

## Song of Solomon 6 – Part 1

### Song of Solomon 6:1-13 NLT

Young Women of Jerusalem Where has your lover gone, O woman of rare beauty? Which way did he turn so we can help you find him? Young Woman My lover has gone down to his garden, to his spice beds, to browse in the gardens and gather the lilies. I am my lover's, and my lover is mine. He browses among the lilies. Young Man You are beautiful, my darling, like the lovely city of Tirzah. Yes, as beautiful as Jerusalem, as majestic as an army with billowing banners. Turn your eyes away, for they overpower me. Your hair falls in waves, like a flock of goats winding down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are as white as sheep that are freshly washed. Your smile is flawless, each tooth matched with its twin. Your cheeks are like rosy pomegranates behind your veil. Even among sixty queens and eighty concubines and countless young women, I would still choose my dove, my perfect one—the favorite of her mother, dearly loved by the one who bore her. The young women see her and praise her; even queens and royal concubines sing her praises: “Who is this, arising like the dawn, as fair as the moon, as bright as the sun, as majestic as an army with billowing banners?” Young Woman I went down to the grove of walnut trees and out to the valley to see the new spring growth, to see whether the grapevines had budded or the pomegranates were in bloom. Before I realized it, my strong desires had taken me to the chariot of a noble man. Young Women of Jerusalem Return, return to us, O maid of Shulam. Come back, come back, that we may see you again.

Young Man Why do you stare at this young woman of Shulam, as she moves so gracefully between two lines of dancers?

### **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 wife(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).