (*ra'ah*) often means "tend" or "pasture" along with the actual mention of "flocks" at the end of the verse is thought to imply the interpolation here. The shepherd work of the lover is of course a major basis of the shepherd hypothesis, which sees the lover as a different person than the king in the story. This also fits with the alternative two-character progression, which sees the lover not as Solomon but represented as both shepherd and king. Yet, as noted in the introduction, it is possible to conceive of Solomon in a shepherding role as king--among other possibilities. In any case, some see the initial absence of the word *flock* to indicate a double entendre--that the woman is asking her lover where he himself grazes (either where he will eat lunch, so she can meet him for a picnic, to which verse 12 might refer, or, as is more commonly assumed, where he will feed on her own graces, whether figuratively deriving sustenance from the good things about her or kissing her, the latter seeming to be indicated later in the Song, as we will see) and where he will, as her personal shepherd, lead her to lie down at noon (not necessarily in a sexual sense). Where can they rest and be romantic together? Some think the intention is for sexual relations, which if so would mean this is no mere courtship or even engagement period--as that is permissible only in marriage (and that includes the sexual foreplay of necking and petting). Yet she may intend merely stretching out on the grass during a picnic lunch to look up at the clouds and talk about life and their future, possibly with cuddling, light caressing and restrained kissing within the context of an engagement. In any event, she wants him to tell her where to find him so that she doesn't appear as a veiled woman--that is, a prostitute (compare Genesis 38:12-15)--while she is searching about for him among his friends with whom he works.

1:8: It is unclear who is speaking in Song of Solomon 1:8. Some contend that the woman's lover is answering her, as she just spoke to him. His answer is seen as a playful one, as it does not alleviate her concern of having to look for him and the appearance that may give. Many, however, feel that the lover is not actually present, and they therefore believe that the daughters of Jerusalem, addressed previously, have overhead the woman's soliloquy and respond to her. Some view their response as sarcastic, essentially telling her that she might as well go back to life on the farm. Those who believe the daughters of Jerusalem are speaking in verse 8 note that the woman is referred to here as "fairest among women"-which is the same way the daughters of Jerusalem refer to her in Song of Solomon 5:9 and Song of Solomon 6:1. Yet others argue that they in these other verses have adopted this designation from the man's use of it in Song of Solomon 1:8 (mockingly, some would say).

1:9-10: Song of Solomon 1:9 (and Song of Solomon 1:10 probably) is spoken to the woman by a man calling her, for the first time, *ra'yati* ("my darling companion")--the nominative form *ra'ayah* perhaps being seen as a counterpart to the related word *rayah,* meaning "shepherd" (from *ra'ah,* "feed" or "tend") as just used in previous verses. Most would say that the man in this case is the woman's lover, who is here praising her--perhaps at their prearranged midday meeting--though adherents of the shepherd hypothesis usually contend that King Solomon (whom they view as interloper rather than the lover) is here attempting to seduce the woman in referring to her as his mare among Pharaoh's chariots (i.e., horse-drawn chariots imported from Egypt--see 1 Kings 10:26-29).

Those who see Solomon as a seducer here think there is something dehumanizing in comparing the woman to a horse, a beautifully groomed animal and prized possession. But this is imposing modern sensitivities onto ancient poetry. After all, if the statement was not

flattering, why would a flattering Solomon attempt seduction through it, as is argued? Indeed, "in ancient Arabic poetry, women were sometimes compared to horses as objects of beauty" (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary,* note on verses 9-11). And "the comparison of a beautiful woman to a horse is well known in Greek poetry. Alcman [of Sparta in the seventh century B.C.] compares Hagesichora [a female choir leader] to 'a sturdy thundering horse, a champion'...and Theocritus [court poet of Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt in the third century B.C.] writes of Helen [of Troy]: 'As some...Thracian steed {adorns} the chariot it draws, so rosy Helen adorns Lacedaemon [i.e., Sparta]'.... In [the work of sixth-century-B.C. poet] Anacreon the image is given a distinctly erotic turn: 'Thracian filly...I could fit you deftly with a bridle/ and, holding the reigns, could steer you past the end posts of our course,...you lack a rider with a practiced hand at horsemanship'" (Ariel and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation,* 1995, p. 144, note on verse 9). In any case, the man in the Song is not comparing the woman to a horse per se, but to a horse in a particular sense.

Notes commentator Marvin Pope in his *Anchor Bible* commentary: "A crucial consideration overlooked by commentators is the well-attested fact that Pharaoh's chariots, like other chariotry in antiquity, were not drawn by a mare or mares but by stallions hitched in pairs.... The situation envisaged is illustrated by the famous incident in one of the campaigns of Thutmose III against Qadesh. On his tomb at Thebes, the Egyptian soldier Amenemheb relates how the Prince of Qadesh sent forth a swift mare which entered among the [Egyptian] army. But Amenemheb [pursued and killed the mare]...thus preventing a debacle before the excited stallions could take out after the mare" (*Song of Songs,* 1977, p. 338). Carr concurs: "These factors suggest that the comparison here underscores the girl's attractiveness. A mare loose among the royal stallions would create intense excitement. This is the ultimate in sex appeal!" (p. 83, note on 1:9).

Yet Fox points out that the term for chariots in verse 9 does not necessarily refer to war chariots but could mean chariots for ceremonial pomp and regalia, an idea that may be borne out in the next verse: "Canticles immediately specifies the basis of the comparison, namely the girl's ornamented beauty, not her sexually arousing effect on males" (p. 105). Glickman says, "It is noteworthy that the image [in verse 10] of ornaments on her cheeks and necklaces around her neck is likely a continuation of the metaphor and portrays a mare decorated with jewels, which were common on the bridles of horses" (p. 195). Yet it could be that both comparisons are in view.

1:11: Song of Solomon 1:11 is spoken to the woman, the "you" here being feminine singular. Yet there is a question as to who is speaking. Some think the man is still speaking--and consider that he must be Solomon, whether as the lover or a seducer, given his call for making gold and silver ornaments (the "we" including those who would do the actual work at his behest). It is often argued that this is beyond the means of a shepherd and therefore speaks against the alternative two-character drama in which Solomon and king are figurative references to any lover--though it should be realized that *any lover* would mean the shepherd reference is figurative as well. It may be that the jewelry here is a literal or symbolic reference to betrothal gifts to a woman (see Genesis 24:22, Genesis 24:53). The NKJV ascribes Song 1:11 to the daughters of Jerusalem. This could fit with the shepherd hypothesis as easily as Solomonic attribution does. Or the women speaking could indicate community women manufacturing wedding attire for a bride. Yet it does not seem natural that the women would jump in at this point unless verses 9-10 are not part of a private meeting between the woman and her lover.

1:12-13: Song of Solomon 1:12-13 is properly attributed to the Shulamite, but the setting is of course debated. Some see the passage as a continuation of the midday meeting of the lovers, with the man

referred to as the king, whether Solomon or another man (a shepherd perhaps) figuratively regaled as a king. The king being at his "table" could, combined with the possible outdoor setting of verses 16-17, indicate a picnic as the lovers' noon outing. In the shepherd hypothesis, the notion here is that while King Solomon is off having a meal, the girl is thinking about her absent shepherd lover--or perhaps meeting with him in secret, unbeknownst to the king. Others see the two lovers of the Song joined together here at their engagement feast or wedding banquet. And still others see a sexual implication--that the man is feasting on the charms of the woman, so to speak. Perhaps there is intentional ambiguity here so that the Song on one level applies to a courtship or engagement period but, for a married couple, a double entendre points to a more intimate encounter. Some, it should be noted, see the word rendered "table" here more generally as meaning an "enclosure"--perhaps denoting one of the shepherds' tents of verse 8 or an open spot under the trees, as, again, may be suggested in verses 16-17.

1:13-14: In Song of Solomon 1:13-14, the Shulamite speaks of her beloved as a bundle or pouch of myrrh (using the assonant phrase *zaror hamor*) between her breasts as a perfume or valuable spice over her heart (verse 13). Many see a sexual connotation here, but that is not necessarily the case--or perhaps it is intended this way for a married couple but not for the courtship period. As Dr. Glickman comments: "Occasionally translators and interpreters will render this in a way that it is not a bag of myrrh between her breasts all night, but Solomon [or her lover if not him] lying there. However, the parallelism of verses 13 and 14 make it clear that just as the cluster of henna blossoms [that represent her lover and not her lover himself] are in En Gedi, the pouch of myrrh [representing her lover and not her lover himself] is between her breasts. It is true that the verb 'lies' means to 'spend the night,' and it creates a warm image of the pouch of myrrh 'spending the night between her breasts.' The image personifies the pouch of myrrh and

pictures Shulamith holding it like a young girl would hold on to her pillow, pretending it is her lover" (p. 196). Yet later the lover actually does lie there himself.

The henna shrub in verse 14 ("camphire" in the KJV) was used to produce a copper-colored cosmetic dye, but the fragrance of the blossoms is here in view. Regarding the oasis of En Gedi near the Dead Sea , "archaeological explorations indicate that a significant perfume business was located there (cf. E.M. Blaiklock and R.K. Harrison, edd., *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* {...1983}, p. 180)" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* note on verses 13-14).

1:15-16: In Song of Solomon 1:15 the woman is addressed by the term *ra'yati* ("my darling companion," rendered "my love" in the NKJV). This would seem to be spoken by her beloved--perhaps while they are enjoying their midday outing. Yet shepherd-hypothesis adherents see this as Solomon's intrusion into the woman's inner reverie. The exchange here stretches the credulity of this interpretation. The man in verse 15 twice extols the woman as "fair" or "beautiful" (NIV)--the Hebrew here being *yaphah.* She then in Song of Solomon 1:16 uses the masculine form of the same word, *yapheh,* in addressing her beloved, here translated "handsome" (NKJV, NIV). This most naturally reads as the man telling the woman, "You are beautiful," and her returning the compliment by saying *"You* are beautiful." The shepherd hypothesis has Solomon saying this, while she completely ignores him and says the same thing in her mind to her absent lover. Such a reading is quite unnatural and awkward--and seems rather unlikely. Note also here that the man says the woman has "dove's eyes"--a compliment also used of the woman in Song of Solomon 4:1 and used *by* the woman of her lover in Song of Solomon 5:12. "The common denominator of eyes and doves is their softness and gentleness, and perhaps also the oval shape of both" (Fox, p. 106).

1:17: In the last line of verse 16, the woman says that their bed (or couch, as it could also be rendered) is green. Song of Solomon 1:17, which could still be her speaking though some make it the words of the lover (imagining rapid exchanges here), refers to cedar beams and fir (or cypress or juniper) rafters of their houses (plural). Some think this refers to the luxury of Solomon's palace. Yet others understand the bed or couch of green and tree rafters to refer to an outdoor setting on a bed of grass under the "houses" of overarching tree branches. This fits with the theme permeating the Song of love in the countryside. It is not clear if this is all to be taken literally or comprehended in a figurative sense. Commentator Tom Gledhill says: "The natural backdrop is a literary device. Our lovers are free from the trappings of convention, of society, of civilization, in order to express themselves fully to each other" (*The Message of the Song of Songs,* 1994, *The Bible Speaks Today,* p. 122).

2:1-3: The outdoor perspective continues in Song of Solomon 2:1, where the woman says, "I am a [not 'the' as in the NKJV] rose of Sharon [the coastal plain], a lily of the valleys" (NIV). "Rose" here is typically thought to be a mistranslation: "Crocus, narcissus, iris, daffodil are the usual candidates" (Carr, p. 87, note on 2:1). The word rendered "lily" is often thought to actually denote a lotus, water lily or anemone. Based on the comparison of "lilies" to lips in Song of Solomon 5:13, some "argue for a red or reddish-purple colour for the flower, but no identification is certain" (p. 88, same note). In any case, the woman is referring to herself as a common country flower. Whether she is being self-deprecating or playfully fishing for a compliment, a compliment is what she gets in return, her lover responding in Song of Solomon 2:2 that she is as a lily among thorns--emphasizing her beauty above that of "the daughters" (i.e., women in general or perhaps the daughters of Jerusalem). Again, the notion of the shepherd hypothesis that this is Solomon's seduction here as she ignores him and thinks instead of her absent lover seems quite unlikely. Indeed, her response compliments

her lover in a manner parallel to what was just spoken to her--elevating him in Song of Solomon 2:3 above "the sons" (i.e., men in general or perhaps the sons of Jerusalem).

She refers to her lover here as no common tree--continuing the outdoor imagery, perhaps actually looking at the forest about them--her point here being that he is no common man. Rather, he is a bountiful tree offering shade (protection from the sun for this maiden who had previously been darkened from working outdoors) and yielding delicious fruit. Carr notes: "The *apple* tree to which the lover is compared is not certainly identifiable. Most versions translate the Hebrew word [*tappuah*] as *apple* (NEB *apricot*)....The [intended] fruit is aromatic (Song of Solomon 7:8), with a sweet taste. In Joel [1:12], it is one of the important agricultural trees associated with the vine, pomegranate and date-palm.... The apricot, although not native to Palestine, was grown there from Old Testament times and may have been introduced early enough to be the fruit in question. Although there is no clear evidence that the apple was cultivated in the ancient Near East, and the Proverbs passage [25:11] speaks of 'apples' of gold, any of the aromatic, sweet, globe-shaped fruits, including the apple...may be what is described here" (p. 89, note on Song of Solomon 2:3).

"Apples" here were evidently associated with love and sensual passion--along with raisin cakes in verse 5. Indeed, such an association in the ancient Middle East is apparent from the pagan sacred marriage texts of Sumer (Pope, pp. 371-372, note on verse 3a), though this should not be taken to imply any sort of pagan association in the Song. The usage here could merely illustrate the common folkloric conception of these foods as aphrodisiacs. On the other hand, the association of apples and raisin cakes with love in the Song may merely be based on the idea that both these foods and love offer sweetness and sensual pleasure. An awakening--perhaps a sexual one (compare Song of Solomon 4:16)--is

later said to have taken place "under the apple tree" (Song of Solomon 8:5), this imagery being symmetrically arranged opposite the passage we are now reading in chapter 2. Interestingly, as Pope points out, the titles of two relatively recent songs indicate that the concept of the apple tree as a sensual place of romance has continued down to the present time: "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree" and "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" ("with anyone else but me," as the latter song continues). Many see the woman's tasting of the man's fruit in verse 3 to imply amatory relations, but that is not necessarily the case. Perhaps the words were carefully chosen so that various layers of meaning can be found here. On one level, it might just mean experiencing the man's goodness (compare Psalm 34:8). On a more sensual level, for an engaged couple for instance, Song of Solomon 2:3 may denote an experience of restrained kissing. And for a married couple it could signify more. That there is a need for restraint here may be implied by the woman's charge to the daughters of Jerusalem in verse 7--though whether this need applies to the woman herself is unclear.

2:4: In Song of Solomon 2:4, the woman again speaks yet no longer addressing her beloved directly. More likely she is either musing privately or speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem, as in verse 7 (in which case verses 4-7 would be addressed to them). She says her lover has brought her to the "banqueting house" and that his "banner" over her is love. "Banqueting house" here is literally "house of wine." "This is the only use of this phrase *(bet hayyayin)* in the Bible, but there are near synonyms, including 'house for the drinking of wine' *(bet misteh hayyayin)* in Esther 7:8 and the 'drinking house' *(bet misteh)* in Jeremiah 16:8 and Ecclesiastes 7:2" (*NICOT,* p. 112, note on Song 2:4). The term in verse 4, then, could indicate a banquet hall or tavern. The word "banner" here translates the Hebrew word *degel,* the same term apparently used in Numbers 1:52 for a tribal standard or flag. Armies flew such standards for identification purposes (the apparent basis of the imagery in Song of Solomon 6:4 and Song of Solomon 6:10).

Perhaps what we have here, as some suggest, is a public proclamation of the man's love for the woman at a feast or party. Some even take it to refer to an engagement party, where a shared cup of wine sealed the betrothal. Others take the wording here to mean a full wedding feast--and see the couple as already married here. Alternatively, some view the house of wine here in more figurative terms since wine has already been compared to loving affections in 1:2 and 1:4. They see the house of wine as merely the place the lovers share affections together, perhaps the same outdoor setting we've already noted. Some even contend that full lovemaking is in mind, though there is no statement to that effect. Of course, if that is meant then the couple would necessarily be married already. Additionally, it should be noted that the translation "banner" is rejected by some who see the term in the Hebrew text here as coming from the Akkadian word *diglu,* meaning "intention" (though "banner" seems more likely, given the other Song references). Either way, an intention is declared, whether privately or publicly.

2:5: In Song of Solomon 2:5, most Bible versions describe the woman making a request for sustenance and refreshment with raisin cakes and apples. (The foods here could be literal or, as noted above, figurative of sensual enjoyment--particularly as the "apples" denote the fruit of her beloved in verse 3.) It should be noted, though, that the word translated "sustain" in verse 5 more broadly means "support" (as in having something to lean on) and the word translated "refresh" is elsewhere used to mean "stretch out" or "spread." So some interpreters understand the woman here asking to be laid out on a bed of raisin cakes and apples. This could imply being sustained by these but it may also imply a wish to indulge in sensual relations or thoughts of such. Either way, the point is to deal with her lovesickness.

However, it is not clear to whom the woman addresses her call here--whether she is speaking to someone in particular (her lover, herself or

the daughters of Jerusalem) or is making a general appeal to anyone who can help her. Some see her as pining away in lovesickness over her absent lover. Others see her lover as present and understand her lovesickness here as being worn out from love but wanting more of the same. Fox comments: "Egyptian love songs nos. 6, 12, and 37 describe the symptoms of love-sickness, in particular weakness and loss of control over the body (nos. 6, 37). There (as in 5:8) the love-sickness is caused by the beloved's absence. Here his presence causes much the same symptoms" (p. 109, note on 2:5). It may even be that she is lovesick because she has stirred up passionate feelings within herself that cannot yet be given full expression, she and her lover being not yet married (which may explain her charge to the daughters of Jerusalem that follows).

2:6: That her lover is actually present seems to be supported by Song of Solomon 2:6. But some say she merely imagines him holding her--or recalls it from times past. Others see a wish: "Oh, may his left hand be under my head and his right hand embrace me" (Glickman, p. 178). Of course, this is possible even if she was with him only moments before. That is, she wishes the experience would not end. Yet it could be that a period of separation is indicated by the arrival of the lover in the next section of the Song noting that winter, a time of bleakness and cold, is past (verses 10-13). The words here in verse 6, prior to the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem in verse 7, reappear in Song of Solomon 8:3 prior to the partially repeated charge to the daughters in Song of Solomon 8:4.

2:7: In Song of Solomon 2:7 (as in Song of Solomon 3:5) the woman charges or adjures the daughters of Jerusalem with the use of an oath formula. A group of women ("daughters") is clearly addressed, but for the "you" here, the Hebrew has "the masculine plural form *'etkem,* instead of the expected feminine *'etken*...similarly *ta'iru* ['you stir up'], *te'oreru* ['you awaken']

in this verse" (Bloch, p. 152, note on 2:7). The same is true in the other three charges to the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song (Song of Solomon 3:5; Song of Solomon 5:8; Song of Solomon 8:4). The masculine plural form could designate a mixed group of men and women, but usually not one exclusively female. It may be pertinent that in the book of Ruth, Naomi uses the masculine plural of her daughters-in-law in giving them a parting blessing from God (Song of Solomon 1:9). Perhaps the formality in these cases allows or calls for this usage.

The particular oath formulation in Song of Solomon 2:7 and Song of Solomon 3:5 seems rather odd. For instead of invoking God, as would be expected, the oath is taken "by the gazelles or by the does of the field." As pointed out in the introduction, there seems to be a deliberate avoidance of mentioning God in the Song--the intent perhaps being to reveal Him more subtly. In this case, we may have an allusion to Him. The quoted phrase above appears in Hebrew as *bisba'ot ’o b^{e}’aylot hassadeh.* This is thought by several commentators to be substituted, based on commonality of sound, for *b^{e}[YHWH] s^{e}ba’ot ’o b^{e}’el (ha)saddai,* meaning "by [the Eternal of] Hosts or by God (the) Almighty." This is possible, and God is implied in any case since the oath is taken by His creatures in nature. Beautiful, graceful, lively and free, these creatures are also representative of human lovers. The man in the Song is compared to a leaping gazelle immediately afterward in Song of Solomon 2:8-9, and a wife is compared to a graceful doe in Proverbs 5:19. The joy of true love between lovers is, like the creatures representing them, ultimately the work of God through creation--thus providing a basis for the oath formula here. It is also conceivable that gazelles and deer were familiar illustrations of sexuality in ancient Near Eastern culture (which may be why pagans used them as love goddess emblems)--so that speaking of these creatures together may have been similar to what we mean today by "the birds and bees." The oath then would be by love and sexuality generally, which, again, is the handiwork of God.

The Greek Septuagint, it should be noted, interprets the phrase in question here as meaning "By the powers [substituting for 'hosts'] and by the virtues of the field," which is perhaps possible (though cryptic as well). In context, however, the mention of gazelle and stag immediately afterward in Song of Solomon 2:8-9 shows that gazelles and does were likely intended here.

At the end of Song of Solomon 2:7 (and in Song of Solomon 3:5 and similarly in Song of Solomon 8:4) we have the substance of the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem: "Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases." In Song 2:7 and 3:5, the "not" and "nor" is translated from the Hebrew *'im.* "While usually meaning 'if,' the particle *'im* is regularly used with a negative sense in oaths, as in 2 Kings 5:16 *hay 'adonay... 'im 'eqqah* 'as the Lord lives, I will not take a thing,' Genesis 14:22-23, Genesis 21:23, 2 Samuel 11:11, etc. The semantic shift from a conditional to a negative meaning may have come about as follows: 'I swear, *if* I were to commit this crime (may such and such an evil come upon me)'→ 'I swear *not* to commit...,' with the negative consequence left unspoken" (Bloch, p. 152, note on Song 2:7).

Some insert the modifier "my" before "love" here (as in the KJV) and think the charge is to not disturb the *lover*--and there is disagreement in such case as to whether the woman or the man is charging the daughters. Yet there is no "my" here--the object of awakening being love and not lover--and the woman is clearly the speaker, following on from verse 6. Others, who see the lovers as engaging in sexual union in preceding verses (which would require that they be already married), take the charge to mean that no one should disturb them in their lovemaking until they are satiated. Still others, who see the woman's lover as not actually present, think she is telling her attendants to not disrupt her daydreaming about her lover until she has spent sufficient time in it--or, alternatively, that they not get her worked up about him until she can actually be with him.

Yet other interpreters take the Shulamite to be instructing the other women here (and by extension the audience) in the ways of love. Some think her point is that they should not artificially drum up loving feelings but, rather, let love develop naturally on its own. And still others believe she is telling them--perhaps derived from her own experience--to not let passionate desire be awakened within them until there is an acceptable context, as the phrase "until it pleases" can mean "until it is agreeable." As Dr. Carr words this likely possibility, "Don't start the process of loving exchange until the opportunity and appropriate occasion is present" (p. 95, note on 2:7). Thus the charge would constitute a warning against premarital intimacy and lustful thoughts. Why then not just say, "Wait until you're married"? Perhaps the instruction is broader than that--including not merely the thought that you wait until you're married, but that you not even think about getting married to a potential spouse until you are both ready for that.

The refrain with its charge closes the first major section of the Song.

"Rise Up, My Love, My Fair One, and Come Away"

This second major section of the Song is demarcated by a frame of similar material at both ends--such a segment being defined in literature as an inclusio. "The unit begins with mountains, gazelle, stag, and it ends in chiastic [symmetrical] fashion with gazelle, stag, and mountains" (Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs, Hermeneia Commentaries,* p. 140, note on Song of Solomon 2:8-17). In the opening she describes him as coming to her as a gazelle or stag (verses 8-9), and in the closing she asks him to be as a gazelle or stag (verse 17). These animals symbolize virility and swiftness. The girl in Egyptian love song number 40 also uses a gazelle simile for her lover: "If only you would come to (your) sister swiftly, like a gazelle bounding over the desert" (Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Group B, translated by Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs,* p. 66). The imagery there is somewhat different, however, in that she tells her lover to be

like a panicked gazelle fleeing a pursuing hunter. Of course, her point is that he be swift. Similarly, she also asks that he would come to her as a royal horse (no. 39, p. 66).

2:8-13: The Shulamite, in Song of Solomon 2:8-13, is clearly excited over the arrival of her beloved, as he calls out and looks into the windows (verses 8-9). In verses 10-13, she quotes his invitation to her to come away with him now that winter is past and spring has arrived. There is an inclusio here, too, within the broader one spanning the section, as his invitation opens and closes with the same words (compare verses 10, 13).

The context and timing of the events described in this section of the Song are debated. Advocates of the shepherd hypothesis typically see the shepherd lover as arriving at the harem and peering in. This is thought to follow chronologically after the woman's thoughts about him in the previous section. "Our wall" (verse 9) in this view is seen as her reference to the harem complex wall--his being "behind" it meaning either that he is on the other side or that he has climbed over and is within it. He has come, it is deemed, to rescue her. It should be acknowledged, however, that the idea of a shepherd lad intruding into a heavily guarded royal harem enclosure and peeking about therein to find his lover without being caught seems rather far-fetched. Moreover, there is no indication in the man's invitation that signals anything about escaping the harem. The points made concern the seasonal change--though there is undoubtedly figurative meaning here.

Many advocates of a two-character progression understand this section of the Song to refer to the courtship or engagement period of the lovers. "Our wall" in this view is understood to mean the wall of the house of the woman and her family. Those who view the first section (1:2-2:7) as describing a courtship and engagement period see this second section (verses 8-17) as merely a later episode during the lovers'

courtship or engagement. Others who view the man and woman as already or getting married in the first section typically see this second section as a reflection on the courtship or engagement period. There does seem to be some degree of reflection here, as the woman appears to quote what she recalls her lover having said rather than him saying it himself (see verse 10)--yet it may be that she merely introduces his speech. Other interpreters view the couple as married in this second section--seeing "our wall" as referring to the wall of their shared home and understanding the man to merely be returning after being away for a while.

Commentator Tom Gledhill, who sees a courtship setting here, remarks on the figurative imagery of the man bounding through the countryside and calling the woman out of her home to join him in the explosion of nature in springtime as part of recurrent theme in the Song: "The rural countryside motif is an expression of untrammelled freedom and exhilaration, of energetic enthusiasm and adventure, travelling new and unexplored pathways, taking the risks that a new liberty entails. The domestic scene as a literary motif, on the other hand, represents safety, security, the acceptance of societies norms and conventions. There is the possibility of dullness and decay and of drab conformity. This motif can indicate a prison within which free spirits are confined. The girl is there in her house (*our wall*) together with her mother and brothers. And her lover regards her as being shut in by society. That is why he beckons her so urgently to join him in the wide outdoors, away from the drab darkness of suffocating domesticity, to enjoy the scents of the blossoms, to feel the wind blowing through their hair as they skip hand and hand across the hills....

"The girl....must take the huge risk of abandoning her former undemanding [domestic] securities to throw in her lot with a boy who is as yet a somewhat unknown quantity, and so face an adventure of increasing knowledge and self-knowledge, of expanding horizons, and

of an uncharted future. She must leave the shelter of the patriarchal or matriarchal household, and find a new life of a different footing, a life of mutual exploration and of new delights, to be entered upon with trembling uncertainty....

"There is a strong sense of temporal movement in the poem from the past through the present to the future. The cold winter *rains* of the drab gloomy weather are now completely gone. They are a thing of the past. And now the tiny spring flowers are sparkling forth amongst the new shoots of the undergrowth.... There is a hint of future blessings in the references to the *fig tree* and the *vines* in blossom. The sterile fig of early spring is the precursor of the edible fig which is produced on new growth and matures in the late summer.... The *vines* in blossom are also a harbinger of the luscious grape harvest to follow. So we have a movement from seeming barrenness, to the full flower of fertility, from dark days of the past to the blossoming of new hope in the future. Our lovers are part and parcel of this explosion of new life and new hope" (*The Message of the Song of Songs,* pp. 132-133). Indeed, spring as a picture of love in bloom does seem to signify a blossoming romance.

2:14: The man next makes a second request of the girl in Song of Solomon 2:14, referring to her as his dove in the clefts of the rock and seeking to hear her voice and see her appearance or form (the word *mar'eh* meaning more than just "face"). This, incidentally, is the verse used in our introduction to illustrate chiastic structure: "form...voice...voice...form." The relation of verse 14 to the inclusio of verses 10-13 is not clear. Some advocates of the shepherd hypothesis think the couple has escaped the harem together and that their flight has brought them to literal mountain cliffs. Yet the imagery here is most likely metaphoric--the woman is compared to a dove that won't come out of its hiding place. This may follow right on the heels of verse 13. Gledhill comments: "The boy's eager invitation [to her to come out and enjoy the spring landscape] seems to be left hanging in mid-air.

And so are we, the readers; we are kept in suspense. Is his invitation accepted? Does the girl join him in his flight across the hillside? It is not at all clear. Some have taken the boy's words in Song of Solomon 2:14 to contain an element of mild disappointment because of his girl's inaccessibility. She does not show her face through the lattice, she does not let her voice be heard. Perhaps she is too shy and tentative; perhaps she is teasing him coyly, 'I won't show myself, I won't come out to you. It's up to you to come out and chase me'" (p. 135).

2:15: The next verse, Song of Solomon 2:15, is one of the more enigmatic verses in this enigmatic Song. It calls for catching the little foxes (or jackals, as the word can also mean) that spoil the vines or vineyards. The speaker, addressee and intended meaning of this verse are all debated. The NKJV attributes the statement to the Shulamite's brothers. Some see them speaking here to her-based on consideration of this section as a flashback and the fact that her brothers earlier made her a vineyard keeper (Song of Solomon 1:6). In the context of this second section, the brothers would essentially be interfering in the romance of the lovers. Others see the brothers speaking to the man in a more recent context. And still others think that the woman is speaking to the man. But none of these ideas fit grammatically. "The verb form [of 'catch'] is imperative, masculine plural" (Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon, Tyndale Commentaries,* p. 101 note on verse 15). This refers to who is being addressed. For this reason, some feel the woman or the man is speaking *to* her brothers. That could fit. Yet the masculine plural need not refer to a group that is all men--just one (usually speaking) that is not exclusively women (the exception perhaps being the formal address noted earlier in regard to Song of Solomon 2:7). In Song of Solomon 2:15 it could be, but is probably not, the female chorus being addressed. More likely, the verse could just be an appeal to people in general--to all who hear the plea.

But just what is the point of the plea? It directs hearers to "catch [for] us" these little foxes. Who is the "us," and what are the foxes? It could be the brothers here speaking to both the man and the woman. Yet this would seem to refer to working in their literal vineyards. In line with this, some shepherd-hypothesis advocates see the man and woman, having escaped the harem, as now engaged in literal vineyard work and catching literal foxes. Others, in a more reasonable interpretation, see the "us" here as the man and woman together asking for help from others--friends, family and God perhaps. The help being sought in this view is to root out the problems of life that would tear down and uproot their budding love. Indeed, even beyond this specific interpretation, many see relationship problems as the foxes or jackals here.

Still others view verse 15 as the woman's response to the man's plea to hear her voice in the previous verse. Note that she is the speaker in verse 16 so it is quite reasonable that she would be the speaker in verse 15 as well. Some think she is merely singing a familiar vineyard song in response. This seems unlikely, as it would have no real pertinence to the Song of Songs. Much more likely is the suggestion of some that she is playfully teasing her lover here. In this view, the vineyards symbolize young women and foxes symbolize lustful youths who would steal their fruit--i.e., their virginity. Teasing in such case would be indicated by the reference to *little* foxes or jackals rather than just foxes or jackals. Dr. Fox notes: "The jackal or wolf cub represents a lusty lover in Egyptian songs nos. 4 and 49. In no. 4 the girl calls her lover 'my (little) wolf [or jackal] cub.'.... In [the work of] Theocritus, too [he being the court poet to Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt in the third century B.C.], foxes symbolize lascivious young men and women (Ode I, 48-50, and Ode V, 112), and the theft of grapes represents sexual intercourse, as a scholium [marginal note] to Ode V explains" (p. 114; see also Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs,* 1994, *Continental Commentaries,* pp. 108-110).

As was noted above, the Shulamite was possibly being coy, playing hard to get, in not coming right out when her beloved called her. So when he presses the issue and asks to see and hear her, she teasingly calls out for help to no one in particular. The "us" she is seeking help for would be herself and other young women in general, who are all in danger from such little foxes. Dr. Fox comments: "Her reply is coquettish.... She is gently teasing her lover, 'tending' or 'guarding' the vineyards as she was ordered to do. She is saying: watch out for the little fox out there--his intentions are clear enough!" (p. 114). This should not be seen as accusing him of actual premarital sexual intentions. Rather, it is just play. Perhaps they are already engaged and she is essentially implying with a grin, "I know what you want, but you can't have it yet."

2:16: More than the other possibilities here, this leads naturally into the affirmation of mutual possession in Song of Solomon 2:16 (which implies a serious commitment and perhaps betrothal) and the woman's statement here that her lover grazes among the lilies. The NKJV interpolates "his flock" after "feeds" but there is no actual mention of a flock in the text. It could be implied by the word translated "feeds," but this is not explicit. Indeed, the same Hebrew words are properly translated "feed among the lilies" in 4:5--with no possible implication of flocks since figurative gazelles are the ones that feed (i.e., they are pictured as eating, not feeding others). Some see the lover in 2:16 engaged in actual shepherding work here--or kingly duties if Solomon is the lover. Yet the imagery of routine employment here would seem to be quite contrary to the tenor of the passage as a time of enjoying spring together. Moreover, the mention of "lilies" here suggests a figurative meaning. The woman was earlier referred to as a lily (Song of Solomon 2:1-2). The plural "lilies" is later used by the woman of her lover's lips (Song of Solomon 5:13). Therefore it may be that she is referring to her own lips in 2:16--so that his grazing among the lilies would mean he is kissing her. Some argue for more intimate activity here, requiring that the couple be already married. The words of 2:16

are repeated in a slightly different order in Song of Solomon 6:3. They thus have the quality of a refrain, which may be why she says them in third person (to the audience) rather than to her lover.

2:17: We then come to Song of Solomon 2:17, another enigmatic verse that is the subject of considerable debate. Let's first notice the opening two lines. The NKJV has "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away." The word "breaks" here is literally "breathes." Notes Murphy: "The 'breathing' and the 'fleeing' of the shadows have been interpreted in diametrically opposite ways: the end of the day or the end of the night. In one case the words are understood to mean the afternoon breeze (Genesis 3:8), and the lengthening of shadows, as night approaches. In the other, the reference would be to the morning wind, and the disappearance of darkness, as day dawns" (p. 139, footnote on 2:17). Another difficulty is that the word translated "until" here can also mean "when." Context determines usage, but that is uncertain here. If we look at Song of Solomon 4:6, where both lines beginning 2:17 are repeated, the context is apparently a night of sexual union. However, it is again not clear if the meaning is that this will *commence when* night falls or *continue until* the morning comes. The latter seems more likely if all of chapter 4 is in the same intimate context, but there is disagreement about that too.

There is further confusion as to whether the opening two lines of 2:17 complete the second line of the previous verse (in which case the period should go after "away" instead of "lilies") or if, as punctuated in the NKJV, the two lines introduce a new sentence that concludes at the end of verse 17. Some who take the first view and think the woman's lover in verse 16 is engaged in actual shepherding work (or other employment represented as shepherding) understand the opening two lines of verse 17 to mean that he is either out all day at his job (supposedly in line with Song of Solomon 1:7) or that he is out all night at it (as a shepherd watching his flock by night). Of course, this still

presents a contrary image to the outdoor freedom of togetherness implied in this section of the Song. Others who share the view of the two lines in question as completing the second line of verse 16 but who see that line as a figurative reference to kissing or more intimate relations believe either that the kisses end at evening (implying the couple is not yet married) or that intimate relations continue all night (which would require that the lovers be married). However, the beginning of verse 17 seems more likely to begin a new sentence if the usage is compared with Song of Solomon 4:5-6. Verse 5, like 2:16, ends with "among the lilies." Yet 4:6, which begins just as 2:17, more clearly denotes a new sentence.

Considering the usage in chapter 4, we should also note another way of viewing 2:17. There are some who believe that the "day" referred to here (in the phrase "until [or 'when'] the day breathes") is the awaited wedding day of the couple--and that the verse means either that they are holding off on intimacy *until* then or that the woman is making a request for intimacy *when* it comes. The usage of the same phrase in Song of Solomon 4:6 might seem to go against these possibilities, since in chapter 4 the day of consummation appears to have come--so that it makes no sense that they would, as a parallel, be waiting for a day at that point. Yet some think the man is on the occasion of the wedding night merely quoting the woman's earlier request from 2:17, saying in essence at this later point that it is time for the request to be fulfilled. Dr. Craig Glickman makes the following argument regarding the use of "day" in 2:17: "'Day' occurs five times in the Song, and the other four occurrences are clearly linked to the wedding day and night. In Song of Solomon 3:11 the lyric refers to the 'day of his wedding,...the day of his heart's rejoicing.' In Song of Solomon 4:6 [which we just cited] Solomon [as Glickman understands the woman's husband to be] promises lovemaking until the following 'day.' And in Song of Solomon 8:8 Shulamith's brothers prepare for the 'day on which she is spoken for,' which is likely her wedding day but possibly engagement. It would be

consistent with the artistry of the Song for the first occurrence of 'day' in 2:17 to refer to the wedding day, as well" (*Solomon's Song of Love,* p. 203).

There is yet more dispute as to whether the next line of 2:17, "Turn, my beloved," means, as some think, return or come back to me (implying he has been or will be away), or means, as others believe, turn and go for now (considering that they are presently together) or is, as still others read it, an erotic innuendo, considering the rest of the verse. Some holding the first opinion of a call to return think, in context of the first part of the verse, that the woman is telling her lover either to return to her in the evening after his workday is over or to return in the morning after being out working at night. And some who are of the opposite opinion of a call to go believe she is telling him to leave their joyful togetherness for the day or night to go work at his job, as is necessary. Again, though, a focus on domestic income earning (as necessary as that is) does not seem to fit with the man's invitation to come out and enjoy the blooming of their love in spring. Others believe that since the couple is not yet married, the woman by saying "turn" is sending her beloved away for the night to conclude their affections until the next morning (or until the wedding day in a more fulfilling sense). *The New American Commentary,*though, says the woman's directive to the man to "'turn, be like' does not imply anything about which *direction* he is to turn [either away or toward], only that he is to *be like* a gazelle" (p. 395, footnote on verse 17)--indicating a shift in behavior or approach.

This brings us to the close of verse 17 (and of the section inclusio started in verses 8-9), with the woman telling her lover to be as a gazelle or young stag--now "upon the mountains of Bether." This concluding phrase is highly controversial. It is not clear whether "Bether" is a proper noun or a descriptive term meaning "separation" or "split." Some see it as an actual geographic reference, though this

specific name is not found elsewhere in Scripture. The common candidates are Bithron, a mountain ravine in Jordan (see 2 Samuel 2:29), and Battir (also spelled Beitar or Bittir), Khirbet el-Jehud, six miles southwest of Jerusalem. "Battir lies on the south side of the Rephaim Valley at the beginning of a chain of low-arched mountains; thinly populated in ancient times, the chain stretches toward the south and could easily be seen as the habitat of a significant population of deer or, to a lesser degree, gazelles" (Keel, p. 115, note on Song 2:17c-f). Others see the name as meaning "mountains of divides"--i.e., "mountains of ravines (or hollows)," as the phrase is rendered in the Greek Septuagint translation. Thus the NIV translation "rugged hills." In either of these views, the man is pictured as back on the hills he was skipping and bounding over to come to the woman in verses 8-9.

Other interpreters see the phrase here as signifying "mountains of separation" in the metaphoric sense of dividing the lovers from one another. Those who see the woman telling the man to turn and go in this context understand her to be putting the brakes on their intimacy until they are married--that is, she is asking her lover to maintain a degree of separation until full union is acceptable. Alternatively, those who think she is calling on him to turn and come to her see her telling him at the end of verse 17 to bound over the mountains that separate them--whether for intimacy or just to be with her.

Still other commentators take "mountains of separation" or "divided mountains" ("cleft mountains" or "mountains of cleavage" some render it) as an anatomical reference--to either the woman's breasts or parts south. Support for this view is found in parallel verses in Song of Solomon 4:6 and Song of Solomon 8:14. In 4:6, which we have already cited, after praising the woman's two breasts in verse 5 the man says, "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense." The reference here is often thought to be, like the preceding verse, to the woman's

breasts or, some would argue, lower parts. The concluding verse of the Song, Song of Solomon 8:14, likewise says, "Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices." Clearly these three verses--2:17, 4:6 and 8:14--are closely related, and there is apparently a sexual connotation here. However, it should be noted that some see in the spice mountains not a specific anatomical reference but the man's delight in the woman's sexuality likened to being in a mystical wonderland--like the land of Punt in the Egyptian love songs. So the mountains of Bether in 2:17 could refer to the woman's sexual landscape, so to speak, either specifically or generally. On the other hand, even given the parallel here, mountains of Bether could still signify separation. That is to say, the mountains of spices come later--for now, the lover must abide on the mountains of separation (meaning that though the two may be together, they cannot be sexually intimate together).

Song 2:17 closes the second major section of the book--just as the very similar Song of Solomon 8:14 ends the last section. (The section change here is also obvious from Song of Solomon 3:1 introducing a new scene.)" [END]

Day 390 & 391 – THURSDAY & FRIDAY: March 14th & 15th

Song of Solomon 3 & 4

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: ""I Sought Him, But I Did Not Find Him"

"These verses are to be taken as a unit," says commentator Roland Murphy of Song **3:1-5,** "because they are clearly separate from what precedes (a reminiscence about a past visit) and from what follows (a description of a procession). The lines are certainly spoken by the woman.... The woman evokes an extraordinary scene in vivid language. The fourfold repetition of 'whom my soul loves' (cf. Song of Solomon

1:7), and the repeated emphasis on the theme of seeking/finding bind these verses together" (*The Song of Songs, Hermeneia Commentaries,* p. 146, note on Song of Solomon 3:1-5).

In the imagery here the woman speaks of desperately searching for her beloved at night. Commentator Tom Gledhill notes: "If we try to link Song of Solomon 3:1-5 with the literal scenario of Song of Solomon 2:8-17, then we might suppose that the girl's pre-arranged rendezvous with her lover did not materialize. He did not show up, and she is in great agitation, longing for her absent lover. However, since it is impossible to be certain of any progression in the events lying behind Song of Solomon 2:8-17, it is better to think of Song of Solomon 3:1-5 as an independent unit. Song of Solomon 2:17 represents, at a metaphorical level, a longing for intimacy. Song of Solomon 3:1 shows a similar longing that has not been fulfilled. Unfulfilled dreams and fantasies lead to a desperate fear of isolation and loss" (*The Message of the Song of Songs,* pp. 143-144).

We should note the poetry of the segment in line with the repetition mentioned above. We see her statement that she would "go about the city" (verse 2) paralleled with her then encountering the watchmen who also "go about the city" (verse 3). The phrase "watchmen who go about" is translated from the alliterative Hebrew words *hassomerim hassobebim.* She four times says she *sought* or would *seek* her beloved and twice remarks that she did *not find* him (verses 1-2)--but the watchmen instead *found* her (verse 3). Then, after passing them by, she at last *found* him (verse 4)--making four mentions of finding to match the four mentions of seeking and the four mentions of "him whom my soul loveth" (verses 1-4, KJV). After finding her lover, she won't let him go until she brings him to her mother's house or room (verse 4)--after which she reiterates the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem that ended the first major section of the Song (verse 5; see Song of Solomon 2:7).

What is going on here? Are we to understand this literally? Did she really get out of bed and go searching about the city for her beloved? Are we to understand that her mother's house was in this city? Is this city Jerusalem since the daughters of Jerusalem are addressed? Some do take it all literally. Followers of the bizarre cultic-mythological approach claim that this segment represents the goddess Ishtar's search for her beloved Tammuz in the underworld--a view for which there is zero evidence. (Indeed, those who accept the Bible as the Word of God and the Song of Solomon as part of that Word are right to reject such a notion out of hand--as God would never espouse or sanction idolatrous myth.) Most commentators, though, take this section to be a troubled dream or dreamlike imagining of the woman, and there is much to support this view.

First of all, we should note that the phrase often translated "by night" in Song of Solomon 3:1 is literally "in the nights" (plural). The New English Bible renders it "night after night." So this was evidently a recurring episode--which makes far more sense if the events here took place in her head.

Second, consider carefully the wording of verse 1. Some imagine that the woman is thinking about the man in bed and then rises to go searching for him. Yet verse 1 actually says that she sought her lover while on her bed. This is obviously not speaking of lifting up the sheets. He is nowhere around. Her seeking in bed in verse 1 must refer to her search about the city in verses 2-3--which necessarily puts it all in her mind.

Third, the whole unit here is parallel, in the symmetrical arrangement of the Song, to a very similar sequence in Song of Solmon 5:2-8--complete with the woman searching for her beloved at night, encountering the city watchmen and ending with a charge to the

daughters of Jerusalem--and that sequence is introduced with the statement that the woman is sleeping.

Fourth, it is difficult to imagine a young woman in ancient Israel being free to roam the city streets at night on her own--as women were then rather cloistered. This is especially problematic for those who assume that the girl was Solomon's fiancé or a woman in his harem. And it is most difficult if this was a recurring circumstance, as indicated in verse 1.

Fifth, the woman's expectation that the watchmen would know her love by that distinction seems odd if the storyline here is real. It seems especially odd if her love was Solomon, for why would she not merely inquire as to the whereabouts of the king--and would this even be a mystery?

Sixth, the speed of the action here seems too compressed for an actual event. No details at all are given of the discovery, as she passes the watchmen and immediately runs into her beloved. It reads more like: "Where is he? Where is he? Is he here? Is he there? Have you seen him? Oh, there he is."

Seventh, the conclusion with the adjuration to the daughters of Jerusalem is probably a literary convention as in Song of Solomon 2:7. It is, again, a poetic refrain and a way to communicate something to the audience.

Thus, it seems best to view this section as a dream or dreamlike thoughts. Murphy argues for the latter: "It may be too much to insist that this is a dream. It is more like 'daydreaming' [though at night] than a dream, the fantasy of one who yearns to be with an absent lover. Psychologically, this may be only a slight degree removed from the expression of the unconscious in dream. The description internalizes an

adventure, a quest, which is always going on within the woman when she is apart from the man. In any case, one is dealing with a literary topos [i.e., a figurative geography or setting]: the search for and discovery of the beloved" (p. 145, footnote on verse 5).

It is still left, though, to comprehend the substance of her thoughts. No doubt this section expresses the woman's relationship insecurities--perhaps during the engagement period just prior to the wedding that marks the next section. Some assume that the couple here is already married, this being seen as the reason she is wondering while in bed why her lover is not with her. Yet this is reading something into the passage, for it does not say she is confused about his absence from her bed--merely that she is seeking him in her thoughts while she is on her bed night after night. Gledhill states: "Obviously, the lovers are not married, for it is his continuous unexplained absence that causes her yearning" (p. 144).

The search within the woman's mind nearly turns to panic until she passes the mysterious watchmen. Who are they in this frantic fantasy? Perhaps they are her own sensibilities--the mental and emotional governors of her own mind. Their patrolling and then finding her would seem to indicate that she finally "got a grip on herself," as the expression goes, which is why she was then able to discover her lover immediately afterward. That is, she calmed down and, thinking more rationally, realized exactly where he was in relation (in this case relationship) to her. (The watchmen, it should be noted, play a more negative role in chapter 5.)

The Shulamite determines on finding her lover to bring him straightway to, as she says, "the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me" (Song of Solomon 3:4). What is this all about? Some see it as a general reference to her family home. (Is this in Jerusalem rather than in a country village as has been supposed? There is no way

to know.) In this view, some believe her home is referred to as the house of her mother since her father is nowhere in the picture in the Song, he evidently having died long before (compare Song of Solomon 1:6). Yet others recognize that the mother's house was a more common designation for the home of young women, who were evidently seen as having been reared by their mothers (compare Genesis 24:28; Ruth 1:8). One thought here is that the woman is thinking of her home as the place of greatest security--that bringing the man there will bring him into and keep him within her sphere. Some, by the way, point to this as proof that the couple is as yet unmarried, but in Song of Solomon 8:2 the woman desires to bring the man to her mother's house within a passage that has a sexual context showing they are there married. Thus, the unmarried status of the couple in Song of Solomon 3:1-5 must be based on other criteria.

Some see the woman's family home in Song of Solomon 3:4 as intending a wedding context. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* says: "The Sumerian love songs talk about the 'entry into the bride's house as the first formal act of marriage, after which came the union of the couple'; so [notes] Y[itzhak] Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature* (...1999), pp. 3-5. He further comments....'the groom is the one who goes or is brought to the house of the bride's parents. By contrast, we find only one example in which the lover brings his beloved bride to his home, and it does not belong to the marriage ceremony'...p. 104" (p. 129, footnote on Song of Solomon 3:1-5; p. 131 footnote on verse 4). In this perspective, the woman sees marriage as the only resolution to the anxiety of separation she has been going through. The visit to the mother's house, though, would not be actual yet--only part of the woman's imagining. Incidentally, some point to Isaac bringing Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent as a possible parallel here (Genesis 24:67)--but in that case the *man's* mother's dwelling is in view and the circumstance appears to be a special one of Rebekah literally and figurative filling an empty

space left by Sarah, who had died. Anyway, a wedding context is possible in Song of Solomon 3:4 if the desire for visiting the mother's house in Song of Solomon 8:2 can have a different meaning.

In a possible parallel, it is worthy of note that in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins, the groom is pictured showing up near the bride's residence late in the night before their wedding (Matthew 25:1-13)--which seems to indicate that this was established custom in Jesus' day. Maybe the idea in Song of Solomon 3:1-5 is that the woman wants to get this process rolling right away. And how interesting it is that verses 6-11 then appear to describe a wedding. We will note more about this in conjunction with our next reading.

Some commentators see the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem in Song of Solomon 3:5 as an implication that the visit to the mother's house in verse 4 is for the purpose of physical relations--seeing this as parallel to Song of Solomon 8:2 followed by a similar charge to the daughters in Song of Solomon 8:4. And the contention among some is that Song of Solomon 3:4 concerns the woman's intention to have premarital sex. *The New American Commentary* counters: "It is difficult to see her taking her boyfriend to her mother's house for a sexual liaison (v. 4). A woman was taken into the man's household at marriage. This is not to be understood as outside of marriage since taking the man to her parents' home for that purpose would be unthinkable in Israelite society" (p. 396, note on Song of Solomon 3:1-5).

Of course, this may cause us to wonder why this would be the chosen site for sexual union after marriage in Song of Solomon 8:2. Likewise we may wonder why mention is made of not just the mother's house but of her "chamber" or room--her bedroom, as it is specified to be the place where the woman was conceived. Different answers are offered. *The New International Commentary* says, "It is the place of the

previous generation's romantic liaison and thus an indirect way to indicate that the woman's intention is to make love" (note on 3:4). Yet the same commentary also presents the suggestion that some other commentators make here--that the reference is anatomical. As *The New American Commentary* says: "The mother's house, 'the room of the one who conceived me,' must represent the idea of the womb. This is the room in which all are conceived" (p. 399, same note). Gledhill concurs: "'The house of my mother' could be translated more exactly as 'my mother-house,' with the possessive 'my' qualifying the compound unit 'mother-house.' Then 'mother-house' could literally be the chamber where motherhood becomes a reality, that is, her womb" (p. 145). The idea would be that she is determined to have sexual union with the man--which implies marriage (rather than premarital relations, as some argue). A problem with this identification is that in specifying the womb of the one who conceived her, the Shulamite would be referring to her mother's womb rather than her own. Yet it is possible that she is implying "the same chamber within me as that wherein I was conceived within my mother." If that is valid, which is by no means clear, then the identification with her mother could perhaps be a recognition that her mother before her went through the same turmoil and resolution that she is going through--which could be a source of strength to her in that she is dealing with a common experience. It should be recognized, though, that being born of one's mother is a theme elsewhere in the Song (see Song of Solomon 6:9; Song of Solomon 8:5). This would seem to impact the meaning in Song of Solomon 3:4, yet the usage here could be a double entendre. (Even in Song of Solomon 8:5, the meaning seems to refer to being reborn through the awakening of love.)

In any case, whether the mother's room is a geographical or anatomical location, there does appear to be a sexual and marital context to the man being brought here at the end of 3:4. And though he is not truly brought here yet, as all is still in the woman's head--the process of

feelings here recurring often over multiple nights--the conjugal thoughts are likely what prompt the repetition of the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem (representing all young women) in verse 5. Don't stir up or awaken love with its physical desires and expression until the time and occasion is right, she is apparently saying. Wait until you find the right person--and wait until you are married to each other.

"Drink, Yes, Drink Deeply, O Beloved Ones!"

3:6a: The previous unit having concluded with the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem (Song of Solomon 3:5), this one begins with a question: "Who is this coming out of the wilderness...?" (3:6a). A grand processional is then described of Solomon's couch surrounded by 60 swordsmen--which seems to be part of the pageantry of a royal wedding (see verses 6-11), though some disagree, as we will point out below. The KJV "espousals" in verse 11 refers to "wedding," as most translations render the word here.

Some contend that this passage represents Solomon's arrival at the home of the Shulamite or his return to Jerusalem. But it is more likely the *woman's* arrival in Jerusalem. The pronoun translated "this" in the above quotation of verse 6 is feminine. Some pair this with the word for "couch" (verse 7), which is a feminine noun, and translate the beginning of verse 6 as *"What* is this...?" Yet "who" seems more likely, given parallels elsewhere in the book. Song of Solomon 6:10 asks, "Who is she [same pronoun] who looks forth as the morning?"--referring, as is clear from the context, to the Shulamite. And the strongest parallel is to be found in Song of Solomon 8:5. Song of Solomon 3:6 and 8:5 each begin a new unit, the preceding section of both ending with the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem (Song of Solomon 3:5; Song of Solomon 8:4). Like Song 3:6, Song 8:5 asks, "Who is this coming up from the wilderness...?" Again, the reference is clearly to the Shulamite. This would suggest very strongly that the reference in 3:6 is also to her. It thus appears that she is being transported on Solomon's couch--having

been fetched from her home and now being brought, many believe, to her wedding with the king in verse 11.

Many understand King Solomon here to be a literal reference, and that may well be. Yet others, as explained in our introduction, see the designation as a symbolic one for a typical groom. *The New American Commentary,* for instance, states: "The groom of the Song is no more literally Solomon than he is literally a gazelle or apple tree. Solomon is the royal figure par excellence and is a symbol for the glory that belongs to any groom" (note on Song of Solomon 3:7-11). Some even postulate that this segment of the Song was lifted from another song or account of one of the real King Solomon's weddings--yet now employed in the Song of Songs in a figurative sense. There is, however, no actual evidence of this.

Who is singing the lyrics of verses 6-11? The NKJV labels these verses as the words of the Shulamite. Yet if she is referred to in verse 6, as seems probable, this makes little sense. It would likewise not seem to be her lover singing if he is synonymous with Solomon or the groom here. For this reason some attribute verses 6-11 to the chorus of the Song, generally equated with "the daughters of Jerusalem." Yet the daughters are told to go forth in verse 11, so they would not appear to be singing either. Some, therefore, argue that the female chorus sings verses 6-10 and that the Shulamite sings verse 11, telling the women to go out and behold Solomon. But it seems odd that they would ask about the Shulamite coming from the wilderness if she is already present to speak with them. Because of this, some postulate a male chorus here that sings all of verses 6-11 or at least verse 11 in an exchange with the women. This is a reasonable resolution. The possible exchanges would be: (1) women sing verse 6 and men sing verses 7-11; (2) women sing verses 6-10 and men sing verse 11; (3) women sing verses 6-8 and men sing verses 9-11; (4) women sing verse 6, men sing verses 7-8, women sing verses 9-10 and men sing verse 11.

3:6b-7a: Let's note a few specifics in this passage. Some tie the "pillars of smoke" in context of coming up from the wilderness (3:6b) to Israel being led through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud and fire. There may be a parallel and metaphor here--with the couple "inheriting the Promised Land" of marriage after a period of trial and test with dark nights of separation (this perhaps even having spiritual parallels). Yet the word for pillars here, *timarot,* "is not the common word *'ammud* used elsewhere for the pillar of cloud and fire that guided the Israelites in the wilderness" (Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon, Tyndale Commentaries,* p. 108, note on Song of Solomon 3:6). Others see the columns of smoke here as a reference to the dust kicked up by the arriving caravan. However, it should be noted that the following word translated "perfumed with," though used in a passive form only here, "occurs elsewhere about 115 times with the meaning 'go up in smoke' or 'make (a sacrifice) go up in smoke" (same note). Thus the columns of smoke evidently denote clouds of spice and fragrant powders mentioned in the same context ("all the merchant's fragrant powders" means all those that money can buy). The fragrant clouds may be rising from the woman and her attendants or from the traveling couch--the carriage, litter or sedan chair--in which the woman sits (3:7a). Perhaps the spices and powders are being burned as incense, thus causing the smoke.

3:7b-8: The guards of this litter are armed, prepared for any threat (Song of Solomon 3:7-8)--a wise precaution for the road of that time yet perhaps also simply a customary honor for the bride. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* makes the following point in this regard: "The lesson is valid for today for a would-be husband. He should give proper thought and planning to protect his bride. One form this takes is providing economic security for her" (note on verses 7-8).

3:9-10: We then see what is translated as Solomon's "palanquin" (meaning a portable enclosed chair) in Song of Solomon 3:9-10. Some

take this to be the same as the couch or litter of verse 7, now described in further detail. Yet others see this as a different mobile chair--with the bride in the litter of verse 7 and the groom (Solomon or another represented by him) in this palanquin of verse 9. Still others would argue that the word in verse 9 is wrongly translated as palanquin--that it should be understood not as a *mobile* chair but as a *fixed* canopied seat or throne on which the groom awaits his bride.

Support for the seat in verse 9 being a fixed structure may possibly be found in the 19th-century Syrian-Arab village wedding customs noted by German consul J.G. Wetzstein, mentioned in our introduction. These customs perhaps hearken back to biblical times. Wetzstein observed them at the open-air threshing floor: "The newly married...appear as king and queen....The bride's-men come, fetch the thrashing-table ('corn-drag') from the straw storehouse...and erect a scaffolding on the thrashing-floor, with the table above it, which is spread with a variegated carpet, and with two ostrich-feather cushions studded with gold, which is the seat of honour...for the king and queen during the seven days" (Franz Delitzsch, "Commentary on the Song of Songs," Appendix: "Remarks on the Song by Dr. J.G. Wetzstein," Kiel & Delitzch, *Commentary on the Old Testament,* Vol. 6, p. 618).

3:11: Continuing in Song 3, the "crown with which his mother crowned him" (Song of Solomon 3:11) is not the literal royal crown of Solomon, as he was crowned king by the high priest (see 1 Kings 1:32-48; 2 Kings 11:11-20). Some suggest a garland, laurel wreath or other wedding headdress--whether for Solomon, if he is intended here, or a groom Solomon is emblematic for. Dr. Carr notes: "According to the rabbinic materials, 'a bridegroom is compared to a king' and until the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70, 'crowns' were worn by ordinary brides and bridegrooms [Pirke deRabbi Eliezer, ch. 16, and Babylonian Talmud, *Sota* 49a]" (p. 113, note and footnote on Song 3:11).

The *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* expands on this, giving the full wedding picture from biblical times: "A passage from the Babylonian Talmud tells us that at a Jewish wedding in the early Christian era a groom would wear a ceremonial crown and receive his bride, who would make her entrance at the wedding party in a sedan chair. This event may explain the description in Song of Songs 3:6-11; it would appear that the bride was riding in such a sedan chair (NIV, 'carriage'), accompanied by an honor guard.... The bride's entourage also included a musical procession (Psalm 45:14; 1 Mc 9:37-39). The groom was attired in festive headdress (Song of Solomon 3:11; Isaiah 61:10), and the bride was adorned in embroidered garments and jewelry (Psalm 45:13-14; Isaiah 49:18; Isaiah 61:10). A veil completed the virgin bride's costume, which may partly explain the success of Laban's ruse of substituting Leah for Rachel on Jacob's wedding night (Genesis 29:23; Song of Solomon 4:1 [though some reject "veil" as a translation here]). Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) describes the arrival of the groom during the night prior to a wedding. He was attended by male companions, one of whom would serve as his best man (Judges 14:20; John 3:29). Upon his arrival the groom's family would host a feast (Matthew 22:2; John 2:9). Putting the evidence together, it appears that the groom with his companions would traditionally arrive at the ceremonial house first, during the night, to be received by a group of young women. Early the next day the friends of the groom would go out to bring back the bride, who would arrive in a sedan chair with the groom's friends as her symbolic honor guard. The marriage would be consummated on the first night of a banquet celebration typically lasting for seven days (Genesis 29:27; Judges 14:12). The bridal couple would seal their union in a bridal chamber (Psalm 19:5; Joel 2:16), and the blood-stained nuptial sheet would be saved by the bride's parents as proof of her prior virginity (Deuteronomy 22:17)" ("Weddings in Ancient Israel," p. 1039).

All of this makes a compelling case for Song of Solomon 3:6-11 portraying a wedding--and that it is a wedding between the woman of the Song and one referred to as Solomon (whether literally King Solomon or another groom regaled as King Solomon). This is especially so when we look at what follows in 4:1-5:1, which is evidently still part of the same unit. Here we have six mentions of "spouse" (verses 8-12; Song of Solomon 5:1) or "bride" (NIV). With no use of "spouse" prior and all of a sudden six times in 10 verses after what appears to be a wedding, surely this is no coincidence.

We also have possible references to a wedding veil (Song of Solomon 4:1, Song of Solomon 4:3). The King James or Authorized Version (AV) translates the word here as "locks" but most modern versions have "veil." Carr notes: *"Veil* (Heb. *samma*) occurs in the Old Testament only at Song of Solomon 4:1, Song of Solomon 4:3; Song of Solomon 6:7, and Isaiah 47:2.... AV *locks* may be based on the Arabic *sm,* 'hair,' but the Hebrew is more probably closer to the Aramaic *s^{e}mam,* 'to veil.' The introduction of the veil at this point in the Song underscores the marriage aspect. Normally girls and women wore head-dresses but not veils, except for special occasions. Engagements (Genesis 24:65) and the actual wedding celebration (Genesis 29:23-25) were two of these occasions" (p. 114, note on Song of Solomon 4:1). However the use in Song of Solomon 6:7 could perhaps belie that. Indeed, a good case can be made from Isaiah for "hair," as pointed out by Ariel and Chana Bloch (*The Song of Songs,* pp. 38, 166, note on 4:1). In Isaiah 47:2 the phrase *galli sammatek* ("remove your veil," NKJV) is parallel to *galli soq* ("uncover the thigh," NKJV). Since *galli* can only mean "uncover" in the latter phrase, it would seem to mean the same in the former phrase. Yet a woman would not uncover her *veil.* Instead, she would uncover her *hair.* Thus the KJV rendering, "uncover thy locks"--though this would be accomplished through removing her veil. Still, not enough is known about the Hebrew word to make translation certain.

We will further examine 4:1-5:1 momentarily. Let us first, however, consider the explanations proposed for the events here in the shepherd hypothesis or three-character drama. Some who are of this opinion contend that the processional in Song of Solomon 3:6-11 represents not a wedding, but Solomon's arrival at the home of the woman to seduce her with his power and grandeur so as to bring her back after her escape from his harem-the seduction occurring in the first part of chapter 4 it is usually asserted (which we will see more about shortly). In this view, the directive in Song of Solomon 3:11 to the daughters of Jerusalem (harem girls, it is presumed, who have traveled with him) is to see Solomon with the crown he received on his wedding day--not that his wedding day is at hand. The idea is that Solomon is wearing this crown now to impress the Shulamite. But it seems quite odd that he would wear a crown from a prior wedding, perhaps only a garland or laurel branch, outside of a wedding context. And we have already seen that the woman is most likely in the procession herself, based on parallel verses in the Song.

Accepting her presence in the procession, some shepherd-hypothesis adherents argue that the depiction is of the Shulamite being brought to Jerusalem by Solomon and his men--or by just his men, with Solomon waiting in Jerusalem--after his men recaptured her. Recognizing a wedding here, some think the king is pressing the Shulamite into marriage with him. Yet, as Delitzsch counters, "The seduction fable is shattered...with the joyful consent of the queen-mother" (p. 549, note on verse 11). Acknowledging this, other shepherd-hypothesis advocates see Solomon marrying another woman here--yet while still trying to win over the Shulamite in the lines that follow in the opening of chapter 4.

It must be admitted that the idea of King Solomon getting married at almost any given time is by no means far-fetched. After all, he did end up with 700 royal wives, and for each there was probably an official

weeklong wedding festival. Consider that 700 weeks of weddings means that more than 13 years of Solomon's 40-year reign was taken up with wedding feasts! Throw in preparation time before each and time for Solomon's 300 concubines besides (one for almost every day of the year) and the staggering magnitude of Solomon's folly on just a physical level (not to mention the spiritual one) looms into view. If we account for Solomon not multiplying wives in his early faithful years and probably less frequently in his final years (particularly if he repented at that time), then the middle years of concentrated marrying must have been almost completely filled with wedding festivity. Yet would this not make such festivity a mere everyday, even monotonous routine for the king? Why would a random wedding in the midst of all this be called in verse 11 "the day of the gladness of his heart"? It could perhaps be argued that a wedding was merely called such-not that this was actually a blissful experience for Solomon. But, we then ask, why would his mother Bathsheba still be crowning him through all this endless parade of nuptial absurdity? It seems so very unlikely.

Again, it appears far more reasonable that the Shulamite is happily marrying Solomon in the king's early years before he started multiplying wives--or alternatively that King Solomon here is not the literal monarch but a figurative distinction for an Israelite groom (both of these being variations of the two-character progression).

4:1-7: Following the first subsection of the current unit (Song of Solomon 3:6-11), we then move into chapter 4. The first part, Song of Solomon 4:1-7 (the second subsection of the current unit), is typically understood as a *wasf,* the Arabic term for a poem of descriptive praise of a person's physical attributes in an itemized fashion. As Wetzstein observed, such was sung in the Syrian Arab wedding tradition--again, perhaps passed down from biblical times. The *wasf* here forms an inclusio--beginning with the double declaration of "You are fair" (verse 1) or "beautiful" (NIV) and ending, after detailing the woman's features,

with "You are *all* fair..." (verse 7). Some take this *wasf* and the rest of chapter 4 as a distinct unit without context. Yet the preceding scene in 3:6-11 appears to provide a context--so that 3:6-5:1 logically forms a single unit of three subsections. If the first subsection represents the wedding procession of the man and woman of the Song in a two-character progression, then 4:1-5:1 most naturally appears to immediately follow it in one of three ways: (1) 4:1-5:1 is the wedding night; (2) 4:1-7 is during the wedding celebration and 4:8-5:1 is the wedding night; (3) 4:1-7 follows the wedding but is before the wedding night and 4:8-5:1 is the wedding night.

Followers of the shepherd hypothesis typically see Song of Solomon 4:1-6 or verses 1-7 as Solomon's attempt to seduce the Shulamite in Jerusalem as part of, as noted, a forced marriage or just after he has married another woman. Some who include verse 8 as part of Solomon's seduction see the setting in the north rather than in Jerusalem, the assumption being that Lebanon in this verse is the woman's homeland. This corresponds with the belief that the procession of Song of Solomon 3:6-11 proceeds to the woman's country home--yet we've already seen the weaknesses of that notion. And Lebanon is likely a figurative reference, as we will see (though it could possibly designate her home in that sense). Moreover, including Song of Solomon 4:8 with verses 1-7 hurts the poetic construction here, verses 1-7 being an inclusio (which also creates a problem for those who put the break between verses 6 and 7). Also, verse 8 refers to the woman as "spouse" or "bride" (NIV)--putting it with the other five uses of the term in the verses that follow (and it seems odd that Solomon as seducer would be using this term for the woman). Verses 9-15 are generally acknowledged to be the words of the woman's true love--even by shepherd-hypothesis adherents--as the woman accepts the speaker as her beloved in verse 16 and then he embraces her invitation to enter her "garden" in Song of Solomon 5:1.

In identifying the man speaking in the first part of chapter 4, we should note correspondences with other verses in the Song. Observe that the first three lines of verse 1 about the woman being fair (beautiful) and having dove's eyes are repeated from Song of Solomon 1:15. Both occurrences of the statement are surely to be attributed to the same man. Shepherd-hypothesis advocates typically view both occurrences as a lustful Solomon's flattering seduction, while adherents of a two-character progression see the woman's lover (whether Solomon or another) speaking in genuine love and admiration.

The imagery of the woman's hair as a flock of goats, her teeth as a flock of sheep, her "temples" (as typically translated) as a piece of pomegranate, her neck like a tower and her breasts like gazelle fawns (Song of Solomon 4:1-5) is all repeated later (Song of Solomon 6:5-7; Song of Solomon 7:3-4). Again, it should be clear that these statements were made by the same man both times--for it is not reasonable that nearly identical descriptions would come from a true love in private and a lascivious interloper on a different occasion. Considering the quantity of descriptive dialogue from the man in these parts of the Song, we should ask why there would be so much set to beautiful lyrical poetry and music to be sung if it is obscene adulterous seduction.

One very important parallel to recognize is that between Song of Solomon 4:5-6 ("...that browse among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee...") and Song of Solomon 2:16-17 ("...he browses among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee..."--both NIV). The latter is clearly the woman speaking of and to her true love, as is commonly acknowledged. Thus it is most natural to understand her true love responding to her in similar terms in Song of Solomon 4:5-6. Indeed, we have already seen further parallels between these two passages and Song of Solomon 8:14--including the imagery of the mountains of spices. This poses a huge problem for shepherd-hypothesis advocates. For it argues very strongly for the first part of

chapter 4 being the words of the woman's true love. And if that is so, the other parallels just mentioned imply that her lover is also speaking in chapters 2, 6 and 7--effectively eviscerating the three-character drama.

Furthermore, it seems rather odd that the woman's true love would all of a sudden be speaking in the second part of chapter 4, without any warning or indication whatever, after Solomon's words in the first part of the chapter. The unabridged *Amplified Old Testament* contains an inventive sequence in its annotations about the woman, repulsed at Solomon's advances through verse 5, speaking the words of verse 6 herself of her absent true love, thereafter leaving the king and going to her own palace quarters and then seeing her beloved shepherd, who happened to show up at this moment, out the lattice of window bars--with him calling to her in verse 7. But *inventive* is the key word here-as there is no hint of such a sequence in the Song itself. And once again, this disrupts the clear inclusio from verses 1-7 (an inclusio being, as noted before, a literary grouping framed by similar material at both ends).

Considering the *wasf* of these verses as genuine admiration from the woman's true love, then, let's note its particulars. Some of the imagery probably sounds rather strange to us in our modern setting, perhaps even comical or grotesque, yet it was no doubt fitting in the pastoral society of ancient Israel.

4:1b: The woman's hair is likened to a flock of goats going down from Mount Gilead (Song of Solomon 4:1; Song of Solomon 6:5)--this referring not to a single mountain but to the slopes descending from the rugged high plateau of Gilead east of the Jordan River. We should not think of dirty, smelly, matted fur here. Rather, as Dr. Michael Fox comments: "Flowing tresses of black hair may be said to resemble lines of black goats seen from afar as they wend their way down the

mountainside" (*The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs,* p. 129, note on 4:1). Perhaps the picture is of bouncing curls when the woman's hair was let down: "The locks of her hair tumbled down freely and sensuously...cascading down over her shoulders just like a flock of goats playfully skipping down the mountains of Gilead. The mountains, on the east side of the Jordan , were known for their excellent grazing land. They were considered a blessing and were occupied by countless flocks and herds" (Tommy Nelson, *The Book of Romance,* 1998, p. 90). The imagery of goat flocks in Gilead conveyed richness and abundance, which is lost on our modern sensibilities. Furthermore, besides the visual representation here, the picture is also emotionally evocative, in keeping with the outdoor and pastoral imagery of the rest of the Song.

4:2: The next verse, comparing the woman's teeth to shorn and washed sheep, each bearing twins and none barren (Song of Solomon 4:2; Song of Solomon 6:6), would hardly come across as a compliment today. "We immediately think of woolly fleeces, which is too jarring. We need to paraphrase as something like 'Your fresh white teeth so clean so smooth, like skin of sheep so closely shorn, and washed and bleached'" (Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs,* p. 155). The washing may also refer to her teeth being wet with saliva and glistening. The bearing of twins may characterize the sheep in the metaphor rather than the woman's teeth directly--that is, her teeth are compared to sheep that are healthy and fertile (a valuable asset at that time). Yet it could be that the word translated "bearing twins" should be understood as "twinning"--perhaps meaning not that the sheep bear twins but that they themselves occur in pairs. Thus the picture would be of top teeth matched to bottom teeth, and none barren or missing would mean that the woman has all her teeth--and there are no gaps. Note the alliteration in Hebrew between *shekulam* ("every one") and *shakulah* ("barren"). Again, the poetic scene here is emotionally evocative. The shearing and washing of the flocks was a jovial village

occasion--filled with amusement and laughter. The man was perhaps being playful here with his smiling bride--and there was probably a fair amount of happy giggling as they approached their first sexual union.

4:3: The word translated "temples" in Song of Solomon 4:3 (and Song of Solomon 6:7), *rakkah,* is singular in the Hebrew. "Temple" or "brow" is the common translation of this word in Judges 4:21 and Judges 5:26. Yet Craig Glickman makes a compelling case for interpreting *rakkah* in the Song as "parted lips" or, more precisely, "the soft, moist inner mouth"--seeing the word as coming from a root meaning saliva (*Solomon's Song of Love,* pp. 181, 208-209). Othmar Keel translates the word as "palate" (*The Song of Songs, Continental Commentaries,* p. 138). Both define the "slice" of crimson pomegranate as being a slit opening for sucking out the juice, corresponding to Egyptian illustrations of the fruit. Glickman adds: "The context of the manner of praise supports this meaning too. Solomon [if he is speaking] is proceeding from the top of her head to her breasts--eyes, hair beside her cheeks, teeth, lips, *rakkah,* neck, breasts--it would be a clear break in direction to descend to the teeth, then to rise to the brow or temple. Consequently, some have rendered this 'cheeks,' but the word in the singular doesn't support this" (p. 208). Furthermore, a different word is used for cheeks in the song (*lehi,* Song of Solomon 1:10; Song of Solomon 5:13). Some, however, take the meaning of *rakkah* in the Song more in line with temple to be the entire side of the face, showing that the woman is partially turned away--and the red color of the pomegranate indicating that she is blushing. The matter is uncertain due to inadequate linguistic data.

4:4: In Song of Solomon 4:4 we see the woman's neck compared to "the tower of David, built for an armory, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men." (Her neck is likened to an "ivory tower" in Song of Solomon 7:4.) Picturing the woman's long neck as a tower may not in itself seem odd even today. But considering it an armory for

hanging a thousand shields does seem strange to us. Probably the description is based on the *necklace* the woman is explicitly said to be wearing in Song of Solomon 4:9. The "shields" would be multiple tiers or layers of a great many small precious metal plates, ornaments or beads on or hanging from it. We do not know what ancient structure is meant by the tower of David in the metaphor. It may have been one of Jerusalem's fortifications or part of the palace complex (compare Nehemiah 3:25). "The custom of hanging shields on the tower was symbolic of the warriors' allegiance to and valor for a particular king or country (cf. Ezekiel 27:10-11)" (*Bible Knowledge Commentary,* note on Song of Solomon 4:4). Perhaps the man is making the comparison in the way he is to illustrate the woman's regal bearing. Or, besides the visual parallels, he could also be implying--considering where the evening is going--that she has stood strong, as a defensive fortress, against possible incursions that would have compromised her sexual purity. This seems to be the meaning of the woman referring to her breasts as towers in Song of Solomon 8:10.

4:5: The woman's breasts here in Song of Solomon 4:5 (and Song of Solomon 7:3) are compared not to towers but to twin baby gazelles feeding among lilies. There may be a visual parallel here between the shape of a fawn's head and the contour of a young woman's breast. Yet the imagery is also emotionally evocative. Baby fawns are young, sweet and tender. Soft and precious, they evoke the desire to gently pet and nuzzle them. Some believe the man here was already undressing his wife on their wedding night--approaching her gently and cautiously as one would a baby gazelle, not wanting to frighten or overwhelm. Proverbs 5:19 uses the imagery of "a loving deer and a graceful doe" in saying that a wife's breasts are intended to regularly satisfy her husband, also implying the need for a gentle touch.

4:6: We earlier discussed the meaning of Song of Solomon 4:6 in comments on Song of Solomon 2:17. It is not clear if the opening two

lines of 4:6 mean that what follows will *commence when* night falls or *continue until* morning comes. If the undressing has already started, then the latter is intended (but this is hard to determine). The mountain of myrrh and hill of frankincense may refer to the breasts just mentioned, lower anatomical parts, or the wonderland of either the woman's body as a whole or general ecstasy, similar to the use of the land of Punt in the Egyptian love songs (or what people today mean when they say, "I'm in heaven"). There does seem to be a relation between the mountains of myrrh and frankincense in Song of Solomon 4:6, the mountains of Bether in Song of Solomon 2:17 and the mountains of spices in Song of Solomon 8:14.

4:7-8: After the *wasf* or praise poem of the first part of chapter 4 ends with the close of the inclusio in Song of Solomon 4:7, thus concluding the second subsection of the current unit, a new subsection opens in Song of Solomon 4:8. As we have already noted, this third subsection, continuing to the end of the unit in Song of Solomon 5:1, is characterized by six mentions of the word "spouse" or "bride" (NIV). It is surely no coincidence that the section of the Song that appears to describe the physical consummation of the relationship is inundated with this word. It is perhaps a not-so-subtle way of telling us that sexual union is reserved for husband and wife.

The mention of Lebanon in verse 8 links the second and third subsections of the current unit poetically. As Glickman notes: "The words for 'frankincense' (*lebonah*) and ('Lebanon') (*lebonon*) sound alike, so when these words occur in proximity, a transitional play on words occurs.... An alliterative transition occurs concluding Song of Solomon 4:6 and beginning Song of Solomon 4:7 with 'frankincense. All of you' (*lebonah cullak,* rendered 'You are completely'), and then beginning Song of Solomon 4:8 with ' Lebanon, O bride' (*lebanon callah*), which draws attention to the root word of 'bride,' which is 'completion,' so that the term for 'bride' connotes a

'completed one.' Such alliteration, of course, also serves to provide poetic transition and unity in the smooth flow of the lyrics" (pp. 209-210). Lebanon also serves to form an inclusio of the man's speech from verses 8-15.

The mention of Lebanon and the mountain peaks of verse 8--all to the north of the land of Israel--has been a matter of confusion. Some see them as denoting the home of the woman. But only Senir and Hermon are clearly the same geographically. Carr notes: *"Amana* is usually taken to be a mountain in the Anti-Lebanon range, but its exact location is uncertain. It is probably the hill in which the Amana River, which flows through Damascus, has its source.... *Senir* and *Hermon* are the Amorite and Hebrew names for the tallest peak (over 9,200 ft.) in the Anti-Lebanon range. The Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon (Mount Hermon) ranges lie some 15 miles apart on opposite sides of the Litani-Hasbani (Biqa') valley" (p. 120, note on verse 8). Yet Lebanon also denotes the valley below Hermon and the wider region (see Joshua 11:17; Joshua 13:5; Judges 3:3). So there may be no geographic disparity here. (We should also consider a possible link between Baal-hermon and Baal Hamon in Song of Solomon 8:11, which we will examine later.) Still, the difficulty of the woman literally being in Lebanon on the night following what is evidently a Jerusalem wedding has led many to view the geographical references in verse 8 figuratively, as seems to be the case (though this could perhaps *include* the idea that she is from the north).

Note the word "look" in the New King James Version. Some see the man calling the woman to accompany him to look down from the mountain heights--implying that he will take her to reach the heights of love and ecstasy together. Yet why would this place them among dangerous lions' dens and leopards' lairs, as mentioned in the latter part of the verse? The problem is likely in the translation "look." The NIV has "descend." As Carr points out: "Two separate roots with identical form lie behind the variety of translations. One means

'journey' or 'descend,' the other 'gaze on' or 'look at'" (p. 119, note on verse 8). If "descend" is chosen here, the man is asking the woman not to join him to look out from the mountains, but to come down from the highland wilderness of wild animals (symbolic of a remote and inaccessible place) to be with him. As Roland Murphy points out: "The woman is not physically present on these mountains, and the man could hardly call to her there. The metaphor stands for her inaccessibility, a theme that appeared already in Song of Solomon 2:14 (crags and rocks). The animals are not threats to *her,* but to those who would try to reach her. A similar theme appears in the Cairo Ostracon 25218 [Cairo Love Songs, no. 21 (or 20D in Fox's numbering), Group A], where the lover is separated from his beloved by a crocodile" (*The Songs of Songs, Hermeneia Commentaries,* p. 160, note on Song of Solomon 4:8). The man in verse 8 may perceive the woman's fears, uncertainties and reservations as creating barriers between them coming together in full enjoyment of sexual union. So he asks that she leave these behind, trusting him fully. It may be that he chose the northern location because her home was there and this would symbolize her inner security and clinging to premarital life. But that's not required.

4:9-10: After the transition of verse 8, 4:9-10 commence further praises from the man for his wife. Dr. Fox notes: "Unlike the Praise Songs [or *wasfs*] in Song of Solomon 4:1-7, Song of Solomon 6:3-10, and Song of Solomon 7:2-8, which laud the girl part by part, this one celebrates her entire person. It is thus an Admiration Song, a type of Praise Song" (p. 133; see p. 271). However, some of her parts are praised in this section, though not for how they appear but for how they provide sensual pleasure to the man.

In Song of Solomon 4:9 we first encounter the phrase "my sister, my spouse" or "my sister, my bride" (NIV). *The Nelson Study Bible* states that "this strange pairing of words was based on the idea that in

marriage a couple became 'related'" (note on verse 9). Yet it should be noted that "brother" and "sister" are terms of endearment in the Egyptian love songs, wherein the lovers are not married. In the Song, the inclusion of "spouse" or "bride" makes the lovers' marital status clear. Dr. Glickman notes that "the phrase 'my sister, my bride' occurs four times, appearing at each stage of lovemaking: arousal (Song of Solomon 4:9); kissing (Sog of Solomon 4:10[-11]); consummation (Song of Solomon 4:12); and after consummation (Song of Solomon 5:1)" (p. 210). Again, the stress seems to be that making love is only for those who are married. Some contend that 4:9-5:1 is a mere verbal exchange expressing admiration and intent--that there is no actual coming together of the couple here (*The Amplified Old Testament,* for instance, has the couple speaking to each other through the window). But the wording and emphasis of Song of Solomon 4:16 and Song of Solomon 5:1 particularly should make it clear that actual physical union is being described--albeit in delicate and metaphoric language in parts.

4:11: In Song of Solomon 4:11, the kisses here leading to sexual union are deep ones involving the tongue--"what we would call a French kiss although it was nineteen hundred years before France was a nation. It was a genuine Hebrew kiss, deep and penetrating. Open-mouth kisses are one of the most sensual acts possible in a marriage union" (Tommy Nelson, p. 100). This is not something that dating couples should be engaged in. The milk and honey imagery here may evoke the idea, mentioned previously, of inheriting the "Promised Land" of marriage--besides the sensual pleasure implied (see also Song of Solomon 5:1).

4:12-15: In Song of Solomon 4:12-15 the man describes his wife as a lush, exotic garden of pleasant fruits and spices, a place of sensual delights. The garden with its fountain is said to be "enclosed...shut up...sealed" (verse 12). These are "metaphors for the beloved's virginity--or perhaps for the fact that she keeps herself exclusively for her husband" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible,* note on verse 12). "Orchard"

in verse 13 is translated from the Hebrew word *pardes,* related to the Persian word from which comes our word "paradise." Note the alliteration of *qineh ve-qinnamon* ("calamus and cinammon") in verse 14 and the beautiful assonance of the words in verse 15 translated "fountain of gardens, a well of living waters"--*ma'yan gannim, be'er mayim hayyim.* The refreshing spring and fountain as metaphors for the woman as a sexual partner are also used in Proverbs 5:15-20.

4:6: The Shulamite responds to her husband's affections in Song of Solomon 4:16. She begins with the word "awake." This is significant, for recall her earlier adjuration to the daughters of Jerusalem to not "stir up nor awaken love" until the right time (Song of Solomon 2:7; Song of Solomon 3:5). Well now it is clearly the right time. Her heretofore closed garden is opened to receive the stirring winds from both north and south, perhaps indicating that she is open completely to stimulation from the man. The figurative winds waft her garden's spices about and out toward her lover as a stream--the word translated "flow out" being the same as that rendered "streams" (from Lebanon) in the previous verse. We should also observe that the meaning of the garden has been narrowed here. The woman does not refer to herself generally as a garden. Rather she uses "my garden" to designate a part or aspect of herself. The meaning may be her sexuality or her private parts--either of which implies the other. All of this she gives to her lover, finally calling it "his garden" and inviting him to come in and enjoy it. "It is problematic to know how literally to take the verb *eat,* but there is no doubt about the fact that she invites him to sexual union of the most intimate type" (*New International Commentary on the Old Testament,* note on verse 16).

5:1: Then in Song of Solomon 5:1, the delighted husband takes his fill of sexual love. All of the various elements mentioned here were used to describe the woman in his prior admiration poem (Song of Solomon 4:8-15)--thus clearly tying 4:16-5:1 to that poetic segment in this third

subsection--yet now the man uses the form "my" for each element (indeed, eight times in short order). Her charms are now *his* to enjoy--and that he does with deep satisfaction. This man's possession of the woman's erotic attributes is, again, clearly indicative of marriage (see 1 Corinthians 7:3-4). Incidentally, it should be recalled that the shepherd hypothesis sees no wedding night here--only a reunion of bride and groom after time apart. Yet the wedding night of the lovers seems to best fit the evidence of the earlier material in this major section and of the section's central position in the Song.

The last three lines of Song of Solomon 5:1 are a matter of some dispute. The NKJV has the man here speaking to his friends--that is, to the guests celebrating outside the bridal chamber during the seven-day wedding feast, telling them to eat, drink and be merry (compare also John 3:29, where the friend of the bridegroom rejoices to hear his voice). Others, however, see the words in Song 5:1b directed to the husband and wife in the bridal chamber. Consider that she just invited him to eat and he responds with eating and drinking. Thus the statement that follows is seen as an affirmation of the couple's lovemaking. The word for "friends" is related to the man's typical endearment term for the woman and "beloved" is the woman's endearment term for the man--yet both words can apply to each. It thus may be that someone is telling the man and woman to "go for it." If so, it is likely the chorus singing here--perhaps representative of the wedding guests. Yet others suggest that the chorus is here representing the songwriter--or even God, looking down and giving His divine approval to sexual relations in marriage, as only He could be a witness to the couple's intimacy.

We should recall from our introduction that 4:16-5:1 forms the central hinge of the Song of Songs--in terms of both language and quantity of verses (adding to the evidence of this being the marriage consummation on the wedding night). So it may well be that at this

central point the songwriter or God is directly communicating through the Song to give its central message--that married lovers should take their fill of sexual love. Yet even if community affirmation is intended, we should recognize that this reflects divine approval--as God is the very Creator of sexuality and the institution of marriage. Again, with the final mention of "spouse" in Song of Solomon 5:1, it should be quite clear that sexual union is intended only for marriage. And in that context, it is a wonderful blessing." [END]

Day 392 & 393 – SATURDAY & SUNDAY: March 16th & 17th

Song of Solomon 5

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: "Song of Solomon 5:1 concludes the fourth and central major section of the book. A new unit commences with an entirely new scene in Song of Solomon 5:2. Before leaving the central section, it should be pointed out that some see the wedding and consummation here as a wish for the future--rather than as already achieved by the lovers at this point in the Song. However there is every indication that the events here are in the present--and no hint that they are yet to come. Nevertheless, such an idea is possible if the Song is not strictly chronological in its arrangement and is more like stream of consciousness--so that the woman's determination to marry the man at the end of the previous dreamlike unit (see Song of Solomon 3:4) gives way to thoughts here about the wedding and consummation. It is true that there is no mention of the word "spouse" or "bride" beyond this unit--although there seem to be other indications that the man and woman are married in later parts of the Song, as we will see. Those who press the issue of the marriage not yet having taken place in the center of the Song usually do so because they are seeking a coherent alignment with the relationship between Christ and the Church--for the section that follows implies a problem between the couple, which is

difficult to apply to Jesus and His perfected Bride being already married. The matter, as with so much else in the Song, is uncertain.

"I Sought Him, But I Could Not Find Him"

We come now to the fifth major section of the Song. It begins at Song of Solomon 5:2, which clearly describes a different scene entirely from that of the previous verses, but there is dispute as to where this section ends. Many have noted the obvious similarity between verses 2-8 and the earlier dreamlike unit of Song of Solomon 3:1-5 (the third major section of the Song). Both segments begin with the woman lying in bed at night. Both describe her rising, probably in mind rather than literally, to search about the city for her beloved, whom she can't seem to find. Both mention her being found by the city watchmen. And both segments show her afterward issuing a charge to the daughters of Jerusalem. There are key differences though. The former passage apparently concerned multiple instances ("By nights..."). The current one gives no such indication. In the former case, the woman was merely wondering in desperation about where the man was when she went to look for him. In this later passage, the man arrives at night, is apparently turned away by the woman, and then leaves, whereupon she *then* goes out in a desperate search for him. In the former passage, the woman was merely found by the watchmen. Here they abuse her. In the former unit, the woman immediately found the man and declared her intention for union with him. Here she does not immediately find him—so resolution is lacking. In the former sequence, the woman's charge to the daughters of Jerusalem was a repeat of the refrain to not awaken love until it's acceptable—and this (Song of Solomon 3:5) formed the end of the unit. Here the charge is that if they find him to tell him that she is lovesick—and this (Song of Solomon 5:8) clearly does *not* form the end of the unit since the daughters respond to her charge in the next verse. Where, then, does this later unit end—and how are we to understand it?

Determining the end of the major section of the Song that begins at Song of Solomon 5:2 involves following the story flow, considering the symmetrical parallel with the aforementioned third major section of the Song (Song of Solomon 3:1-5) and observing a chiastic structural pattern that begins at Song of Solomon 5:2 and recognizing where this pattern concludes. Let's take these one at a time.

First the story flow. Verse 9 is clearly the response of the daughters of Jerusalem to the Shulamite's charge in the preceding verse, as they mention her charge explicitly. Observe that their response is a question about why her lover is so special. This then sets up the Shulamite's description of her lover in verses 10-16 (the last verse explicitly addressing the daughters).” The daughters then respond in Song of Solomon 6:1, and the Shulamite answers them in verses 2-3. Verse 3 here, concerning the mutual possession of the lovers, appears to be a refrain (see also Song of Solomon 2:16; Song of Solomon 7:10). This and the fact that the man's praise speech beginning inSong of Solomon 6:4 is not introduced has led some to consider Song of Solomon 6:3 as the end of the unit. Yet we should consider that the man's earlier praise speech beginning in Song of Solomon 4:1 is not introduced and appears to continue the same unit as that begun in Song of Solomon 3:6. Indeed, Song of Solomon 6:2-3 seems to convey a return of the lover, so that his speaking thereafter would follow naturally from that (though shepherd-hypothesis advocates view this differently, as we will consider shortly).

The man's praise of the woman beginning in verse 4 continues through verse 9 with the mention of queens, concubines and "daughters" praising her. Some see this as a section ending, taking the next words in verse 10, "Who is she...?" to begin a new section, parallel to these words occurring at the commencement of the central and final major sections of the Song (see Song of Solomon 3:6; Song of Solomon 8:5). However, the question in Song of Solomon 6:10 seems most likely to be

the words of the queens, concubines and daughters just mentioned in verse 9 (or the man quoting them)—making it a continuation of the same section. (Note also that verses 4 and 10 end the same—the full context indicating that these are the bracketing verses of an inclusio.)

Verses 11-12 are difficult with respect to who is saying them and what they mean (verse 12 does follow from verse 11). Some note the parallels between verse 11 and Song of Solomon 7:12 and take these verses to be the beginning and end of an inclusio. However, the theme and scene of Song of Solomon 7:12 obviously continues beyond it. Still, Song of Solomon 6:11 could be the beginning of a new section, but there is no clear break to indicate this. Indeed, some have argued that verses 11-12 are a response to the women in verse 10.

Verse 13 is taken as a new section in modern Hebrew Bible chapter divisions—which are the same as in the English versions throughout the Song except here. (What English Bibles number as 6:13, Hebrew Bibles number as 7:1—and Hebrew verse numbers are all one number higher than in English versions throughout chapter 7.) Yet while Son of Solomon 6:13 (English numbering, which we will adhere to throughout) does appear to go with the praise song that follows in chapter 7, perhaps inspired by the dance of 6:13, this verse—especially if the word rendered "return" is properly translated—would seem to be a call in response to the previous verse (or at least a response to seeing the Shulamite, who appears in verse 10). So there seems to be no break here. The praise sequence in chapter 7 then continues through the middle of verse 9, where the woman breaks into the thought (which we will examine more shortly). She then makes a statement in verse 10 similar to the refrain of mutual possession in Song of Solomon 2:16 and Song of Solomon 6:3. The woman's call in Song of Solomon 7:11 to come away could then denote a continuation of the same section or, particularly if verse 9 refers literally to sleep, the start of a new section. We will stop here to go to the next ending determinant.

The second factor here is the symmetrical parallel with the third major section of the Song, the dreamlike unit mentioned above (Song of Solomon 3:1-5). The wedding and consummation appear to form the fourth and central section of the Song (3:6–5:1). On either side of that segment are these similar dreamlike sequences. Note that the former section went from the woman's panicked loss of her lover to the joy of reuniting with him. In parallel, we would expect the panicked loss of her lover in the latter section to conclude with a happy reunion. It does—but not right away. Still, despite the longer length of the latter section in reaching resolution, it is sensible that its conclusion should come with the reunion. This could conceivably come with Song of Solomon 6:3, but all is not clearly resolved until the implied sexual union of Song of Solomon 7:9.

Third is the issue of the apparent chiastic structure of this section, as discovered by Dr. Craig Glickman. Recall the chart from his book *Solomon's Song of Love* showing the symmetrical outline of the entire Song (an adaptation of which is reproduced in our introduction). Well, he also provides an expanded diagram of each major section—which greatly helps in comprehending the structure of the current section (see below). The diagram for this section reveals that the unit beginning at Song of Solomon 5:2, with the Shulamite *sleeping alone,* continues through Song of Solomon 7:9, where it is implied that the lovers are *sleeping together.* However, the refrain of verse 10 appears to complete the thought here. Looking at the chart, consider that another form of this refrain also occurs in Song of Solomon 6:3 as a transition to the central subsection of the chiasm (i.e., from subsection c to d). Thus, it also seems logical as a transition at the end of the chiasm leading into the next major section. Dr. Glickman himself groups Song of Solomon 7:10 with the next section, as the beginning of the second section from the end, because another form of the refrain occurs near the end of the second section from the beginning (in Song of Solomon 2:16). Still, he does view Song of Solomon 7:10 as

transitional from the current unit. Indeed, he generally regards the section breaks as transitional, at times with some overlap, rather than as hard and fast (and that may well be the case). Note that there are seven subsections within this unit—as detailed in the chart.

SECTION C′: EXPANDED OUTLINE OF NIGHT OF SEPARATION FOLLOWING THE WEDDING NIGHT (5.2 TO 7.9)*

a: Shulamith is awakened, alone and reluctant (5.2-8)

- she is awakened from sleep
- he desires to see her, but she is reluctant
- she longs to find him
- she is faint from love

b: awakened to give tenfold praise (5.9-16)

- begins section with question by daughters of Jerusalem
- begins praise with twofold "how" (in original language)
- ten parts praised include head, hair, eyes, abdomen, legs
- proceeds from head to toe; concludes with mouth
- images of ivory, towers, Lebanon, [lilies or] lotus flowers, sources of water
- ends praise with summary statement beginning with "this"

c: aware of Solomon's [her beloved's] presence in the garden (6.1-3)

- addresses the daughters of Jerusalem
- her beloved went down to his garden

***d*: receives his praise in the garden: (6.4-10)**

- repeats less erotic praise of wedding night
- concludes praise of her body with praise of mouth [alt. of 'temple']
- begins and ends praise with imagery of Israel

c′: recounts her journey to the garden (6.11-12)

- addresses the daughters of Jerusalem
- she went down to the garden

b′: receives tenfold praise ([6.13;] 7.1-5 [or 6])

- begins section with questions by daughters of Jerusalem
- begins praise with twofold "how" in original language
- ten parts praised include head, hair, eyes, abdomen, legs
- proceeds from toe to head; concludes with mouth (7.9)
- images of ivory, tower, Lebanon, [lilies or] lotus flowers, sources of water
- ends praise with summary statement beginning with "this" (7.7)

a′: delightfully make love, together drift off to sleep (7.6 [or 7]-9)

- love flows through her body
- she is intimate with him
- he passionately desires her, and she passionately responds
- they drift off to sleep

*From Dr. Craig Glickman, *Solomon's Song of Love,* 2004, p. 236 (more explanation is given throughout his Appendix C: "The Elegant Design of the Song," pp. 231-241).

It may be noted that this unit (5:2–7:10) is by far the longest unit in the Song—set symmetrically opposite to what is by far the shortest unit in the Song (Song of SOlomon 3:1-5). It is not known why the Song was composed this way—but it has the very interesting effect of making the actual center of the Song (4:16–5:1) fall at the end of the central unit (3:6–5:1) rather than in the middle of the central unit. It also serves to stress the greater magnitude and impact of events in this longest section as compared with the earlier problem in the shortest section.

5:2-8: Now let us proceed into what is happening within this unit, starting with the first subsection (Song of Solomon 5:2-8). The man knocks to be let in at night after the woman has gone to bed and is sleeping (Song of Solomon 5:2-3). If the Song is arranged chronologically, this episode would seem to occur after the couple is married—unlike the previous dreamlike sequence, which appears to have preceded their wedding. Of course, this is assuming that the apparent sequence of the wedding and the wedding night in 3:6–5:1 concerns a real and present event rather than a dream or wish for the future—and that 5:2–7:10 is not a flashback to the premarital courtship or engagement period. Indication that the couple is married is found in the fact that the man is seeking entry very late at night, when the dew makes his hair wet (Song of Solomon 5:2). Some argue that this is still during the seven-day wedding festival and that the man is late in coming to the bridal chamber, having been reveling with his friends. But the setting may well be sometime later, in the couple's private home.

Some might argue that if the two lovers are married, the man would not need to be let into a shared bedroom with his wife. However, even if a private home is meant, it is possible that he is without a key. Furthermore, women in that society may have had their own quarters separate from their husband—as evidenced by Abraham's wife Sarah having had her own tent (see Genesis 24:66-67; compare also Genesis

31:33). Alternatively, some read Song of Solomon 5:2-6a as heavy with double entendre—the idea being that the man and woman are already lying in bed together and that he is actually seeking sexual entrance while she is sleeping. Verse 3 may speak against that, though, since the woman doesn't want to put on a robe or get her feet dirty after having washed them—which seems to imply having to get up to open the door of her quarters. Yet it could be that she is referring to a possible need to rise briefly after sexual relations.

Of course, even if the man is literally standing outside his wife's door, the implication of this section seems to be that he desires sexual relations—not that he just wants to come in to sleep. As Dr. Michael Fox points out: "While Song of Solomon 5:2 clearly begins a new dramatic sequence...the similarity between the motifs of this unit and those of the preceding one shows that the placement of the units is not random. In the preceding unit the girl was called a 'locked garden' (Song of Solomon 4:12). Here too the boy's entry to the desired place is prevented by a 'lock,' and here too the girl is willing 'to open' to him (Song of Solomon 5:5-6; cf. Song of Solomon 4:16)" (*The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs,* p. 142).

The tenor of the woman's response in Song of Solomon 5:3 is unclear. Perhaps she is really sleepy and tired. Some fault her for being lazy, indifferent, cold and unreceptive. Yet it is reasonable that she would be quite groggy, lethargic and even incoherent if awakened late in the night. On the other hand, the husband, if he is literally outside the door, could be faulted for showing up so late—though perhaps his job required it in a later setting. Or, if he is already in bed with her, he could perhaps be faulted for insensitivity. (Those who see this passage as representing Christ and the Church, with some even thinking Jesus referred to the knocking on the door here in Revelation 3:20, fault the woman exclusively for failure to properly respond to her husband—though this may be a misapplication of the passage.) Others see the

woman's response as teasing or playful—that is, her complaint is not genuine and she really intends to let her husband in, as we see her desiring him in verse 4 and in verse 6 saying her heart leapt when he spoke. (Thus the problem that develops would be a misunderstanding, and no one's particular fault.)

5:4: In Song of Solomon 5:4, the word translated "latch" here literally means "hole" and "of the door" is not in the Hebrew. Where the NKJV says the woman's "heart yearned" for the man and the KJV has "bowels were moved," forms of the Hebrew words *me'ah* and *hamah* are used. As Lloyd Carr notes: "The basic meaning of the word [*me'ah,* Strong's no. 4578] is the internal organs generally (2 Samuel 20:10; Psalm 22:14), or the digestive tract (Jonah 2:1f.). But several texts use the term to refer to the procreative organs [sometimes rendered 'loins' by translators], either male (*e.g.* Genesis 15:4; 2 Samuel 7:12) or female (*e.g.* Ruth 1:11. In Genesis 25:23; Psalm 71:6; and Isaiah 49:1, *me'eh* is used in parallel with *beten,* the common word for *womb*). The focus of the thrill is specifically sexual" (*The Song of Solomon, Tyndale Commentaries,* p. 135, note on Song of Solomon 5:4). *Hamah* (Strong's no. 1993) means to make a loud sound or, by implication, to be in commotion or tumult. Some see the word in Song of Solomon 5:4 as meaning "moaned," "roiled" or "seethed." Yet it should be pointed out that the two words together can simply connote sympathy: "The Hebrew expression...is used elsewhere to express pity or compassion (e.g., Isaiah 16:11; Jeremiah 31:20). It was not used to express sexual arousal as some scholars maintain" (*Bible Knowledge Commentary,* note on Song of Solomon 5:3-4). Yet it may be that the phrase could, in context, be taken in an amatory sense. Perhaps, as with other verses here, a double entendre is intended.

5:5: In Song of Solomon 5:5, the Shulamite says that she arose for her beloved and that her hands and fingers dripped with liquid myrrh on the handles of the lock. This is understood in one of three ways among

natural interpreters. Some see the woman getting out of bed and quickly splashing or rubbing on myrrh as perfume so that it was all over her hands and got onto the lock handle when she touched it. Others see the myrrh as having been left on the lock handle by the man as a token of affection, this being earlier a symbol for him in Song of Solomon 1:13, the myrrh getting onto her hand because of touching the handle. Sometimes cited in this regard is the first-century-B.C. Roman poet Lucretius. In his work *On the Nature of Things,* he said, "But the lover shut out, weeping, often covers the threshold with flowers and wreaths, anoints the proud doorposts with oil of marjoram, presses his love-sick kisses upon the door..." (quoted by Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs, Hermeneia Commentaries,* p. 168, footnote on 5:2–6:3). Of course, this was written around 900 years after the Song and in a very different cultural setting. Still others see an erotic metaphor in Song of Solomon 5:5. The man's lips are said to drip liquid myrrh in verse 13.

5:6-7: When the woman at last opens for her lover in Song of Solomon 5:6a, whether this means that she literally arises to let him in, does so in a dream or, in a metaphoric sense, becomes receptive to sexual union, it is too late. He is gone! It would seem that whether the woman was genuinely sleepy in her earlier response or was being coy, the man takes her lack of immediacy as a rebuff. Thus we have a problem between the lovers. As Shakespeare wrote, "The course of true love never did run smooth" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Act 1, Scene 1). Some recognize this episode as representative of a period of sexual adjustment to each other in marriage. Upset at the man's departure, the woman seeks and calls for him in similar imagery to that of Song of Solomon 3:1-5. It seems likely that at least Song of Solomon 5:6-7 contains a dream or daydream-at-night sequence similar to that of the prior passage—especially given the lack of reaction to being struck by the watchmen in verse 7. Perhaps finding her lover gone sent her into the dreamlike mode described previously.

How are we to understand the abuse by the city watchmen here? They strike and wound her and strip off her light overcloak, as the word translated "veil" in the NKJV is thought to mean (this being a different word from that often translated "veil" in Song of Solomon 4:1). Again, a literal interpretation does not seem likely. Those who take this literally and see the Shulamite as the bride of Solomon should consider the implausibility of city watchmen assaulting the queen of Israel. Would they not recognize her? How would she even have made it out of the palace? As for the Shulamite being a designation for a woman *not* married to Solomon, this still does not explain her being able to roam the streets at night—much less the striking and stripping and lack of reaction to this mistreatment. Thus we look to a dreamlike, figurative interpretation here. Recall that in the parallel of Song of Solomon 3:1-5, the watchmen seemed to signify the woman's own sensibilities, her mental and emotional governors that took hold of her, helping her to see things rationally (i.e., she "got a grip" on herself). In the present case, we should consider that the woman is perhaps wracked with guilt for effectively chasing her lover away, even if unintentional. Thus, through the mental and emotional patrol of her mind, she essentially beats herself up and is left miserable over what has happened.

5:8: Her message then in Song of Solomon 5:8 to the daughters of Jerusalem is to tell her beloved that she is lovesick. That is, she doesn't want him to have the wrong idea, thinking she doesn't want to be with him (sexually, the whole context implies). Rather, she desperately longs for him, ailing from desire. A few translators take the words here to have the Shulamite charging the daughters to *not* tell her beloved that she is lovesick—out of embarrassment over her foolish actions in searching for him (e.g., Fox, p. 146, note on 5:8). Yet this denies the clear sense of longing here and is probably not grammatically accurate. (More on this will follow in the comments on Song of Solomon 8:4.) As noted with regard to Song of Solomon 2:5, Egyptian love songs 6, 12

and 37 describe the symptoms of lovesickness. Observe the latter: "Seven days have passed, and I've not seen my lady love; a sickness has shot through me. I have become sluggish, I have forgotten my own body. If the best surgeons come to me, my heart will not be comforted with their remedies. And the prescription sellers, there's no help through them; my sickness will not be cut out. Telling me 'she's come' is what will bring me back to life..." (Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Group A, in William Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt,* pp. 320-321).

5:9: In 5:9, the beginning of the second subsection of the current unit (verses 9-16), the daughters of Jerusalem, whom the Shulamite has just addressed, respond to her—their words likely being sung by the chorus. They refer to her as "fairest among women" or "most beautiful of women" (NIV)—as they also do in Song of Solomon 6:1. This descriptor was earlier given in Song of Solomon 1:8, where it was not clear whether the daughters of Jerusalem or the lover was speaking. Some contend that the use of this phrase by the women is sarcastic—especially followers of the shepherd hypothesis who see the other women here as members of Solomon's harem. As for the daughters asking what is so special about the Shulamite's lover, some see their query as sincere (deeming them her friends) while others view it sarcastically as well. Shepherd-hypothesis adherents sometimes point out that this verse creates a problem for those who see Solomon as the woman's true love—for would not the women already know all about him? Yet it could be that their question is a mere literary device to give the woman an opportunity to extol the attributes of her beloved.

5:10-16: This she does in the verses that follow. In a *wasf* (again, a song of descriptive praise cataloging a person's physical characteristics) in Song of Solomon 5:10-16, the Shulamite sings of her beloved's body from head to toe. She starts out in verse 10 with his overall general appearance, "white and ruddy" describing the reddish tinge of healthy white skin (compare 1 Samuel 16:12; 1 Samuel 17:42; Lamentations

4:7)—and "chief among ten thousand" referring to his distinguished appearance (not to being king). She later concludes summarily, "Yes, he is *altogether* lovely" (Song of Solomon 5:16). "And in between, she compliments ten aspects of her beloved. This number underscores his worth in her eyes, since *ten,* like *seven,* is a number used to signify perfection" (Glickman, p. 100)—ten signifying a full enumeration, there being ten fingers of the hands. The aspects here are: 1) head (verse 11a); 2) hair (verse 11b); 3) eyes (verse 12); 4) cheeks (verse 13a); 5) lips (verse 13b); 6) arms (verse 14a); 7) "body" or abdomen (verse 14b); 8) legs (verse 15); 9) countenance or stature; 10) mouth or speech.

Let's note a few particulars here. "Gold" denotes the precious quality of his head, not to being blond, as the man's hair is black (verse 11). Observe that the longest description is given of the man's eyes (verse 12), which are compared to doves, just as the man drew the same comparison with the woman's eyes (see Song of Solomon 1:15; Song of Solomon 4:1). The "lilies" the man's lips are compared to in Song of Solomon 5:13b are often thought to be reddish in color, perhaps lotuses or anemones—and this goes for the mention of the same flowers throughout the Song (though it could be that the comparison is due to shape rather than color). The word translated "body" in verse 14b is a form of *me'ah,* the word used earlier in verse 4 in reference to the innards of the abdomen. Obviously the word must also be applicable to the exterior or it could not be praised as something visible in verse 14. Some believe an erotic reference is intended by the woman here. Yet we should note that she is not speaking directly to her lover in private but describing him to other women. (Of course, this may all be part of her dream.)

After reaching the legs in the downward progression of praise (verse 15a), the woman mentions the man's "countenance" (NKJV) or "appearance" (NIV). While the word rendered countenance could refer to facial expression, the comparison with Lebanon and its cedars (which

are great and tall) implies appearance more broadly. In fact, it seems likely that the legs, being long and sturdy, lead to mention of the man's great stature and bearing. The concluding focus on the mouth being sweet in verse 16 seems a regression from the downward progress of the *wasf.* It may mean that consideration of all his qualities has led her to desiring to kiss him. Or, since the lips were earlier mentioned in verse 13b, the man's "mouth" in verse 16a may refer to another aspect that does not fit in the bodily description—his *speech,* as the mouth often connotes in Scripture. This, she tells the daughters of Jerusalem in verse 16b following the *wasf,* is her lover and this is her "friend"—i.e., her companion, stressing not just their sexual relationship but also their general togetherness and closeness. All of this, she tells them, makes him a man to be desired (thus explaining her lovesickness)." [END]

Day 394 & 395 – MONDAY & TUESDAY: March 18th & 19th

Song of Solomon 6

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: "**6:1:** In Song of Solomon 6:1, beginning the third subsection of the present unit (verses 1-3), their interest is clearly piqued. They are now enthusiastic about finding him. Some consider the women the Shulamite's friends indicating their support for her in her search. Yet others see this as the women of Jerusalem (or other harem girls in the shepherd hypothesis) expressing their own desire for this wonderful man just described to them. It is interesting to note that they ask her where the man has gone, as if she knows (when she has been searching for him).

6:2-3: More surprising, though, is her response in Song of Solomon 6:2-3—wherein she relates exactly where he is. And just where is that? Some think that the man here going to his garden to "feed his flocks" means that he has returned to his regular job—the shepherd to his shepherding of flocks or, if Solomon, that he is engaged in his duties as

king. This, however, ignores the context of the Song. The man going to "his garden" and the beds of spices to feed (the italicized *"his flock"* in verses 2 and 3 in the NKJV is not in the Hebrew here) is surely related to the end of the former unit, where the man going into his garden of spices referred to sexual union with the woman (see 4:9–5:1). We are later told that the woman dwells in the gardens (Song of Solomon 8:13). The man's gathering of lilies (Song of Solomon 6:2) ties in to his gathering of myrrh and spice (Song of Solomon 5:1) and to his feeding among the lilies (Song of Solomon 6:3)—the latter probably referring to the woman's lips (as with Song of Solomon 5:13) or other physical charms, she herself being the beds of spices of Song of Solomon 6:2. Verse 3 is the refrain of mutual possession reversed from Song of Solomon 2:16, where the man grazing among the lilies is first mentioned. This passage, it would seem, has nothing to do with the man being away at his regular job. Rather, in answer to the women questioning the Shulamite about where her lover is that they may seek him, she seems to be emphatically answering, "He is with me" and "He's mine" (some seeing the implication as, "...and is not available for you").

Just what is happening here? Recall in the earlier dreamlike sequence of Song of Solomon 3:1-5 that the woman, after getting hold of herself (pictured by the watchmen finding her) immediately found her beloved—probably indicating that he was never really lost. Similarly, in the present sequence, it appears that after the lover is gone and the woman seeks for him with pangs of guilt (pictured by the watchmen striking her), she describes her desire for her lover and then finds that he is not really gone after all. Perhaps the man being "gone" concerned him being emotionally withdrawn after what he perceived as a sexual rejection by his wife. And now that she has reached out to him, he is again expressing his love as always—physically, companionably and, in the verses that follow, in praise of her. The women of Jerusalem may have never been literally present—merely a sounding board for the

woman's feelings. Or it could be that the withdrawal period was unresolved by the next day and she was actually speaking to her friends about trying to resolve the problem. In fact, this one episode could be representative of a lengthy adjustment period in marriage—where a number of such episodes occur. In any case, things work out—the man returns (emotionally if he never actually left physically). The mutual possession refrain "indicates that the emotional distance had been overcome on her part and she was confident that it had also been overcome on his part. All that was needed for a complete reconciliation was a statement of forgiveness or acceptance from the lover" (*BKC,* note on 6:1-3). And that comes next.

6:4-10: In the fourth and central subsection of this unit Song of Solomon 6:4-10, the man now praises the woman in verses 4-9, beginning with a *wasf,* some of which is repeated from Song of Solomon 4:1-7. Shepherd-hypothesis advocates see this as another attempt at seduction by the interloping Solomon, considering that the elements repeated from the beginning of chapter 4 show that he was speaking in that previous section as seducer as well. Yet we have already noted in our comments on 3:6–5:1 the major difficulties with the beginning of chapter 4 being spoken by someone other than the woman's true love. Both sections, Song of Solomon 4:1-7 and Song of Solomon 6:4-9, are more reasonably attributed to the woman's lover (which could be Solomon in a positive sense).

6:4: In Song of Solomon 6:4 the man compares the Shulamite to the cities of Tirzah and Jerusalem—pointing out that she is as "awesome as *those* with banners" ("those" here possibly denoting "armies" or "hosts," as commonly translated, though this is not explicit in the Hebrew). Comparing a beautiful woman to cities probably sounds strange to us today. But people still speak and sing of certain cities as beautiful, exciting or loved in an idealized sense. Jerusalem was described elsewhere as "the perfection of beauty" (Psalm 50:2;

Lamentations 2:15) and "beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth" (Psalm 48:2). However, comments Tom Gledhill, "the resemblance is not so much in physical beauty...but in royalty, power and stature. *Tirzah* was an ancient Canaanite city, mentioned in Joshua 12:24. Jeroboam I moved his capital there at the time [soon after Solomon's death] of the schismatic breakaway of Israel from the Solomonic dynasty which ruled Judah. Omri later established Samaria as the capital of the Northern Kingdom [1 Kings 14:1-20; 1 Kings 16:8-26—this all showing that the Song likely dates to before the transfer of the capital to Samaria and probably before the divided monarchy period]. The site of *Tirzah* [now Tell el-Farah, six miles north of Shechem] has been described as one of great natural and rustic beauty. *Jerusalem* of course was the capital of the Davidic Kingdom of Judah [and all Israel]. It is possible that we are meant to perceive connotations from the etymologies of these names. *Tirzah* [which was also a woman's name (Numbers 26:33; Numbers 27:1)] comes from a root meaning 'to be pleasant' [lovely or delightful] (hence: Mount Pleasant). *Jerusalem* means something like 'a foundation of [peace or] well-being.' Later, in Song of Solomon 8:10, the girl describes herself as one who brings *shalom,* that is well-being, peace and security. We say that a city in a prominent position has a certain 'aspect.' So also our girl 'looks out' with grandeur, dignity and loftiness [compare Song of Solomon 6:10]. Her aspect is awesome, yet pleasing. *Tirzah* may be regarded as the archetype of the delightful garden city, whilst *Jerusalem,* perched on its fortified rocky outcrop, represents imposing impregnability" (*The Message of the Song of Songs,* p. 191).

The New American Commentary states regarding the lover's words at this time of reunion and reconciliation: "His awe of her is as great as ever; if anything, it has increased. She is compared to Tirzah and Jerusalem, the two greatest cities of the early monarchy, in all their splendor. The meaning is that she inspires awe and wonder in him; and, as in his comparison of her to David's tower [in Song of Solomon 4:4—

which the city imagery may hark back to, considering the other repeated references in this section], he is still aware that he [or anyone else] cannot storm her by force (the walls of the city were its prominent feature). The request that she turn away her eyes [in 6:5a] further expresses his sense of her power. She can unnerve him with a single glance" (p. 417, note on verses 4-5a).

6:5-7: Regarding the eyes in Song of Solomon 6:5a, we may recall that the man in his previous *wasf* compared the woman's eyes to doves (Song of Solomon 4:1a). It may be that he does not repeat this in the present *wasf,* as he does other elements, because the woman has already turned and applied the same picture to him in her own *wasf* (Song of Solomon 5:12). So he *elevates* the praise in this case—telling her that her eyes overwhelm him. She is just stunning—a knockout, we might say today. The man's praise then in Song of Solomon 6:5-7 is essentially repeated from his earlier *wasf* (see Song of Solomon 4:1b, Song of Solomon 4:2, Song of Solomon 4:3b). He, as Dr. Glickman points out, "praises her hair, smile, and lips in [almost] exactly the same way he did on the wedding night. He tells her again that she is his...darling companion [Song of Solomon 6:4], and dove [verse 9]. This is not for lack of creativity—it's a poetic way to communicate that his appreciation for her has not diminished since that time" (pp. 110-111). Thus we seem to have more of the reconciliation of the lovers here. (Some, however, see the *wasf* repetition here as following formal custom during the seven-day wedding festival, which they consider to still be ongoing at this point.)

6:8-9: Song of Solomon 6:8-9 presents us with a difficulty that, as explained in our introduction, impacts the identification of the characters in the Song. In verse 8 we have mention of 60 queens, 80 concubines and numberless maidens—the point in the next verse being that the Shulamite outshines them. Who are these women? Many take them to be Solomon's harem before it reached a later size of 700 royal

wives and 300 concubines (see 1 Kings 11:1-3). The maidens here are sometimes taken to be ladies in waiting—many of whom would supposedly later become concubines. If the various women in these verses, or any of them, do represent Solomon's harem, it is most likely that Solomon is not the lover in the Song—a point in favor of the shepherd hypothesis and of the alternative two-character progression, which sees a nameless groom portrayed as King Solomon.

Yet it could be that the reference is to the wives and concubines of rulers near and far. A number of commentators point out the general quality of the women here. Gledhill, for instance, states: "The *queens, concubines* and *virgins* are mentioned in order of decreasing rank, but their numbers increase in ascending scale, *sixty, eighty, beyond number.*The numbers must not be taken literally; it is merely a literary device to indicate an indefinitely large number. All these gorgeous females are usually considered to be members of Solomon's harem. But the reference is more general. There is no mention of the king at all" (p. 193). *The New American Commentary* says: "The increasing numbers (sixty, eighty, a countless multitude) are typical wisdom technique" (p. 417, note on Song of Solomon 6:8-9). "Note that the sixty and eighty are respectively three score and four score [as the KJV writes these numbers], as in the wisdom formula, 'For three..., even for four" (footnote on verses 8-9; see Proverbs 30:15, Proverbs 30:18, Proverbs 30:21, Proverbs 30:29; Amos 1:3, Amos 1:6, Amos 1:9, Amos 1:11, Amos 1:13; Amos 2:1, Amos 2:4, Amos 2:6). Interestingly, the large number started with in Song of Solomon 6:8, Song of Solomon 6:60, is also used for the armed guards in Song of Solomon 3:7—so the number may well be representative.

The only problem here is that the queens and concubines are said at the end of verse 9 to praise the Shulamite—and the parallelism here identifies the virgins as the "daughters," most likely meaning the daughters of Jerusalem referred to throughout the Song. This would

seem to limit the queens and concubines to Jerusalem as well, particularly as they are portrayed as speaking of and to the Shulamite. It may, however, be that the queens and concubines are the consorts of foreign kings visiting Jerusalem—either all at once at some grand occasion (perhaps even Solomon's wedding to the Shulamite) or in smaller groups over an extended period of time. This would give these women exposure to the Shulamite as the wife of Solomon—particularly since she would at this stage be the only one. So it is quite possible that a young Solomon, prior to his polygamous corruption, is the lover in the Song. Yet even if the women mentioned here are not his harem, it is not required that Solomon be the lover. A nameless man and woman could still be portrayed throughout the Song. Of course, in this case the praise from several score of royal consorts would likely be figurative (that is, the man would be saying that all other women would have to admit that the Shulamite outshines them—whether or not they actually do).

The Shulamite here is not classed among the increasing numbers of other women. Rather, she, as the man's "perfect one" and the "only one" (verse 9), is in a class all by herself. ("My dove, my perfect one" is repeated from Song of Solomon 5:2). The woman is likewise said in Song of Solomon 6:9 to be the "only one of her mother, the favorite [Hebrew *barah*] of the one who bore her." There is a question here as to whether the woman is the only daughter of her mother. (We know she had brothers.) A favorite only daughter is an oxymoron—but the word *barah* here can mean "pure" (just as it is translated "clear" in verse 10), which may better parallel the man's description of the Shulamite as "perfect" or "undefiled." "Speaking of the girl from the mother's point of view accentuates the girl's youth and innocence" (Fox, p. 153).

6:10: There is some question as to who is speaking in Song of Solomon 6:10. Some, as is reflected in the NKJV speaker annotations, argue for

the man still speaking, particularly given the repetition of "awesome as...with banners" from verse 4 (indicating an inclusio). Yet the phrase "Who is she...?," parallel to its occurrence in Song of Solomon 3:6 and Song of Solomon 8:5, seems to denote some surprise and evidently comes from someone who is not already speaking with the Shulamite—as the man has been. As the women of the chorus (representing the daughters of Jerusalem) apparently sing Song of Solomon 3:6 (and probably Song of Solomon 8:5 too), it seems most likely that they sing Song of Solomon 6:10 as well. This follows the context here well. The man concluded verse 9 with mention of the daughters and royal consorts praising the Shulamite, effectively introducing verse 10 as conveying their words. Of course, it could be that the man is quoting their words in concluding his own praise section. (Either way, the praise section does include verse 10.)

The Shulamite, we should recall, earlier sought help from the daughters of Jerusalem while she was in distress over the apparent separation from her lover. Now she is utterly radiant—giving real cause for surprise. Perhaps the idea is to see them saying, "What have we here?," wondering why she is now so happy. There is also a contrast here with the perceived disdain of the daughters for the Shulamite in the opening of the Song. *The New American Commentary* says: "The woman is so thoroughly transformed that the girls hardly recognize her. They describe her beauty as like that of the moon and sun, but they do not use the usual vocabulary for these bodies. The word for 'moon' here [*lebanah,* alliterative with *Lebanon* and *lebonah* (frankincense)] is related to the word 'white' and contrasts with her self-description in 1:5, where she asks the Jerusalem girls not to chide her for her dark skin. She is also said to be like the 'dawn'; the word used here is a play on the word in Song of Solomon 1:5 for 'black.' The word for 'sun,' which is related to the word for 'heat,' seems to imply that she is too dazzling to behold. In a Cinderella motif, the woman who was very ordinary is now extraordinary in her beauty and breathtaking to

behold" (p. 418, note on Song of Solomon 6:10). Additionally, we may have the concept here of her light breaking forth after a dark and troubled night.

Based on the opening and close of the apparent inclusio here, Glickman draws an interesting comparison: "'Fair...as Tirzah, as lovely as Jerusalem,...as awe-inspiring as bannered hosts' begins the praise in Song of Solomon 6:4 and parallels the conclusion of the praise [in verse 10:] 'fair as the white moon, pure as the blazing sun, awe-inspiring as bannered hosts.'... Since Tirzah was a magnificent city in northern Israel...yet not deemed as glorious as Jerusalem, it seems natural to see the moon describing Tirzah, the sun describing Jerusalem, and the bannered hosts bringing balance to both descriptions but taking its specific meaning from the different contexts [in the latter case perhaps referring to the stars].... So both the beginning and ending of this section praise Shulamith as representing the best of Israel in its glory. The symbolism of the moon, sun, and eleven stars (or twelve, counting Joseph—Revelation 12:1) in the dream of Joseph, where they represent the Israel comprised of Jacob, his wive(s), and Joseph's eleven brothers, adds further support to this view (Genesis 37)" (p. 213). If this association is valid, as seems plausible, it would lend support to the idea that the Shulamite represents, in a typological sense, the nation of Israel or spiritual Israel (spiritual Jerusalem), the Church.

The description in this section of the uniqueness of the woman along with the comparison of her appearance to celestial grandeur resembles Egyptian love song 31: "One, the lady love without a duplicate, more perfect than the world, see, she is like the star rising at the start of an auspicious year. She whose excellence shines, whose body glistens, glorious her eyes when she stares.... She turns the head of every man, all captivated at the sight of her.... When she comes forth, anyone can see that there is none like that One" (Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Group A, in Simpson, pp. 315-316).

6:11-12: As was earlier noted regarding the next two verses, Song of Solomon 6:11-12 (the fifth subsection of the current unit), it is difficult to know who is speaking here and just what is meant. Murphy comments: "Verses 11-12 represent a sudden break with the preceding song of admiration [though some see a response here to verse 10, as we will see]. It is difficult to determine who is the speaker. Since the woman is the garden to which the man comes in Song of Solomon 5:1, the verse might be attributed to him. On the other hand, the blooming of the vine and blossoming of the pomegranates are repeated in an invitation uttered by the woman in Song of Solomon 7:13. The difficulty is compounded by the obscurity of v. 12. One may draw a parallel with chapter 7, where the man's resolve to be united with the woman follows a song of admiration (...[verses 7-8 after verses 1-6]). So also, Song of Solomon 6:11-12 might represent his coming to the woman after the praise of her beauty in the previous verses. However, v.11 can also be understood as spoken by the woman who recalls a former tryst with the man. She gives a specific purpose to her visit to the garden: to see if the flowers are in bloom, etc. In the language of the Song, this sign is associated with love. The man spoke of the awakening of nature in the famous Spring song of Song of Solomon 2:11-13, and it has been pointed out that phrases of Song of Solomon 6:11 are repeated in Song of Solomon 7:13 (spoken by the woman). The visit to the garden may be intended as a real visit to a real garden by the woman; the language about the blossoms would then suggest that the purpose is a rendezvous with the lover" (pp. 178-179, note on verse 11).

However, Murphy also points out that "the association of the nut-garden with the valley is not clear. The garden [if literal] could hardly contain a valley. It must [again, if literal] be a vantage point from which to see the valley in bloom, which occurs in the Spring as a result of the winter rains. But perhaps we are simply confronted with a profusion of images (garden, valley, vines, pomegranates) that have no spatial connotation" (p. 176, footnote on verse 11). Or perhaps the garden, as

already postulated, is figurative of the woman's body, so that a fertile valley would not be out of place here in an erotic connotation. We will come back to verse 11 after considering the next verse.

Regarding verse 12, "commentators are unanimous that this verse is the most difficult in the Song and one of the most difficult in the Old Testament to make sense of.... The words themselves are all common, all but the last used well over 100 times each in the Old Testament, but the syntax is elusive" (Carr, pp. 151-152, note on verse 12). Consider the Hebrew transliteration and the literal rendering:

Lo'	Not	(I know/knew not)
yada 'ti	I know/knew	
naphshi	my soul	(my being or myself)
samatni	set me	chariots
merkabot	chariots	
'ami	my people	(or Amminadib, a proper name)
nadib	prince	

The proper name interpretation, which is followed by the King James Version, goes all the way back to the Greek Septuagint translation. The same commentary continues: "Many have understood the word to be a proper name, Amminadib, taken as a variant of the more frequently attested Amminadab [see Exodus 6:23; Numbers 1:7; Numbers 2:3; Numbers 7:12, Numbers 7:17; Numbers 10:14; Ruth 4:19-20; 1 Chronicles 2:10; 1 Chronicles 6:22]. This rendition certainly is possible, and, if correct, the figure of Amminadab would [it is supposed] have a

similar function to [the mysterious] Prince Mehi in Egyptian love poetry. The latter is a well-known lover, who is also associated with chariots. However, two factors speak against this view. One, it is something of a last resort to appeal to a proper name in a difficult text. Second, the Amminadab of the Bible has no special connection with love, and there are no other tales or evidence to suggest that another Amminadab had those connections" (pp. 186-187, note on Song of Solomon 6:12). However, it may be significant that Nahshon of the house of Amminadab was the chief of Judah following the Exodus and that the ruling lineage of Israel , that of David and Solomon, was traced back to him (see the scriptural references above). Considering this, it is possible that being set in the "chariots of Amminadib" is perhaps a figurative reference to being made royalty. However, Amminadab's name is nowhere else used this way.Some put the first three words together as meaning "I do not know myself (anymore)" or "I did not know myself"—or "I am beside myself (with joy)." They then take the next two words to be "She set me in (or as) chariots" or "You set me in (or as) chariots" (there is no preposition here in the Hebrew). Others put the first two words together as meaning "I knew it not (when)"—that is to say, "Before I knew it..." These interpreters then take the next three words to mean "My being (implying my thoughts and feelings) set me in (or as) chariots." Placement in a chariot implied royal acceptance and public exaltation (compare 1 Kings 20:33; 2 Kings 10:15). Regarding the phrase *‘ammi-nadib,*there has long been dispute as to whether it should be taken as two words or as one word, a proper name. On the two-word view, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* explains, "Some have taken it as a construct phrase consisting of the word 'people' (*‘am*) and *nadib,* a word often rendered 'prince,' but more appropriately taken as *noble,* generous or willing" (p. 186, note on verse 12). Thus the NKJV rendering: "the chariots of my noble people." However, it should be noted that the word *nadib* is typically translated "prince" (ruler) almost immediately after in Song of Solomon 7:1 (*bat-nadib* here understood as "daughter of a prince,"

though some consider it "noble daughter"). A conceivable alternative is "set me in the chariots of my people's prince"—which would seemingly be spoken by the woman of being accepted by the man regaled as king (or as actually king if Solomon). Yet another possible meaning is "set me in the chariots of my people as prince"—which would be the words of the man referring to being made to feel like a king, sitting as king at the wedding feast or perhaps being actually crowned king if Solomon (though there is no other indication of an actual coronation).

How, then, are we to understand verses 11-12? Most see the woman speaking here (as the NKJV does)—primarily because verse 13 seems a response to her. Adherents of the shepherd hypothesis usually claim that the woman in verses 11-12 is recalling her abduction into Solomon's harem—in response to the women in verse 10 asking how she happened to be there among the princesses. The idea is that she was roaming about in the outdoors near her home when she came among the king's retinue and was taken away. Others think the woman is merely expressing how it is that she came to be a bride—that she went from enjoying the springtime of love with her beloved (compare Song of Solomon 2:10-13) to being exalted to a queen in their wedding (either figuratively or, if she is Solomon's bride, literally). Some who see the woman as Solomon's bride view her as dreaming of her homeland and desiring to visit there—and that her desires materialize later in the Song. The thought here is that Solomon's duties have kept them apart and that she wants him all to herself on a vacation away from palace life—the chariots being either the means of actually fleeing away or representing her mental flight of fancy.

Yet, as noted earlier, it seems likely that the garden imagery has a sexual connotation, as elsewhere in the Song. Or perhaps the blossoming here more generally relates to the budding of the loving relationship (as in Song of Solomon 2:10-13)—which would include amatory expression in the case of a married couple. *The Bible*

Knowledge Commentary states regarding Song of Solomon 6:11-12: "These verses tell the story of the couple's reconciliation from the beloved's [i.e., the woman's] point of view. She knew that he [her lover] had 'gone down to his garden' (v. 2). So she went there to see if their love was still in bloom (v. 11). As a person would look in the spring for new growth, buds on grape vines, and pomegranate blossoms, so she looked for fresh evidence of their love. When she found him there his first words were words of praise (vv. 4-10), indicating that their love was in fact flourishing" (note on verses 11-13). The chariots imagery in verse 12 would then simply mean that she is now exalted and overjoyed after a period of distress. The Shulamite in such case would seem in verses 11-12 to be responding to the women's question in verse 10 about why she is now so radiant. Tommy Nelson interprets verses 11-12 as the Shulamite's words in this way: "I went to find out if there was still hope for fruitfulness in our relationship, and before I knew it, my soul—my love, my husband, Solomon—had fully forgiven me!" (*The Book of Romance,* p. 148). Thus we have the continuing theme of reconciliation.

On the other hand, it could be the man speaking in verses 11-12 (as the NIV notes). Consider again the chiastic structure of this section (as shown in the chart from Glickman displayed earlier in our comments on the current unit). Here we see that Song of Solomon 6:11-12 is symmetrically parallel with Song of Solomon 6:2-3, which concerns the man going to his garden—an apparent reference to the woman (see also Song of Solomon 8:14). Glickman sees Song of Solomon 6:11-12 as referring to the woman now going to the garden, which as described above may well be the case, but it could again be the man. And if so, perhaps the reference is to the exact same thing as in Song of Solomon 6:2-3, with him describing how overjoyed and exalted it made him feel to be reconciled and intimate with his wife once more. Note also the vine (or vineyard) as an image of the woman in Song of Solomon 1:6—

though it may be that the man could be pictured this way too (as could perhaps the loving relationship between the two).

6:13: Song of Solomon 6:13 transitions into the next subsection of the present unit (6:13–7:5 or 7:6). Recall that Hebrew Bibles label this verse 7:1. Again, it is not obvious who is speaking. "It seems a fair conclusion to suggest that the first and second halves of the verse are spoken by different parties as we move from an imperative directed at the *Shulammite* to a sentence that seems to question the command. In the first parallel line, noted by the fourfold repetition of the verb *return* ([*shubi*]), the speakers are plural and request that the Shulammite come back into their presence so that they may get a close look at her" (*NICOT,* p. 191, note on 6:13, English numbering). Just who the plural speakers are is not clear. Note that the NKJV attributes the words to the man and his friends. This is likely based on the fact that "the verb form in the next colon [in the Shulamite's response] is masculine: *Why should you look?"* (Carr, p. 154, note on verse 13). The sudden introduction of other men here, though, seems rather odd. (Some even take these other men as the admirers of the Shulamite in Song of Solomon 7:1-5. But other men praising the sexual charms of a married woman in those verses seems extremely unlikely.) It should be recognized that the masculine plural can indicate a group comprising men *and* women (as long as the group, typically speaking, is not exclusively women—but see the relevant comments on Song of Solomon 2:7). Since the daughters of Jerusalem have been mentioned several times, it seems simplest to view the group of Song of Solomon 6:13 as them and the man. Shepherd-hypothesis advocates see the group as Solomon and his other harem girls. Alternatively, a chorus of both women and men (as was suggested for Song of Solomon 3:6-11) could be singing the first part of the verse—perhaps representing the wedding guests generally if these verses are still in the wedding context (though that is questionable).

The opening of Song of Solomon 6:13 is heavy with alliteration: *Shubi, shubi, ha-Shulamit; shubi, shubi.* Following this are two forms of the word *hazah* ("gaze") and then *ba-Shulamit.* This is, we should note, the only verse in the Song (and in all Scripture) that actually uses the term Shulamite—spoken by those calling to her and by herself or the man in reply. As explained in our introduction, this word could perhaps refer to a person from the town of Shunem. Others suggest a person of Shalem or Salem —i.e., Jerusalem. Yet it seems odd that the woman would be designated this way when the daughters of Jerusalem are not called the daughters of Salem. As our introduction further details, the term Shulamite seems more likely to be a female form of the name Solomon—the Solomoness, as it were—both being related to the word *shalom,* meaning peace and well-being. Perhaps this was a pet name for the actual bride of Solomon or a figurative title for a bride portrayed as a queen. Others have proposed a meaning, based on an expanded sense of *shalom,* of perfect one, completed one or consummated one. This would tie in to the meaning of the Hebrew word for bride or spouse in chapter 4, *kallah,* literally denoting one who is complete. It should also be pointed out that some have seen the term Shulamite here as a reference to another person. As Gledhill explains: "Others have suggested that the girl senses a rival here, that she is being upstaged by a Shunammite who is being recalled by her companions. But it is all too easy to explain away awkward verses by positing yet another intruding character, and thus adding to the complexity of the story" (p. 203). The term most likely refers to the principal woman throughout the Song—the one who in 8:10 finds "peace" (*shalom*) with her beloved.

There is dispute as to the specific sense of the repeated Hebrew word *shubi* in Song of Solomon 6:13. The NKJV translates it "return"—as if she is going away and the call is for her to come back. Yet the word could have the meaning of "turn" or "turn around"—implying that she is facing away and is asked to turn so as to be seen (or so that her

attention is redirected). Verse 10 saw the woman radiant in her happiness over her reunion with her lover. Verses 11-12 is likely either the woman or the man giving details of their happy reconciliation in the deepening of their loving and sexual relationship. Verse 13 in this vein is then thought by many to be calling for the woman to return from the revelry of her thoughts. Alternatively, it could be that the man and the chorus are calling for her return in a further unfolding of the reconciliation. Some, however, think that the woman is being called back from daydreaming about her distant home. Others, in a different take, believe the woman is retiring from the wedding festivity (perhaps going with her husband to the bridal chamber) and is being asked by all the guests to come back or make an about face so that they may continue to behold her resplendence mentioned in verse 10. Others, though, considering the mention of a dance at the end of the verse, interpret the word *shubi* as meaning turn in the sense of dancing—i.e., *whirl* or, as Marvin Pope in his *Anchor Bible* commentary has proposed, *leap* (though many reject this translation). Still others interpret *shubi* here as a call of "again" or "encore"—which would imply some activity being engaged in (the dance it is thought).

The latter part of verse 13 is usually thought to be the response of the Shulamite (as in the NKJV), speaking of herself in third person and asking what the onlookers would see in her as related to the dance mentioned here. Some see her being self-effacing or playfully fishing for compliments here, asking what there is to behold about her as she dances a dance—setting up the *wasf* or praise poem of the verses that follow. Others contend that there is no dance—that she is rebuking the onlookers for wanting to gaze on her as they would on some camp dancer (see below). However, the beginning of the *wasf* with praise of the woman's feet in sandals (Song of Solomon 7:1) seems to indicate that she does dance here. On the other hand, some attribute the words here to the man (as the NIV does). It is clear that he would not be asking what there is to see in the woman. So his words are taken as

either a rebuke for others gawking at her or a simple acknowledgement of their awe. Dr. Glickman takes the *mah* at the beginning of the second part of Song of Solomon 6:13 not as "what" but, as at the beginning of 7:1, as meaning "how"—seeing the man as commenting to the group, "How you gaze in awe upon Shulamith..." (p. 186).

What is the "dance of the two camps"? The NIV has "dance of Mahanaim," leaving the concluding phrase untranslated. Mahanaim was a place on the east side of the Jordan River near Bithron (2 Samuel 2:29), which some have identified, as we earlier noted, with Bether in Song of Solomon 2:16. Mahanaim derived its name from the stay there of Jacob and his family in Genesis 32—"Two Camps" denoting either his own family's and that of God's angels or, as some view it, his family here split into two companies. Since this episode ended with the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau, Glickman takes the reference to mean any dance in celebration of reconciliation (p. 216). That could perhaps be hinted at here. However, it should be pointed out that while Genesis 32:2 and other scriptural references to *Mahanaim* present the term as a proper name, Song of Solomon 6:13 uniquely uses the term with the definite article--*ha-mahanaim* meaning *"the* two camps" as opposed to the geographic reference (just as you wouldn't say "the Chicago").

Rejecting the geographical reference, some see in the terminology of the two camps a woman dancing between military companies, entertaining troops in a promiscuous sense—and deem that the Shulamite does not want to be viewed like this. Others, however, consider it some sort of belly dance the woman would perform for her husband (considering the visibility of the body parts implied in the *wasf* that follows). This was not necessarily in private. (Recall the 1956 movie *The Ten Commandments,* where the daughters of Jethro danced before Moses, as would have been common in that society. See also Judges 21:16-24.) Some take the dance here to be part of the seven-day wedding festivities. J.G. Wetzstein's observations in the

1800s of Syrian Arab wedding traditions, which may have been passed down from biblical times, included special dances accompanied by poems or songs—including a sword dance by the bride accompanied by a *wasf* (see Franz Delitzsch, "Appendix: Remarks on the Song by Dr. J.G. Wetzstein," "Commentary on the Song of Songs," *Keil & Delitzch's Commentary,* pp. 622-626). Some have argued that the two camps could be two lines of people between which the woman is dancing. Or perhaps the two sets of family and friends at the wedding are meant (if that is even the context here). There is simply no way to know." [END]

Day 396 & 397 – WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY: March 20th & 21st

Song of Solomon 7

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: "**7:1-5:** We proceed next to the *wasf* (the descriptive praise song cataloging physical virtues) in Song of Solomon 7:1-5 (and perhaps verse 6), which extols the woman not from head to toe (as in other cases) but, just the opposite, from toe to head. It has been argued, reasonably so as we have noted, that the praise begins with the feet because she is dancing the dance mentioned in Song of Solomon 6:13 (attention thus being drawn to the feet first). That she is dancing and not undressed in bed, as some believe, is likely from the mention of her feet being in sandals. Some even think the "curves" of the woman's thighs in Song of Solomon 7:1 refers to movement, though this is disputed. The implied visibility of some body parts here, as noted above, has led some to envision her not in thick robes but in the more revealing garb of a belly dancer—form fitting with diaphanous veils. Some, it should be pointed out, regard "navel" and the waist in verse 2 as actually denoting a lower area. If so and if the dance is before a plurality of onlookers, the description would be from the mind and not from what is actually seen at the time. Some, however, take her to be dancing nude (which would only be proper

before her husband in private), yet the sandals would seem to argue against that. But who knows?

In any case, it seems most likely (as in the NKJV speaker annotations) that the woman's true love, her husband, is singing the words here. Note particularly the description of her breasts as twin gazelle fawns (verse 3), which is repeated from the man's earlier praise in Song of Solomon 4:5 (likely given immediately before or during the wedding night)—just as Song of Solomon 6:5-7 repeated elements from that same time (see Song of Solomon 4:1-3). In the former repetition, the man was essentially telling the woman that he feels the same about her as he did previously—and the idea would be the same here, thus continuing the theme of reconciliation and reunion. Of course, shepherd-hypothesis advocates usually argue that the beginning of chapter 4 was Solomon's seduction—and some of them see him speaking here at the beginning of chapter 7 too. Yet others among them, as well as some followers of the two-character progression, take the end of verse 5, "a king is held captive by your tresses," to mean that the "king" could not here be speaking. Yet this is rather weak reasoning, as he could easily be speaking in third person—whether this is Solomon as seducer, Solomon as lover or another represented as Solomon (just as the Shulamite is often thought to be speaking in third person at the end of Song of Solomon 6:13). Some, in consideration of the group calling to the Shulamite at the beginning of 6:13, understand the same group to be speaking in Song of Solomon 7:1-5. Some argue for a group of young men in both cases. But the idea that they would be praising the woman's intimate parts as the husband looks on is untenable, being inappropriate and even dangerous—particularly if these are, as some bizarrely imagine, young men catcalling the queen while King Solomon looks on! As with the shepherd hypothesis generally, we should ask why lustful desire would be set to lengthy, beautiful poetry to be sung. Others argue for the daughters of Jerusalem singing admiringly in 7:1-5. Again, however, the intimate references and the repetition already

noted in the description of the breasts argues strongly for the husband—and the mention of the king in verse 5 does not at all rule him out.

Furthermore, Glickman points out that this *wasf* is one of tenfold praise—signifying a full enumeration—set in symmetrical parallel within the present unit to the tenfold praise of the woman for her beloved in Song of Solomon 5:10-16. This parallel strengthens the identification of the current praise segment with the man—it being his praise for the woman in turn. The ten elements in this *wasf* are: 1) feet (verse 1a); 2) thighs (verse 1b); 3) navel (verse 2a); 4) waist (verse 2b); 5) breasts (verse 3); 6) neck (verse 4a); 7) eyes (verse 4b-c); 8) nose (verse 4d-e); 9) head (verse 5a); 10) hair (verse 5b-c).

7:4a: The comparison of the woman's neck to an ivory tower in Song of Solomon 7:4a recalls the man's earlier comparison of her neck to the tower of David , described as an armory, in Song of Solomon 4:4. The mention of ivory may be intended to convey the sense of gleaming rather than pure whiteness. This nevertheless seems a rather odd way of describing a woman black of skin, as some contend the Shulamite is based on her describing herself as having dark skin in Song of Solomon 1:5-6. Indeed, as she plainly stated there, her darkened skin was a result of working outdoors. It may be that significant time has passed since her initial appearance in the Song—so that she is no longer so dark (compare also the likening of her to the white moon in Song of Solomon 6:10).

7:4b-c: The woman's eyes are described as "the pools in Heshbon by the gate in Bath Rabbim" (Song of Solomon 7:4b-c)—this being a town 20 miles east of the Jordan River in the territory of Reuben, now called Hesban. "Heshbon, once the royal city of King Sihon (Numbers 21:26), was blessed with an abundant supply of spring water. Bath Rabbim ('daughter of many' [or 'daughter of great ones']) may have been a

popular name for Heshbon" (*NIV Archaeological Study Bible,* note on Song of Solomon 7:4). Biblical archaeologist Bryant Wood has noted regarding this site: "Remains from the period of the divided monarchy, the Iron II age (ca. 900-600 B.C.), were also found. Pottery from the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. came to light in two sites on the mound. One is an open-air water reservoir which is undoubtedly the largest such Iron Age reservoir on Jordan 's East Bank. The sections uncovered indicate that it is 50 feet square and 18 feet deep with a capacity of nearly 300,000 gallons. It was probably one of the pools mentioned in Song of Solomon 7:4" ("The Israelites and the King's Highway," *Archaeology and Biblical Research,* Spring 1990, p. 41).

7:3d-e: The comparison of the woman's nose to "the tower of Lebanon which looks toward [faces or overlooks] Damascus" (Song of Solomon 7:4d-e) is problematic for a few reasons. First, we don't know what is meant by the object of comparison. Some suggest a fortification in Jerusalem built of Lebanon cedars, as was Solomon's national armory, named "the House of the Forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings 7:2)—though the dimensions of this particular building do not resemble a tower (yet a tower may have protruded from it). In line with this is the suggestion that the tower was a fortification on the north side of Jerusalem that faced Damascus —as Jerusalem 's northern gate was later known as the Damascus Gate. Others suggest an otherwise unknown mountain fortress in the high Lebanon range to the north of Israel. And still others think the Lebanon mountain range itself is in mind—towering above the land around.

The second, and larger, problem here is applying the imagery to the woman. How, we may wonder, is her nose to be compared to any of these things? Of all the descriptions in the various *wasfs* in the Song, this one probably seems to our modern sensitivities to be the most outlandish—a great tower or mountain protruding from a woman's face hardly seeming something beautiful. Some suppose the

fortification imagery to symbolize her face being set against the invasion of her person by unwanted advances (particularly with the Syrians of Damascus having been at times enemies of Israel). Others take the comparison to be with a scene of awe or grandeur—mountains or a grand fortress on a mountainside—though having no relation to shape or actual appearance.

Yet just as some specifics of appearance are intended in the other descriptive comparisons, that would also seem to be the case here. Dr. Carr says that the Lebanon range, "solid limestone and 10,000 feet high, hardly seems an apt comparison for a lady's nose. The simile has given commentators no end of trouble. Prominent noses are not normally considered especially beautiful. Delitzsch...took this to mean 'symmetrical beauty combined with awe-inspiring dignity,' since it 'formed a straight line from the brow downward, without bending to the right or left.' This is hardly convincing. *Lebanon* (*cf.* Song of Solomon 3:3; Song of Solomon 4:8) is one of several words derived from the Hebrew root *laben,* 'to be white' (*cf.*'frankincense,' Song of Solomon 3:6). It was probably the whiteness of the limestone cliffs that gave the mountain its name. This suggests that the imagery here is associated with the colour of her nose rather than its shape or size. Her face is pale, like the ivory tone of her neck, not sunburnt (*cf.* Song of Solomon 1:6)" (p. 159, note on Song of Solomon 7:4). This seems reasonable, as verse 4 would then have "ivory tower" set in parallel to "tower of Lebanon," which in Hebrew sounds like "white tower." Yet the fortification concept of resisting ingress also seems applicable here in both cases—as in Song of Solomon 4:4.

7:5: Some take the comparison of the woman's head in Song of Solomon 7:5 to Mount Carmel, in the northwest of Israel, as a reference to her holding her head high. However, the more likely comparison is to Carmel's beauty and lushness, the mountain being heavily covered with forest—as the woman's head was covered by her beautiful hair, which

is next described. The description of her hair as purple could refer to the lustrous highlights of her flowing locks in flickering lamplight (as she danced perhaps), her hair being earlier compared to goats that were most likely black or dark brown (Song of Solomon 4:1; Song of Solomon 6:5). Or "like purple" may point to her hair's richness or regal quality—purple dye being expensive and used by royalty—thus a fitting twine to figuratively bind a king (captivating the man).

7:6-9a: The next sentence in Song of Solomon 7:6, beginning with "How beautiful..." (NIV), may conclude the *wasf* of the previous verses, forming an inclusio with the "How beautiful..." of the opening in verse 1. Some, however, take it as the opening of a new subsection. It is, in any case, transitional. The next subsection (Song of Solomon 7:6 or Song of Solomon 7:9 or Song of Solomon 7:10) is the last subsection of the present unit. Those who view verses 1-5 as spoken by a group believe the lover (or Solomon as seducer in the mind of shepherd-hypothesis advocates) breaks in at verse 6, introduced by the mention of "king" in verse 5. Yet it seems more likely that no break in speaker has happened here—that the lover sings Song of Solomon 7:1-5, Song of Solomon 7:6 and Song of Solomon 7:7-9a.

Verses 7-8 speak of shinnying up the woman as a palm tree to take hold of her breasts—as the phrase the KJV and NKJV render "go up to" is literally "go up in" or "go up into" (J.P. Green's Literal Translation), usually understood as "climb" (NIV). Clearly the man here is intending sexual intimacy with the woman. Some see this section describing present sexual relations between husband and wife. That seems likely in terms of the formerly parted couple coming back together—now fully—particularly with the remark about sleepers, as we will see. However, some argue that the intimacy is not here actually renewed—merely thought of and not realized until after Song of Solomon 8:4 or after the end of the Song. Some, of course, argue that the couple has never been married—that the intimacy of 4:16–5:1 was a wish for the

future, not yet a reality. And the intimacy here in Song of Solomon 7:7-10 and in the next sections is viewed that way as well. Then there are the followers of the shepherd hypothesis, who see Solomon here continuing his attempted seduction of the woman. How, though, would an interloping seducer be privy to the experience of kissing her, as implied in what follows? The rejoinder is typically that it is pure fantasy on his part.

The end of verse 8 describes the fragrance of the woman's nose as apples or a similar fruit—"nose" being the proper translation of the word translated "breath" in the NKJV (this being the same word translated "nose" in verse 4). Yet the breath coming from her nose may well be in mind. A similar statement occurs in Egyptian love song number 12: "The scent of your nose alone is what revives my heart" (Papyrus Harris 500, Group B, translated by Fox, p. 21). Fox comments: "A gesture of affection frequent in the ancient East (including the Far East) was the nose kiss, in which the couple would rub faces and smell each other's nose" (p. 97, note on Song of Solomon 1:2). Others see the breath of passion here.

The wording of Song of Solomon 7:9 makes it clear that a change of speakers takes place in the middle of this verse. After the description of the interior of the woman's mouth as wine, she breaks in and says that the wine goes down smoothly for her beloved. Those who understand a two-character progression here see the man speaking his erotic intentions to the woman and then her joining in, completing his sentence—saying that she is happy to give him the enjoyment he seeks. This ties in well to her statement about the wine flowing smoothly over or through the "lips of sleepers." Some emend the text here to read "lips and teeth" (e.g., NIV). But there is no need for that. The word "sleepers" denotes those who sleep together—married lovers, which strengthens the argument that the couple is married here. Glickman translates the end of the verse to say, "as we fall asleep" (p. 187). He

stresses that this completes the theme of the unit. It began with the woman waking from sleep separated from her beloved when he desired physical relations with her (Song of Solomon 5:2-8), and it now concludes with the two falling asleep together after physical union.

Those who adhere to the shepherd hypothesis view this in a completely different way. They see Solomon pressing his seduction through the beginning of verse 9 to the point that the woman can no longer take it. Her breaking into the verse is then seen as her telling the lustful king that the wine of her mouth is not for him but for her true love, who is not actually present. However, the sleeping imagery does not fit so well in this interpretation.

7:10: Finally here we consider Song of Solomon 7:10. As noted earlier, it seems to reasonably conclude this unit—though it could transitionally open the next. Song of Solomon 2:16 was the first occurrence of the refrain of mutual possession sung by the woman. She reversed it in Song of Solomon 6:3, transitioning into the central subsection of the unit we have here been covering. There she said, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." Now in Song of Solomon 7:10, at the end of the unit, she declares, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me." Shepherd-hypothesis advocates take this as her final stand for her true love in opposition to Solomon's advances. But why, we should ask, has the woman here changed the refrain to conclude with not her lover's *possession* of her but, it is now stressed, his *desire* for her? The simplest explanation is that his desire for her has just been expressed in the preceding passage—which argues strongly against the shepherd hypothesis. We should also observe that in the previous two instances of the refrain, the lover is described as feeding among the lilies, which may imply kissing (see Song of Solomon 5:13). In Song of Solomon 7:10 there is no mention of that—perhaps because it is already clearly implied in verse 9. This again favors the two-character progression. In this view of the present unit, we see that the man had initially desired

the woman but, after perceiving her as refusing him, was gone—whether actually or just emotionally. But after she expressed her longing for him, he followed with expressing his undiminished love for her again, his great admiration for her, and now his intense desire for her anew—accompanied, it would seem, by kissing and sleeping together.

We should also note that the Hebrew word used here for "desire," *teshuqah,* occurs in only two other places in the Old Testament—in Genesis 4:7, where sin is pictured as wanting to get at Cain, and, more significantly, in Genesis 3:16 in the judgment on the primal couple, Adam and Eve, where the woman was told that her desire would be toward her husband who would rule over her (not always in a good sense it would seem). Now the Shulamite says that she belongs to her beloved and that *his* desire is toward *her.* Some see here an implied reversal of the Edenic judgment—that is to say, that through the loving admiration and desire of a good husband, the curse is mitigated or even alleviated (perhaps paralleling the reconciliation and relationship healing that has occurred in this section).

In reading the next unit, where we note more about verse 10 up front, we will see the lovers go away together for the purpose of deepening their love and intimacy.

"Come, My Beloved, Let Us Go Forth to the Field"

In this short unit the woman invites her beloved to join her in a trip into the countryside in the bloom of springtime. (That she is speaking is clear from the wording.) In the symmetrical arrangement of the Song, as explained by Dr. Craig Glickman in *Solomon's Song of Love,* this sixth major section of the Song (second to last) is parallel to the second major section (Song of Solomon 2:8-17), in which the man asked the woman to come away with him into the country in springtime. Thus there is a reversal of roles in her now taking the initiative to lead their

love to a new level. Interestingly, the refrain of mutual possession was part of the conclusion of the former section (Song of Solomon 2:16)—expressing the total commitment of the couple—and its order reversed within the reconciliation of the previous unit (Song of Solomon 6:3). Now a changed form of that refrain in Song of Solomon 7:10, emphasizing desire, occurs right before the present unit as a transition into it (or right at the beginning of it according to Glickman). Some see the present unit as progressing further toward the sexual intimacy the lovers sought at the end of the former unit. Others, however, believe sexual union was achieved in the former unit—but that now the woman is seeking to deepen their love and intimacy.

Shepherd-hypothesis advocates, believing Song of Solomon 7:9-10 is the Shulamite's rejection of Solomon's unwanted advances, take the current unit as her then addressing her true love and purposing to return with him to her childhood home (given the reference to her mother's house in Song of Solomon 8:2). How he is suddenly present in this view is unclear (perhaps she has sought him out without any description). Some deem him still absent. Commentator Franz Delitzsch decries this view, and the three-character drama generally, quite sternly: "The advocate of the shepherd-hypothesis thinks that the faithful Shulamith, after hearing Solomon's panegyric [or elaborate praise, given earlier in chapter 7], shakes her head [in verses 9-10] and says: 'I am my beloved's.' To him she calls [in verse 11], 'Come, my beloved'; for, as [19th-century German commentator H.G.A.] Ewald seeks to make this conceivable: the golden confidence of her near triumph [in resisting the king] lifts her in spirit forthwith above all that is present and all that is actual; only to him [her absent true love] may she speak; and as if she were half here and half already there, in the midst of her rural home along with him, she says, 'Let us go out into the fields,' etc. In fact, there is nothing more incredible than this Shulamitess, whose dialogue with Solomon consists of Solomon's addresses, and of answers which are directed, not to Solomon, but in a

monologue to her shepherd; and nothing more cowardly and more shadowy than this lover, who goes about in the moonlight seeking his beloved shepherdess whom he has lost, glancing here and there through the lattices of the windows and again disappearing" ("Commentary on the Song of Songs," *Keil & Delitzch's Commentary,* note on Song of Solomon 7:12). Indeed, where has this shepherd been throughout the woman's ongoing struggle in the palace? Feeding his flock? Why has he not contended with Solomon regarding his imprisoned bride? Appeal might be made to the shepherd as emblematic of Christ away in heaven. Yet the shepherd lad himself is not in heaven. And if Christ were on earth, would He not strive for His Bride—for His people? Would Christ always be sneaking around? Even while in heaven, Christ actively intervenes for His Bride! He does not stand impotently by and leave the Church to face Satan's temptations alone. Given all this and other factors we have previously noted, the shepherd hypothesis just does not seem very likely.

We also might wonder why, if the couple is already married in the three-character view here, would the woman wish to return to the house of her mother (if this phrase be understood literally). Would she not want to return with her beloved shepherd husband to their shared home after this terrible ordeal? Of course, some shepherd-hypothesis advocates argue that they are not yet married. In that case, we should wonder at the erotic implications of this section.

Some advocates of a *two*-character progression believe that the lovers in this section are not married and that, in a rather different picture, they are trying to slip away to be alone together for intimacy—the presumption being that they can't where they are and that if they were married they would simply go to their bedroom. Yet why would the Song be celebrating an unmarried couple sneaking off to the woods for premarital sex? Such a theme would not have been condoned in ancient Israel, particularly among those who canonized Scripture. Some

see the unmarried couple merely imagining future intimacy here—but given the detailed fantasizing it would be better for the two not to meet in private!

We ought to recognize, moreover, that the presumption that a husband and wife could at any time just go to their bedroom for fulfillment is a false notion. Even today it is common for married couples to want to "get away" from regular duties and routines to be freer to concentrate on their relationship and enjoy togetherness unencumbered. Many, understanding a "getaway" in mind here, believe the wife is seeking to go on a vacation with her husband—to travel into the countryside or, more specifically, to visit her childhood home. Some even think she desires a permanent move. Still others comprehend the picture here as being that of the newly married couple leaving the wedding feast with its temporary bridal chamber to go to their home—i.e., to their new life together.

Many, it should be realized, understand the Shulamite to be speaking of the outdoors metaphorically—so that the couple's bedroom is in actuality (or at least in the main) the setting for intimacy. The use in verse 13 of "our gates" or "our door" (NIV) would seem to argue for this. As commentator Tom Gledhill points out: "We have met this theme of love in the countryside before (Song of Solomon 2:8-13). The whole of nature seems to be sprouting and blossoming, and the two lovers want to be part of that. Their love has blossomed and become fragrant, they are ripe for love. Love in the springtime is a common literary motif. It seems to suggest that powers and urges that have long lain dormant can now burst forth unhindered and without restraint. The imagery seems to indicate that there is a time and a season for everything. There were times when restraint was necessary, but now it is the time to embrace [Ecclesiastes 3:1, Ecclesiastes 3:5]. Romance in the great outdoors is also a picture of untrammelled freedom and of closeness to nature. The literary fiction reminds us of our creatureliness

and of our unashamed delight in participating in the natural order of things" (*The Message of the Song of Songs,* pp. 211-212). Furthermore, we should recall the metaphor in Song of Solomon 2:10-13 of the springtime of romance following a "winter" period of separation. Even so, here in Song of Solomon 7:11-12 the springtime romance follows a period of trouble in the relationship—a winter of separation of a different sort.

7:11: In Song of Solomon 7:11, the sentence "Let us go forth to the field" has a bit of a wild connotation to it. Recall the earlier adjurations by the gazelles and does "of the field" (Song of Solomon 2:7; Song of Solomon 3:5)—an image of lovers in the open country. "Let us lodge in the villages" in the latter part of the verse may seem a bit tamer. But we should realize that the word rendered "villages" here, *k^{e}pharim,* while it *can* refer to unwalled villages, occurs two other times in the Song in both singular and plural form in reference to fragrant henna plants (Song of Solomon 1:14; Song of Solomon 4:13). Thus some see the end of Song of Solomon 7:11 as meaning "Let's spend the night among the henna bushes" or even "among fragrant surroundings." Perhaps a pun is intended with villages. In any case, the henna bushes would seem to more closely follow the other metaphoric imagery here. "Of course," as Gledhill continues, "the fantasy of the lover's love-making is an illusion, which must not be punctured by a crudely literal interpretation, where all such romantic notions are too rapidly frustrated by the intrusions of nettle rash, soldier ants, bumble bees and stony ground, to say nothing of ragged urchins peeping through the undergrowth" (p. 212). That is to say, nature as the setting for love is an idealized picture.

7:12: The wording of Song of Solomon 7:12 appears to be taken from Song of Solomon 6:11, as both mention going to see if the vine has budded and the pomegranates are in bloom. The parallel mutually affirms the sexual and relationship connotations of both passages—as

does Song of Solomon 6:11's parallel with going to the garden in Song of Solomon 6:2. We should also recall the vineyards in Song of Solomon 7:12 as symbolic of the woman in Song of Solomon 1:6 and Song of Solomon 8:12. There, the woman says in Song of Solomon 7:12, she will give the man her love— *dodi* here referring to her loving acts or affections, the context here being clearly a sexual one.

7:13: This is magnified in Song of Solomon 7:13 with the mention of "mandrakes," alternatively spelled "mandragoras." In Hebrew, the spelling is *duda'im,* which is closely related to *dodi* in verse 12. Indeed, the Hebrew meaning seems to be "love plant," and it is sometimes called a "love apple." The word occurs in Scripture only here and four times in Genesis 30:14-16, where Rachel and Leah used mandrakes while competing to produce offspring for Jacob. Yet in the Song "it is their property as a sexual stimulant that is in view, here, and not their aid to reproduction" (Gledhill, p. 212). Not that these lovers really need an aphrodisiac—as stimulated with one another as they already are. The mention of mandrakes is most likely a literary device to clarify that sexuality is the real meaning here behind all the plant and springtime imagery.

Commentator Othmar Keel points out: "The plant occurs frequently in Egyptian pictures from the New Kingdom (1540-1075 B.C.)....The ancient Egyptian love song also describes the effect of the love apple. The man sings: 'If only I were her Nubian maid, her attendant in secret! She would let me bring her love apples [i.e., mandrakes]; when it was in her hand, she would smell it, and she would show me the hue of her whole body' [Cairo Love Songs, Group B, no. 21]. The woman's skin is described in another love song: 'Your skin is the skin of the mandrake, which induces loving'" (*The Song of Songs, Continental Commentaries,* pp. 257-258, note on 7:13a).

Another of the Egyptian love songs mentions mandrakes in an interesting parallel to the blossoming of love we have seen: "If only my sister were mine every day, like the greenery of a wreath!... The reeds are dried, the safflower has blossomed, the *mrbb*flowers are (in) a cluster (?), the lapis-lazuli plants and the mandragoras have come forth.... {The blo}ssoms from Hatti have ripened, the *bsbs*-tree blossomed,...the willow tree greened. She would be with me every day, like (the) greenery of a wreath, all the blossoms are flourishing in the meadow...entirely" (Cairo Love Songs, Group B, no. 21E, translated by Michael Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs,* p. 38).

The mention of all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, at the couple's gates or doors has been seen by some as a metaphoric reference to marital relations during the wedding feast. Marvin Pope notes in his *Anchor Bible* commentary that there is a "Talmudic reference to hanging fruits in the bridal tent (TB [Babylonian Talmud] Abodah Zarah 12)" (*Song of Songs,* p. 650, note on verse 14b, Hebrew numbering). Even beyond this, the figurative meaning of the whole passage provides the basis for the primary way the wording should be comprehended here. The varied delectable fruits, new and old, are synonymous with the acts of love she is offering at the end of verse 12. This would seem to strongly imply that the couple is already married—for the old pleasant fruits symbolize the aspects of their physical relationship already experienced that they will continue in. The new implies new elements to be brought in to their lovemaking—perhaps introducing more romance, more adventure, more romping and play (as symbolized by journeying to the wild outdoors)." [END]

Day 398 & 399 – FRIDAY & SATURDAY: March 22nd & 23rd
Song of Solomon 8
Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: “**8:1:** In Song of Solomon 8:1, the woman expresses her desire that her lover be like her brother—note the "like" (or "as"), not that she wants him to actually be her brother. This may be playing off the man's earlier affectionate references to her as "sister" (4:9-5:2). "Who nursed at my mother's breasts!" in the next line of 8:1 may imply on some level that she wishes she had known the man her whole life—that she had grown up with him (so that she would not have missed any time with him). Yet the main reason she wishes he were like her brother (or, rather, that he would be viewed like her brother) is explained in the latter part of the verse—she wants to kiss him freely in public. As *The New American Commentary* states: "The point is that she wishes she were free to display her affection openly. In the ancient world this would have been impossible for a woman with any man except a father, brother, or other near relative, the kissing of whom would not be construed by the public as a quasi-sexual act. The freedom to kiss in public would not apply to her husband" (p. 424, note on verse 1). *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* concurs but explains that this is deduced mainly from the passage itself: "The verse likely reflects some kind of cultural norms for public intimacy. That is, it might be permitted to touch, hold hands, and kiss a brother, but not a lover (or perhaps even a husband) since the latter, as opposed to the former, would have erotic implications, likely thought unseemly in public. The problem, however, is that we must infer this custom from the verse since we do not know in any kind of detail the customs of the day" (p. 204, note on verse 1). Of course we do see this in later Middle Eastern custom. *The New American Commentary* further notes: "Fox (*Song,* 166) incorrectly assumes that this [verse] proves that the couple 'is not betrothed, let alone married.' But the open display of affection between the sexes is frowned upon in many societies (e.g., traditional Oriental [i.e., Eastern] society) regardless of whether the couple is married" (p. 424, footnote on verse 1).

8:2: In Song of Solomon 8:2, we have the image of the woman desiring to lead the man into her mother's house, a picture we saw earlier in Song of Solomon 3:4. In the NKJV and other English versions, the word "lead" here is rendered in the subjunctive form as *"would* lead"—following, as with the verbs in the two prior lines at the end of verse 1, from the beginning of verse 1. That is, if the man were perceived like her brother, then she *would* kiss him in public, *would* not be despised for doing so and, in the present clause, *would* lead him and *would* bring him to her mother's house. We have already, in commenting on verse 1, made sense of why the man being as the woman's brother would allow her to kiss him openly. But why would it enable her to lead him to her mother's house? Why should she not be able to freely do this anyway, since this implied going to a place of privacy? It could be that the issue of concern, though not spelled out here, was that of leading him *by the hand.* Recall her dreamlike thoughts in Song of Solomon 3:4: "I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother." Perhaps, as noted above, a married couple holding hands was also looked down upon. Others, however, interpret this differently. In *The New American Commentary,* Dr. Duane Garrett contends: "The mood of her words here [at the beginning of 8:2] is not subjunctive but indicative and indeed determined, as shown by the juxtaposition of the two verbs; and it should be translated: 'I *will* lead you; I *will* take you to the house of my mother.' Since she cannot express her love with a kiss openly, she will express her love much more fully privately" (p. 425, note on verse 2). The latter interpretation seems likely given the connotations here—since there seems to be little question that she is indeed going to lead him to this place as she desires.

Some, as noted above, take the mother's house here to be the couple's literal vacation destination, it being referred to as the Shulamite's mother's house because—as explained in our previous comments on 3:4—either her father was not in the picture (compare Song of

Solomon 1:6) or young women were considered to be raised in their mothers' homes (compare Genesis 24:28; Ruth 1:8). Alternatively, some see the woman as desiring to move back home or near home, taking the man with her (this supposedly being their logical residence together if he were like her brother). Of course, we must not forget the amatory subtext of this unit. The mother's house, taken literally, seems an odd choice for a romantic rendezvous. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says that in Song of Solomon 8:2 the Shulamite "playfully assumed the role of an older sister (I would [or will] *lead* you—the verb *nahag* is always used of a superior leading an inferior) and even the role of the mother. The lady of the house would give special wine to the guests. So the beloved [i.e., the woman] shared the characteristics of a sister, an older sister, and a mother in her relationship to her husband. The Song also portrays the lovers as friends (cf. Song of Solomon 5:1, Song of Solomon 5:16). Thus the lovers had a multifaceted relationship" (note on Song of Solomon 8:2-4).

In trying to make sense of the mention of the mother's house here, we should also recall the earlier use of the imagery of the woman taking the man to her mother's house in Song of Solomon 3:4—which was followed by the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem in Song of Solomon 3:5 (likely concerning physical relations), just as the current use of the mother's house imagery in 8:2 is followed in verse 4 by a form of the same charge. In our comments on the earlier passage, we noted the possibility that the reference points to a groom visiting a bride's parents' house as initiating a marriage. Some might apply that in the present case to the couple being not yet married and looking forward to the intimacies of marriage. Yet, if they are already married, the imagery could imply that they want to be as if newly married (on a second honeymoon, we might say today). Alternatively, it was noted in the prior case that some interpret "mother's house" or "mother-house" as meaning the womb, which would make the reference a sexual one.

It was also pointed out, though, that the next phrase in 3:4, "and into the chamber of her who conceived me," made the womb meaning difficult, as the *mother's* womb would then seemingly be meant instead of the girl's (but not out of the question since the girl could have been referring to the same part of her own person as that in which her mother conceived her). A similar difficulty with respect to the womb interpretation occurs in 8:2, the next clause seeming to refer more directly to the mother: "she who used to instruct me." However, this phrase, *t^{e}lamm^{e}deni,* could also be translated as "you would teach me" (Jerusalem Bible; Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs, Hermeneia Commentaries,* p. 180) or "you *will* teach me"—thus referring to the man. Some wish to emend the Hebrew text here. Gledhill comments: "The troublesome *t^{e}lamm^{e}deni* can easily revert to *t^{e}ladeni* by dropping the 'm,' thus meaning, 'she gave me birth'" (p. 216)—seen to correspond to "her who conceived me" in Song of Solomon 3:4 (and similar meanings in Song of Solomon 6:9 and Song of Solomon 8:5). But dropping a consonant from the Masoretic Text is unwarranted—as is the Greek Septuagint changing the entire line in Song of Solomon 8:2 to repeat the phrase from Song of Solomon 3:4. It seems more likely that the wording in Song of Solomon 8:2 was carefully chosen to be close to the former wording in 8:2 but with a significant difference. The wording may even be intentionally ambiguous as to person. In one sense, the Shulamite, who was reared and taught by her mother in the ways of love, will now take on the role of teacher of her husband in the bedroom. Yet on the other hand, the woman who was formerly taught by her mother will now learn much more about the ways of love from her husband assuming the teaching role. Thus, the indication may be that they will instruct *one another* in their shared adventure.

Concerning the giving of wine to drink in the next line, this may refer on some level to the role of the lady of the house playfully assumed, as mentioned above. Of course, this should be seen in a figurative sense. "The second line of the verse utilizes the by-now-well-attested theme

of drinking intoxicating liquids to signify physical intimacies (Song of Solomon 1:2; Song of Solomon 5:1; Song of Solomon 7:9). Sexual activity is both sensual and intoxicating, and so is drinking spiced wine and pomegranate wine" (*NICOT,* p. 204, note on 8:2). Note particularly that she refers to the juice of her own pomegranate. This is clearly an erotic symbol. We earlier saw the woman's sexuality represented as an orchard of pomegranates (Song of Solomon 4:13). And note the symbolism in one of the Egyptian love songs, where trees of an orchard are describing lovers meeting there: "The sister and brother make {holiday}, {swaying beneath} my branches; high on grape wine and pomegranate wine are they, and rubbed with Moringa and pine oil" (Turin Love Songs, no. 28, in William Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt,* p. 312).

In verse 2 "there is also an interesting word/sound play between 'I would make [or 'will have'] you drink' (*'aššaq^{e}ka...*) and 'I would...kiss you' (*'eššaq^{e}ka...*) in Song of Solomon 8:1" (*NICOT,*note on verse 2). And this follows *'emsa'aka* ("I would find") in verse 1. Moreover, "'pomegranate (*rimmoni*), and 'right hand' (*wimino*) [in verse 3] have similar sounds" (Gledhill, p. 216).

8:3: Song of Solomon 8:3 repeats the statement in Song of Solomon 2:6 (about the man holding the woman) that preceded the refrain of adjuration to the daughters of Jerusalem in Song of Solomon 2:7. It now precedes an altered form of that refrain. Some, as in the NKJV translation, take the words in both cases as referring to present reality, which is reasonable. Others see in both cases a wish, translated, "Oh, may his left hand be under my head and his right hand embrace me" (Glickman, pp. 178, 188). This is also quite reasonable. In the latter case, the realization of the desires expressed in this unit would still be yet to come—perhaps immediately following without direct comment. It is even possible that the ambiguous wording, though the same, could

allow for a wish in the former case and present reality in the latter—the context being different.

8:4: The present unit concludes in Song of Solomon 8:4 with an altered form of the adjuration refrain to the daughters of Jerusalem that concluded earlier units in Song of Solomon 2:7 and Song of Solomon 3:5. In this case there is no mention of the gazelles and does of the field as before. Perhaps more interestingly, as Dr. Glickman notes, is that the refrain at Song of Solomon 8:4 "replaces the word rendered 'not' (*im*[literally 'if' but meaning 'not' in oath formulas]) that precedes 'arouse' [or 'stir up'] and 'awaken' in the earlier refrains with a different word (*mah*).... Most translations note that this new word preceding 'arouse' and 'awaken' (*mah*—'what, why, that') *can* on rare occasions indicate negation. Then they translate 8.4 like before: 'Do *not* arouse...until it pleases.' But in light of the subtle but very instructive differences in the occurrences of other refrains...the translator must consider whether the variation yields a change of meaning as well. The grammars and lexicons that suggest this new word may imply negation can cite examples only where the negation arises out of a rhetorical question like, 'How can I do this wrong?' meaning 'I can't do this wrong.' But that rarely occurs, and it would be awkward that the imperative 'promise me' (or 'swear to me' [or 'I charge you']) would introduce it. Furthermore, if Shulamith had wished to request a promise 'not to arouse,' she could simply have used the same word for 'not' she used in the earlier refrains.... Quite significantly, the only other place where [*mah*] follows the verb 'promise me' [or 'I charge you'] (in Song of Solomon 5:8), it bears the sense of 'that'" (pp. 226-227). Let's note that third adjuration out of the four in the Song: "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem , if you find my beloved, *that* you tell him I am lovesick" (Song of Solomon 5:8; compare Song of Solomon 2:7; Song of Solomon 3:5; Song of Solomon 8:4). The Hebrew word rendered "that" in Song of Solomon 5:8 is *mah.* As noted earlier, some see here a negative sense: "do *not* tell

him." But most understand the meaning as "that" in the positive sense (i.e., "that you do" or "that you will")—which makes a good deal more sense. With this usage in the third adjuration, "the songwriter appears to intentionally prepare the reader for the different sense of the refrain in 8:4, when *mah* occurs twice" (Glickman, p. 227).

Thus 8:4 seems to more reasonably be translated as "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, *that* you stir up and *that* you awaken love *when* it pleases" (not *"until* it pleases" as before—since the Hebrew word here can mean either *when or until* depending on the context). Glickman, understanding *mah* as denoting adverbial intensity, translates Song of Solomon 8:4 as follows: "I want you to promise me, O young women of Jerusalem, that you will surely arouse, you will surely awaken love when love pleases to awaken." The previous wording of the refrain in Song of Solomon 2:7 and Song of Solomon 3:5, seeming to be a warning against premarital intimacy (and perhaps even against stirring up loving feelings too early in a relationship), is valid and important. But it is also important to *not* hold back from love and intimacy when the right person and marriage at last does come. The Song thus gives us the appropriate balance: "No way" *before* it's time and "all the way" *when* it's time! Glickman comments: "Perhaps in light of the obvious benefit of acting when the time is right and Shulamith's unfortunate experience on the night recounted after the wedding night, she desires to state the refrain in its positive form here. In light of the instructive transformations of other refrains in the Song, the resounding encouragement to seize the opportunity for real love when the opportunity arises is a climactic conclusion to this refrain" (pp. 227-228).

As the curtain rings down on this unit, it is not clear whether the lovers are already together in their intimacy or whether they are heading off together (literally or figuratively) for that purpose.

"Set Me as a Seal Upon Your Heart"

8:5a: We come now to the concluding section of the Song, which evidently looks back on the relationship and also looks ahead. In considering the unit's opening in Song of Solomon 8:5a, we should recall that the third unit of the Song closed in Song of Solomon 3:5 with the adjuration refrain to the daughters of Jerusalem and the next, the fourth and central unit (probably concerning the wedding of the couple), opened in Song of Solomon 3:6 with "Who is this coming out of the wilderness...?"—this being likely a reference to the woman (compare also Song of Solomon 6:10). Even so, the unit before the present one closed in 8:4 with a form of the adjuration refrain and this last unit opens in verse 5 with "Who is this coming up from the wilderness...?"—clearly defined in this case as the woman, since she is "...leaning upon her beloved" (same verse).

Recall from our comments on the preceding unit that some believe the couple was there heading off on a romantic getaway to rekindle their romance—some understanding the destination to be the woman's childhood home. Proponents of the shepherd hypothesis see the couple leaving the palace and harem in Jerusalem and permanently returning to the area of the woman's childhood home. In either case, Song of Solomon 8:5 is often considered to be the couple coming up from the wilderness in approaching the childhood home. Taking verses 8-9 to be the words of the Shulamite's brothers is considered to buttress this view—the idea being that these words are spoken during a visit to the home of the woman's family. This is part of the reason that some attribute verse 5 (as the NKJV does) to an unnamed relative—often viewed here as witnessing the couple's arrival at the country homestead. The other reason is that the speaker is taken to be the same in the latter part of the verse—where the speaker, a single individual, is deemed from the wording to have been present at the birth of the person being addressed. This is likely a mistaken notion, as

we will see. Furthermore, we should consider that the Song is not a drama in the sense that we might expect a brief walk-on role. It is a song sung in parts—and it seems odd that there would be a man waiting to sing this one small part. (Though one man singing here who also sings elsewhere with a male chorus is perhaps conceivable.)

Others who believe the lovers leave on a getaway vacation, whether to the countryside generally or to the woman's childhood home particularly, see verse 5 not as early in the getaway but as the *end* of it. That is, they see here the man and woman returning to Jerusalem *from* vacation (which is understood to have occurred between verses 4 and 5 without description). In this view, the beginning of verse 5 is read as being spoken by residents of Jerusalem—most likely the chorus representing the daughters of Jerusalem , who were just mentioned in verse 4. This would parallel the chorus of women singing, as they probably do, "Who is this [or she]...?" in Song of Solomon 3:6 and Song of Solomon 6:10.

Some, as we earlier saw, recognize the getaway intended by the woman in the previous section to be purely figurative, so that no literal trip was being proposed. In this view, the husband and wife were either going to their new life together after the wedding feast or, more likely, intending after a period of trouble in marriage to reconnect with one another in their own home and bedroom. This could mean that the beginning of verse 5 is to be understood figuratively as well—the man and woman returning from the countryside signifying their reemergence among people after a period of private lovemaking. Or the man and woman coming up from the wilderness together might signify their reunion after the period of distress. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* states: "A final picture of the Song's couple is presented here. The wilderness or desert had two symbolic associations in the Old Testament. First, the wilderness was associated with Israel 's 40-year period of trial. In their love the couple had overcome trials which

threatened their relationship (e.g., the insecurity of the beloved, Song of Solomon 1:5-6 [more so in Song of Solomon 3:1-5]; the foxes [if that was really a problem], Song of Solomon 2:15; and indifference [or perhaps simply misunderstanding], Song of Solomon 5:2-7). Second, the desert or wilderness was used as an image of God's curse (cf. Jeremiah 22:6; Joel 2:3). The couple's coming up out of the wilderness suggests that in a certain sense they had overcome the curse of disharmony pronounced on [the primal couple] Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:16b)" (note on Song of Solomon 8:5). Along these lines, the first emergence from the wilderness in Song of Solomon 3:6 perhaps symbolized coming from the betrothal period separation and difficulties and, in the wedding ceremony, inheriting the "Promised Land" of marriage. This second emergence from the wilderness could be seen as a renewed inheriting of that Promised Land—a renewed marriage. Only now their emergence from the wilderness is not merely through the institution of marriage (as symbolized by the public wedding) but through leaning on each other, working out their difficulties and growing together in love and intimacy (shown by the two coming up together privately). Again, it would make sense here that the chorus sings the beginning of verse 5—not as literal witnesses of a return from the wilderness, but as friends noting the special togetherness of the couple. The NIV lists the singers here as the "Friends"—referring to the chorus.

8:5b: Who, then, is singing in Song of Solomon 8:5b, who is being addressed, and how is this part of the verse to be understood? As mentioned above, the NKJV attributes both parts of the verse to a relative—thought, because of the wording in the latter part, to have been present at the birth of the person being addressed. (The idea is that the speaker points to a literal apple tree and says to one of the newly arrived lovers, "That's the spot where you were born [or conceived].") There are a few points we should observe.

First of all, the object suffixes of this verse are all masculine—the "you" addressed being apparently the man. Some dispute this, however, on a thematic basis. They correctly point out that other references to being brought forth by the mother in the Song apply to the woman (Song of Solomon 3:4; Song of Solomon 6:9; Song of Solomon 8:2). There is, however, an earlier mention of the man's mother in the context of the wedding, she being the one who crowns him and thus sends him off into marriage (Song of Solomon 3:11). And this may apply here in a figurative sense with the woman as the speaker, as we will see momentarily. Yet another reason people insist on the man not being the one awakened and brought forth, in either a literal or figurative sense, is that they find this difficult to reconcile with the man as a type of Christ (or God in Jewish allegory). How, in a spiritual sense, could the woman, as the Church or Israel, (or a relative, for that matter) have wakened Christ (or God)? Would it not be the other way around? Of course we then get into disputes about Israel or Mary giving birth to Christ. And would this not also be an issue with the mention of the mother in Song of Solmon 3:11? Or how about the woman proposing to lead the man in Song of Solomon 3:4 and Song of Solomon 8:2? Indeed, a preconceived notion about spiritual parallels should not be the basis for ignoring Hebrew grammar. Marvin Pope in his *Anchor Bible* commentary correctly points out that the retention of the masculine suffixes in the Jewish Masoretic Text here despite this running counter to centuries of Jewish allegorical interpretation, supports a solid early tradition for the masculine suffixes (*Song of Songs,* p. 663, note on verse 5c). This is not to say there is no typology here—but it probably should not be applied strictly to every line or passage. It thus seems best to take the grammar of Song of Solomon 8:5b at face value and understand the man as the one being addressed.

Second, the phrases in verse 5b represent key themes in the Song. "Awakened" occurs earlier in the adjurations to the daughters of

Jerusalem about not awakening and then awakening love (Song of Solomon 2:7; Song of Solomon 3:5; Song of Solomon 8:4) and also in the erotic central passage of the Song, where the woman calls for the north wind to awake and blow on her garden (Song of Solomon 4:16). The "apple tree" (or a comparable fruit tree, as it is not certain just what fruit is meant by the term "apple" in both places—some suggest apricot) was used of the man as being the place of love and intimacy in Song of Solomon 2:3—the fruit there and in Song of Solomon 2:5 being symbolic of sensual pleasure. And being brought forth by the mother is, as already noted, mentioned of the woman in Song of Solomon 3:4, Song of Solomon 6:9 and Song of Solomon 8:2 (the former and latter verses here occurring in a sexual context and perhaps having an erotic meaning). So it seems most likely that the sentence in Song of Solomon 8:5b is to be taken in a figurative sense of sexuality—especially on the heels of an emergence from the wilderness that is also probably a metaphor concerning the relationship. Surely a relative is not making all these erotic connections. This is most likely private communication between the lovers—probably the woman (as the NIV notes) speaking to the man, as per the grammar. As before, some of the prior references alluded to concern the experience of the woman—though both were involved in these and there may be a mutual application, especially as the last section concerned the woman taking the initiative to lead the man in a renewal of romance and intimacy.

Third, the repetition near the end of the verse seems to emphasize not just being conceived, but the labor of birth, as the NIV translates it. As Dr. Craig Glickman explains: "The word for 'to labor' in birth [as he translates it] may also mean 'conceived' or simply 'to be pregnant.' The noun derived from the word means 'labor pains,' which favors the meaning of the verb as 'to labor' in birth. Perhaps the songwriter intends both meanings, having a play on words with a single word" (*Solomon's Song of Love,* p. 228). Here, again, may be a figurative picture of the pain of labor giving way to the joy of new life.

Putting all of this together, it would seem that the woman is telling the man that she awakened him sexually during the delight of intimacy with him—and that he was born anew through this experience (or perhaps that he was, so to speak, born to be loved by her). More specifically, she may be speaking of having *re* awakened him sexually in a rebirth during their recent intimacy—the idea possibly being that she herself has followed the pattern of his mother in giving new life to him (in their revived relationship) after going through a period of distress. Directing attention toward the apple tree, besides its implication of sensual delight, would seem to indicate a return to the joy of love in the opening section of the Song (again see Song of Solomon 2:3). That is to say, after coming up from the wilderness in a renewal of marriage, the lovers find that they have arrived back at the love they once knew. This truly is a beautiful picture. Of course, it is contingent on seeing some chronological progress in the Song from the beginning until this point. A number of interpreters deny this, but it helps a great deal in making sense out of what is being described throughout.

8:6-7: Continuing the apparent theme of renewing the marriage (as, again, coming up from the wilderness in Song of Solomon 8:5 was an image previously associated with what seems to be the wedding of the couple in Song of Solomon 3:6-11), we are next, in Song of Solomon 8:6-7 given a call to renewed commitment and an abstract description of the nature of love, which in context refers to the various aspects of the love between a man and woman in marriage—including the mutual attraction, passionate desire, romantic feeling, companionship, concern, and commitment that bind them together. As the pronouns in verse 6a are masculine singular, it is clear in context that the woman is speaking to the man—and, given the "for" here, that she speaks through the end of verse 7 (as is generally acknowledged).

She asks him to set her as a seal on his heart and on his arm (verse 6a). Engraved stone or metal seals, used for identification (Genesis 38:18)

and signature purposes, were carried on one's person—just as people in the Western world today don't leave home without wallet and driver's license. The word for "seal" in Song of Solomon 8:6 "is an Egyptian loanword. Such objects could be worn on strings about the neck (Genesis 38:18) and thus lie over the 'heart'; they were also worn as rings on the hand (Jeremiah 22:24)" (Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs, Hermeneia Commentaries,* p. 191, footnote on Song of Solomon 8:6). Interestingly, the boy in one of the Cairo Love Songs may have used similar imagery: "If only I were her little seal-ring, the keeper of her finger! I would see her love each and every day...{while it would be I} who stole her heart" (Group B, no. 27 or 21C, translated by Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and The Egyptian Love Songs,* p. 38). Here the picture is of perpetual closeness with the person loved.

Song of Solomon 8:6, however, does not mention the finger but the "arm." Some picture a bracelet. Yet a ring on the finger could be meant if the word literally translated "arm" is interchangeable here with "hand," "just as in Song of Solomon 5:14 'hand' was understood as 'arm'" (Murphy, footnote on 8:6). Yet the nuance of "arm" is surely deliberate in this brilliantly crafted work. If the woman herself is pictured as a seal, then it would seem she wishes to be over the man's heart (in private affections) and on his arm (in the sense of holding onto his arm and being presented on his arm in public). Their arrival in Song of Solomon 8:5 was marked by her leaning on him, evidently on his arm. On the other hand, "set me as a seal upon your heart...upon your arm" may have the sense of *"impress* me as a seal onto your heart and arm." In this case, the idea is that she be indelibly stamped onto his heart (that is, onto his emotions and inner commitment) and onto his arm (meaning, as with God's commandments in Deuteronomy 6:6-8, onto his actions). And, considering the identification imagery, she may have been asking that the man be completely identified with her—that in observing him, all would see a man wholly devoted to her (her name being figuratively tattooed on his arm, as we might think of it today).

Moreover, there may be a sense here of a mark of ownership—that the man would willingly belong, and be *seen* as belonging, to her (in this apparent recommitment to marriage with its mutual possession).

The remainder of Song of Solomon 8:6-7 gives the basis of the commitment the woman desires of the man—clearly implied to be the basis of her own feelings. The first two lines about the seal are connected by the word "for" to the next two lines about love being as strong as death (in not letting go of those in its grasp) and, likewise, jealousy (i.e., proper jealousy in the sense of guarding the exclusivity of the committed relationship) being as "unyielding as the grave" (NIV)—the word "cruel" in the KJV and NKJV probably being a wrong nuance in this case of the Hebrew word here that literally means "hard." Glickman notes a short chiastic or symmetrical
pattern: *a:* heart; *b:* arm; *b':* strong; *a':*jealousy unyielding (p. 228). This abstract statement about the nature of love, continuing through to the end of verse 7, is quite remarkable here—there being nothing else like it in the Song. Having tied the whole of the Song together in the description of the renewal of the relationship in verse 5, the segment that follows forms the secondary high point of the Song (the climax being the central passage, 4:16-5:1). Here in Song of Solomon 8:6-7, in what is likely aimed at the audience in an instructive sense, we are told not only about the unbreakable grip of love and accompanying jealousy, but that love is a flame of God, as the words in the last line of verse 6 can translated "a flame of YAH." If this translation is correct, this is the only direct mention of God in the Song. The translation issues here, and the import of this segment, are considered in detail in our introduction, and you may wish to review that here. Though this translation is disputed, it reasonably fits here—and the wording may be intentionally ambiguous so that the mention of God is very subtle. In any case, it is clear that God is the very author of human love and sexuality.

The last two lines of verse 6 go with the first two lines of verse 7. So intensely does true love burn that "great waters" (*mayyim rabbim*) cannot put it out—these being representative in other passages of Scripture of destructive forces and applying most naturally here, since water would typically extinguish a flame. This is not to say that love can never die—for it clearly can and does die out through neglect and wrong choices of the lovers themselves. But when true love is burning, it cannot be quenched.

At the end of verse 7 we are further told that love cannot be bought. If a man gave everything he had for love, "it [or 'he,' this could be translated] would be utterly scorned" (NIV). Shepherd-hypothesis advocates take this as a summary of what has happened throughout the Song. *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* contends here: "True love is not only unquenchable, it is also unpurchaseable. Solomon had made every effort to buy her love with all the luxuries of the court, but to no avail. The Shulammite speaks from experience" (note on verses Song of Solomon 8:6-7). Yet there are ways to understand this passage that do not require a three-character interpretation. If Solomon is the lover in the Song, the woman could simply be making a point that it was not his wealth that drew her to him in love as some might assume—that he, rather, won her over naturally because no one can be induced to true love through bribery. On the other hand, if a poor shepherd and vineyard caretaker girl are being extolled in the Song as if they are king and queen, the girl may be contrasting her man with the real Solomon, commenting that true love is not really about wealth and splendor. Murphy makes another suggestion here, pointing out that this pronouncement of disdain on one seeking to buy love "may seem somewhat anticlimactic after the preceding lines, but in the biblical world, where the *mohar,* or bride-price, played a significant role, the reference was appropriate. Moreover, the practices associated with the bride price seem to figure in the background of vv 8-12" (p. 198, note on verses 6-7). We will consider this shortly.

8:8-10: The next segment here, Song of Solomon 8:8-10, seems to spring out of nowhere. While these verses go together based on the same matter under discussion carrying through them, it is not clear who is speaking and who is being discussed. Let's first consider what is being talked about, as this is fairly easy to discern. In verse 8, a group or an individual speaking on behalf of a group mentions having a little sister with no breasts—probably indicating that she is very young. Concern is expressed as to what to do for this sister in (or perhaps in consideration of) "the day when she is spoken for"—which seems to indicate the day that commitment is made to her in betrothal or marriage (or at least the time when such is possible). Some note a similar expression in 1 Samuel 25:39 regarding David and Abigail. In fact, this meaning would follow well in the context of the commitment sought in Song of Solomon 8:6.

Verse 9 is either a response by another part of the group here or a continuation by the same speaker or speakers if the question at the end of verse 8 was posed rhetorically. If she is a "wall," verse 9 says, the group will build a silver battlement on her—and if a "door," the group will enclose her with cedar boards. Some assume that the "wall" imagery here corresponds to the girl having no breasts and believe that the intention is to enhance her flat-chested appearance. But this is clearly not the case. The "if" here clearly indicates a condition not presently apparent. Of course some then assume that the concern is whether the girl will remain undeveloped. But this is not the point either. In verse 10 a girl who does have breasts (which are reckoned as towers) is presented as a "wall" (so no flatness is intimated here). Moreover, the imagery of building of *battlements* on this wall shows what kind of wall is meant, making the meaning plain. "The wall (the Hebrew word [and the battlements imagery] signifies a fortified city wall, not the wall of a house)...suggests defence, impregnability, repulsion of intruders. Metaphorically it represents chastity, unavailability, self-protection and preservation" (Tom Gledhill, *The*

Message of the Song of Songs, p. 236). Indeed, in the context of preserving a young girl for marriage, the wall imagery could reasonably apply only to the guarding of her virginity. The battlements, normally meaning further stone courses (though some picture turrets here), could entail extra support in maintaining virginity. Yet their being silver would seem to refer more to adornment as a reward or gift (perhaps a bridal gift)—the courses atop the wall being the place in this metaphoric picture to place such adornment.

There is a bit of confusion about the "door" (or "gate") imagery. Some regard this in the same sense as the wall—that it also implies a barrier to entrance. The enclosure with cedars is then reckoned to be, as before, extra security and/or, as a reward, adornment consisting of cedar paneling. Others, however, regard the door or gateway as promoting access—an image of being open, or sometimes open, to seduction and unchastity. The need, it is deemed in this case, is to board her up—to sequester her from that potential. This seems more probable. For consider: In presenting the image of a door beside that of a wall, are both really intended in the same light? It seems hard to get around the idea that you can get *through* one of these. There certainly is not the same *degree* of impregnability. Furthermore, the woman in verse 10 selects only *one* of these to describe herself—the wall. The implication seems to be that she has *not* been a door. And boarding over a door makes more sense than decorating it with paneling. The word "enclose" here means "confine" (Strong's No. 6696).

Who is saying all this, and who is the little sister? Most understand, as in the NKJV speaker annotations, that the Shulamite's brothers (mentioned in Song of Solomon 1:6) are speaking in Song of Solomon 8:8-9 (or that she is quoting them—with her continuing to speak after verse 7) and that verse 10 is her comment in reply. Many holding this opinion see verses 8-9 as a flashback to the brothers discussing the Shulamite when she was young. Others, however, see them presently

discussing *another* sister. On the other hand, some consider that the woman is speaking (to or on behalf of her brothers) of a younger sister in the present—verse 10 referring to her being a personal example to the sister. Still others see the female chorus singing here as the daughters of Jerusalem regarding a young girl among them, a "sister," figuratively speaking, among them (they all being "daughters")—perhaps representative of young girls generally. Again, verse 10 would be the Shulamite pointing to herself as an example. Others have proposed a group of men, suitors (being supposedly the companions of verse 13), discussing the Shulamite in verses 8-9 as a young "sister" in a figurative sense—each aiming to sequester her until marriage. This view is the most unlikely, as there has been no hint of such suitors at any point prior (and verse 13 does not support the idea, as we will see). What, then, of the other views here?

Regarding the Shulamite and her brothers having a younger sister, we should consider the earlier words of the man in Song of Solomon 6:9: "My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite [or 'pure one,' this probably ought to be] of her mother." At face value, it would appear that the Shulamite is an only daughter (not an only child, as we know she had brothers). Some argue for the supposed interpretation of "favorite" here as being parallel to the concept of one and only—unique or being essentially the only one the mother sees. Of course, this would be rather sad for a second daughter. (And the idea that a second daughter would be too young to be prized or noticed by her mother is absurd.) Furthermore, "favorite" does not seem a reasonable meaning of the Hebrew word here, since the same word is translated in the next verse as "clear" (you would never say "favorite as the sun"). A second sister would be necessary only if the Shulamite were clearly shown to be speaking her own words in Song of Solomon 8:8. Yet since there are easily other alternatives, there is really no basis for a second sister.

While it is possible that the daughters of Jerusalem are speaking of a young one among them, why would one be singled out? Would there not be many such young girls? Perhaps the idea is that one represents many, each to be considered individually. Older sisters could and did, of course, influence younger ones. But did older sisters have the authority that seems to be indicated here? "Responsibility of *brothers* for a sister is well established in the Bible, especially in matters pertaining to sexuality and marriage, as in the case of Rebecca, Genesis 24:29-60; Dinah, Genesis 34:6-17; and the daughters of Shiloh, Judges 21:22. Song of Solomon 1:6 clearly reflects the fraternal authority of the brothers over the Shulamite" (Ariel and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs,* pp. 214-215, note on Song of Solomon 8:8). Such authority is magnified in the absence of a father. Even if older sisters had similar authority over younger sisters, we should consider that this is attested to nowhere else in Scripture and that such an image has no correspondence to earlier imagery in the Song—whereas the common opinion that the brothers are speaking does.

In encountering verse 8, we properly recognize a change of speakers since the Shulamite, who was previously speaking, had no other sister. Then, in considering who the little sister is, we consider that the Shulamite herself is earlier referred to figuratively as "sister" by her beloved. And, more importantly, we recall that she earlier referred to herself as being under the authority of her brothers (Song of Solomon 1:6)—making her their younger sister. Thus, without inventing new information, it is most natural to assume (barring some conflict) that they are in Song of Solomon 8:8-9 speaking of her. A potential conflict immediately emerges with respect to the chronology. We consider that the Shulamite is no longer a young girl under their care, but is evidently married to her beloved. However, we also note that we have already met with reflection on past events a few verses prior, as the lovers returned to the theme of the apple tree (from Song of Solomon 2:3) in Song of Solomon 8:5—getting back, as we earlier noted, to the love

they once knew. This, we should recognize, is a facet of the overall symmetrical arrangement of the Song—particularly correspondence between the last major section (Song of Solomon 8:5-14) and the opening section (1:1–2:7). And now we have further correspondence in what is evidently additional reflection. In Song of Solomon 1:6, the earlier mention of the Shulamite's brother's authority over her, she said that they were angry with her and made her a vineyard keeper so that she was not able to attend to her own vineyard (her own person, particularly her appearance in context). Putting this together with Song of Solomon 8:8-9 gives us a better picture here. It seems that part of their motivation was to safeguard her purity.

Some believe the Shulamite's brothers were angry with her in Song of Solomon 1:6 because she had *failed* to protect her virginity—and that her work in the vineyard, where they could see her, was her sequestering. Yet the Shulamite declares herself a wall in Song of Solomon 8:10, so this seems unlikely. Perhaps the brothers were mistaken (not necessarily thinking she committed immorality but imagining based on something that happened, perhaps some perceived flirtation, that she might). Or perhaps she earlier mistook their assignment of her to vineyard work as their anger—when it was merely a way to help her maintain her chastity (through having duties that took up her time and energy and kept her in public view). She seems to appreciate their past efforts in verse 12, as we will see in a moment.

Those who regard verses 8-9 as the words of the brothers but see only a female chorus in the Song typically imagine that the woman is here quoting the brothers. Yet there is no indication of a quote here, such as we find in Song of Solomon 2:10. Indeed, this would be extremely confusing to listeners since the woman sings the previous verse (Song of Solomon 8:7). How could an audience reasonably comprehend a new speaker here without a new singer? The man singing would not make quick sense of it. These factors make a good case for a male chorus

singing here (and probably earlier in parts of Song of Solomon 3:6-11). This does not mean that the brothers, in the storyline of the Song, are actually present in Song of Solomon 8:8-9. Those who consider Song of Solomon 8:5 as picturing the arrival of the lovers at the Shulamite's country home often imagine her family gathered together with them in Song of Solomon 8:8-10 and the group reminiscing here. Likewise, some who see the lovers returning to Jerusalem in Song of Solomon 8:5 imagine a family visit. Those who comprehend a wedding feast setting still ongoing—or having just ended—think that the family is still gathered together in verses 8-10. Yet we ought to realize that the brothers' words in verses 8-9, constituting a memory or reflection, do not require any such gathering or visit.

Verse 10, as already noted, is typically taken to be the words of the Shulamite. Where her words are typically translated "I am a wall," some render this "I *was* a wall" (NRSV), which is possible, as the verb is only implied. Indeed, this seems to fit better in context. In reply to her brothers having in the past wondered if she would be a wall or a door, she says she was a wall, with her breasts as towers (meaning that they were unreachable and guarded atop her fortress wall). Yet this was until she became in "his" eyes (which can logically only mean the eyes of her lover—perhaps referring to the one who spoke for her, as verse 8 anticipated) as one finding "peace." That is, the lover (the husband) was, through terms of peace, allowed entrance into her fortress. His advances were not repelled but embraced. Some take "peace" (*shalom*) here in the sense of wholeness and contentment, and this may be implied in a secondary sense. Yet the primary meaning in the metaphor seems to be that of opposing forces coming together, there being no further need of defensive fortifications guarding chastity (at least *within* marriage—there still of course being a need to defend against threats from outside). The peace and unity here may also tie in to the ongoing reconciliation of the past few chapters—the idea being

one of having recaptured that earlier peace that came through marital union (physical and otherwise).

It is interesting to note the phrase "one who found peace [*shalom*]" at the end of verse 10 as a designation for the woman. This may specifically relate to the reference to her in Song of Solomon 6:13 as *ha-Shulamit* (the Shulamite), possibly—especially if a feminine form of *Sh^{e}lomoh* (Solomon)—derived from *shalom.* Indeed, the last word in Song of Solomon 8:10 is *shalom,* "peace," and in the next verse, verse 11, is *Sh^{e}lomoh* (Solomon). Indeed, *"his* eyes" in verse 10 is thought by some to refer to Solomon since his name immediately follows. So we may have some implied wordplay here: *ha-Shulamit* finding *shalom* in *Sh^{e}lomoh.* This, it would appear, happened with initial union in marriage—and it has now happened again, in a parallel sense, through the renewal of love and intimacy. Shepherd-hypothesis proponents view the woman's statement in an entirely different light of course, usually taking it to mean that Solomon finally ceased his attempted seduction of her and allowed her to be with her beloved shepherd.

8:11-12: Continuing in Song of Solomon 8:11-12, we note that these two verses clearly go together (each mentioning *Solomon, vineyard, thousand* and *fruit*), though there is dispute as to who is speaking and what is truly being portrayed. Solomon, we are told in verse 11, had a vineyard in Baal Hamon, a name otherwise unknown. In verse 12, Solomon is addressed and mention is made of "my own vineyard." How are we to take these verses—literally or figuratively? And why are they here? As with verses 8-10, this segment that follows seems at first glance to come out of the blue. Yet considering the reflection we have already noted—and the symmetry between this closing section of the Song (Song of Solomon 8:5-14) and the opening section (1:1–2:7), it is natural and appropriate to look for more of the same.

Solomon, we should note, is mentioned twice here (Song of Solomon 8:11-12) and also twice in the opening section (Song of Solomon 1:1, Song of Solomon 1:5)—both these positions being exactly opposite to three mentions of his name in the central section of the Song concerning the apparent wedding procession (Song of Solomon 3:7, Song of Solomon 3:9, Song of Solomon 3:11). The word translated "keepers" or "those who tend" (Song of Solomon 8:11-12), thus appearing twice here in this segment, occurs elsewhere in the Song only in the opening section—in that case also appearing two times together as "keeper" and "kept" (Song of Solomon 1:6). This former instance is part of the segment that also mentions Solomon (Song of Solomon 1:5-6). Furthermore, it should be recognized that the word "vineyards" and then "my own vineyard" at the end of Song of Solomon 1:6 parallels the two mentions of "vineyard" in Song of Solomon 8:11 and "my own vineyard" in Song of Solomon 8:12. On top of this, we should observe that Song of Solomon 1:6 is also the verse that mentioned the Shulamite's brothers assigning her work—parallel to their authority over her we have already noted in Song of Solomon 8:8-9. All of this very strongly indicates that Song of Solomon 8:8-12 should all be taken together—as parallel to Song of Solomon 1:5-6.

This can help us to understand what is going on in Song of Solomon 8:11-12. In Song of Solomon 1:6, the girl was sent by her brothers to work in the sun in literal vineyards—and this prevented her from devoting as much energies as she would have liked to her own personal vineyard, a figurative reference to her own person (her appearance being at issue here). This gives us good reason to see the vineyard of Song of Solomon 8:11 literally and the personal vineyard of verse 12 as a figurative reference to the speaker's person. Indeed the vineyard of verse 11, in this parallel, would seem to be one that the girl was sent to work in—followed by reference to her own person in the vineyard of verse 12. However, the related wording between verses 11 and 12 indicate that the vineyard in verse 11 is to be understood figuratively

on some level, as we will see. Thus it may be that a literal situation in verse 11 is being used in a symbolic manner.

A literal interpretation of the vineyard in verse 11 most naturally implies a literal interpretation of Solomon here as well. It does not follow that a poor shepherd or even an average citizen would have a great vineyard leased to keepers who were to bring a return of 1,000 silver coins for the fruit sold. The lord of this vineyard would be a wealthy individual, and King Solomon makes a great deal of sense in that light. Solomon is the likely author of Ecclesiastes, and the writer of that book lists among his great works the planting of vineyards and the making of gardens and orchards with pools and all kinds of fruit trees (Song of Solomon 2:4-7). That Israelite kings had a penchant for possessing vineyards is also evident in the story of Ahab's desire for Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. We may also note David's appointment of officials to oversee vineyards and wine production, evidently to supply state needs (1 Chronicles 27:27). Solomon's administration was surely no different in this. So it may well be (putting the whole story together in Song of Solomon 1:5-6 and Song of Solomon 8:8-12) that the king placed one of his vineyards into the care of the Shulamite's brothers and that they delegated some responsibilities to her.

In this scenario, Baal Hamon in verse 11 would be a literal place—though it is probably also a figurative reference. On the literal side, we should note that even though "Baal-hamon" is not specifically attested to elsewhere, there are other geographic names in Scripture beginning with Baal—for example, Baal-hermon, Baal-meon, Baal-peor, Baal-perazim, Baal-hazor. Some see a resemblance to a place mentioned in the Apocrypha, which is written in Greek: "As pointed out by a number of commentators, Judith 8:3 mentions a place called Balamon, possibly a Greek equivalent to Baal-hamon, which is near Dothan. In this regard, it is interesting that the Septuagint translates the Song of Songs' reference as *Beelamon"* (*New International Commentary on the Old*

Testament, p. 219, note on Song of Solomon 8:11). This is the same as "Khirbet Balama, modern Ibleam...about a mile south-west of Janin [in the northern West Bank].... This site was occupied as early as the pre-conquest Canaanite period" (Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon, Tyndale Commentaries,* p. 174, note on verse 11). This being taken as the location of the vineyard in which the Shulamite worked is thought by some to buttress the view of the word Shulamite being equivalent to Shunammite, since Shunem was about 15 miles away. But that's quite a distance for people without modern cars. It certainly doesn't make sense as a daily commute.

Alternatively, some take Baal-hamon as an altered form of Baal-hermon in the far northern territory of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan River (Judges 3:3; 1 Chronicles 5:23). This location is understood to be parallel with "Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon" (Joshua 11:17; compare Judges 13:5) and typically equated with modern Banyas, a beautiful, lush place of springs and waterfalls in the Golan Heights. Mention of Baal-hermon here is thought to parallel the several uses of the word Lebanon in the Song, particularly in Song of Solomon 4:8 as possibly signifying the woman's homeland: "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse...from the top of Senir and Hermon." Of course, it may be wondered in that case why the Song would not simply say "Baal-hermon" in 8:11 and not "Baal-hamon" when the spelling "Hermon" is used in Song of Solomon 4:8. It may be that the songwriter, perhaps Solomon himself, intentionally changed the spelling here to, in a clever wordplay, inject a figurative meaning.

In any case, it seems highly likely that there is a figurative meaning in this name—exclusively if no physical location is intended. For commentators point out that the term Baal-hamon means "lord (or possessor) of a tumult (or crowd or multitude)" or, alternatively, "lord of abundance (or wealth)"—these definitions fitting Solomon. He was the lord of a multitude and of abundant wealth. Moreover, the

term *baal* or "lord" could designate "husband," and the abundance could well apply to the wife as the fruitful vineyard—so that the name could apply to the actual Solomon or a nameless groom represented by him. A figurative meaning here would give us a very strong parallel with the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7. The actual word order at the beginning of Song of Solomon 8:11 is "A vineyard was to Solomon in Baal-hamon (possessor of abundance)." Isaiah 5:1b, written well after the Song of Solomon and perhaps alluding to it, reads: "A vineyard was to my Beloved in a horn of fatness" (J.P. Green, *The Interlinear Bible*)—or on a fruitful hill, as it is often interpreted. This correspondence may also imply other parallels—such as Solomon (or one referred to as Solomon) being the beloved in the Song. And since in the Song of the Vineyard God is the Beloved (Husband) in relation to His people Israel as His vineyard, it may be that we have here a scriptural basis for understanding the marriage in the Song of Songs as typifying, on some level, divine marriage.

If the actual King Solomon is the lover in the Song, neither of verses 11-12 can be attributed to the male lead. It might in this case be possible that a chorus sings verse 11 and the woman sings verse 12, but it is generally reckoned in this view that the woman is singing both verses. Support for this comes from verse 10—where "his eyes" is understood to anticipate the mention of Solomon in verse 11. That she would refer to Solomon now by name without having done so previously (all the other times using "my lover") does perhaps seem odd. Yet it may be that it is appropriate for the businesslike discussion here of ownership, profits and payment.

Those who believe the actual Solomon is the lover here comprehend a figurative comparison being made to a literal financial arrangement. The idea is that the brothers, as caretakers, were to bring a return of 1,000 silver coins for selling the fruit of the vineyard. (Interestingly, Isaiah 7:23 mentions a thousand vines being worth a thousand silver

coins—yet that is the sale value of the vineyard itself, as opposed to the expected return from produce in Song of Solomon 8:11.) In verse 12, the woman mentions her own vineyard (probably indicating her own person, as in Song of Solomon 1:6) but then says that "the thousand"—i.e., the same thousand previously referred to (not "a thousand" as in the KJV and NKJV)—goes to Solomon and 200 to the keepers, the woman's brothers. The wording here is sometimes taken to mean that each caretaker was to bring a return of 1,000 coins and then keep 200. Yet it is clear from verse 12 that the thousand was the total value of the vineyard's produce. What, then, of the 200? If each keeper received 200, as some believe, this would be a problem if there were five brothers, as the profit would be eaten up. In fact, though, we don't know how many there were. Others suggest that 200 (a fifth of the 1,000) was the total payment to the keepers. Of course we can't know, and it's not important. The point is that the caretakers receive fair payment for their efforts—and the 200 does seem to indicate that an actual sum is in view (whereas the thousand by itself might be viewed in purely figurative terms).

Of course, a figurative parallel is understood here. As Solomon's literal vineyard gave him profits in part through the efforts of its caretakers, so would his figurative vineyard, his wife, yield up her profits to him (willingly, she seems to be saying)—again, thanks in part to the work of the caretakers, her brothers, who should properly be compensated. This seems to indicate a change in attitude on her part regarding their having made her work in the literal vineyard. (Indeed, some deem her grateful in thinking that if they had not made her work there, she would never have met her future husband—though this is an assumed embellishment.) Some even regard that the money to the caretakers here is an allusion to the bride price or gift a man would give to his bride's family (compare Genesis 24:22; Genesis 24:53; Genesis 29:18; Genesis 34:12; Exodus 22:17; 1 Samuel 18:23-25). This was of course a small price to pay next to the great reward reaped from receiving a

wife! (as represented by the thousand coins). Of course, in no way is this to be taken as having bought love—which cannot be done, the point stressed in Song of Solomon 8:7. That may be why there is emphasis in verse 12 showing that the woman's vineyard is her own—to give freely.

Shepherd-hypothesis advocates see the actual King Solomon referred to in Song of Solomon 8:11-12—yet they of course do not reckon him as the woman's beloved. They typically see the vineyard of verse 11 in both a literal and figurative sense. Literally, they deem it the place where the Shulamite was working in Song of Solomon 1:6—and the place she was noticed by the king (since she was working in his vineyard). Figuratively, they conceive of the vineyard and the name Baal-hamon as representing either Solomon's wealth and kingdom or his vast harem. In the first view, verses 11-12 are taken to be the words of the woman, telling Solomon in verse 12 that he can keep his wealth and power with which he tried to seduce her—that he cannot buy her person, her own vineyard, which belongs to her (this seen as parallel to the end of verse 7, which transitioned into the segment now in question). The 200 for the caretakers in this conception allow for, nonetheless, honest earning in working for the king, such as by her brothers. In the second conception, of the vineyard as the harem, the idea is that Solomon put it into the care of eunuchs, whom the Shulamite has had to deal with (though there has been no prior mention of them). The thousand coins are seen to be the physical enjoyment the king derives from all his women (often thought to symbolize his 1,000 women—yet the 60 and 80 of Song of Solomon 6:8 makes that problematic as seeming to represent a much smaller number at this point). In this view, either the Shulamite or her beloved shepherd is thought to be speaking. If the woman, she is in verse 12 telling the king that he may have his "profit" from his harem but he will not derive any profit from her personal vineyard—or, in a slight variant, "You've got all those others so just let me be." If the shepherd is seen

as speaking, he is saying the same thing but referring in verse 12 to the woman as his own vineyard. The keepers receiving 200 here, whether the Shulamite or the shepherd is speaking, are deemed to be the eunuchs getting their personal compensation out of the deal—yet it seems rather odd that these new characters would be introduced here at the end in a summary conclusion.

Those who understand an alternative two-character progression in the Song wherein a nameless groom is portrayed as Solomon sometimes interpret verses 11-12 in much the same fashion as those who see the literal Solomon as the lover (considering the woman to be singing in both)—except that the verses are taken either in a wholly figurative sense (the vineyard entrusted to caretakers here seen as applying only to the wife and not to a real vineyard) or in an analogous sense, with an actual vineyard arrangement of the real Solomon overlaid onto the characters here (the family in reality having no connection to actual Solomon). On the other hand, there are some who take some earlier references to "king" and "Solomon," such as those connected with the wedding in Song of Solomon 3:6-11, as applying to a nameless groom but who nonetheless consider Solomon in Song of Solomon 8:11-12 not as the groom but as the real Solomon—in the sense of a foil or contrast. In this light, verses 11-12 are thought to portray Solomon negatively—as in the shepherd-hypothesis view—as one who did try to buy love many times over (counter to the point in verse 7) or one who maintained a harem for personal profit. In this conception the groom is thought to be commenting that Solomon can have his big vineyard, the harem (so large it must be entrusted to others) while he will be happy with his own—this being the woman. The 200 are then taken as a knock at Solomon—to say that others who are taking care of his women are getting some of their fruit (this being not the eunuchs but other lovers). Yet such an interpretation does not seem consistent with the other imagery here.

All things considered, it is probably best to take verses 11-12 as sung by the woman and referring either to the real Solomon as her lover (prior to his polygamous corruption) or to a nameless groom as her lover here portrayed positively as Solomon. The 200 here seems best explained by the bridal gifts typically presented to a woman's relatives. This goes well in line with the reflection of this section regarding the relationship of the couple in the Song—here highlighting the arrangement of the marriage as the natural outcome of the preparatory work of the woman's family in rearing her and helping her to maintain her chastity. All are ultimately blessed through this noble effort.

8:13-14: Finally we come to Song of Solomon 8:13-14, the last two verses of the Song. There is no ambiguity here as to who is speaking. The grammatical gender of a number of the words make it clear that the man is speaking in verse 13 and that the woman is speaking in verse 14. Yet still there is dispute as to what is intended.

In verse 13, the woman is said to "dwell in the gardens." Some debate is made regarding the word rendered "dwell." That could be a correct sense, but others argue for "stay," "linger" or "sit"—seeing the implied permanence of "dwell" to go beyond what is intended, particularly as some infer from this verse that the man is cut off from the woman while she is in the gardens (which is reckoned to be a condition that does not last). This perspective, however, may be wrong. The garden motif appeared earlier in 4:12–5:1 as symbolizing the woman as a source of every kind of sensual pleasure. The imagery reappeared in Song of Solomon 6:2, with the lover returning to the garden, probably again in a sensual context—and then once more in verse 11, where the visit to the garden, whether this is by the woman or the man, is to examine the blossoming of the relationship in terms of love and intimacy (see also Song of Solomon 7:12). The plural "gardens" in Song of Solomon 8:13 may imply something different from these earlier singular references—yet it may be simply a way to ensure that we do

not envision her in a fixed place or static situation in her cultivation of her sexuality and relationship with her husband (and perhaps other aspects of life as well).

The "companions" here are masculine plural—which can denote an all-male group yet also a mixed group of men and women. The particular Hebrew term used for the friends here occurs elsewhere in the Song only in Song of Solomon 1:7, where it refers to the man's companions, portrayed as fellow shepherds. The companions in Song of Solomon 8:13 are listening for the woman's voice. The man then asks to hear her voice. It should be recalled that he made the same request in Song of Solomon 2:14, following his invitation to her to join him in the newness of spring (verses 10-13), symbolizing the budding of their love. In Song of Solomon 2:14, her being as a dove in the rocky clefts indicated some apparent inaccessibility—perhaps indicating that she had not yet fully given herself to him yet. Thus, his desire to see and hear her on that occasion may have symbolized his request that she join completely in a life together with him. It is based on that imagery that some see in Song of Solomon 8:13 an indication again of inaccessibility. Moreover, the mention of the companions listening for the woman's voice has led some to believe that they have the same intention as the man. Some imagine here a group of rival suitors vying for the woman's affections. But there is no other hint of that elsewhere in the Song—and such an interpretation is not at all necessary. In fact if the companions be linked to those in Song of Solomon 1:7, we might ask why the man's friends would be trying to court his bride? Of course, it might be argued that Song of Solomon 8:13 is flashback to early in courtship, but that does not tie in well to verse 14—which appears a response to verse 13.

It could well be that the companions of verse 13 are a mixed group of men and women. Indeed, the specific word used would appear to link the meaning with the man's friends in Song of Solomon 1:7. Yet in the symmetrical arrangement of the Song, we might expect that since Song

of Solomon 8:8-12 corresponds to Song of Solomon 1:5-6, something following Song of Solomon 8:8-12 would correspond to something preceding Song of Solomon 1:5-6. Indeed, commentator Robert Alden noted this in his chart on the chiastic arrangement of the Song's lyrics, which is reproduced in our introduction. The companions of Song of Solomon 8:13 are there shown to correspond to the female friends in Song of Solomon 1:4b. Yet perhaps both the woman's friends of 1:4b *and* the man's friends of Song of Solomon 1:7 are intended in Song of Solomon 8:13. Some picture all the wedding guests as being in mind here—if the wedding feast setting is still intended. Even if an all-male group of the man's friends is meant, this would not imply rival suitors. *The New American Commentary* suggests: "This may imply that she has moved out of her old world—the world of her brothers and of the Jerusalem girls—and has entered his" (p. 430, note on verse 13). Furthermore, "'Friends pay heed to your voice'...simply means that all attention is fixed on her" (same note).

If there is any sense of the man being cut off from the woman here, it seems only to do with the fact that they are together with others in public and therefore cannot share the secret togetherness of their relationship. So in asking to hear the woman's voice, the man may be seeking to hear something that the others who are listening never could—her expressed desire for intimacy, which is exactly what she answers with in verse 14. Recall that the man's request to hear her voice in Song of Solomon 2:14 was followed by her call (whether coy or serious) for catching the little foxes (Song of Solomon 2:15), her refrain of mutual possession (Song of Solomon 2:16) and then her concluding request that he be like a gazelle or young stag on the mountains (Song of Solomon 2:17). In chapter 8, the man's request to hear the woman's voice (verse 13) is followed immediately with her concluding request that he be like a gazelle or young stag on the mountains (verse 14)—without intervening dialogue or remarks as before.

In this last verse of the Song of Songs, we end as we began in Song of Solomon 1:1-4a with the woman seeking escape and intimacy with the man. As noted above, the wording of Song of Solomon 8:14 is very close to the woman's words in the latter part of Song of Solomon 2:17. In full the earlier verse stated, "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 [separation or perhaps cleavage]." There she seemed to be looking forward to the consummation of marriage yet to come. Then, on what appears to be the wedding day, we see further mountain imagery from the man: "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" (Song of Solomon 4:6). As was pointed out in earlier comments on these verses, the mountains here are taken by some as an erotic symbol. Some see them as representing the woman's breasts, lower parts or body generally. But others reckon them to imply some sensual wonderland, such as being in the land of Punt in the Egyptian love songs—or what people often mean today when they say, "I'm in heaven." The imagery of a gazelle or stag on mountains (Song of Solomon 2:17) and then mountains of spices (Song of Solomon 4:6; compare Song of Solomon 4:13–5:1; Song of Solomon 6:2) combine in Song of Soomon 8:14 at the Song's conclusion.

It should be pointed out that the word translated "Make haste" here actually means "Flee." Some imagine that the woman might be telling the man here to go away from her—with similar ambiguity to that found in the word "turn" in Song of Solomon 2:17. Yet it seems obvious that if she is telling him to go in Song of Solomon 8:14, she means that she will be right behind him. More likely, since the place she tells him to go is one that elsewhere obviously symbolizes intimacy with her, she is more likely telling him to leave from wherever he is, from whatever he is doing, to be with her to romp and play in the enjoyment of physical relations.

The impression here is one of ongoing physical relations within the marriage bond. Some interpreters, we have previously noted, believe the couple has never as yet been married—and take all the singing of intimacy to be anticipation of the future wedded bliss. Yet it is hard to believe that all of the erotic language and innuendo in the Song would be shared between an unmarried couple—particularly given the social setting of the Song's composition. We certainly have anticipation here at the end—yet it appears to be of more to come within the blessings of a marriage relationship that already exists. And with that, the Song is over. "The lack of closure at the end of the poem has the effect of prolonging indefinitely the moment of youth and love, keeping it, in Keats's phrase, 'forever warm'" (Ariel and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs,* p. 19).

So much to say, then, for so short a book as the Song of Solomon! And still we are no doubt left wondering if we truly comprehend it. Of course, it is probably not vital that we do in all respects—or God would have made the meaning plainer for us. It seems far more important that it make an impression on us, that we get the gist of it and that our lives are appropriately impacted by it.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes well: "The Song of Songs is a beautiful picture of God's 'endorsement' of physical love between husband and wife. Marriage is to be a monogamous, permanent, self-giving unit, in which the spouses are intensely devoted and committed to each other, and take delight in each other. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24). The Song of Songs shows that sex in marriage is not 'dirty.' The physical attractiveness of a man and woman for each other and the fulfillment of those longings in marriage are natural and honorable. But the book does more than extol physical attraction between the sexes. It also honors pleasing qualities in the lovers' personalities. Also moral purity before marriage is praised (e.g.,

Song of Solomon 4:12). Premarital sex has no place in God's plans (Song of Solomon 2:7; Song of Solomon 3:5). Faithfulness before and after marriage is expected and is honored (Song of Solomon 6:3; Song of Solomon 7:10; Song of Solomon 8:12). Such faithfulness in marital love beautifully pictures God's love for and commitment to His people."" [END]