

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

Song of Solomon 1 & 2 – Part 2

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^eba'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 chiasmic [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 chiasmic 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 inclusive 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]