

Song of Solomon 7 – Part 2

7:10: Finally here we consider Song of Solomon 7:10. As noted earlier, it seems to reasonably conclude this unit—though it could transitionally open the next. Song of Solomon 2:16 was the first occurrence of the refrain of mutual possession sung by the woman. She reversed it in Song of Solomon 6:3, transitioning into the central subsection of the unit we have here been covering. There she said, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." Now in Song of Solomon 7:10, at the end of the unit, she declares, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me." Shepherd-hypothesis advocates take this as her final stand for her true love in opposition to Solomon's advances. But why, we should ask, has the woman here changed the refrain to conclude with not her lover's *possession* of her but, it is now stressed, his *desire* for her? The simplest explanation is that his desire for her has just been expressed in the preceding passage—which argues strongly against the shepherd hypothesis. We should also observe that in the previous two instances of the refrain, the lover is described as feeding among the lilies, which may imply kissing (see Song of Solomon 5:13). In Song of Solomon 7:10 there is no mention of that—perhaps because it is already clearly implied in verse 9. This again favors the two-character progression. In this view of the present unit, we see that the man had initially desired the woman but, after perceiving her as refusing him, was gone—whether actually or just emotionally. But after she expressed her longing for him, he followed with expressing his undiminished love for her again, his great admiration for her, and now his intense desire for her anew—accompanied, it would seem, by kissing and sleeping together.

We should also note that the Hebrew word used here for "desire," *teshuqah*, occurs in only two other places in the Old Testament—in Genesis 4:7, where sin is pictured as wanting to get at Cain, and, more significantly, in Genesis 3:16 in the judgment on the primal couple, Adam and Eve, where the woman was told that her desire would be toward her husband who would rule over her (not always in a good sense it would seem). Now the Shulamite says that she belongs to her beloved and that *his* desire is toward *her*. Some see here an implied reversal of the Edenic judgment—that is to say, that through the loving admiration and desire of a good husband, the curse is mitigated or even alleviated (perhaps paralleling the reconciliation and relationship healing that has occurred in this section).

In reading the next unit, where we note more about verse 10 up front, we will see the lovers go away together for the purpose of deepening their love and intimacy.

"Come, My Beloved, Let Us Go Forth to the Field"

In this short unit the woman invites her beloved to join her in a trip into the countryside in the bloom of springtime. (That she is speaking is clear from the wording.) In the symmetrical arrangement of the Song, as explained by Dr. Craig Glickman in *Solomon's Song of Love*, this sixth major section of the Song (second to last) is parallel to the second major section (Song of Solomon 2:8-17), in which the man asked the woman to come away with him into the country in springtime. Thus there is a reversal of roles in her now taking the initiative to lead their love to a new level. Interestingly, the refrain of mutual possession was part of the conclusion of the former section (Song of Solomon 2:16)—expressing the total commitment of the couple—and its order reversed within the reconciliation of the previous unit (Song of Solomon 6:3). Now a changed form of that refrain in Song of Solomon 7:10, emphasizing desire, occurs right before the present unit as a transition into it (or right at the beginning of it

according to Glickman). Some see the present unit as progressing further toward the sexual intimacy the lovers sought at the end of the former unit. Others, however, believe sexual union was achieved in the former unit—but that now the woman is seeking to deepen their love and intimacy.

Shepherd-hypothesis advocates, believing Song of Solomon 7:9-10 is the Shulamite's rejection of Solomon's unwanted advances, take the current unit as her then addressing her true love and purposing to return with him to her childhood home (given the reference to her mother's house in Song of Solomon 8:2). How he is suddenly present in this view is unclear (perhaps she has sought him out without any description). Some deem him still absent. Commentator Franz Delitzsch decries this view, and the three-character drama generally, quite sternly: "The advocate of the shepherd-hypothesis thinks that the faithful Shulamith, after hearing Solomon's panegyric [or elaborate praise, given earlier in chapter 7], shakes her head [in verses 9-10] and says: 'I am my beloved's.' To him she calls [in verse 11], 'Come, my beloved'; for, as [19th-century German commentator H.G.A.] Ewald seeks to make this conceivable: the golden confidence of her near triumph [in resisting the king] lifts her in spirit forthwith above all that is present and all that is actual; only to him [her absent true love] may she speak; and as if she were half here and half already there, in the midst of her rural home along with him, she says, 'Let us go out into the fields,' etc. In fact, there is nothing more incredible than this Shulamitess, whose dialogue with Solomon consists of Solomon's addresses, and of answers which are directed, not to Solomon, but in a monologue to her shepherd; and nothing more cowardly and more shadowy than this lover, who goes about in the moonlight seeking his beloved shepherdess whom he has lost, glancing here and there through the lattices of the windows and again disappearing" ("Commentary on the Song of Songs," *Keil & Delitzsch's*

Commentary, note on Song of Solomon 7:12). Indeed, where has this shepherd been throughout the woman's ongoing struggle in the palace? Feeding his flock? Why has he not contended with Solomon regarding his imprisoned bride? Appeal might be made to the shepherd as emblematic of Christ away in heaven. Yet the shepherd lad himself is not in heaven. And if Christ were on earth, would He not strive for His Bride—for His people? Would Christ always be sneaking around? Even while in heaven, Christ actively intervenes for His Bride! He does not stand impotently by and leave the Church to face Satan's temptations alone. Given all this and other factors we have previously noted, the shepherd hypothesis just does not seem very likely.

We also might wonder why, if the couple is already married in the three-character view here, would the woman wish to return to the house of her mother (if this phrase be understood literally). Would she not want to return with her beloved shepherd husband to their shared home after this terrible ordeal? Of course, some shepherd-hypothesis advocates argue that they are not yet married. In that case, we should wonder at the erotic implications of this section.

Some advocates of a *two*-character progression believe that the lovers in this section are not married and that, in a rather different picture, they are trying to slip away to be alone together for intimacy—the presumption being that they can't where they are and that if they were married they would simply go to their bedroom. Yet why would the Song be celebrating an unmarried couple sneaking off to the woods for premarital sex? Such a theme would not have been condoned in ancient Israel, particularly among those who canonized Scripture. Some see the unmarried couple merely imagining future intimacy here—but given the detailed fantasizing it would be better for the two not to meet in private!

We ought to recognize, moreover, that the presumption that a husband and wife could at any time just go to their bedroom for fulfillment is a false notion. Even today it is common for married couples to want to "get away" from regular duties and routines to be freer to concentrate on their relationship and enjoy togetherness unencumbered. Many, understanding a "getaway" in mind here, believe the wife is seeking to go on a vacation with her husband—to travel into the countryside or, more specifically, to visit her childhood home. Some even think she desires a permanent move. Still others comprehend the picture here as being that of the newly married couple leaving the wedding feast with its temporary bridal chamber to go to their home—i.e., to their new life together.

Many, it should be realized, understand the Shulamite to be speaking of the outdoors metaphorically—so that the couple's bedroom is in actuality (or at least in the main) the setting for intimacy. The use in verse 13 of "our gates" or "our door" (NIV) would seem to argue for this. As commentator Tom Gledhill points out: "We have met this theme of love in the countryside before (Song of Solomon 2:8-13). The whole of nature seems to be sprouting and blossoming, and the two lovers want to be part of that. Their love has blossomed and become fragrant, they are ripe for love. Love in the springtime is a common literary motif. It seems to suggest that powers and urges that have long lain dormant can now burst forth unhindered and without restraint. The imagery seems to indicate that there is a time and a season for everything. There were times when restraint was necessary, but now it is the time to embrace [Ecclesiastes 3:1, Ecclesiastes 3:5]. Romance in the great outdoors is also a picture of untrammelled freedom and of closeness to nature. The literary fiction reminds us of our creatureliness and of our unashamed delight in participating in the natural order of things" (*The Message of the Song of Songs*, pp. 211-212). Furthermore, we

should recall the metaphor in Song of Solomon 2:10-13 of the springtime of romance following a "winter" period of separation. Even so, here in Song of Solomon 7:11-12 the springtime romance follows a period of trouble in the relationship—a winter of separation of a different sort.

7:11: In Song of Solomon 7:11, the sentence "Let us go forth to the field" has a bit of a wild connotation to it. Recall the earlier adjurations by the gazelles and does "of the field" (Song of Solomon 2:7; Song of Solomon 3:5)—an image of lovers in the open country. "Let us lodge in the villages" in the latter part of the verse may seem a bit tamer. But we should realize that the word rendered "villages" here, *k^epharim*, while it *can* refer to unwalled villages, occurs two other times in the Song in both singular and plural form in reference to fragrant henna plants (Song of Solomon 1:14; Song of Solomon 4:13). Thus some see the end of Song of Solomon 7:11 as meaning "Let's spend the night among the henna bushes" or even "among fragrant surroundings." Perhaps a pun is intended with villages. In any case, the henna bushes would seem to more closely follow the other metaphoric imagery here. "Of course," as Gledhill continues, "the fantasy of the lover's love-making is an illusion, which must not be punctured by a crudely literal interpretation, where all such romantic notions are too rapidly frustrated by the intrusions of nettle rash, soldier ants, bumble bees and stony ground, to say nothing of ragged urchins peeping through the undergrowth" (p. 212). That is to say, nature as the setting for love is an idealized picture.

7:12: The wording of Song of Solomon 7:12 appears to be taken from Song of Solomon 6:11, as both mention going to see if the vine has budded and the pomegranates are in bloom. The parallel mutually affirms the sexual and relationship connotations of both passages—as does Song of Solomon 6:11's parallel with going to the garden in Song of Solomon 6:2. We should also recall the

vineyards in Song of Solomon 7:12 as symbolic of the woman in Song of Solomon 1:6 and Song of Solomon 8:12. There, the woman says in Song of Solomon 7:12, she will give the man her love— *dodi* here referring to her loving acts or affections, the context here being clearly a sexual one.

7:13: This is magnified in Song of Solomon 7:13 with the mention of "mandrakes," alternatively spelled "mandragoras." In Hebrew, the spelling is *duda'im*, which is closely related to *dodi* in verse 12. Indeed, the Hebrew meaning seems to be "love plant," and it is sometimes called a "love apple." The word occurs in Scripture only here and four times in Genesis 30:14-16, where Rachel and Leah used mandrakes while competing to produce offspring for Jacob. Yet in the Song "it is their property as a sexual stimulant that is in view, here, and not their aid to reproduction" (Gledhill, p. 212). Not that these lovers really need an aphrodisiac—as stimulated with one another as they already are. The mention of mandrakes is most likely a literary device to clarify that sexuality is the real meaning here behind all the plant and springtime imagery.

Commentator Othmar Keel points out: "The plant occurs frequently in Egyptian pictures from the New Kingdom (1540-1075 B.C.)....The ancient Egyptian love song also describes the effect of the love apple. The man sings: 'If only I were her Nubian maid, her attendant in secret! She would let me bring her love apples [i.e., mandrakes]; when it was in her hand, she would smell it, and she would show me the hue of her whole body' [Cairo Love Songs, Group B, no. 21]. The woman's skin is described in another love song: 'Your skin is the skin of the mandrake, which induces loving'" (*The Song of Songs, Continental Commentaries*, pp. 257-258, note on 7:13a).

Another of the Egyptian love songs mentions mandrakes in an interesting parallel to the blossoming of love we have seen: "If only my sister were mine every day, like the greenery of a

wreath!... The reeds are dried, the safflower has blossomed, the *mrbb*flowers are (in) a cluster (?), the lapis-lazuli plants and the mandragoras have come forth.... {The blo}ssoms from Hatti have ripened, the *bsbs*-tree blossomed,...the willow tree greened. She would be with me every day, like (the) greenery of a wreath, all the blossoms are flourishing in the meadow...entirely" (Cairo Love Songs, Group B, no. 21E, translated by Michael Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, p. 38). The mention of all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, at the couple's gates or doors has been seen by some as a metaphoric reference to marital relations during the wedding feast. Marvin Pope notes in his *Anchor Bible* commentary that there is a "Talmudic reference to hanging fruits in the bridal tent (TB [Babylonian Talmud] Abodah Zarah 12)" (*Song of Songs*, p. 650, note on verse 14b, Hebrew numbering). Even beyond this, the figurative meaning of the whole passage provides the basis for the primary way the wording should be comprehended here. The varied delectable fruits, new and old, are synonymous with the acts of love she is offering at the end of verse 12. This would seem to strongly imply that the couple is already married—for the old pleasant fruits symbolize the aspects of their physical relationship already experienced that they will continue in. The new implies new elements to be brought in to their lovemaking—perhaps introducing more romance, more adventure, more romping and play (as symbolized by journeying to the wild outdoors)." [END]