

Song of Solomon 8 – Part 2

There is a bit of confusion about the "door" (or "gate") imagery. Some regard this in the same sense as the wall—that it also implies a barrier to entrance. The enclosure with cedars is then reckoned to be, as before, extra security and/or, as a reward, adornment consisting of cedar paneling. Others, however, regard the door or gateway as promoting access—an image of being open, or sometimes open, to seduction and unchastity. The need, it is deemed in this case, is to board her up—to sequester her from that potential. This seems more probable. For consider: In presenting the image of a door beside that of a wall, are both really intended in the same light? It seems hard to get around the idea that you can get *through* one of these. There certainly is not the same *degree* of impregnability. Furthermore, the woman in verse 10 selects only *one* of these to describe herself—the wall. The implication seems to be that she has *not* been a door. And boarding over a door makes more sense than decorating it with paneling. The word "enclose" here means "confine" (Strong's No. 6696).

Who is saying all this, and who is the little sister? Most understand, as in the NKJV speaker annotations, that the Shulamite's brothers (mentioned in Song of Solomon 1:6) are speaking in Song of Solomon 8:8-9 (or that she is quoting them—with her continuing to speak after verse 7) and that verse 10 is her comment in reply. Many holding this opinion see verses 8-9 as a flashback to the brothers discussing the Shulamite when she was young. Others, however, see them presently discussing *another* sister. On the other hand, some consider that the woman is speaking (to or on behalf of her brothers) of a younger sister in the present—verse 10 referring to her being a

personal example to the sister. Still others see the female chorus singing here as the daughters of Jerusalem regarding a young girl among them, a "sister," figuratively speaking, among them (they all being "daughters")—perhaps representative of young girls generally. Again, verse 10 would be the Shulamite pointing to herself as an example. Others have proposed a group of men, suitors (being supposedly the companions of verse 13), discussing the Shulamite in verses 8-9 as a young "sister" in a figurative sense—each aiming to sequester her until marriage. This view is the most unlikely, as there has been no hint of such suitors at any point prior (and verse 13 does not support the idea, as we will see). What, then, of the other views here?

Regarding the Shulamite and her brothers having a younger sister, we should consider the earlier words of the man in Song of Solomon 6:9: "My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite [or 'pure one,' this probably ought to be] of her mother." At face value, it would appear that the Shulamite is an only daughter (not an only child, as we know she had brothers). Some argue for the supposed interpretation of "favorite" here as being parallel to the concept of one and only—unique or being essentially the only one the mother sees. Of course, this would be rather sad for a second daughter. (And the idea that a second daughter would be too young to be prized or noticed by her mother is absurd.) Furthermore, "favorite" does not seem a reasonable meaning of the Hebrew word here, since the same word is translated in the next verse as "clear" (you would never say "favorite as the sun"). A second sister would be necessary only if the Shulamite were clearly shown to be speaking her own words in Song of Solomon 8:8. Yet since there are easily other alternatives, there is really no basis for a second sister.

While it is possible that the daughters of Jerusalem are speaking of a young one among them, why would one be singled out?

Would there not be many such young girls? Perhaps the idea is that one represents many, each to be considered individually. Older sisters could and did, of course, influence younger ones. But did older sisters have the authority that seems to be indicated here? "Responsibility of *brothers* for a sister is well established in the Bible, especially in matters pertaining to sexuality and marriage, as in the case of Rebecca, Genesis 24:29-60; Dinah, Genesis 34:6-17; and the daughters of Shiloh, Judges 21:22. Song of Solomon 1:6 clearly reflects the fraternal authority of the brothers over the Shulamite" (Ariel and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, pp. 214-215, note on Song of Solomon 8:8). Such authority is magnified in the absence of a father. Even if older sisters had similar authority over younger sisters, we should consider that this is attested to nowhere else in Scripture and that such an image has no correspondence to earlier imagery in the Song—whereas the common opinion that the brothers are speaking does.

In encountering verse 8, we properly recognize a change of speakers since the Shulamite, who was previously speaking, had no other sister. Then, in considering who the little sister is, we consider that the Shulamite herself is earlier referred to figuratively as "sister" by her beloved. And, more importantly, we recall that she earlier referred to herself as being under the authority of her brothers (Song of Solomon 1:6)—making her their younger sister. Thus, without inventing new information, it is most natural to assume (barring some conflict) that they are in Song of Solomon 8:8-9 speaking of her. A potential conflict immediately emerges with respect to the chronology. We consider that the Shulamite is no longer a young girl under their care, but is evidently married to her beloved. However, we also note that we have already met with reflection on past events a few verses prior, as the lovers returned to the theme of the apple tree (from Song of Solomon 2:3) in Song of Solomon 8:5—getting back, as

we earlier noted, to the love they once knew. This, we should recognize, is a facet of the overall symmetrical arrangement of the Song—particularly correspondence between the last major section (Song of Solomon 8:5-14) and the opening section (1:1–2:7). And now we have further correspondence in what is evidently additional reflection. In Song of Solomon 1:6, the earlier mention of the Shulamite's brother's authority over her, she said that they were angry with her and made her a vineyard keeper so that she was not able to attend to her own vineyard (her own person, particularly her appearance in context). Putting this together with Song of Solomon 8:8-9 gives us a better picture here. It seems that part of their motivation was to safeguard her purity.

Some believe the Shulamite's brothers were angry with her in Song of Solomon 1:6 because she had *failed* to protect her virginity—and that her work in the vineyard, where they could see her, was her sequestering. Yet the Shulamite declares herself a wall in Song of Solomon 8:10, so this seems unlikely. Perhaps the brothers were mistaken (not necessarily thinking she committed immorality but imagining based on something that happened, perhaps some perceived flirtation, that she might). Or perhaps she earlier mistook their assignment of her to vineyard work as their anger—when it was merely a way to help her maintain her chastity (through having duties that took up her time and energy and kept her in public view). She seems to appreciate their past efforts in verse 12, as we will see in a moment.

Those who regard verses 8-9 as the words of the brothers but see only a female chorus in the Song typically imagine that the woman is here quoting the brothers. Yet there is no indication of a quote here, such as we find in Song of Solomon 2:10. Indeed, this would be extremely confusing to listeners since the woman sings the previous verse (Song of Solomon 8:7). How could an audience reasonably comprehend a new speaker here without a

new singer? The man singing would not make quick sense of it. These factors make a good case for a male chorus singing here (and probably earlier in parts of Song of Solomon 3:6-11). This does not mean that the brothers, in the storyline of the Song, are actually present in Song of Solomon 8:8-9. Those who consider Song of Solomon 8:5 as picturing the arrival of the lovers at the Shulamite's country home often imagine her family gathered together with them in Song of Solomon 8:8-10 and the group reminiscing here. Likewise, some who see the lovers returning to Jerusalem in Song of Solomon 8:5 imagine a family visit. Those who comprehend a wedding feast setting still ongoing—or having just ended—think that the family is still gathered together in verses 8-10. Yet we ought to realize that the brothers' words in verses 8-9, constituting a memory or reflection, do not require any such gathering or visit.

Verse 10, as already noted, is typically taken to be the words of the Shulamite. Where her words are typically translated "I am a wall," some render this "I was a wall" (NRSV), which is possible, as the verb is only implied. Indeed, this seems to fit better in context. In reply to her brothers having in the past wondered if she would be a wall or a door, she says she was a wall, with her breasts as towers (meaning that they were unreachable and guarded atop her fortress wall). Yet this was until she became in "his" eyes (which can logically only mean the eyes of her lover—perhaps referring to the one who spoke for her, as verse 8 anticipated) as one finding "peace." That is, the lover (the husband) was, through terms of peace, allowed entrance into her fortress. His advances were not repelled but embraced. Some take "peace" (*shalom*) here in the sense of wholeness and contentment, and this may be implied in a secondary sense. Yet the primary meaning in the metaphor seems to be that of opposing forces coming together, there being no further need of defensive fortifications guarding chastity (at least *within* marriage

—there still of course being a need to defend against threats from outside). The peace and unity here may also tie in to the ongoing reconciliation of the past few chapters—the idea being one of having recaptured that earlier peace that came through marital union (physical and otherwise).

It is interesting to note the phrase "one who found peace [*shalom*]" at the end of verse 10 as a designation for the woman. This may specifically relate to the reference to her in Song of Solomon 6:13 as *ha-Shulamit* (the Shulamite), possibly—especially if a feminine form of *Sh^elomoh* (Solomon)—derived from *shalom*. Indeed, the last word in Song of Solomon 8:10 is *shalom*, "peace," and in the next verse, verse 11, is *Sh^elomoh* (Solomon). Indeed, "his eyes" in verse 10 is thought by some to refer to Solomon since his name immediately follows. So we may have some implied wordplay here: *ha-Shulamit* finding *shalom* in *Sh^elomoh*. This, it would appear, happened with initial union in marriage—and it has now happened again, in a parallel sense, through the renewal of love and intimacy. Shepherd-hypothesis proponents view the woman's statement in an entirely different light of course, usually taking it to mean that Solomon finally ceased his attempted seduction of her and allowed her to be with her beloved shepherd.

8:11-12: Continuing in Song of Solomon 8:11-12, we note that these two verses clearly go together (each mentioning *Solomon*, *vineyard*, *thousand* and *fruit*), though there is dispute as to who is speaking and what is truly being portrayed. Solomon, we are told in verse 11, had a vineyard in Baal Hamon, a name otherwise unknown. In verse 12, Solomon is addressed and mention is made of "my own vineyard." How are we to take these verses—literally or figuratively? And why are they here? As with verses 8-10, this segment that follows seems at first glance to come out of the blue. Yet considering the reflection we have already noted—

and the symmetry between this closing section of the Song (Song of Solomon 8:5-14) and the opening section (1:1–2:7), it is natural and appropriate to look for more of the same.

Solomon, we should note, is mentioned twice here (Song of Solomon 8:11-12) and also twice in the opening section (Song of Solomon 1:1, Song of Solomon 1:5)—both these positions being exactly opposite to three mentions of his name in the central section of the Song concerning the apparent wedding procession (Song of Solomon 3:7, Song of Solomon 3:9, Song of Solomon 3:11). The word translated "keepers" or "those who tend" (Song of Solomon 8:11-12), thus appearing twice here in this segment, occurs elsewhere in the Song only in the opening section—in that case also appearing two times together as "keeper" and "kept" (Song of Solomon 1:6). This former instance is part of the segment that also mentions Solomon (Song of Solomon 1:5-6). Furthermore, it should be recognized that the word "vineyards" and then "my own vineyard" at the end of Song of Solomon 1:6 parallels the two mentions of "vineyard" in Song of Solomon 8:11 and "my own vineyard" in Song of Solomon 8:12. On top of this, we should observe that Song of Solomon 1:6 is also the verse that mentioned the Shulamite's brothers assigning her work—parallel to their authority over her we have already noted in Song of Solomon 8:8-9. All of this very strongly indicates that Song of Solomon 8:8-12 should all be taken together—as parallel to Song of Solomon 1:5-6.

This can help us to understand what is going on in Song of Solomon 8:11-12. In Song of Solomon 1:6, the girl was sent by her brothers to work in the sun in literal vineyards—and this prevented her from devoting as much energies as she would have liked to her own personal vineyard, a figurative reference to her own person (her appearance being at issue here). This gives us good reason to see the vineyard of Song of Solomon 8:11 literally and the personal vineyard of verse 12 as a figurative reference to

the speaker's person. Indeed the vineyard of verse 11, in this parallel, would seem to be one that the girl was sent to work in—followed by reference to her own person in the vineyard of verse 12. However, the related wording between verses 11 and 12 indicate that the vineyard in verse 11 is to be understood figuratively on some level, as we will see. Thus it may be that a literal situation in verse 11 is being used in a symbolic manner. A literal interpretation of the vineyard in verse 11 most naturally implies a literal interpretation of Solomon here as well. It does not follow that a poor shepherd or even an average citizen would have a great vineyard leased to keepers who were to bring a return of 1,000 silver coins for the fruit sold. The lord of this vineyard would be a wealthy individual, and King Solomon makes a great deal of sense in that light. Solomon is the likely author of Ecclesiastes, and the writer of that book lists among his great works the planting of vineyards and the making of gardens and orchards with pools and all kinds of fruit trees (Song of Solomon 2:4-7). That Israelite kings had a penchant for possessing vineyards is also evident in the story of Ahab's desire for Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. We may also note David's appointment of officials to oversee vineyards and wine production, evidently to supply state needs (1 Chronicles 27:27). Solomon's administration was surely no different in this. So it may well be (putting the whole story together in Song of Solomon 1:5-6 and Song of Solomon 8:8-12) that the king placed one of his vineyards into the care of the Shulamite's brothers and that they delegated some responsibilities to her.

In this scenario, Baal Hamon in verse 11 would be a literal place—though it is probably also a figurative reference. On the literal side, we should note that even though "Baal-hamon" is not specifically attested to elsewhere, there are other geographic names in Scripture beginning with Baal—for example, Baal-hermon, Baal-meon, Baal-peor, Baal-perazim, Baal-hazor. Some

see a resemblance to a place mentioned in the Apocrypha, which is written in Greek: "As pointed out by a number of commentators, Judith 8:3 mentions a place called Balamon, possibly a Greek equivalent to Baal-hamon, which is near Dothan. In this regard, it is interesting that the Septuagint translates the Song of Songs' reference as *Beelamon*" (*New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 219, note on Song of Solomon 8:11). This is the same as "Khirbet Balama, modern Ibleam...about a mile south-west of Janin [in the northern West Bank].... This site was occupied as early as the pre-conquest Canaanite period" (Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon, Tyndale Commentaries*, p. 174, note on verse 11). This being taken as the location of the vineyard in which the Shulamite worked is thought by some to buttress the view of the word Shulamite being equivalent to Shunammite, since Shunem was about 15 miles away. But that's quite a distance for people without modern cars. It certainly doesn't make sense as a daily commute.

Alternatively, some take Baal-hamon as an altered form of Baal-hermon in the far northern territory of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan River (Judges 3:3; 1 Chronicles 5:23). This location is understood to be parallel with "Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon" (Joshua 11:17; compare Judges 13:5) and typically equated with modern Banyas, a beautiful, lush place of springs and waterfalls in the Golan Heights. Mention of Baal-hermon here is thought to parallel the several uses of the word Lebanon in the Song, particularly in Song of Solomon 4:8 as possibly signifying the woman's homeland: "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse...from the top of Senir and Hermon." Of course, it may be wondered in that case why the Song would not simply say "Baal-hermon" in 8:11 and not "Baal-hamon" when the spelling "Hermon" is used in Song of Solomon 4:8. It may be that the songwriter, perhaps Solomon himself, intentionally changed

the spelling here to, in a clever wordplay, inject a figurative meaning.

In any case, it seems highly likely that there is a figurative meaning in this name—exclusively if no physical location is intended. For commentators point out that the term Baal-hamon means "lord (or possessor) of a tumult (or crowd or multitude)" or, alternatively, "lord of abundance (or wealth)"—these definitions fitting Solomon. He was the lord of a multitude and of abundant wealth. Moreover, the term *baal* or "lord" could designate "husband," and the abundance could well apply to the wife as the fruitful vineyard—so that the name could apply to the actual Solomon or a nameless groom represented by him. A figurative meaning here would give us a very strong parallel with the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7. The actual word order at the beginning of Song of Solomon 8:11 is "A vineyard was to Solomon in Baal-hamon (possessor of abundance)." Isaiah 5:1b, written well after the Song of Solomon and perhaps alluding to it, reads: "A vineyard was to my Beloved in a horn of fatness" (J.P. Green, *The Interlinear Bible*)—or on a fruitful hill, as it is often interpreted. This correspondence may also imply other parallels—such as Solomon (or one referred to as Solomon) being the beloved in the Song. And since in the Song of the Vineyard God is the Beloved (Husband) in relation to His people Israel as His vineyard, it may be that we have here a scriptural basis for understanding the marriage in the Song of Songs as typifying, on some level, divine marriage.

If the actual King Solomon is the lover in the Song, neither of verses 11-12 can be attributed to the male lead. It might in this case be possible that a chorus sings verse 11 and the woman sings verse 12, but it is generally reckoned in this view that the woman is singing both verses. Support for this comes from verse 10—where "his eyes" is understood to anticipate the mention of Solomon in verse 11. That she would refer to Solomon now by

name without having done so previously (all the other times using "my lover") does perhaps seem odd. Yet it may be that it is appropriate for the businesslike discussion here of ownership, profits and payment.

Those who believe the actual Solomon is the lover here comprehend a figurative comparison being made to a literal financial arrangement. The idea is that the brothers, as caretakers, were to bring a return of 1,000 silver coins for selling the fruit of the vineyard. (Interestingly, Isaiah 7:23 mentions a thousand vines being worth a thousand silver coins—yet that is the sale value of the vineyard itself, as opposed to the expected return from produce in Song of Solomon 8:11.) In verse 12, the woman mentions her own vineyard (probably indicating her own person, as in Song of Solomon 1:6) but then says that "the thousand"—i.e., the same thousand previously referred to (not "a thousand" as in the KJV and NKJV)—goes to Solomon and 200 to the keepers, the woman's brothers. The wording here is sometimes taken to mean that each caretaker was to bring a return of 1,000 coins and then keep 200. Yet it is clear from verse 12 that the thousand was the total value of the vineyard's produce. What, then, of the 200? If each keeper received 200, as some believe, this would be a problem if there were five brothers, as the profit would be eaten up. In fact, though, we don't know how many there were. Others suggest that 200 (a fifth of the 1,000) was the total payment to the keepers. Of course we can't know, and it's not important. The point is that the caretakers receive fair payment for their efforts—and the 200 does seem to indicate that an actual sum is in view (whereas the thousand by itself might be viewed in purely figurative terms).

Of course, a figurative parallel is understood here. As Solomon's literal vineyard gave him profits in part through the efforts of its caretakers, so would his figurative vineyard, his wife, yield up her profits to him (willingly, she seems to be saying)—again, thanks in

part to the work of the caretakers, her brothers, who should properly be compensated. This seems to indicate a change in attitude on her part regarding their having made her work in the literal vineyard. (Indeed, some deem her grateful in thinking that if they had not made her work there, she would never have met her future husband—though this is an assumed embellishment.)

Some even regard that the money to the caretakers here is an allusion to the bride price or gift a man would give to his bride's family (compare Genesis 24:22; Genesis 24:53; Genesis 29:18; Genesis 34:12; Exodus 22:17; 1 Samuel 18:23-25). This was of course a small price to pay next to the great reward reaped from receiving a wife! (as represented by the thousand coins). Of course, in no way is this to be taken as having bought love—which cannot be done, the point stressed in Song of Solomon 8:7. That may be why there is emphasis in verse 12 showing that the woman's vineyard is her own—to give freely.

Shepherd-hypothesis advocates see the actual King Solomon referred to in Song of Solomon 8:11-12—yet they of course do not reckon him as the woman's beloved. They typically see the vineyard of verse 11 in both a literal and figurative sense.

Literally, they deem it the place where the Shulamite was working in Song of Solomon 1:6—and the place she was noticed by the king (since she was working in his vineyard). Figuratively, they conceive of the vineyard and the name Baal-hamon as representing either Solomon's wealth and kingdom or his vast harem. In the first view, verses 11-12 are taken to be the words of the woman, telling Solomon in verse 12 that he can keep his wealth and power with which he tried to seduce her—that he cannot buy her person, her own vineyard, which belongs to her (this seen as parallel to the end of verse 7, which transitioned into the segment now in question). The 200 for the caretakers in this conception allow for, nonetheless, honest earning in working for the king, such as by her brothers. In the second conception, of the

vineyard as the harem, the idea is that Solomon put it into the care of eunuchs, whom the Shulamite has had to deal with (though there has been no prior mention of them). The thousand coins are seen to be the physical enjoyment the king derives from all his women (often thought to symbolize his 1,000 women—yet the 60 and 80 of Song of Solomon 6:8 makes that problematic as seeming to represent a much smaller number at this point). In this view, either the Shulamite or her beloved shepherd is thought to be speaking. If the woman, she is in verse 12 telling the king that he may have his "profit" from his harem but he will not derive any profit from her personal vineyard—or, in a slight variant, "You've got all those others so just let me be." If the shepherd is seen as speaking, he is saying the same thing but referring in verse 12 to the woman as his own vineyard. The keepers receiving 200 here, whether the Shulamite or the shepherd is speaking, are deemed to be the eunuchs getting their personal compensation out of the deal—yet it seems rather odd that these new characters would be introduced here at the end in a summary conclusion.

Those who understand an alternative two-character progression in the Song wherein a nameless groom is portrayed as Solomon sometimes interpret verses 11-12 in much the same fashion as those who see the literal Solomon as the lover (considering the woman to be singing in both)—except that the verses are taken either in a wholly figurative sense (the vineyard entrusted to caretakers here seen as applying only to the wife and not to a real vineyard) or in an analogous sense, with an actual vineyard arrangement of the real Solomon overlaid onto the characters here (the family in reality having no connection to actual Solomon). On the other hand, there are some who take some earlier references to "king" and "Solomon," such as those connected with the wedding in Song of Solomon 3:6-11, as applying to a nameless groom but who nonetheless consider Solomon in Song of Solomon 8:11-12 not as the groom but as the

real Solomon—in the sense of a foil or contrast. In this light, verses 11-12 are thought to portray Solomon negatively—as in the shepherd-hypothesis view—as one who did try to buy love many times over (counter to the point in verse 7) or one who maintained a harem for personal profit. In this conception the groom is thought to be commenting that Solomon can have his big vineyard, the harem (so large it must be entrusted to others) while he will be happy with his own—this being the woman. The 200 are then taken as a knock at Solomon—to say that others who are taking care of his women are getting some of their fruit (this being not the eunuchs but other lovers). Yet such an interpretation does not seem consistent with the other imagery here.

All things considered, it is probably best to take verses 11-12 as sung by the woman and referring either to the real Solomon as her lover (prior to his polygamous corruption) or to a nameless groom as her lover here portrayed positively as Solomon. The 200 here seems best explained by the bridal gifts typically presented to a woman's relatives. This goes well in line with the reflection of this section regarding the relationship of the couple in the Song—here highlighting the arrangement of the marriage as the natural outcome of the preparatory work of the woman's family in rearing her and helping her to maintain her chastity. All are ultimately blessed through this noble effort.

8:13-14: Finally we come to Song of Solomon 8:13-14, the last two verses of the Song. There is no ambiguity here as to who is speaking. The grammatical gender of a number of the words make it clear that the man is speaking in verse 13 and that the woman is speaking in verse 14. Yet still there is dispute as to what is intended.

In verse 13, the woman is said to "dwell in the gardens." Some debate is made regarding the word rendered "dwell." That could be a correct sense, but others argue for "stay," "linger" or "sit"—

seeing the implied permanence of "dwell" to go beyond what is intended, particularly as some infer from this verse that the man is cut off from the woman while she is in the gardens (which is reckoned to be a condition that does not last). This perspective, however, may be wrong. The garden motif appeared earlier in 4:12–5:1 as symbolizing the woman as a source of every kind of sensual pleasure. The imagery reappeared in Song of Solomon 6:2, with the lover returning to the garden, probably again in a sensual context—and then once more in verse 11, where the visit to the garden, whether this is by the woman or the man, is to examine the blossoming of the relationship in terms of love and intimacy (see also Song of Solomon 7:12). The plural "gardens" in Song of Solomon 8:13 may imply something different from these earlier singular references—yet it may be simply a way to ensure that we do not envision her in a fixed place or static situation in her cultivation of her sexuality and relationship with her husband (and perhaps other aspects of life as well).

The "companions" here are masculine plural—which can denote an all-male group yet also a mixed group of men and women. The particular Hebrew term used for the friends here occurs elsewhere in the Song only in Song of Solomon 1:7, where it refers to the man's companions, portrayed as fellow shepherds. The companions in Song of Solomon 8:13 are listening for the woman's voice. The man then asks to hear her voice. It should be recalled that he made the same request in Song of Solomon 2:14, following his invitation to her to join him in the newness of spring (verses 10-13), symbolizing the budding of their love. In Song of Solomon 2:14, her being as a dove in the rocky clefts indicated some apparent inaccessibility—perhaps indicating that she had not yet fully given herself to him yet. Thus, his desire to see and hear her on that occasion may have symbolized his request that she join completely in a life together with him. It is based on that imagery that some see in Song of Solomon 8:13 an indication

again of inaccessibility. Moreover, the mention of the companions listening for the woman's voice has led some to believe that they have the same intention as the man. Some imagine here a group of rival suitors vying for the woman's affections. But there is no other hint of that elsewhere in the Song—and such an interpretation is not at all necessary. In fact if the companions be linked to those in Song of Solomon 1:7, we might ask why the man's friends would be trying to court his bride? Of course, it might be argued that Song of Solomon 8:13 is flashback to early in courtship, but that does not tie in well to verse 14—which appears a response to verse 13.

It could well be that the companions of verse 13 are a mixed group of men and women. Indeed, the specific word used would appear to link the meaning with the man's friends in Song of Solomon 1:7. Yet in the symmetrical arrangement of the Song, we might expect that since Song of Solomon 8:8-12 corresponds to Song of Solomon 1:5-6, something following Song of Solomon 8:8-12 would correspond to something preceding Song of Solomon 1:5-6. Indeed, commentator Robert Alden noted this in his chart on the chiasmic arrangement of the Song's lyrics, which is reproduced in our introduction. The companions of Song of Solomon 8:13 are there shown to correspond to the female friends in Song of Solomon 1:4b. Yet perhaps both the woman's friends of 1:4b *and* the man's friends of Song of Solomon 1:7 are intended in Song of Solomon 8:13. Some picture all the wedding guests as being in mind here—if the wedding feast setting is still intended. Even if an all-male group of the man's friends is meant, this would not imply rival suitors. *The New American Commentary* suggests: "This may imply that she has moved out of her old world—the world of her brothers and of the Jerusalem girls—and has entered his" (p. 430, note on verse 13). Furthermore, "'Friends pay heed to your voice'...simply means that all attention is fixed on her" (same note).

If there is any sense of the man being cut off from the woman here, it seems only to do with the fact that they are together with others in public and therefore cannot share the secret togetherness of their relationship. So in asking to hear the woman's voice, the man may be seeking to hear something that the others who are listening never could—her expressed desire for intimacy, which is exactly what she answers with in verse 14. Recall that the man's request to hear her voice in Song of Solomon 2:14 was followed by her call (whether coy or serious) for catching the little foxes (Song of Solomon 2:15), her refrain of mutual possession (Song of Solomon 2:16) and then her concluding request that he be like a gazelle or young stag on the mountains (Song of Solomon 2:17). In chapter 8, the man's request to hear the woman's voice (verse 13) is followed immediately with her concluding request that he be like a gazelle or young stag on the mountains (verse 14)—without intervening dialogue or remarks as before.

In this last verse of the Song of Songs, we end as we began in Song of Solomon 1:1-4a with the woman seeking escape and intimacy with the man. As noted above, the wording of Song of Solomon 8:14 is very close to the woman's words in the latter part of Song of Solomon 2:17. In full the earlier verse stated, "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether [separation or perhaps cleavage]." There she seemed to be looking forward to the consummation of marriage yet to come. Then, on what appears to be the wedding day, we see further mountain imagery from the man: "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" (Song of Solomon 4:6). As was pointed out in earlier comments on these verses, the mountains here are taken by some as an erotic symbol. Some see them as representing the woman's breasts, lower parts or body generally.

But others reckon them to imply some sensual wonderland, such as being in the land of Punt in the Egyptian love songs—or what people often mean today when they say, "I'm in heaven." The imagery of a gazelle or stag on mountains (Song of Solomon 2:17) and then mountains of spices (Song of Solomon 4:6; compare Song of Solomon 4:13–5:1; Song of Solomon 6:2) combine in Song of Solomon 8:14 at the Song's conclusion. It should be pointed out that the word translated "Make haste" here actually means "Flee." Some imagine that the woman might be telling the man here to go away from her—with similar ambiguity to that found in the word "turn" in Song of Solomon 2:17. Yet it seems obvious that if she is telling him to go in Song of Solomon 8:14, she means that she will be right behind him. More likely, since the place she tells him to go is one that elsewhere obviously symbolizes intimacy with her, she is more likely telling him to leave from wherever he is, from whatever he is doing, to be with her to romp and play in the enjoyment of physical relations.

The impression here is one of ongoing physical relations within the marriage bond. Some interpreters, we have previously noted, believe the couple has never as yet been married—and take all the singing of intimacy to be anticipation of the future wedded bliss. Yet it is hard to believe that all of the erotic language and innuendo in the Song would be shared between an unmarried couple—particularly given the social setting of the Song's composition. We certainly have anticipation here at the end—yet it appears to be of more to come within the blessings of a marriage relationship that already exists. And with that, the Song is over. "The lack of closure at the end of the poem has the effect of prolonging indefinitely the moment of youth and love, keeping it, in Keats's phrase, 'forever warm'" (Ariel and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, p. 19).

So much to say, then, for so short a book as the Song of Solomon! And still we are no doubt left wondering if we truly comprehend it. Of course, it is probably not vital that we do in all respects—or God would have made the meaning plainer for us. It seems far more important that it make an impression on us, that we get the gist of it and that our lives are appropriately impacted by it.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes well: "The Song of Songs is a beautiful picture of God's 'endorsement' of physical love between husband and wife. Marriage is to be a monogamous, permanent, self-giving unit, in which the spouses are intensely devoted and committed to each other, and take delight in each other. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24). The Song of Songs shows that sex in marriage is not 'dirty.' The physical attractiveness of a man and woman for each other and the fulfillment of those longings in marriage are natural and honorable. But the book does more than extol physical attraction between the sexes. It also honors pleasing qualities in the lovers' personalities. Also moral purity before marriage is praised (e.g., Song of Solomon 4:12). Premarital sex has no place in God's plans (Song of Solomon 2:7; Song of Solomon 3:5). Faithfulness before and after marriage is expected and is honored (Song of Solomon 6:3; Song of Solomon 7:10; Song of Solomon 8:12). Such faithfulness in marital love beautifully pictures God's love for and commitment to His people.'" [END]