

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

Song of Solomon 1 & 2 – Part 1

Song of Solomon 1:1-17 NLT

This is Solomon's song of songs, more wonderful than any other. Young Woman Kiss me and kiss me again, for your love is sweeter than wine. How pleasing is your fragrance; your name is like the spreading fragrance of scented oils. No wonder all the young women love you! Take me with you; come, let's run! The king has brought me into his bedroom.

Young Women of Jerusalem How happy we are for you, O king. We praise your love even more than wine.

Young Woman How right they are to adore you. I am dark but beautiful, O women of Jerusalem—dark as the tents of Kedar, dark as the curtains of Solomon's tents. Don't stare at me because I am dark—the sun has darkened my skin. My brothers were angry with me; they forced me to care for their vineyards, so I couldn't care for myself—my own vineyard. Tell me, my love, where are you leading your flock today? Where will you rest your sheep at noon? For why should I wander like a prostitute among your friends and their flocks? Young Man If you don't know, O most beautiful woman, follow the trail of my flock, and graze your young goats by the shepherds' tents. You are as exciting, my darling, as a mare among Pharaoh's stallions. How lovely are your cheeks; your earrings set them afire! How lovely is your neck, enhanced by a string of jewels. We will make for you earrings of gold and beads of silver. Young Woman The king is lying on his couch, enchanted by the fragrance of my perfume. My lover is like a sachet of myrrh lying between my breasts. He is like a bouquet of sweet henna blossoms from the vineyards of En-

gedi. Young Man How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful! Your eyes are like doves. Young Woman You are so handsome, my love, pleasing beyond words! The soft grass is our bed; fragrant cedar branches are the beams of our house, and pleasant smelling firs are the rafters.

Song of Solomon 2:1-17 NLT

Young Woman I am the spring crocus blooming on the Sharon Plain, the lily of the valley. Young Man Like a lily among thistles is my darling among young women. Young Woman Like the finest apple tree in the orchard is my lover among other young men. I sit in his delightful shade and taste his delicious fruit. He escorts me to the banquet hall; it's obvious how much he loves me.

Strengthen me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am weak with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me. Promise me, O women of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and wild deer, not to awaken love until the time is right. Ah, I hear my lover coming! He is leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. My lover is like a swift gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he is behind the wall, looking through the window, peering into the room. My lover said to me, "Rise up, my darling! Come away with me, my fair one! Look, the winter is past, and the rains are over and gone. The flowers are springing up, the season of singing birds has come, and the cooing of turtledoves fills the air. The fig trees are forming young fruit, and the fragrant grapevines are blossoming. Rise up, my darling! Come away with me, my fair one!" Young Man My dove is hiding behind the rocks, behind an outcrop on the cliff. Let me see your face; let me hear your voice. For your voice is pleasant, and your face is lovely. Young Women of Jerusalem Catch all the foxes, those little foxes, before they ruin the vineyard of love, for the grapevines are blossoming! Young Woman My lover is mine, and I am his. He browses among the lilies. Before the dawn breezes blow and the night shadows flee, return to me, my love, like a gazelle or a young stag on the rugged mountains.

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^edyd-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 overheard 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 reins, 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, ed., *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).