

The Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon is an unusual book from the canon of Scripture. It has always been a part of Scripture; however, it is never quoted from in the New Testament. Like most Hebrew poetry (in fact, like most ancient poetry), there is nothing beyond syntax to indicate a change of scene or of characters. That must be done by examining the verbs, nouns and pronouns and noting a shift from masculine to feminine or from singular to plural. The principal characters have names of endearment for one another, and these names reveal who is speaking.

Most commentaries draw parallels between this song and the relationship between Christ and the church or between Jesus Christ and Israel (see Isa 54:5,6 Eph 5:27 Rev 21:2,9). The Song of Solomon is very sensual throughout and some Bible expositors would rather dispense with that; so they allegorize it. Although strong right/man right woman love helps us to understand God's relationship to us, there is no reason to assume that the Song of Solomon is allegorical.

The Song of Solomon has several basic interpretations and these depend upon how many people are involved in this story. The most common interpretation is that this is a relationship between Solomon and the Shulammitte woman. The chief problem here is that Solomon had so many wives and mistresses, what is the importance here of this particular relationship? This particular woman is never mentioned again in Scripture. Now, Solomon's father David also had several wives and his relationship with Bathsheba was given the most attention in the Bible, since they were a link in the genetic line of the humanity of our Lord and because David and Bathsheba were right man and right woman.

In all actuality, there are three principal characters: Solomon, the shepherd lover, and the Shulammitte woman, with the supporting characters of the daughters of Jerusalem (the girlfriends of the Shulammitte woman) and Solomon's 60th wife. This interpretation is the most logical because (1) Solomon would likely not be referred to as a shepherd lover. (2) When Solomon and the Shulammitte woman are together, she seems to drift off into a fantasy world and dream about her lover. If her lover is Solomon, why dream about the very person that you are with. (3) When the Shulammitte woman and her lover are separated, she searches the city for him. This follows the marriage of Solomon and his 60th bride. If these two couples are one couple (as most interpretations allow) then Solomon would be an easy man to find because they would both live in his palace.

ACT I

Solomon or the Shepherd Lover

The first act runs from SOS 1:1 through 3:5; it introduces the primary characters, the Shulammitte woman (although she is not spoken of as such until SOS 6:13--which is actually the only reference to her national origins). The first act sets the scene with Solomon calling the maiden into his palace while she is totally occupied with another man, her shepherd lover.

Solomon was the likely author, as per SOS 1:1. I Kings 4:32 indicates that Solomon was quite a prolific writer (3000 proverbs and 1000 songs).

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's [SOS 1:1, NASB]

The first verse is the title of this book and it identifies the author as Solomon. The NASB indicates that this could be translated "The Best of Songs."

Vv 2-7 clearly belong to the Shulammitte woman; she refers to her lover (vv 2-4a) and to Solomon (v. 4b); and v. 4c is likely a chorus of her friends.

May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine. Your oils have a pleasing fragrance, your name is [like] purified oil; therefore the maidens love you. Draw me after you [and] let us run! The king has brought me into his chambers." [SOS 1:2-4a]

In the first couple verses, the Shulammitte woman introduces all of the principle characters: she is the one who is speaking and it is obvious that this begins from a woman's point of view; she mentions her lover; she mentions the maidens, her unmarried friends who like the shepherd lover and are happy for their love; and Solomon.

Solomon was the king of Israel from circa 973-933 BC. He had a great deal of money and he was a collector: he collected wisdom (Eccl. 1:13-14); real estate of all types (Eccl. 2:4-6); slaves to do his bidding and animals of all kinds (Eccl. 2:7); liquid assets (Eccl. 2:8a); a live band (Eccl. 2:8b); and he collected women (Eccl. 2:8c). In fact, he had 700 wives and 300 mistresses (I Kings 11:3), which caused his heart to go after other gods (I Kings 11:2,4-6). Like any other male Lothario, Solomon had his ways. Being the king, it was quite easy for him to send for a maiden, have her brought to him in his castle, and then take it from there (compare with II Sam 11:2-4).

The Shulammitte woman, meanwhile, is thinking of her shepherd lover. Her soul is occupied with him while she is with Solomon. She compares the shepherd lover's love to wine, pleasurable and intoxicating. His oil is a fragrance to her and even his name gives her pleasure.

The Shulammitte woman is obviously quite taken with her lover, as are her friends, and she desires for him to "draw" her. The Hebrew word means to "draw towards" and it is in the Qal imperative (the imperative of entreaty) masculine singular. "Let us run" is in Qal future first person plural--her lover is asked to draw her to him and they will run [to anyone for refuge]. Her desire to run is easily explained: Solomon has called her into his castle into his chambers. Any single woman knew what that was all about. Solomon was on the prowl for another woman; either another wife or another mistress. Solomon has called for this woman and has brought her into his chambers--an inner room in the castle; probably not a bedroom but a room for receiving guests.

What has been done here is perfect story telling: the title and author are given, the characters have been all introduced, and the plot has been set into motion. This is, however, a true story, written under the direction of God the Holy Spirit. This will not make Solomon look good; if you are going to write a fictional story and you play one of the parts, it is highly unlikely that our part will be unfavorable. However, when guided by God the Holy Spirit, what is said is the truth.

If the only primary characters in this narrative were Solomon and the Shulammitte woman, then it would be confusing for her to want to run or flee with someone else just as Solomon is first bringing her into his palace. A woman whose soul is occupied with Solomon would be overwhelmed by the opportunity to meet and be seduced by Solomon.

We will rejoice in you and be glad. {We} will extol your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you. [SOS 2:4b]

The change to "we" indicates that someone else is speaking. When a woman faces a dilemma, such as the one here, it is common for her to seek the counsel of her friends. They are happy for her love and they hold it in the highest regard. However, notice that the verse ends with "rightly do **they** love you." Just in case there is any confusion as to how many people are involved; the chorus of maidens refer to both the shepherd lover and to Solomon as loving this woman.

The woman is modest and, like all women, recognizes her physical short-comings and even dwells upon them at length.

I am black [sunburnt] but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark complected, for the sun has burned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me caretaker of the vineyards, [but] I have not taken care of my own vineyard. Tell me, O you who my soul loves, where you tend your flock? Where will you cause [them] to lie down at noon? For why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions? [SOS 1:5-7]

She is in Solomon's chambers, awaiting Solomon, and she is thinking of her beloved shepherd lover. She is thinking back to conversations with her friends, Solomon's female attendants (slaves, possibly), identified as the daughters of Jerusalem, about her lover and about conversations with her lover. From v. 5 alone, it is unclear whether she is black or very dark complected. Furthermore, we do not know anything about this woman's national origins. Although she is referred to as a Shulammitite woman, scholars disagree as to what "Shulammitite" is. It is most likely a reference to a place of origin, possibly the town of Shunem but certainly a town since its location has been possibly lost to history. V. 6 explains why she is darker complected than most; she has spend a great deal of time in this vineyard, leased from Solomon (SOS 8:11-12). She had the responsibility of overseeing of the family vineyard at the insistence of her brothers and working outside darkened her skin. She feels that she has not taken care of her skin or her beauty as she should have. Furthermore, she does not tout her position as overseeing the vineyard. She acquired that position because her brothers were angry with her and therefore delegated that responsibility to her.

In v. 7 she thinks of conversations with her lover and how she had asked him where he will take his flock to feed and to be taken care of ("tending" the flock is either in the Qal future or the imperfect). This is not unlike asking someone where he works. She is recalling the beginning of their relationship. "Causing the flock to lie down" is in the Hithpael imperfect [another books says future]; in any case, a causative relationship is involved here. Both verbs are in the 2nd person, masculine singular, meaning she is speaking to an individual man.

At the end of v. 7, she tells her shepherd friend that she does not want to have to search through several herds of other shepherds in order to find him. This is why she wants to know where he will be. She desires this man specifically and has no interest in shepherds in general.

Obviously: there are two men involved here. Solomon, the king, is not out on some hill shepherding a bunch of sheep. Where some expositors came up with the idea that this book involves only Solomon and the Shulammitite woman is a mystery to me. Some spiritualize this beyond belief, calling this the union of Christ and the church. Whereas, it is true that category #2 love (love between a man and his right woman) helps to illustrate to us God's perfect love for us, his church, at the time of this book, there was no church and church age doctrine was a mystery. People who are religious often tend to be quite ascetic and tend to have a difficult time with a book which is as explicitly sensual as the Song of Solomon. Therefore, their interpretation is going to be confused.

While in Solomon's palace, she remembers the voice of her shepherd friend:

If you yourself do not know, most beautiful among women, go forth on the trail of the flock, and pasture your young goats by the tents of the shepherds. [SOS 1:8]

This sounds like their first real conversation and he has described to her how to find him. Then she is shocked back to reality by the voice of Solomon. We know it is Solomon because of his comparisons. He will say things to her that her shepherd friend would not say.

To me, my darling, you are like my mare among the chariots of Pharaoh. Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments; your neck with strings of beads. [SOS 1:9-10]

A shepherd would not be drawing analogies to a mare among the chariots of the Pharaoh nor would his emphasis be upon the ornaments. Several translations mention rows of jewels around the cheeks. Even though the term "jewels" does not occur, it is implied by both the Hebrew word used and by v. 11. The context of v. 10, mentioning strings of beads also indicates that "rows of jewels" is an accurate rendering. Why is she wearing these things? She cannot afford them. This is what Solomon sees in her. Her friends, the daughters of Jerusalem are thrilled that she is in love with her shepherd lover, but even more thrilled that she has been called to Solomon's chambers. So that she can go to Solomon's palace properly adorned, her friends had made the offer:

We will make for you ornaments of gold with beads of silver. [SOS 1:11]

The Shulammitte woman's friends were happy no matter which way she chose. She, however, even in the presence of Solomon, cannot help but think about her shepherd lover.

While the king was on his couch, my perfume gave forth its fragrance. My beloved to me is a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi. [SOS 1:13-14]

She smells her own fragrance and it brings to her memories of her beloved. She is totally unable to concentrate upon Solomon. This is fragrance of memory. Henna flowers are also used to ward off bugs and thus indicate protection. It's as though Solomon is not even in the same room with her. Her soul is guarded by her love for her shepherd lover. She hears the voice of her beloved:

How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are doves. [SOS 1:15]

She recalls the wonderful things that her shepherd lover has said to her. These things are in her soul. She thinks of what is in her soul for her shepherd lover and their home:

How handsome you are, my beloved, so pleasant! Indeed, our bed is covered with leaves! The beams of our house are cedars, our rafters cypress trees. [SOS 1:16-17]

They both live outside much of the time and their bed, as far as she is concerned, is a pile of green leaves on the ground. The cedars and the cypress trees are the ceilings and beams of their home. She is in the midst of a beautiful palace with the richest man in the world and all she can think about is living outdoors with her shepherd lover. She continues to remember conversations with her shepherd lover:

I am a meadow saffron of Sharon, the lily of the valleys. [SOS 2:1]

Like a Lily among thorns, so is my darling among the maidens. [SOS 2:2]

She admits to him that she is attractive, but she is merely a meadow saffron from the plains of Sharon, an autumn flower springing from poisonous bulbs, a picture of the old sin nature, of all things. There are varying views upon what kind of flower this is, but I believe the point is that these are common flowers and there are millions of other flowers to be found in the same area. Her shepherd lover sees her a Lily, not out of a valley of lilies, but out of a valley of thorns. Lilies, in the Mid-East, are tall and beautiful. The shepherd lover sees her as not just a lily which stands out from all the other lilies, but that, by comparison, she is a lily in a valley of thorns. This is how he views her in comparison to other women. She is about to be called by

Solomon, the king, so that he might propose marriage to her. She must go to Solomon's castle. They are both expressing their devotion toward one another. She to him to reassure him, and he to her so that she realizes how much she means to him.

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest; so is my beloved among the young men. In his shade I took great delight and sat down, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. [SOS 2:3]

The apple tree in v. 3 is not a common apple tree, but either sweet, golden quinces, with a taste and fragrance far superior to our quinces; or, according to another, a citron, a golden apple tree, always green and perfuming the air. In either case, the picture here is of strength and beauty and fragrance; with a fruit which is wonderful to eat. The shade is respite and protection from her shepherd lover.

However, she is still with Solomon at this time and he has noticed that she has a far away, glazed look in her eyes; and that she is barely paying attention to her. So he takes her for a bite to eat or for a glass of wine.

He has caused me to be brought into the banquet-room [or, house of wine], having been furnished with banners above me--love. [SOS 2:4]

The Hiphil preterit 3rd person masculine singular is a tense of causative action. Solomon, when noticing that she was not paying attention to him, caused her to be brought to his banqueting-house, which is literally the house of wine. The word "love" has me confused; one source says feminine singular and another claims masculine plural. When attached to the rest of the sentence, a verb is supplied. Note that she is with Solomon in an incredible palace and she is lovesick with her shepherd lover. She is so much in love that she cannot eat. She just wants enough food to keep from fainting.

Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, because I am lovesick. [Let] his left hand [be] under my head and his right hand embrace me. [SOS 2:5-6]

Sustain me with raisin cakes (and refresh) are both in the Piel imperative. This is an intense imperative of entreaty; and it is in the masculine plural, indicating that Solomon has servants around seeing to their every need. Solomon would certainly like her to drink a little, and she is demanding a small amount of food. She does not speak out loud to say that she is lovesick; she thinks it in her soul. This does indicate that in category #2 love that there is some physical contact. Here is a difference of opinion on the parsing of "embrace." One claims the Piel future and another Piel imperfect. In either case, "embrace" is the intensive stem. It means to embrace passionately.

The shepherd lover is aware of this visit to the castle. After all, she has asked him to run away with her. The daughters of Jerusalem, her maiden friends, are impressed with the passion of their love on the one hand, and the wealth of Solomon on the other.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you will not arouse or awaken love until it delights. [SOS 2:7]

The shepherd lover does not want his lover's maiden friends to encourage her to go after Solomon. They are to allow her love to wait until it unfolds in delight to true love. He asks them to make an oath that they will not encourage this. Why it is by the gazelles and the hinds, I don't have a clue.

The sound! My beloved! Behold, he is coming, climbing on the mountain, leaping on this hills! My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he is standing behind our wall; he is looking through the windows; he is peering through the lattice. [SOS 2:8-9]

In her occupation with this man, she is attuned to his ever sound. Often, there would be a wall around a large home for protection. The young man has come up to their house and is looking for her. The word "sound" is a noun, not a verb, so it is not translated "listen."

**My beloved responded and said to me, [SOS 2:10a]
Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along. For, behold, the winter is past, the rain is over, gone. The flowers have appeared in the land; the time has arrived for pruning [the vines], and the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. The fig tree has ripened its figs, and the vines in blossom have even forth fragrance. Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along! [SOS 2:10b-13]**

In that day and time, it was a much different world. People did not go out throughout the winter as lovers. The elements made this quite difficult. The spring brought with it good weather, a new beginning, and there is excitement in the newness of their love. They are not running away together; they are just going out for the first time, both fully cognizant of their feelings for one another. All of this is fragrance of memory for the Shulammite woman.

The words "responded" and "said" are both in the third masculine singular, meaning this is her shepherd lover speaking to her. The verbs for "arise" and "come" are both in the feminine singular, meaning that he is speaking to her; the imperative is the imperative of entreaty.

O my dove, in the clefts of the rock in the secret place of the steep pathway, let me see your form, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your form is lovely. [SOS 2:14]

Physical attraction is a normal and natural thing in category #2 love. It cannot be the overriding thrust of the relationship. There must be a soul match and the souls that match must have character. In those days, two lovers did not have a great many amusements to choose from. Often, it was just walking or hiking and talking. This is male behavior--taking his love to places where she has not been to before.

The chorus of the daughters of Jerusalem chimes in and the meaning is somewhat unclear to me.

Catch the foxes for us, the young foxes that are ruining the vineyards while our vineyards are in blossom. [SOS 2:15]

The foxes were quite destructive of a vineyard. They would eat the blossoms and the fruit before it was ready to be harvested. The vineyards in blossom is symbolic of the love blooming between the shepherd lover and the Shulammite woman. These foxes represent the details of life (including Solomon), however innocuous or attractive, which would be destructive to their love.

My beloved [is] mine, and I [am] his; he pastures [his flock] among the lilies until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away. Turn, my beloved, and become like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of Bether. [SOS 2:16-17]

In the cool of the day is literally "when the day breathes." "Turn" is the Qal imperative of a word which means to "turn like a door on hinges" but it, in a similar fashion, means "to become like anything" or "to turn oneself into something." "Become" is a separate verb, but it is closely connect to "turn" as a part of the sentence structure.

On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him. I must arise now and go about the city in the streets and in the squares. I must seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him but did not find him. [SOS 3:1-2]

Note that she is completely in love with her shepherd lover; her soul and body both desire him; also notice that they are not sleeping together, despite the intensity of their passion.

The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, [and I said,] "Have you seen him, whom my soul loves?" Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to my mother's house, and into the room of her who conceived me. [SOS 3:3-4]

The watchmen are the cops on the beat. She is totally occupied with this man and asks anyone whom she sees if they have seen him. She finds him and takes him to her mother's house (where she also lives).

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you will not arouse or awaken my love until she [or, it] pleases. [SOS 3:5]

As this is a song, it has various choruses and refrains. Here, the shepherd lover is asking the daughters of Jerusalem, his maiden's friends, not to apply peer pressure upon her (particularly since they would be drawn to Solomon's wealth and fame), but to allow her to fall in love as her soul chooses.

ACT II

Solomon's Wedding

This act begins with a marriage of Solomon (recall that he had 300 wives) and it contains all the splendor and glory of a royal marriage. The fact that it is one out of 300 is not an issue with respect to its grandeur.

What is this coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all scented powders of the merchant? Behold, it is the [traveling] bed of Solomon; sixty men around it, of the mighty men of Israel. All of them are wielders of the sword, expert in war; each man has his sword at his side, [guarding] against the terrors of the night. [SOS 3:6-8]

Song of Solomon 3:6-11 is a chorus. Solomon is being moved through Zion from Jerusalem and his marriage was a spectacle, observed by the entire populace of that area, like a parade. This will give his standard operating procedure, which will highly impress the maiden friends of the Shulammite woman. These comments would be from the crowd as the procession moves through the city.

You could smell this procession before it arrived, as v. 6 says. Solomon was forever the consummate romantic, and chose for his bed, carried or guarded by 60 men, to smell of perfume. From the Hebrew, it is an actual bed which is being transported, very likely with Solomon and possibly his bride on it.

King Solomon has made for himself a sedan chair 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. [SOS 3:9-10]

The bed is further described in v. 9. The Hebrew is a word for a nuptial bed which Solomon has designed in such a way to be transportable. The bed itself was a sight to behold. It could function as a couch, but apparently was large enough to be a bed. The daughters of Jerusalem had designed and fitted the lining.

The daughters of Jerusalem now break out into a chorus, speaking to the women of Zion, where Solomon is traveling through.

Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with the crown [or, wreath] with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of his gladness of heart. [SOS 3:11]

The daughters of Jerusalem, the maiden friends of the Shulammitte woman, are quite impressed with this and expect that the maiden women of Zion will be similarly impressed.

In chapter 4, Solomon begins seducing the young maiden he has just betrothed. This is not the Shulammitte woman.

How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful you are. Your eyes are doves behind your veil; your hair is like a flock of goats that have descended from Mount Gilead. [SOS 4:1]

Solomon has used these lines before. His experience with goats are going to be from afar; he will see a heard of goats coming down a mountain and it will be a black cascade down the mountain. Solomon would have a much different experience with goats than would a shepherd.

Your teeth are like a flock of [newly] shorn ewes which have come up from their washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost her young. [SOS 4:2]

The teeth of this maiden are white and perfect; much different than the teeth of some maidens. They are symmetrical and none are missing.

Your lips are like a scarlet thread and your mouth is lovely. Your temples are like a slice of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David built with rows of stones, on which are hung a thousand shields, all the round shields of the mighty men. [SOS 4:3-4]

Her neck is long and straight, and she is wearing a necklace.

Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away. I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense. [SOS 4:5-6]

This is an altogether sensual experience for Solomon. Her breasts are firm and stand out and the entire experience is one of sweet savor because of all the perfume that Solomon has provided.

You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you. Come with me from Lebanon, [my] bride, may you come with me from Lebanon, journey down from the summit of Amana, from the summit of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, [my] bride; you have made my heart beat faster with a single [glance] of your eyes, with a single strand of your necklace. [SOS 4:7-9]

To some men, Solomon has the ideal life. He is the king, with power over all twelve tribes. He is basking in the prosperity of his nation and the peace obtained by his father David. He has every material possession that he could ever want. And if he becomes bored, he just finds another woman and marries her (or adds her to his collection of mistresses--concubines). Whereas, we may desire to go to Paris, to Spain, to San Francisco; Solomon could honeymoon with his bride anywhere he chose. He had lines that any woman would fall for. Women gravitate toward men who are rich and powerful and handsome. However, Solomon would soon grow tired of this woman and she will eventually (very likely within 2-6 months) just become another fixture of his house, living with the other wives and concubines, never to be touched or wooed again; or, infrequently at best, competing with hundreds of other women. Solomon himself will continually have this soul craving, thinking that he will fulfill it with the next bride or mistress. As hard as it is to imagine, because we often believe that good environment brings happiness, Solomon was a miserable man for much of his adult life because he rejected doctrine, knowing of its benefits, and was on a continually frantic search for happiness. The book of Ecclesiastes deals with Solomon's misery.

Notice that throughout Solomon's seduction of this woman, he will always return to complimenting her on her jewelry and perfume, both of which were likely provided at the castle. A king's wives and concubines were often procured by officials in the castle and prepared by the same. They all knew what Solomon preferred and would help the woman to meet those standards (see the book of Esther).

Solomon continues with his seduction of his bride (which would be terribly romantic, except that Solomon will say these words a thousand times to a thousand different women):

How beautiful are your caresses, my sister,[my] bride. How much better are your caresses than wine, and the fragrance of your oils [is better than] all spices. Your lips, [my] bride, drip honey; honey and milk are under your tongue, and the fragrance of your clothes is like the fragrance of Lebanon. [SOS 4:10-11]

The word often translated "love" in this verse, is the Hebrew word *dôwd* (also, *dôd*), which is always in the plural and comes from an unused root word meaning "to boil." The Emphasized Bible's rendition of "caresses" rather than "love" is more apt. Solomon is most interested in what this woman can do for him, even though the situation is temporary.

It is important to note that love requires more than romantic phrasing, at which Solomon is very adept (as are many predatory males). He could be saying this just as easily to the Shulammitite woman, had she succumbed to his charms, but he is saying it to another woman. As long as the woman was packaged properly and physically attractive, Solomon worried about little else.

A garden locked is my sister, [my] bride, a rock garden locked, a spring sealed up. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, henna with nard plants, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense. Myrrh and aloes, along with all the finest spices. You are a garden spring, a well of fresh water, and streams from Lebanon. [SOS 4:12-15]

This woman is a virgin and it is a shame that her virginity is wasted on Solomon who, several years from then, have trouble remembering her name (notice that he continually calls her with endearments and never uses her name). Solomon begins to speak of his bride, but continually is sidetracked to how she smells, which is strictly a function of maids in the castle who prepare the bride. Solomon's continual mention of Lebanon would cause one to think that his bride is from Lebanon.

Awake, O north [wind], and come, [wind of the] south; make my garden breathe out, let its spices be wafted abroad. May my beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruits. [SOS 4:16]

V. 16 is the only time that Solomon's bride from Lebanon even speaks. She is nothing but a pretty ornament to him. What is in her soul interests Solomon very little. On the other hand, all that interests her is his fame and riches. Solomon is a good meal ticket.

I have come into my garden, my sister, [my] 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. Eat, friends, drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers. [SOS 5:1]

Solomon is in a tremendous mood. There is nothing like a little romance to temporarily pep up the soul and one's spirits. This effect, however, when not shared with the right person, is transitory. Solomon will be cheerful and happy and stimulated and this stimulation might last much of the night; however, because this is bride #60 (and he will marry 240 more), this stimulation will not last. Solomon had the time and money and peace within his nation to pursue whatever pleasures he so desired, and later concluded all his searches as empty and futile. This book should always be studied in conjunction with Ecclesiastes.

ACT III

The Shulammite Woman and her Shepherd Lover

The dream:

We now return to the Shulammite woman and she is dreaming of her lover. Her soul is overwhelmed with thoughts of him. Solomon's bride, on the other hand, had no emotions to express within this book. She spoke but once and they were words of surrender and not of occupation with the person of Solomon. The Shulammite woman is very expressive and has a great deal to say in her dreams and in her conscious life about the one who occupies her soul.

I was asleep, but my heart was awake. The sound of my beloved--knocking. [SOS 5:2a]

Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one! For my head is drenched with dew [and] my locks with the damp of the night. [SOS 5:2b]

The Shulammitte woman even dreams of her shepherd lover; she dreams that he comes for her in the middle of the night. As SOS 5:2 states, she is asleep, but her soul is awake (what better way to describe dreaming) and her soul is occupied with her right man.

She is in bed, dreaming; dreaming that she is in bed. She begins to think just as a person who has just been awakened. Her soul is charged but her body is tired. She mentally goes through the preparations that she must go through in order to answer the door.

I have taken off my dress; how can I put it on [again]? I have washed my feet; how can I dirty them again? [SOS 5:3]

As she dreams, she drifts from sequence to sequence. She has stopped thinking about getting up and putting on her clothes and her beloved's hand has reached through the opening to her hand.

My beloved extended his hand through the opening, and my feelings for him were aroused. I arose to open [the door for] my beloved and my hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers with myrrh distilling, upon the handles of the bolt. I myself opened to my beloved; but my beloved had turned away [and] had passed on. [SOS 5:4-6a].

The Shulammitte woman was confused in her choice between her right man, the shepherd lover, and the more glamorous Solomon. Her shepherd lover went away during this time, to allow her free will to choose. She has chosen but she can no longer find her shepherd lover. She dreams about him and he is just out of her grasp. Now that she realizes what she wants, she wants him right then and there. Her soul is frustrated because he is not there for her right then.

My soul 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. The watchman who makes the rounds in the city found me; they struck me and wounded me; the guardsmen of the walls took away my shawl from me. [SOS 5:6b-7]

What is occurring in this dream is her frustration and hurt that she feels because she is not with her shepherd lover. Those who are there to protect her do not. Only her shepherd lover will protect her soul and body.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, as to what you will tell him: for I am lovesick [or, if you find my beloved, will you not tell him that I am faint with love?]. [SOS 5:8]

What kind of beloved is your beloved [or, what is your beloved more than any other beloved?], O most beautiful among women? What kind of beloved is your beloved that you thus adjure us? [SOS 5:9]

Note that, again, if there were only one couple in the song, this would make very little sense. The Shulammitte woman wants the daughters of Jerusalem to tell her beloved that she is sick with love. If she just married Solomon, then this would be a given as a newlywed. And would it make any sense for the Daughters of Jerusalem to ask what is special about her beloved? Why would they ask what sets him above all the others. If this lover were Solomon, then they know what he's got that other men don't have. This would be unquestioned by anyone in Jerusalem. However, if this woman turned down Solomon for a shepherd lover, then certainly her friends would want to know what does this man have that sets him apart?

The Shulammite woman's soul is filled with this man and she remembers every detail about him:

My beloved is dazzling [white] and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand, his head is like gold, pure gold; his locks are like clusters of dates [bushy], black as a raven. His eyes are like doves, beside streams of water bathed in milk and reposed in their setting [set as gems in a ring]. His cheeks are like a [raised] bed of balsam, banks of sweet-scented herbs, his lips are lilies, dripping with liquid myrrh. [SOS 5:10-13]

The shepherd lover's eyes are blue and the white is very white and clear. He is Caucasian, but well-tanned, and his looks are of great value to the woman. He has curly, black hair and strong, raised cheekbones. To the woman, his lips are pleasant and his breath is pleasant to her.

His hands are rods of gold set with beryl [or, topaz]; his abdomen is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of alabaster set on pedestals of pure gold; his appearance [form] is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars [or, as noble as the cedars]. His mouth is full of sweetness and he is wholly desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. [SOS 5:14-16]

The Shulammite woman finds her shepherd lover tall and strong, tanned and muscular. Because he has first touched her soul, she finds everything about his physical appearance desirable.

Where has your beloved gone, most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you? [SOS 6:1]

My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of balsam to pasture his flock in the gardens and gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. He who pastures his flock among the lilies. [SOS 6:2]

Again, how illogical it would be to think that the shepherd lover and Solomon are one and the same. What would Solomon be doing hauling a bunch of sheep around with him. He was the king of Israel. When it comes to finding him, he would be one of the easiest people to find. The shepherd lover, on the other hand, does have a flock of sheep that he tends and he takes to graze in different areas. And who knows, maybe even as a strong virile man, he likes lilies? Notice that God's design is this one man for this one woman and this one woman for this one man. In our souls, at least prior to them becoming confused by broken dreams and dashed hopes, confused by the function of our old sin nature and the sin natures of others, have a notion of a Prince Charming or a Cinderella, that one person who stands out among ten thousand (which, at that time, was a very large group), who is unique and wholly desirable; the one person which God designed for us.

The Shulammite woman and her shepherd lover are reunited:

She and her shepherd lover are reunited and he initiates the endearments:

You are beautiful as Tirzah, my darling, as lovely as Jerusalem, as awesome as an army with banners. Turn your eyes away from me, for they have confused me; your hair is like a flock of goats that have descended from Gilead. Your teeth like a flock of ewes which have come up from their washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost her young. [SOS 6:4-6]

In that day and age, white teeth which are even and matched was seen much less often than it is today, during our age of orthodontists. Her dental hygiene and genetic predisposition here had all paid off. As strong as this man is, she only needs to look at him to confuse him; to him, she is beautiful to the point of distracting his thoughts when he looks upon her.

Your temples are like a slice of pomegranate behind your veil. There are sixty queens and eighty concubines [mistresses], and maidens without number, but my dove, my perfect one, is unique; she is her mother's one daughter; she is the pure [child] of the one who bore her. The maidens saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines [also], and they praised her, saying, "Who is this that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun, as majestic as an army with banners?" [SOS 6:7-10]

The shepherd lover was aware of Solomon's interest in his right woman. He even left and allowed her to look in her soul and make the right decision. He, like much of Jerusalem, was aware of how many wives and mistresses that Solomon had collected up until that time, since every time Solomon married another woman, there was this great procession through the city, as previously described. As we have seen, the Shulammite woman did go as far as to go to Solomon's castle and she was prepared by the maidens and she met the queens and mistresses of Solomon. Even they found her to be beautiful.

The shepherd lover recognizes her as his right woman--she stands out from even Solomon's wives and mistresses to him. With right man and right woman, fame, riches and beauty of other men or women is unimportant.

The shepherd lover explains where he has been and what he thought about. Some men have to get away from it all, as it were, to think about their own emotions; to determine what they are feeling.

I went down to the nut orchard, to look upon the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. [SOS 6:11]

The picture here is of a man who is very attracted to his Shulammite woman. He knows about Solomon's interest in his maiden, that even Solomon's female servants favored a marriage between the Shulammite woman and Solomon. He has given himself some time away to think about her.

The next couple verses are rather difficult. The translations vary somewhat and the Revised Standard Version notes "The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain." The New English Bible reads: "I did not know myself; she made me feel more than a prince reigning over the myriads of people." The NASB reads: "Before I was aware, my soul set me over the chariots of my noble people" "I know not [how it was] my soul set for me the chariots of my willing people." is how the Emphasized Bible renders v. 12. Notice that even the Emphasized Bible, described by RB Thieme as "slavishly literal", adds a few words to try to clarify the meaning. The English rendering of the Septuagint is quite different from the rest: "There I will give thee my breasts; my soul knew [it] not; it made me as the chariots of Aminadab."

The Hebrew begins with a simple negation, translated "or ever" in the KJV and "before" in the Scofield version. However, these words are put there more as connectives. Whatever follows is negated. "Aware" is in the Qal preterite of the word usually translated "to know." The Qal stem is the simplest and the preterite can mean an action in the past or an action which began in the past and continues. When someone does not know something, they are confused. This is what the shepherd lover was while on this hiatus. The common word for "soul" is found along with the Qal preterite of *sîym*, which means "to put", but has a wide variety of applications, translated appoint, being, call, care, charge, commit, etc. With reference to the soul, we must realize that the shepherd is not physically placed anywhere or physically placed over anything. His

mind is on his Shulammite woman, and, certainly, like any other man in his position, his mind is on Solomon. The translations do agree upon the word "chariot" (in the plural) but we end with a word often transliterated "Amminadib." There are no spaces between the words in the Hebrew and there is another word found several times in the Old Testament, transliterated "Amminadab." This allows for the possibility that this is a particular person. However, the word could be looked at as two words, "am", which refers to a people or a tribe or troops or attendants. The second word, "nâdîyb", which means voluntary, generous or magnanimous. It is also translated "noble" or "liberal" or "prince." What we have here is the shepherd lover, in his confusion feels as though he has been placed in a royal chariot with attendants. When a man is in love and realizes that his right woman is also in love with him, he is in a place exalted above imagination. There is no power or fame which can match this. The shepherd lover, confused and pondering, feels as though he is wonderful position of adulation because of how the Shulammite woman feels about him and how he feels about her. We might use the idiom "walking on air" or "walking on clouds."

[Although] I was confused, my soul had placed me [or, made me feel as though I had been placed] over royal chariots with attendants. [SOS 6:12]

V 13 begins in a way which is easy enough, but become difficult. There are two sets of people speaking in v. 13. A group is speaking because one of the verbs is in the first person plural. The daughters of Jerusalem genuinely like the Shulammite woman, which is difficult because exceptionally beautiful women are seldom liked by other women. However, the disposition and dedication of the Shulammite woman has caused them to wish for her company.

In the second part of v. 13,(7:1 in some Bibles) the new queen, the jealous queen asks "what do you see (2nd person masculine plural) in the Shulammite?" She realizes after a very short honeymoon that Solomon's attendants and Solomon himself are all still taken by the Shulammite. The masculine plural applies to Solomon and his attendants. The Shulammite woman is either at a cattle function, now being privy to such affairs, and she is excited about having fallen in love with her right man, having made the right decision and she is dancing for joy. Her exuberance and happiness flood the palace and the queen is jealous. The last couple words are the ones difficult to translate. Machaneh can mean "armies", but it can also mean, figuratively, "angels", "cattle" or "stars." These are the two groups of people who have been called out to this get-together (royalty and non-royalty). The word translated "company" actually means "dancing" or "showing exultation or joy publically, sometimes by dancing."

Come back, come back, O Shulammite; come back, come back that we may gaze at you. [SOS 6:13a]

Why should you gaze upon the Shulammite as the showing of exultation between the two groups [of people]? [SOS 6:13b]

The consummation of the marriage of the Shulammite woman and her shepherd lover:

In chapter 7, we have the union of the Shulammite woman and her shepherd lover. The emphasis in the union of Solomon and his bride was the wedding ceremony.. A small amount of time was spent on the actual honeymoon, but the greatest part of their relationship was the wedding day. And after all that, Solomon still had a desire for the Shulammite woman which enraged his new bride. In the union of the Shulammite and her lover, the emphasis is upon their love and attraction, which they savor as wine.

How beautiful are your footsteps in sandals, O nobleman's daughter! The curve of your hips are like jewels, the work of the hands of an artist. Your naval is a round goblet which never lacks spiced wine; your belly is like a heap of wheat fenced about with lilies. Your breasts are like twin fawns, twins of a gazelle. [SOS 7:1-3]

What sort of a wedding they had was entirely unimportant. The shepherd lover begins at his right woman's feet and works his way up her body, drinking in her beauty. He is entirely captivated.

Your neck is like a tower of ivory, your eyes are like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim; your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, which faces toward Damascus. Your head crowns you like Carmel, and the flowing locks of your head are like purple threads; the king is captivated by your tresses. [SOS 7:4-5]

It is no secret, not even to the shepherd lover, that even the king was captivated by the Shulammitte woman, although the king's admiration was not as intimate as was the shepherd lover's. The shepherd lover continues:

How beautiful and how delightful you are. My love, with all your charms! Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are [its] clusters. I said, 'I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruit stalks.' Oh, may your breast be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like apples. And your mouth is like the best wine. [SOS 7:6-9a]

This last passage is the culmination of category #2 love. Category #2 love, between right man and right woman is expressed in many ways; but it is the only category of love which is expressed in the union of the two bodies. The union of the two bodies represents the union of the two souls to a permanent earthly bond. Their wedding night leaves the Shulammitte woman almost speechless:

It [the wine of her mouth] goes down smoothly for my beloved, flowing gently through the lips of those who fall asleep. I [am] my beloved's and his desire is toward me. [SOS 7:9b10]

ACT IV

The Epilogue

As often occurs in a play, many of the players are brought out on stage for the finale. Here, we have the same thing. The Shulammitte woman and her shepherd lover are going to return to her family and face the disapproval of her mother, who, like any short-sighted woman, would have preferred that her daughter marry Solomon over this shepherd.

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; let us see whether the vine has budded [lits, burst forth]; the blossoms have opened, the pomegranates have bloomed. There I will give you my love. The mandrakes have given forth fragrance; and over our doors are all the precious things, both new and old, which I have saved up for you, my beloved. [SOS 7:11-13]

The Shulammitte woman and her shepherd lover are about to do a little traveling. This is not aimless wandering, but we will see that it is back to her home. She is concerned that her mother may not accept him as her new husband. If he were her brother, it would be easier to bring him home.

Oh, that you were a brother to me who nursed at my mother's breasts. Had I found you outdoors, I would kiss you; no one would despise me, either. I would lead you; bring you into the house of my mother who used to instruct me; I would give you spiced wine to drink from the juice of my pomegranates. Let his left hand be under my head and his right hand embrace me. [SOS 8:1-3]

Solomon, as the king, would have been quite a prize for the family. They did not give much thought to the fact that as a wife, she would have been one of sixty women (and, eventually, one of three hundred women). They thought of the fame and the financial rewards. The shepherd lover was a nobody, by comparison. However, the family failed to realize that the shepherd lover was the right man for the Shulammitte woman and that means that no one else would do.

In this, the end of the poetry, some phrases are repeated. In vv. 1-2, the Shulammitte woman is speaking to her shepherd lover, then in v. 3 she is thinking to herself. It was one of the common refrains of the song. This brings back another common refrain. When faced with his right woman going to see Solomon, the shepherd lover either spoke to her friends or prayed the following:

I want you to swear, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you do not arouse or awaken love until she pleases. [SOS 8:4]

Her brothers, possibly working out in the fields, see the two lovers arriving:

Who is this coming out from the desert-wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? [SOS 8:5a]

Then the shepherd lover whispers to her that his love for her and their destiny was from her birth:

Beneath the apple tree, I awakened you; there your mother was in labor with you. There she was in labor and gave you birth. [SOS 8:5b]

As they walk toward the family, she whispers back to him:

Place me as a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as the Sheol; its flame [love] [is the] flames of fire from the Lord. Many rivers cannot quench love, nor will floods overflow it; if a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, they would utterly despise him. [SOS 8:6-7]

The strength of right man and right woman love is herein described. It is from this passage that we have received the phrase "jealousy is as cruel as the grave." The rivers overflowing love are tears. The love of right man right woman is one of the most powerful forces in the devil's world. Love continues beyond death and tears do not destroy love. Love cannot be bought, which is what the last phrase states. This does not mean that all right man right woman love is perfect and transcends all things. Being in the devil's world and the participants are in possession of two old sin natures. In other words, there is a lot which can go wrong. Furthermore, severe problems can result from just one old sin nature functioning or both. In the Song of Solomon, the shepherd lover and the Shulammitte woman have done everything right. She rejected Solomon's advances; he respected her volition. This is a point at which we should examine the doctrines of right man/right woman, category #2 love, jealousy and seals.

V. 6 is the only place in the Song of Solomon where our Lord is mentioned. Jesus Christ is the God of believers and unbelievers alike, even if they do not acknowledge Him as such. This strength of category

#2 love (the love between right man and right woman) applies to all people, believers and unbelievers alike. God has set inside of us the unquenchable flame of love. This is why men and women will go out night after night to bars in search of love. For the unbeliever, it may be the closest thing which he finds to God's love. This is if the unbeliever finds it. The believer and unbeliever alike will recognize its power and strength and its driving force.

The brothers, recognizing that their sister has been completely and thoroughly spoken for, now ask about their younger sister:

We have a little sister, and she has no breasts; what shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for? If she is a wall [a virgin], we shall build near her a castle of silver; but if she is a door [not a virgin], then we shall barricade her with planks of cedar. [SOS 8:8-9]

The brothers will simply do anything for their little sister if she is a virgin at marriage. If she is not, they will still provide the equivalent of a dowry for her.

The bride answers them:

I was a wall [virgin] and my breasts were like towers; then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace [and prosperity]. [SOS 8:10]

The Shulammite woman was a virgin at her marriage and she found contentment, peace and prosperity with her right man.

She also has some unfinished business to attend to with Solomon:

Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he entrusted the vineyard to caretakers; each one was to bring a thousand [pieces of] silver for its fruit. My very own vineyard is at my disposal; a thousand [pieces of] silver are for you, Solomon, and two hundred are for those who take care of its fruit. [SOS 8:11-12]

She was the caretaker of the family vineyard (SOS 1:6) and she handled the financial end of it. I don't quite follow what is meant by this or how this figures into Song of Solomon.

O you, fell dweller in the gardens, the companions are listening to your voice. [SOS 8:13]

Come quickly, my beloved, like a gazelle or a young stag, upon the mountain of spices. [SOS 8:14]