

The Song of Solomon

Comments by Dave DeWitt



The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's (1:1)

Introduction

The title *The Song of Solomon* is the one used in most English Bibles and it comes from verse one. Some call it *Canticles* (meaning: hymn, song, or chant) a title derived from the Latin. The Hebrew title, *The Song of Songs* also comes from verse 1. The repetition of the word *song* in the Hebrew title probably has the idea of the best of songs, just as the repetition of the word *holy* (*holy of holies*) in Exodus 29:37 means *most holy*.

The author was Solomon, with direct quotes from the Shulemmite and a few from the daughters of Jerusalem. This is confirmed in verse one. But there are other indications that Solomon wrote the book. Six other verses refer to him by name (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12). He is called the “king” (1:4, 12; 3:9, 11; 7:5). He also rides on an elaborate carriage (3:7-10) and in a chariot (6:12). And only Solomon would have *sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number* (6:8). It seems that this song was one of 1,005 that he wrote (1 Kings 4:32). Possibly the phrase *The Song of Songs* indicates it was his favorite.

We know nothing about the Shulemmite girl except what is in this Song (although that's quite a bit). But we know a lot about Solomon. When he was born to David and Bathsheba it says *she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the LORD loved him* (2 Samuel 12:24). After he was crowned as king he asked for wisdom and it pleased God (1 Kings 3:10). He went on to build the Temple, strengthen Jerusalem, construct chariot cities, and secure peace through all of Israel. Even more significantly he gave us Proverbs and Ecclesiastes as well as this Song. Solomon ended his life poorly because he practiced idolatry. He brought his wives' idols in to Jerusalem, and he joined them in worshipping those idols. For the most part his disobedience happened after he was 50 years old.

This Song was one of Solomon's first poems (Proverbs was written to his son and Ecclesiastes was composed later in his life). But this Song was penned after *God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore* (1Kings 4:29). So we must conclude that this Song, and the romance it describes, are part of that wisdom.

The content is a poetic expression of mutual admiration between Solomon and his Shulemmite bride. Some question how Solomon could write about a woman in such a romantic way when he eventually had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3). Others suggest this was his first wife. But since 6:8 tells us that *there are sixty queens and eighty concubines*, apparently this Shulemmite girl is #141, and wife/queen #61. More likely, she is the only one Solomon was romantically in love with. His concubines were a show of strength and his wives were primarily political arrangements (1Kings 3:1). But this Shulammitte girl seems to be the only woman he married because he was romantically attached to her. At any rate, in this Song she is treated as his only love.

The poem tells a love story. It takes place before, during, and shortly after their marriage. We do not know for sure how Solomon met the Shulemmite or why she is called a Shulemmite, but she was from Lebanon, up near or on Mount Hermon. We know that Solomon did a lot of business in Lebanon because he bought cedars of Lebanon from Hiram King of Tyre for his building projects in Israel (1Kings 5:1-12). From the Song we get the picture that Solomon had some other holdings in Lebanon, including a vineyard near Mount Hermon which was under the care of the Shulemmite's brothers.

As a young girl the brothers watched over her and made her go with them to work in the vineyard. Most likely Solomon first saw her when he visited the vineyard. The comments near the end of the Song (8:1-2) suggest they may have originally even met years earlier when she was a child or a teenager. It seems that he came to the vineyard, saw her, and was smitten by her beauty, what we might call "love at first sight." He made arrangements to meet her and spoke to her romantically. He courted her, kissed her, and spent time alone with her. But he did not have intimate relations with her, even though they both longed for it.

Then he came with an elaborate entourage to ask her to be his wife. After the wedding he took her to Jerusalem. There, although they were in love, they had a disagreement and he left. Then she felt bad and went looking for him. After some significant difficulties they got back together and they went on sort-of-a second honeymoon.

The date of its writing was about 965 BC. Solomon became king at age 30 and reined for 40 years, between 971 and 931 BC. This song would be written early in Solomon's reign. Quite likely Solomon was about 36 years old and she was possibly 10 years younger.

The Theme of the poem is, **Romance leads to marriage.** In other words, if it does not think in terms of marriage then it is not romance. Romance always thinks, "Until death do us part."

The Interpretation

Several different interpretations have been suggested for the song. The Song has been interpreted in at least five different ways:

- 1. An allegory of God's love for Israel** (in the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Targum – an Aramaic interpretation of the Hebrew Bible). But these are the product of Rabbinic/Pharisaic Judaism, not Old Testament Levitical Judaism.
- 2. An allegory of Christ's love for the Church** (from Hyppolytus, Origen, Jerome, Athanasius, Augustine, and Bernard of Clairvaux). An author may use metaphors and allegories, which should be interpreted as such. But an allegorical method of interpretation is different. It is subjective, not tied to the author's intended meaning, and impossible to verify in any rational manner.
- 3. A Type of Christ** (a common view of evangelicals)

This is different from an allegory in that it sees Solomon as a historical person and does not seek to discover another meaning for every detail. But types can only be verified when some biblical author refers to them as such. No author of the Bible anywhere ever relates the Song of Solomon to Christ and the Church.



4. **A Drama, like a play, involving two or three main characters** (suggested by noted commentators Franz Delitzsch, H. Ewald, and S.R. Driver). But there are no dramas known among the Israelites at this time. Also, the book does not nicely divide up into acts and scenes of a drama.
5. **A lyric poem written as a love song** (the view of most literal scholars – such as Ryrie, MacArthur, and Deere of the DTS Bible Knowledge Commentary). **This is the best view in the opinion of this author.**

There is no textual reason to take the *Song of Solomon* as anything other than a straightforward, literal, poetic expression of romantic love. There is no evidence anywhere that this love poem is a type of Christ or has anything whatsoever to do with God’s love for Israel or Christ’s love for the Church.

Understanding “The Song”

The only reasonable interpretation of any literature is the author’s intended meaning. The meaning intended in the Song of Solomon is that romance leads to marriage. But **this is not a book about marriage**. It’s about romance, and romance alone. Romance leads to marriage because the passion caused by the mutual affection drives the couple to marriage. It does not drive them to just have sexual relations because their intention is to always be together. Sexual relations outside of that permanent commitment, which we call marriage, makes a mockery of romance. The longing they desire intensifies their passion because they understand physical consummation must await a ceremony where he invites her to become his life-long wife and she freely agrees.

Marriage in the Song is described with a ceremonial procession. Some argue that it is hard to find marriage in the book. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines marriage as: “The formal union of a man and a woman, typically recognized by law, by which they become husband and wife.” In 3:6-11 there is a formal procession, after which (in Chapters 4 and 5) Solomon calls her his *bride* five times. The basic meaning of this word *הַלְוָה* (*kalah*) for *bride* is *complete* or *finished*. The KJV translates it *spouse*. Before this procession she is just his *beloved*, after this procession she is also his *הַלְוָה* (*kalah*), *bride*, one who has *completed* or *finished* the procedure to become his *spouse*. Since Israel was a monarchy this was a legal union, which is what we call marriage.

But the couples in the book do not start out deciding to get married and then go looking for a mate. Marriage is almost an after thought in the Song. It is forced upon them because of their romantic love. They have nowhere else to go with their love but marriage. Even after they are married, the focus of the book is not on their marriage but their attraction for one another. Once again let me emphasize, **this is not a book about marriage**. There is much more to marriage than the “love” in the Song. Solomon never suggests this romantic fervor should continue all through marriage. Those who teach such a thing only create unnecessary tensions for married couples.

Romance is the beginning of a marriage relationship, not the maturity of it.

The Marriage Process

Seeing---flirting---**desiring**---dating---marrying---having/raising children---being responsible---being a patriarch/matriarch

The Song of Solomon deal only with this area in the marriage process

The word *love* occurs 15 times in the NASV translation of The Song of Solomon. There are two different Hebrew words translated *love* in the Song. There is also a word the English usually translates as *darling*. But the strongest Hebrew word for *loyal love* is not in the Song.

- One word is דוד (dod). This is usually translated *beloved*, or *beloved one* (which can mean *lover* or *betrothed*). It is the root of the name *David*. In the *Song of Solomon* this word emphasizes **romantic attraction**.
- The other word is אהב (ahab). This is translated *love*, *beloved*, or *lovers*. But it also has the idea of *friendship*. [It's like the Greek word φιλέω (phileo).] It is defined as “Affection both pure & impure, divine & human.” (BDB). It's often used of a parent's love for their children, for example David's love for Absalom is called אהב (ahab). In the *Song of Solomon* this emphasizes **friendship**.
- The word רַעְיָתִי (ra'yati) *my darling* used nine times in the Song, has the idea of one who is a **loved companion**. The word is usually associated with friends of a bride, including her bride's maids.
- But the strong Hebrew word for *loyal love* חסיד (chased), is not used in the Song of Solomon. חסיד (chased) is like the strong word for love in Greek ἀγάπη (agape), which is the **giving/serving loyal love** defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. That's the love required for a life-long mature marriage. But that's not discussed in The Song of Solomon.

The Application

As with Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, this is scripture and therefore it must be applied. The Song of Solomon should be applied in the same manner as any literature. Also, as with Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, these are poetic expressions that must be observed and interpreted before they are applied. Not every metaphor in the Song is easy to understand, but the general meaning is.

Application answers the question, “How can the interpretation of a piece of literature be put to use?” In the case of biblical literature it is all inspired of God, inerrant, infallible, and therefore demands application. The Song of Solomon describes the perfect or ideal romantic relationship. Not everyone will find someone they can be that passionate about. But it is still ideal. The general application of the book is that people who are qualified for marriage and do not have a gift of celibacy should not just go looking for a husband or a wife. But they should hope for, pray for, and look for someone that they can be romantically attracted to in the same manner as Solomon and his Shulemmite bride.

The Outline

The outline does not follow the traditional chapter divisions. The content outlines as follows:

- I. The courtship (1:1-3:5)
- II. The wedding (3:6-5:1)
- III. The marriage (5:2-8:4)
- IV. Expressions of love and how it began (8:5-14)

Throughout the song there are statements by three parties, Solomon, the Shulemmite, and the daughters of Jerusalem. Although there is plenty of admiration expressed by both lovers, the focus seems to be on the Shulemmite – her appearance, her feelings for Solomon, and his feelings for her.

Questions About the Introduction to the Song

1. The title “The Song of Songs” comes from,
 - A. English
 - B. Latin
 - C. Hebrew
2. The reason we know Solomon wrote this poem is because,
 - A. Verse 1 says so
 - B. He is presented as a king
 - C. He talks about his many queens and concubines
 - D. A and B
 - E. All of the above
3. The Shulemmite is wife #
 - A. 1
 - B. 61
 - C. 141
4. The Shulemmite is from,
 - A. Jerusalem
 - B. Lebanon
 - C. Damascus
5. The Song was recorded in about the year,
 - A. 931 BC
 - B. 965 BC
 - C. 971 BC
6. The idea that the Song is an allegory is taught by some,
 - A. Jews
 - B. Christians
 - C. Both Jews and Christians
7. The best way to interpret the Song is as,
 - A. A type of Christ, because this recognizes Solomon as a historical figure
 - B. A drama, because there are at least three characters speaking
 - C. A love poem, because that’s what the author intended
8. The wedding in the Song is presented as
 - A. A commitment
 - B. A ceremony
 - C. A time of intimacy
9. The Song is presented as,
 - A. Something to be sought
 - B. Something to be imitated
 - C. Something to be careful about
 - D. All of the above
10. Love in the Song is defined as,
 - A. Lust
 - B. Loyalty
 - C. Friendship

Answers: 1. C; 2. E; 3. B. 4. B; 5. B; 6. C; 7. C; 8. B (all are possible, but it is primarily a ceremony); 9. A; 10. C.

1. The Courtship

(1:1-3:5)

The first section is filled with expressions of sexual desire. But it also reveals great sexual restraint and the agony which that restraint causes the lovers.

Warning: The Song of Solomon contains romantic descriptions that can be hazardous to your health. Romance can be the most pleasure producing and the most misery producing emotion on the planet.

Chapter One, Early Courtship

Read verses 1-4a. The Shulemmite responded to Solomon's early advances

The two have gotten to know each other by some means not given. When we meet them, they have already fallen in love. The Shulammitte speaks first – talking to herself, about her desire to be kissed by Solomon, smell his perfume oils, and be taken into his chambers.

She begins with the word יִשְׁקֵנִי (yisheq), *he kissed me*. It's a verb called an imperfect jussive. The imperfect suggests a future, incomplete or ongoing action. The jussive is a desire, wish, or command. So she is longing for his kiss, but it seems that she had already experienced his kisses and wished for them to be future and ongoing.

She also says, *The king has brought me into his chambers*. The word הֵבִיאָנִי (haboani) for *he brought me*, is a hiphil perfect. The hiphil has the idea of “caused to,” *he caused me to come*. The perfect tense is usually completed action. There is no indication here of sexual intimacy, but she is saying that they have been alone together in his chambers, he has kissed her, and she longs for more.

The word for *love* in her statement, *For your love is better than wine*, is the word דֹּד (dod) which emphasizes romantic attraction.

Read verse 4b. Rejoicing in Solomon's love for the Shulemmite

The statement can be amplified in as follows:

We [the daughters of Jerusalem (see verse 5)] *will rejoice in you* [or *with you* masculine singular referring to Solomon] *and be glad*; *We* [the daughters of Jerusalem] *will extol your* [masculine singular, again referring to Solomon's] *love* [דֹּד (dod)] *more than wine*. *Rightly do they* [the people of Israel] *love* [אָהֵב (aheb)] *you* [consider you a friend].

Read verses 5-6. Tanned by the Sun

Then the Shulammitte tells the daughters of Jerusalem that she is dark, tanned from being in the sun because *My mother's sons were angry with me; They made me caretaker of the vineyards*. There is no indication here (one way or the other) that these boys were not her full brothers, but the statements in 8:8-9, *We have a little sister*, sounds like they were actually her brothers. She compared her tanned skin to **the tents of Kedar**, which were made of black goats' hair. It is unclear if she is Hebrew or Lebanese but she is a mid-eastern girl tanned by the sun.



Read verses 7-11. Seeking Solomon among the shepherds

The Shulammitte wants to go out and find Solomon where he is working during the day. She asks, *Where do you pasture* (or *shepherd*) [the (NASV) words *your flock*, is not in the text], *where do you make it lie down at noon?* [Or, *Where do you lie down at noon*]. She seems to use the word *pasture/shepherd* as a metaphor of his work. It's unlikely she thought he was taking care of sheep (this is supported by the phrase in 2:16, *He pastures in the lilies*). Solomon was off checking on some of his other holdings somewhere else in Lebanon. But she did not want to chase him *like one who veils herself*, that is, as a prostitute.

Solomon told her if you want to find me *pasture your young goats by the tents of the shepherds*. Here he actually used the words for *goats* and *tents* and *shepherds*. So apparently this girl actually took care of vineyards and goats and spent too much time in the hot sun. This is no rich prince, just a beautiful village girl whose brothers made her work outside. But Solomon says she is *Most beautiful among women*, admiring her cheeks and neck. In response to this the daughters of Jerusalem say, *we will make for you ornaments of gold, with beads of silver*.

The word רַעֲיָתִי (ra'yati) *my darling*, used here and throughout the Song, has the idea of one who is **a loved companion**. The word *darling* is only used in the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament.

Read verses 12-14. Thinking about Solomon at night



Here the Shulammitte is alone at night thinking *My beloved is to me a pouch of myrrh, which lies all night between my breasts*. And she wishes the *pouch of myrrh* were Solomon. She also compares him to *henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi*. The significant point to notice is the unfulfilled longing which only serves to intensify her desires.

Read verses 15-17. Mutual admiration and appreciation

They exchange admiration for each other's appearance. She also says he is *pleasant* (*charming* or *delightful*) referring to his personality. Most commentators believe that the reference here to, *our couch* and *The beams of our houses* being *cedars* and *cypresses* is a reference to the forest and meadow where they first met, or where they met regularly.



A Lesson From Chapter one. Premarital romantic passion is valuable, as long as it includes restraint.

Chapter Two, Lovesick

In 2:1-3:5 we are given 4 little romantic dramas.

Read verses 1-3. *The lily of the valleys*

In verse one she says she is like a *rose of Sharon*. Sharon is Israel's northern coastal plain between Caesarea and Joppa/Tel Aviv.) She also claims to be *The lily of the valleys*, meaning Solomon made her feel like a rose and a lily (1:9-10, 15). In the next two verses the lovers contrast each other with men and women surrounding them.

*Like a lily among the thorns,
So is my darling among the maidens."*



Read verses 4-6. Romantic drama #1, He took her to a banquet hall

It seems that Solomon took her to *his banquet hall* (literally *his wine house*). It seems that at this point he was already treating her as his only love, publically. She says *his banner* (a military identification flag) *over me is love*. During the banquet she ate and enjoyed herself. Then, possibly referring to a dance, or a time when they were together after the banquet, she thought,



*Because I am lovesick,
Let his left hand be under my head,
And his right hand embrace me (5c-6).*

It should be noted that any attempt to apply the phrases, *The lily of the valley*, or *his banner over me is love*, (or any other statement of love in the Song) to Christ and the Church is illegitimate and inappropriate. Neither our love for Christ nor Christ's love for the Church are romantic. The love between God and Israel and between Christ and the Church, are expressed with completely different words, חסיד (chased) and ἀγάπη (agape). Words which are not used in the Song of Solomon.

Read verses 7-14. Romantic drama #2. The couple went on a date to a secret place

The statement in verse 7 (repeated in 3:5 and 8:4), *do not arouse or awaken my love until she pleases*, is difficult to interpret. It is probably better translated *do not arouse or awaken love until it pleases*. It seems that the Shulammitte was telling the daughters of Jerusalem, or making a general proclamation to everyone, to not rush romantic love. In other words don't go and look for someone to be in love with, rather let it happen when you meet the right person.

The remainder of the paragraph is the Shulammitte anticipating the arrival of Solomon to take her out, seemingly for a walk on a spring day. Solomon arrived and invited her to go *in the clefts of the rock, in the secret place of the steep pathway*. He wanted to be alone with her when he told her, *Let me see your form (or appearance), and hear your voice*.



Read verse 15. Keep the *little foxes from ruining the vineyard*.

The question is whether *The little foxes that are ruining the vineyards*, are literal or metaphorical.

- If it is meant to be metaphorical, it could refer to problems in their relationship, or problems caused by her brothers (or others) that might ruin their relationship. This is supported by the last phrase, *While our vineyards are in blossom*.
- If it is meant to be literal, it could refer to actual foxes ruining her vineyard and she wanted Solomon to help solve the problem. This is supported by the fact that no problems were suggested at this point in their relationship. The problem with this interpretation is that it is hard to connect it to the romantic theme of the poem.

Read verses 16-17. Romantic drama #3, She waits for him to come *in the cool of the day*



The Shulemmite is convinced, *My beloved is mine, and I am his*. But during the day when he is away, she thinks of him when *He pastures in the lilies*. She longs for him to come,
Until the cool of the day
When the shadows flee away,

[Because the chapter divisions are misplaced the fourth drama has been placed in Chapter three. Since it is a continuation of the dramas, I have included it here.]

Read Chapter three verses 1-5. Romantic drama #4, She seeks him in the city streets

This is the last drama before the wedding. She desired him so much one night that she went looking for him in the city. She thought,

I must arise now and go about the city;
In the streets and in the squares.



After several failed attempts, she finds him and they embrace for a long time. Then she brings him back to her mother's house, and into her mother's bedroom. Notice that throughout the courting time there is no indication that the Shulemmite wants to snag him as a husband. Her only motive in pursuing him is to be with him and express her love.

A Lesson From Chapter Two, Only date people you plan to marry.

Questions About The Courtship

1. True or False? The Song begins connecting kissing with love.
2. In her first discourse, the Shulemmite says she wants to,
 - A. Drink wine with him
 - B. Talk with him
 - C. Be alone with him
3. When she said, *I am black but lovely* she meant
 - A. She has a dark complexion
 - B. She has been tanned by the sun
 - C. She has a dark complexion and has also been tanned by the sun.
4. Before their marriage their courtship focused on
 - A. Being alone together
 - B. Getting to know each other
 - C. Admiring each other's physical appearance
5. In Chapter Two, the reference to each other as a lily and an apple tree is a
 - A. Statement of their love
 - B. A comparison of their beauty to that of others
 - C. A longing to see one another
6. In Chapter Two, she is lovesick because,
 - A. She is with him and wants to be embraced by him
 - B. She is away from him and wants to be with him
 - C. She has made herself sick thinking about him
7. According to the Song, he does several things with her before they get married. What does the Song NOT say that **he** did?
 - A. Hold hand her hand
 - B. Take her to a banquet
 - C. Take her to a secret place
 - D. Ask to see her physical form
 - E. A and D
8. According to the Song, she does several things with him before they get married. What did the Song NOT say that **she** did?
 - A. Wait for him in the evening
 - B. Look for him in the city
 - C. Want him to hold her in his arms
 - D. Expect to lay down with him.
 - E. None of the above, because she did all those things
9. Before marriage their romance included
 - A. Belonging to one another
 - B. Being committed to marrying one another
 - C. Meeting the family
 - D. All of the above
10. The statement, *do not arouse or awaken my love until she pleases*, means,
 - A. The Shulemmite should be allowed to sleep as long as she likes
 - B. Solomon should not be forced to love anyone until he is ready
 - C. Love should not be forced on anyone but allowed to take its own course.

Answers: 1. True; 2. C (1:4); 3. B; 4. C; 5. B; 6. A; 7. A; 8. D; 9. A; 10. C.

2. The Wedding (3:6-5:1)

Chapter Three, The Wedding Procession

Read Chapter 3 verses 6-11. The wedding begins

The first aspect of the wedding is the arrival of Solomon at the home of the Shulemmite. From various biblical statements we can conclude that there seems to be two phases to an ancient formal Hebrew wedding. First the bride awaits the arrival of the groom at her parent's home. There is a ceremony there, which may take several days, and it includes the consummation of the marriage. Then the groom takes the bride to his own house, where there might be a second ceremony (Psalm 19:5; Joel 2:16; Matthew 25:1; John 2:1).

The Shulemmite described Solomon's arrival by exclaiming, *What is this coming up from the wilderness, like columns of smoke?* Then she gave four specific details:

1. His coach was surrounded by a cloud of aromatic *smoke*, perfumed with *myrrh and frankincense*.



2. The coach was surrounded by *sixty mighty men of Israel*. Each man has his sword at his side.

3. Solomon was sitting in a *sedan chair*. The word, אֲפִרְיֹן (appiryon) is sometimes translated *chariot* (KJV). But it is more accurately called a *sedan chair*. This is defined in the Oxford American Dictionary as “an enclosed chair for conveying one person, carried between horizontal poles by

two or more porters.” This is a carriage, which Solomon *made for himself... from the timber of Lebanon. He made its posts of silver, Its back of gold And its seat of purple fabric, With its interior lovingly fitted out by the daughters of Jerusalem.*

4. He also wore a crown. We are told it was *the crown*
With which his mother has crowned him
On the day of his wedding,
And on the day of his gladness of heart



In his genealogy Matthew reminds us, *David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah* (Matthew 1:6). Both Joseph and Jesus' mother Mary were decedents of David and Bathsheba. Bathsheba became a queen after David took her by adultery and had her husband sent to the front lines to be killed. When the child of adultery died, *David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon* (2 Samuel 12:24). When David was on his deathbed, Adonijah, conspired to be king but Bathsheba approached David to remind him of his promise that Solomon would be king. David concurred and Solomon was crowned king. By the time of Solomon's marriage to the Shulemmite about six years had passed and Bathsheba was the Queen Mother, and perhaps the most influential woman in all of Israel. Now we learn that she is also at this wedding. Apparently she traveled to Lebanon with the procession so she could crown *him on the day of his wedding,*

A Lesson From Chapter Three, a wedding should be a formal, specific, legal event.

Chapter Four, Solomon Adores His Bride

Read verses 1-7. Solomon adores her physical features



Her eyes are like doves, soft and peaceful
Her hair is like a flock of goats that have descended from Mount Gilead, long and flowing
Her teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes, perfect, regular, white.
Her lips are like a scarlet thread, thin and red.
Her mouth is lovely.
Her temples (the side of her face and her cheeks) are like a slice of a pomegranate, smooth and ruby colored.
Her neck is like the tower of David, straight and strong.
Her two breasts are like two fawns, soft and youthful.
In other words, *You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you.*



Read verses 8. Come with me from Lebanon

The Shulemmite lived in Lebanon near the *the summit of Amana, and the summit of Senir and Hermon*. Senir and Hermon are two peaks in the Hermon range (Deuteronomy 3:9 speaks of Senir as a synonym for Hermon). When Solomon arrived to take her as a wife he asked her to leave these mountains, which undoubtedly were beautiful, but they were also a place of dangers. He said he was taking her,

*From the dens of lions,
From the mountains of leopards*

Again, this could be physical or metaphorical. If it is a metaphor, it refers to some problem that is not explained.

Read verses 9-15 Solomon continued admiring her virginity

Solomon refers to his bride as a *sister* four times, but only in this section (4:9-5:1). Again Solomon admired her beauty with graphic metaphors. But unique to this discourse is the emphasis on her virginity.

*A garden locked is my sister, my bride,
A rock garden locked, a spring sealed up.*

So she was not only sexually unavailable to others, but also *sealed up* and *locked* to Solomon until now. Clearly they did not have sexual relations before marriage, though they both longed for it. He continued the garden metaphor with many specific plants and spices.

Read verse 16. The invitation for intimacy

The initial sexual intimacy seems to have taken place during the days of wedding ceremony. Apparently this was common in Israel at the time. Here the Shulammitte invites Solomon to consummate their wedding by continuing the *garden* metaphor.

*Make my garden breathe out fragrance,
Let its spices be wafted abroad [better translated *flow out*].
May my beloved come into his garden
And eat its choice fruits!*



[Once again, the chapter division is incorrect. Chapter five verse one concludes the wedding description and should be part of Chapter Four, so I have included it here.]

Read chapter 5 verse 1. The wedding night intimacy

Solomon expressed the pleasure he experienced as he had relations with his bride.

I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam.

I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;

I have drunk my wine and my milk.

The next statement is easy to understand but it is not clear who is saying it to whom. Someone says:

Eat, friends (or companions);

Drink and imbibe deeply (literally, drink and be drunk),

O lovers (the word is דוד (dod) lovers or beloved ones).

Some commentators say this is Solomon addressing the other guests. This is possible but it seems a bit awkward. They surely would not be present in the bedroom, so one would have to assume he spoke these words through a wall or curtain of some sort. Or he may have left the bedroom to tell them and returned. Again, this is possible but seems awkward. This could also be an editorial comment made by a third party. In the Bible Knowledge Commentary, Jack Deere gives the following interpretation.

A more plausible suggestion is that the speaker was God Himself. Only their Creator would have been a “guest” on that occasion. Since their love was from Him it was fitting that He approve it. He invited them to enjoy sexual love in marriage as if it were a banquet (“eat ... and drink”). This clearly indicates God’s approval of marriage, which He designed in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 2:24).

A solution is not clear from the text.

A Lesson From Chapter Four, Admire your bride and honor her virginity until the day of your marriage.

Questions About The Wedding

1. True or False? It is reasonable to conclude, based only upon the statements in the Song, that this wedding was attended by: Solomon, his mother Bathsheba, the Shulemmite, her mother and brothers, and 60 might men of Israel.
2. The marriage was defined by,
 - A. A formal procession
 - B. A statement of commitment
 - C. Formal vows
 - D. Sexual intimacy
 - E. A and D
 - F. All but C
 - G. All of the above
3. In Solomon's wedding procession, he sat in a sedan chair made by:
 - A. Himself
 - B. Himself and the daughters of Jerusalem
 - C. Himself and his mother, Bathsheba
 - D. All of the above
4. True or False? Jesus's mother Mary was a descendent of David and Bathsheba through Solomon
5. The formal procession is followed by,
 - A. Solomon's mother crowning him with a crown
 - B. A formal invitation for the Shulemmite to be his bride
 - C. Solomon's statements of admiration
 - D. The Shulemmite's responds
 - E. Sexual intimacy
 - F. All of the above in that order
 - G. All of the above but not in that order
 - H. All of the above except B
6. The Shulemmite's response, to the invitation to be his bride, was to,
 - A. Leave with him to go to Jerusalem
 - B. Agree to be his bride
 - C. Invite him to have sexual intimacy
7. After Solomon states that the lovers have made love physically (in 5:1) the text makes the exhortation, *Drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers*. This is probably
 - A. Solomon talking to the guests from his bedroom
 - B. Solomon leaving his bedroom to say this to the guests
 - C. God addressing the newlyweds

Answers: 1. True; 2. F (E is also acceptable, F assumes the formal ceremony was a statement of commitment); 3. B (3:9-10); 4. False (Mary was a descendent of David and Bathsheba through their son Nathan – Luke 3:31); 5. G (B and C should be reversed); 6. C (4:16). 7. All three have been suggested and no clear answer is available from the text.

3. The marriage (5:2-8:4)

Chapter 5 The Regret That Follows A Mistake

Much time has passed between 5:1 and 5:2. They have married and moved back to Jerusalem. She has her own private quarters. This would have been in Solomon's palace, if it was completed at the time. The next section (chapter five verse two through the end of chapter six) poetically describes this event, the second major drama of the book. The courtship and wedding were the first drama, now comes the second drama, a conflict and a resolution.

Read verses 2-7. A mistake, a regret, and a search for her lover

The opening line, *I was asleep but my heart was awake* could indicate she was having a dream, but it is unlikely that the conflict which followed it was a dream. One night, after they were married for a time, Solomon came to her room late. She was already in bed and asleep, dreaming. He came in out of the night and asked,

*Open to me, my sister, my darling,
My dove, my perfect one!
For my head is drenched with dew,
My locks with the damp of the night.*

But she was not pleased that he came so late and did not want to be disturbed. Half awake, and not thinking clearly, she complained about having to get up and get dressed to let him in so late at night saying,

*I have taken off my dress,
How can I put it on again?
I have washed my feet,
How can I dirty them again?*

Solomon then *extended his hand through the opening* in her door. Apparently this was an outer door, and she changed her mind and got up to go out and open it. She said,

*My beloved extended his hand through the opening,
And my feelings were aroused for him.
I arose to open to my beloved;
And my hands dripped with myrrh,
And my fingers with liquid myrrh,
On the handles of the bolt
I opened to my beloved,
But my beloved had turned away and had gone!*

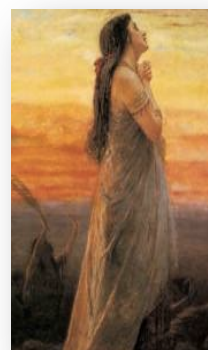
Then she was sorry so she said,

*My heart went out to him as he spoke.
I searched for him but I did not find him;
I called him but he did not answer me.
I searched for him but I did not find him.*

Her search for him did not go well. After she went out at night to look for him she reported that,



*The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me,
They struck me and wounded me;
The guardsmen of the walls took away my shawl from me*



Read verses 8-16. She asks for help, because she is lovesick

Since she could not find her lover, the Shulemmite asked the daughters of Jerusalem for help in locating him. The KJV has the best translation here,

*I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
If ye find my beloved, that ye tell him,
That I am sick of [or from] love*

They asked for a description of him and she gave another elaborate description of how handsome he was. She admired: his head, his hair, his eyes, his cheeks, his lips, his hands, his abdomen, his legs, and ended describing his mouth, then concluded *And he is wholly desirable*.

A Lesson From Chapter 5, When you have a conflict, seek out a resolution immediately. Do not let the sun go down on your anger (Ephesians 4:26).

Chapter 6

She Searched for Him, Until He Found Her

Read verses 1-3. The daughters of Jerusalem joined the search for her beloved. It is never clear who the daughters of Jerusalem are. They are mentioned seven times in the Song and nowhere else in the Old Testament. The only other time the phrase occurs is when Jesus used it to refer to the women in Jerusalem weeping at His crucifixion (Luke 23:28). Here they are most likely the maids that Solomon assigned to the Shulemmite when they got married and moved to Jerusalem.



It was probably morning before the Shulemmite returned to her house. But rather than go out alone again she asked the daughters of Jerusalem to find Solomon and tell him *I am lovesick* for him (5:8).

Since it is daylight now, she knew he would be back at work. The answer to his whereabouts (as in 2:16) was probably not meant to be an exact location.

*My beloved has gone down to his garden,
To the beds of balsam,
To pasture his flock in the gardens,*

It might be significant that she reversed the order of mutual possession from 2:16 *My beloved is mine, and I am his*, to *I am my lover's and my lover in mine* (6:3). She also leads with her belonging to him in 7:10. We should not make too much of this, but since she maintains this order it may indicate a change of priority since she is now his wife.

Read verses 4-7. Solomon praises his Shulemmite wife

It seems that the daughters of Jerusalem found Solomon and declared the Shulemmite's *lovesick* feeling for him. The next verses (6:4-10) may be a message (possibly written), which was sent back from Solomon to the Shulemmite with the daughters of Jerusalem. At any rate Solomon once again praised her beauty. He began by saying, or writing,

*You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my darling,
As lovely as Jerusalem.*



Jerusalem was Solomon's city, the city of David, and the one he and his father David had made beautiful. Tirzah was a lovely city in Samaria. Later, during the divided Kingdom era it became the capital of four kings of the Northern Kingdom: Baasha, Elah, Zimri, and Omri (1 Kings 15:21, 33; 16:8, 15, 23). After that Omri, the father of Ahab, moved the northern kingdom capitol to the city of Samaria.

Then Solomon went on to repeat many of the praises he gave her before their marriage verbatim. Probably, this was to let her know that his love for her was the same as before their marriage.

Read verses 8-10. Wife # 61

Then he made a significant comment.

*There are sixty queens and eighty concubines,
And maidens without number;
But my dove, my perfect one, is unique*

This revealed that Solomon not only had wives (who's children received an inheritance), and concubines (who's children did not receive an inheritance), but he also had numerous *maidens*, just to beautify the court. Of course she knew

about the other 140 wives and concubines so he made this statement to tell her that she stood above them all in his estimation. The point is, *But my dove, my perfect one, is unique.*



The NASV translates the next phrase to mean she is her mother's only daughter. It may mean she was her mother's best daughter (the word "only" is not in the text). The point is the next phrase, *She is the pure* [the word means *clean* or *innocent*] *child of the one who bore her.* Next Solomon said that the three groups of women surrounding him (*the maidens, the queens and the concubines*) *praised her beauty.*

Read verses 11-12. She tests the priority of his love



Being married to Solomon was different from being courted by him. Now there were many other *maidens, queens and concubines.* So the Shulammitte went *down to the orchard of nut trees* to see if Solomon would notice her and if he still wanted her more than all his other women. This may be the meaning of *I went ... To see the blossoms of the valley, To see whether the vine had budded Or the pomegranates had bloomed.* Or she may have gone to actually see those blossoms and blooms, but with the motive of placing herself where Solomon could see her. Then Suddenly Solomon saw here and she said, *Before I was aware, my soul set me over the chariots of my noble people.* It is not clear who *my soul* referred to but the result was that Solomon went to her and put her in his own chariot.



Then the onlookers said, *Come back, come back, O Shulammitte; Come back, come back, that we may gaze at you!*

Next, she (or possibly Solomon) said, *Why should you gaze at the Shulammitte, As at the dance of the two companies?* In other words they were looking at her with the admiration of someone watching a large dance ensemble *of the two companies.* The word for companies can mean camp, as in a military camp. It is the word Mahanaim, which is also a city east of the Jordan River where David fled from Absalom (2 Samuel 17:24). But here it most likely just means a large formal dance.

A Lesson From Chapter Six, Mature lovers dealing with a conflict seek for a resolution not a personal victory.

Questions About The Conflict

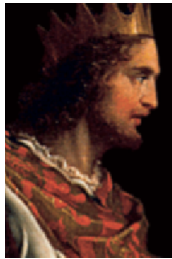
1. When Solomon came to her door, in Chapter Five, why did she not let him in?
 - A. She was asleep
 - B. She did not want to have sexual relations this late
 - C. She was not thinking clearly
 - D. All of the above
2. When Solomon made another appeal by extending his hand through an opening in the door she,
 - A. Became angry
 - B. Changed her mind and got up to let him in
 - C. Called for the daughters of Jerusalem
3. When she went looking for him at night, she
 - A. Got lost
 - B. Found him
 - C. Got robbed and beaten
4. In the morning she asked the daughters of Jerusalem
 - A. To help locate him
 - B. To bring him back to her
 - C. To tell him she was lovesick
5. She then told the daughters of Jerusalem
 - A. What he looks like
 - B. Where to find him
 - C. What to bring to him
6. Where did she tell the daughters of Jerusalem to look for him?
 - A. Where he works
 - B. Where he rests
 - C. Where he meditates
7. She wanted the daughters of Jerusalem to tell him that,
 - A. She was sorry about not letting him in
 - B. They belong to each other
 - C. She wanted to kiss him
8. Solomon responded with a written or verbal poem which,
 - A. Explained why he left
 - B. Said that he would return
 - C. Proclaimed her beauty
9. Upon hearing, or reading, Solomon's response,
 - A. She went to him
 - B. She went to an orchard near him
 - C. She waited eagerly for him
10. Then Solomon saw her and put her in his chariot to take her back to Jerusalem. Next,
 - A. The daughters of Jerusalem said they wanted her to stay in the garden
 - B. Solomon told her how beautiful she was
 - C. The Shulemmite expressed a desire for sexual intimacy with him

Answers: 1. C; 2. B. 3. C (5:7); 4. C (5:8); 5.A (5:10-16); 6. A (although C is possible – 6:2-3); 7.B (6:3); 8. C (6:4-9); 9. B (6:11); 10. A (6:13).

Chapter 7 Mutual Admiration of the Newlyweds

Read verses 1-8. Solomon admires the beautiful body of his Shulemmite bride

This is a paragraph of physical admiration of Solomon for his new wife. She came to the place where he was working, he put her in his own chariot, and took her home. Now that the tension of the separation is over, once again the two praise each other's beauty. It seem that Solomon takes her back to the city of Jerusalem and to his palace (because they leave in the morning for the villages – 7:11).



Here Solomon specifically mentioned her feet, her hips, her navel, her belly, her breasts, her neck, her eyes, her nose, and finishes admiring her head with an emphasis on her long hair. Some of the comparisons seem strange to us, and many women today would not consider them complementary (*Your belly is like a heap of wheat ... Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon*). But obviously those were complements (her belly was smooth and golden like wheat, her nose was perfectly formed).

The phrase *O prince's daughter*, is better translated *O noble or generous daughter*.

The comparison of her *eyes to the pools in Heshbon* is a reference to the Transjordan city east of Jericho, which Moses and the Israelites captured from Sihon the king of the Amorites. Ryrie says it was “A city known for its abundant water supply (Numbers 21:26).”

Solomon ended expressing his desire to make love with her physically and fall asleep with her.

Your stature is like a palm tree,

And your breasts are like its clusters.

I said, 'I will climb the palm tree,

I will take hold of its fruit stalks.'

Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, ...

Flowing gently through the lips of those who fall asleep (7-9).



Read verse 10. The bride responds

The Shulemmite responded with the conclusion a husband should inspire his wife to make. She feels secure in his love, and repeated the statement of 2:16 and 6:3. Even among all the other women she concluded,

I am my beloved's,

And his desire is for me.

Notice here she only talks about the fact that she belongs to him, and it's based on his desire for her.

Read verses 11-13. A request in the morning

After a night of lovemaking she said (and possibly wakes him up to say), *Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country. Let us spend the night in the villages. Let us rise early and go to the vineyards*. She invites him to go out of the city to see the blooms and blossoms of spring in the villages. But this is actually her taking the initiative in lovemaking. It's a kind of second honeymoon. She invites him to spend the day and night with her in the villages. Then she says, *There I will give you my love*. The context of this *love* is one of offering him some *mandrakes*, which were considered to be an aphrodisiac to stimulate sexual desire (Genesis 30:14-16).

A Lesson From Chapter Seven, Marriage should be followed by passionate lovemaking

Chapter 8 Together Always

Read verses 1-4 She desires to always have been with him

The Shulemmite said that she wished he were her natural brother. Well, not really. Her point is, then she could show him affection publically. *If I found you outdoors, I would kiss you; No one would despise me, either.* Many suggest this is because public affection was frowned upon, even for married couples. But there is no evidence for that here. In Genesis 26:28 we read that *Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah* publically. More likely she is saying that she would have been able to kiss him as a young boyfriend. She also said that if he were her brother she could have brought him in to her mother's house and give him *spiced wine to drink*. She ended these wishes with a statement repeated from 2:6, *Let his left hand be under my head And his right hand embrace me.* For the third time verse 4 gives the expression (from 2:7 and 3:5) best translated, *do not arouse or awaken love Until it [love] pleases.*



4. Expressions of Their Love and How It Began (8:5-14).

Read verse 5. Remembering where they met.

The first sentence is a question that stands by itself, unrelated to the statements that proceeds or follow (as does the last phrase of verse 4). The question is, *Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?* It required no answer. It may be asked by the daughters of Jerusalem as they observe Solomon and his wife returning from their time in the villages. The point is she was publically displaying her desire for them to always be together. The next statement *Beneath the apple tree I awakened you; There your mother was in labor with you,* seems to be Solomon reminiscing about when he first met her, in the apple orchard near where she was born.

Read verses 6-7. True love cannot be bought or quenched

The Shulemmite poetically made four astute observations about romantic love. But first she asked Solomon to consider her as a *seal* on his *heart* and *arm*. This undoubtedly is a request to be her husband's most treasured possession. Most likely the *heart* represents his feelings and the *arm* his activities. Then she says:

1. *Love is as strong [or mighty] as death.* The idea is, it cannot be overcome or avoided.
2. Love has a *Jealousy* [also translated an *inflexibility* or *zeal*] *as severe as Sheol; Its flashes are flashes of fire, The very flame of the LORD.* The idea is that romantic love demands that the two of you be each others' only love, "until death do us part," Therefore it naturally must come with *jealousy* and *inflexibility*.
3. *Many waters cannot quench love, Nor will rivers overflow it.* The idea is that even severe life circumstances will not destroy love, or effect it at all.
4. *If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, it would be utterly despised.* The idea is not just that love cannot be bought. It's more than that. Anyone who tried to buy it, *would be utterly despised* by the one whose love they were trying to buy. The point is Solomon with all his wealth could not buy the Shulemmite's love. She gave it freely.

Read verses 8-9. Comments from the Shulemmite's brothers



When she was a little girl the Shulemmite's brothers said, *We have a little sister, And she has no breasts.* Then they ask themselves, *What shall we do for our sister On the day when she is spoken for?* The next comments refer to her moral behavior as she grows up. The premise, *If she is a wall*, refers to what they will do if she has chaste behavior, if she keeps others out like a wall, in other words if she remains a virgin. The conclusion is, *We will build on her a battlement of silver.* The specific symbol is not clear but the point is they will reward her with gifts. On the other hand, *if she is a door*, meaning if she is open to promiscuous men, if she does not protect her virginity, then *We will barricade her with planks of cedar.* In other words her brothers said that they would step in and force her to be protected.

Read verse 10. She remained a virgin

But the Shulemmite remained a virgin even as she grew into a woman. She says, *I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers.* And because of this she could offer herself to Solomon and he could find peace in the fact that she had been with no one else. She said, *Then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.* This word for peace (or contentment) is the common Hebrew greeting שלום (shalom). It seems to be an intentional wordplay in that it sounds much like Solomon's name שלמה (Shelomoh).

Read verses 11-12. The two vineyards

The Shulemmite tells us that *Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon.* The location is unknown but in 1:6 she said her brothers made her work in a vineyard and she referred to herself as a vineyard. As mentioned before, Solomon probably owned the vineyard, and her brothers were the *caretakers who had to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit* to Solomon.

Then the Shulemmite referred to herself when she said, *My very own vineyard is at my disposal.* Solomon has untold wealth and she only had herself. But she voluntarily gave herself to him, *The thousand shekels are for you, Solomon.* The next phrase is unclear. The statement, *And two hundred are for those who take care of its fruit*, may be a request for Solomon to take care of her brothers who took care of her as a child.

Read verses 13-14. Husband and wife speak to each other

The song ends with Solomon longing to hear her voice. He referred to her as *you who sit in the gardens.* Possibly he is looking at her from the window of the room where he is working. He sees her sitting talking to those in the royal garden. He thinks, *My companions are listening for your voice — Let me hear it!*

The Shulemmite responded. Possibly she saw him looking at her, but anyway she longed to be with him, So she wished him to come to her so she said, *Hurry, my beloved, And be like a gazelle or a young stag On the mountains of spices.*



Questions About Being Together Always

1. The admiring comments of 7:1-9 are made by,
 - A. Solomon
 - B. The Shulemmite
 - C. Both Solomon and the Shulemmite
2. The admiring comments of 7:1-9 are made,
 - A. In Lebanon
 - B. In Jerusalem
 - C. In a village
3. The admiring comments of 7:1-9 are,
 - A. Exclusively about physical beauty
 - B. Mostly about physical beauty
 - C. Statements that include physical beauty
4. Chapter 7 verses 7-9 is
 - A. Mutual admiration by Solomon and the Shulemmite
 - B. Solomon's desire for sexual lovemaking
 - C. Mutual desire for sexual lovemaking
5. The statement of 7:10 *I am my beloved's, And his desire is for me* is,
 - A. What a wife should tell her husband
 - B. How a wife should respond to lovemaking
 - C. How a husband should make his wife feel
6. After a night of lovemaking the Shulemmite wants the two of them to,
 - A. Stay in bed and remain asleep
 - B. Sleep in then go to Jerusalem
 - C. Get up early and go to the villages
7. The Shulemmite says she wished he were her brother because,
 - A. He would have treated her better than her brothers did
 - B. She could kiss him in public without ridicule
 - C. She could take him in to her house and kiss him privately
8. When the Shulemmite was a little girl her brothers thought she was,
 - A. Skinny
 - B. Unattractive
 - C. Naïve
9. The brothers of the Shulemmite were determined to keep her,
 - A. From socializing with men
 - B. Working in the vineyard
 - C. A virgin
10. The Shulemmite concludes by saying, *I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers; Then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.* This means,
 - A. The same as, *I am my beloved's, And his desire is for me*
 - B. She was able to use her body to give Solomon peace
 - C. She remained a virgin until she was married

Answers; 1. A; 2. B. 3. B (verse 6 include admirations of character); 4.B; 5. C; 6. C; 7. B (C is also true but she did that even though he was not her brother (3:4); 8. A; 9. C; 10. C (8:12).

This Concludes our study of the Song of Solomon.