

## Song of Solomon 6 – Part 2

**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:

<i>Lo'</i>	Not	(I know/knew not)
<i>yada 'ti</i>	I know/knew	
<i>naphshi</i>	my soul	(my being or myself)
<i>samatni</i>	set me	chariots
<i>merkabot</i>	chariots	
<i>'ami</i>	my people	(or Amminadib, a proper name)
<i>nadib</i>	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 chiasmic 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 *Shulammitte* to a sentence that seems to question the command. In the first parallel line, noted by the fourfold repetition of the verb *return* ([*shubī*]), the speakers are plural and request that the Shulammitte 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 & Delitzsch'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]