

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

Song of Solomon 7 – Part 1

Song of Solomon 7:1-13 NLT

How beautiful are your sandaled feet, O queenly maiden. Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a skilled craftsman. Your navel is perfectly formed like a goblet filled with mixed wine. Between your thighs lies a mound of wheat bordered with lilies. Your breasts are like two fawns, twin fawns of a gazelle. Your neck is as beautiful as an ivory tower. Your eyes are like the sparkling pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is as fine as the tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus. Your head is as majestic as Mount Carmel, and the sheen of your hair radiates royalty. The king is held captive by its tresses. Oh, how beautiful you are! How pleasing, my love, how full of delights! You are slender like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters of fruit. I said, “I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruit.” May your breasts be like grape clusters, and the fragrance of your breath like apples. May your kisses be as exciting as the best wine—

Young Woman Yes, wine that goes down smoothly for my lover, flowing gently over lips and teeth. I am my lover’s, and he claims me as his own. Come, my love, let us go out to the fields and spend the night among the wildflowers. Let us get up early and go to the vineyards to see if the grapevines have budded, if the blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates have bloomed. There I will give you my love. There the mandrakes give off their fragrance, and the finest fruits are at our door, new delights as well as old, which I have saved for you, my lover.

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: “**7:1-5:** We proceed next to the *wasf* (the descriptive praise song cataloging physical virtues) in Song of Solomon 7:1-5 (and perhaps verse 6), which extols the

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

In any case, it seems most likely (as in the NKJV speaker annotations) that the woman's true love, her husband, is singing the words here. Note particularly the description of her breasts as twin gazelle fawns (verse 3), which is repeated from the man's earlier praise in Song of Solomon 4:5 (likely given immediately before or during the wedding night)—just as Song of Solomon 6:5-7 repeated elements from that same time (see Song of Solomon 4:1-3). In the former repetition, the man was essentially telling the woman that he feels the same about her as he did previously—and the idea would be the same here, thus continuing the theme of reconciliation and reunion. Of course, shepherd-hypothesis advocates usually argue that the beginning of chapter 4 was Solomon's seduction—and some of them see him speaking here at the beginning of chapter 7 too. Yet others

among them, as well as some followers of the two-character progression, take the end of verse 5, "a king is held captive by your tresses," to mean that the "king" could not here be speaking. Yet this is rather weak reasoning, as he could easily be speaking in third person—whether this is Solomon as seducer, Solomon as lover or another represented as Solomon (just as the Shulamite is often thought to be speaking in third person at the end of Song of Solomon 6:13). Some, in consideration of the group calling to the Shulamite at the beginning of 6:13, understand the same group to be speaking in Song of Solomon 7:1-5. Some argue for a group of young men in both cases. But the idea that they would be praising the woman's intimate parts as the husband looks on is untenable, being inappropriate and even dangerous—particularly if these are, as some bizarrely imagine, young men catcalling the queen while King Solomon looks on! As with the shepherd hypothesis generally, we should ask why lustful desire would be set to lengthy, beautiful poetry to be sung. Others argue for the daughters of Jerusalem singing admiringly in 7:1-5. Again, however, the intimate references and the repetition already noted in the description of the breasts argues strongly for the husband—and the mention of the king in verse 5 does not at all rule him out. Furthermore, Glickman points out that this *wasf* is one of tenfold praise—signifying a full enumeration—set in symmetrical parallel within the present unit to the tenfold praise of the woman for her beloved in Song of Solomon 5:10-16. This parallel strengthens the identification of the current praise segment with the man—it being his praise for the woman in turn. The ten elements in this *wasf* are: 1) feet (verse 1a); 2) thighs (verse 1b); 3) navel (verse 2a); 4) waist (verse 2b); 5) breasts (verse 3); 6) neck (verse 4a); 7) eyes (verse 4b-c); 8) nose (verse 4d-e); 9) head (verse 5a); 10) hair (verse 5b-c).

7:4a: The comparison of the woman's neck to an ivory tower in Song of Solomon 7:4a recalls the man's earlier comparison of her

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

7:4b-c: The woman's eyes are described as "the pools in Heshbon by the gate in Bath Rabbim" (Song of Solomon 7:4b-c)—this being a town 20 miles east of the Jordan River in the territory of Reuben, now called Hesban. "Heshbon, once the royal city of King Sihon (Numbers 21:26), was blessed with an abundant supply of spring water. Bath Rabbim ('daughter of many' [or 'daughter of great ones']) may have been a popular name for Heshbon" (*NIV Archaeological Study Bible*, note on Song of Solomon 7:4). Biblical archaeologist Bryant Wood has noted regarding this site: "Remains from the period of the divided monarchy, the Iron II age (ca. 900-600 B.C.), were also found. Pottery from the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. came to light in two sites on the mound. One is an open-air water reservoir which is undoubtedly the largest such Iron Age reservoir on Jordan 's East Bank. The sections uncovered indicate that it is 50 feet square and 18 feet deep with a capacity of nearly 300,000 gallons. It was probably one of the pools mentioned in Song of Solomon 7:4" ("The Israelites and the King's Highway," *Archaeology and Biblical Research*, Spring 1990, p. 41).

7:3d-e: The comparison of the woman's nose to "the tower of Lebanon which looks toward [faces or overlooks]

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

The second, and larger, problem here is applying the imagery to the woman. How, we may wonder, is her nose to be compared to any of these things? Of all the descriptions in the various *wasfs* in the Song, this one probably seems to our modern sensitivities to be the most outlandish—a great tower or mountain protruding from a woman's face hardly seeming something beautiful. Some suppose the fortification imagery to symbolize her face being set against the invasion of her person by unwanted advances (particularly with the Syrians of Damascus having been at times enemies of Israel). Others take the comparison to be with a scene of awe or grandeur—mountains or a grand fortress on a mountainside—though having no relation to shape or actual appearance.

Yet just as some specifics of appearance are intended in the other descriptive comparisons, that would also seem to be the case here. Dr. Carr says that the Lebanon range, "solid limestone and 10,000 feet high, hardly seems an apt comparison for a lady's nose. The simile has given commentators no end of trouble. Prominent noses are not normally considered especially beautiful. Delitzsch...took this to mean 'symmetrical beauty combined with

awe-inspiring dignity,' since it 'formed a straight line from the brow downward, without bending to the right or left.' This is hardly convincing. *Lebanon* (cf. Song of Solomon 3:3; Song of Solomon 4:8) is one of several words derived from the Hebrew root *laben*, 'to be white' (cf. 'frankincense,' Song of Solomon 3:6). It was probably the whiteness of the limestone cliffs that gave the mountain its name. This suggests that the imagery here is associated with the colour of her nose rather than its shape or size. Her face is pale, like the ivory tone of her neck, not sunburnt (cf. Song of Solomon 1:6)" (p. 159, note on Song of Solomon 7:4). This seems reasonable, as verse 4 would then have "ivory tower" set in parallel to "tower of Lebanon," which in Hebrew sounds like "white tower." Yet the fortification concept of resisting ingress also seems applicable here in both cases—as in Song of Solomon 4:4.

7:5: Some take the comparison of the woman's head in Song of Solomon 7:5 to Mount Carmel, in the northwest of Israel, as a reference to her holding her head high. However, the more likely comparison is to Carmel's beauty and lushness, the mountain being heavily covered with forest—as the woman's head was covered by her beautiful hair, which is next described. The description of her hair as purple could refer to the lustrous highlights of her flowing locks in flickering lamplight (as she danced perhaps), her hair being earlier compared to goats that were most likely black or dark brown (Song of Solomon 4:1; Song of Solomon 6:5). Or "like purple" may point to her hair's richness or regal quality—purple dye being expensive and used by royalty—thus a fitting twine to figuratively bind a king (captivating the man).

7:6-9a: The next sentence in Song of Solomon 7:6, beginning with "How beautiful..." (NIV), may conclude the *wasf* of the previous verses, forming an inclusio with the "How beautiful..." of the opening in verse 1. Some, however, take it as the opening of

a new subsection. It is, in any case, transitional. The next subsection (Song of Solomon 7:6 or Song of Solomon 7:9 or Song of Solomon 7:10) is the last subsection of the present unit. Those who view verses 1-5 as spoken by a group believe the lover (or Solomon as seducer in the mind of shepherd-hypothesis advocates) breaks in at verse 6, introduced by the mention of "king" in verse 5. Yet it seems more likely that no break in speaker has happened here—that the lover sings Song of Solomon 7:1-5, Song of Solomon 7:6 and Song of Solomon 7:7-9a.

Verses 7-8 speak of shinnying up the woman as a palm tree to take hold of her breasts—as the phrase the KJV and NKJV render "go up to" is literally "go up in" or "go up into" (J.P. Green's Literal Translation), usually understood as "climb" (NIV). Clearly the man here is intending sexual intimacy with the woman. Some see this section describing present sexual relations between husband and wife. That seems likely in terms of the formerly parted couple coming back together—now fully—particularly with the remark about sleepers, as we will see. However, some argue that the intimacy is not here actually renewed—merely thought of and not realized until after Song of Solomon 8:4 or after the end of the Song. Some, of course, argue that the couple has never been married—that the intimacy of 4:16–5:1 was a wish for the future, not yet a reality. And the intimacy here in Song of Solomon 7:7-10 and in the next sections is viewed that way as well. Then there are the followers of the shepherd hypothesis, who see Solomon here continuing his attempted seduction of the woman. How, though, would an interloping seducer be privy to the experience of kissing her, as implied in what follows? The rejoinder is typically that it is pure fantasy on his part.

The end of verse 8 describes the fragrance of the woman's nose as apples or a similar fruit—"nose" being the proper translation of the word translated "breath" in the NKJV (this being the same

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

The wording of Song of Solomon 7:9 makes it clear that a change of speakers takes place in the middle of this verse. After the description of the interior of the woman's mouth as wine, she breaks in and says that the wine goes down smoothly for her beloved. Those who understand a two-character progression here see the man speaking his erotic intentions to the woman and then her joining in, completing his sentence—saying that she is happy to give him the enjoyment he seeks. This ties in well to her statement about the wine flowing smoothly over or through the "lips of sleepers." Some emend the text here to read "lips and teeth" (e.g., NIV). But there is no need for that. The word "sleepers" denotes those who sleep together—married lovers, which strengthens the argument that the couple is married here. Glickman translates the end of the verse to say, "as we fall asleep" (p. 187). He stresses that this completes the theme of the unit. It began with the woman waking from sleep separated from her beloved when he desired physical relations with her (Song of Solomon 5:2-8), and it now concludes with the two falling asleep together after physical union.

Those who adhere to the shepherd hypothesis view this in a completely different way. They see Solomon pressing his seduction through the beginning of verse 9 to the point that the woman can no longer take it. Her breaking into the verse is then seen as her telling the lustful king that the wine of her mouth is

not for him but for her true love, who is not actually present. However, the sleeping imagery does not fit so well in this interpretation.