

Krapf Commentary Series

Song of Solomon

1:1

The text of the book shows that Solomon is indeed the author; the references to plant and animal life in connection to Solomon's knowledge (cf. 1 Kings 4:32-33). Also, Solomon is mentioned often in the text (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12), and referred to as a king (1:4, 12; 7:5), and the references to places which would have been part of the Israelite territory during Solomon's reign (Lebanon, 3:9; 4:8, 11, 15; 5:15; 7:4; Hermon, 4:8; Amana, 4:8).

The title of this book is taken from the first words of the book; the Song of Songs or the most excellent Song. The same writer, who described the world as "vanity of vanities," gives us the "Song of Songs." It is the best of all Solomon's 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32). It is the best of all songs in Scripture, and there were many songs. The best thing about this song is that this is a song of divine love. How graciously He

woos the Shulamite, how patiently he waits for her, and how beautifully he causes her to love him (1 John 4:19).

Christ's love for us, is a love that seeks us, and that causes us to seek him also (compare Luke 19:10 & Matthew 6:33, 7:7). It is a love that persists and protects us from our own folly and indifference (5:2ff, see also Luke 22:32). It is a love that has sealed us in everlasting union (8:6, see also Jeremiah 31:3). Our love for him is not just an expression of our gratitude to him, but the working out of his love implanted in us.

1:2-7

The young woman (the Shulamite) in this story is brought into the palace of Solomon from a rural background. Solomon and the girl had already met perhaps out in the fields, but she came to the palace to express her love for him and her desire to be drawn after him (vs. 4). In the palace the young Shulamite saw the "daughters of Jerusalem," the most beautiful women in the nation, prepared with oils and perfumes for the palace court (See Esther 2:12), and she made the mistake of comparing herself (as we do ourselves) with others. Her confidence was shaken and she was filled with a sense of unattractiveness and ugliness in her

rugged weather-beaten appearance (vs. 6). It is not helpful comparing ourselves to those around us, the attractions of their lives and their situation, etc. The Shulamite did the right thing, however, and turned from this to Solomon the king, spoke to him directly, and said, *"tell me where can I meet you at noon"* (vs. 7).

Having "tasted and seen..." (Psalm 34:8) the believer cannot be satisfied to let the relationship go cold. Once we have experienced the joys of his love—better than the joys of wine (vs. 2). His "name" is fragrant, and the fragrance of his character lingers on in our hearts (vs.3) drawing us out after him (see also 5:5). True love never ends with desire; it must act, it must pursue, it must pray with the Shulamite, kiss me (vs. 2), draw me (vs. 4), tell [speak to] me (vs. 7).

1:8-2:7

This section records a wonderful conversation between the Shulamite and Solomon—it is an exchange between the believer and the Saviour. The Shulamite finds hope in the one whom her soul loves (Vs. 8) and discovers that although she maybe unattractive in the eyes of some, she is beautiful in the eyes of one—He sees her as the *"fairest among women"* (1:8; 5:9; 6:1; *"no blemish"* 4:7). Although

she may bear the scars of the past, there is one who graciously sees us as comely.

In verses 12-14 the Shulamite identified him as the king and her lover. She reflects about the privilege of having such a precious relationship. Her perfume (Vs. 12) wafts over to him and catches his attention. The smell of him (vss. 13-14) lingers with her, and the lingering fragrance means that he never really leaves her. He preoccupies her mind. This back and forward of compliments has brought the couple to a quiet place; his house of wine or perhaps vineyard. There in the quiet place where his look over me is love (2:4), the girl is overwhelmed with love—*"sick with love."* She needs him to "sustain" and "revive" her. The idea is that he provides support and refreshing from sickness and feed her food to restore her.

As he says to us "you are beautiful..." (vs. 15) so we can say the same to him (vs. 16). It is the same beauty—it is his beauty in us. We view his beauty, and he sees his own beauty reflected in us (Psalm 90:17). How gracious is our Saviour, and eager to commend us. He gives us his righteousness and credits us with the beauty of it. He gives us faith and credits us with the power of that faith (Hosea 12:3).

2:8-17

This section shows one of the most beautiful seasons of fellowship between Solomon and the Shulamite in the book. The girl (the Shulamite) is speaking. She hears "*the voice of my beloved*," leaping over the mountains calling her out. But she is shy (vss. 14-15). She has raised barriers that keep him away, as we often do with the Lord, and while she hides herself from him, he is standing behind the "wall," looking through the windows trying to catch a glimpse of her and encourage her out (vs. 9).

He calls to her "arise my love, my beautiful one and come away" (vss.10, 13). He has come with energy and eagerness, leaping over the mounting (Vs. 8-9), overcoming obstacles, but she is the only obstacle, and perhaps the hardest to overcome. He must conquer her heart, and he does this by reasoning (vss. 11-13) and pleading with her (vs. 14). She comes out and walks with him, but there are little things on her mind that distract her (little foxes vs. 15), that spoil the relationship. She is assured that, despite her failures and annoyances, "he grazes among the lilies"—expressing mutual relationship. This expression is found again twice with variation in 6:3 and 7:10, to show that there is a relationship with the "lilies" (the girl). With this confidence she

petitions him to come back again when the day breaks. (the next day, vss. 8-9 and 17).

Like the Shulamite, we are often the only obstacle to God's blessing and fellowship, distracted by the little, everyday annoyances of life, that spoil our relationship with the Saviour. We hide from him and avoid him, rather than coming out and enjoying his presence. Let us be open with him, eager and waiting for his knock on the door of our hearts (Revelation 3:20).

3:1-5

This paragraph of the book introduces a sudden change of mood. There has been a period of absence. "Night after night" she longs for his presence, she can't get him out of her thoughts. The repeated phrase "whom my soul loves" highlights the intensity of her love (3:1-4).

As she lay in the quiet of the night, the fear of losing her beloved keeps her from sleep. She finally gets out of bed and goes searching for him "about the city"—and ends with the agonising cry "I found him not" (Vs. 2). The watchmen have not seen him. We get the impression then that there is a sense of failure and disappointment. The resolve and intensity of her love, however, is rewarded "as soon

as" she leaves them (vs. 4). She finds him, seizes him and does not let him go.

She goes a step further and says that she will not let him go until she brings him into "the house of her mother" (vs. 4). This expression is found twice outside the Song of Solomon (Genesis 24:28 and Ruth 1:8), and speaks of a place where she can discuss and plan the wedding and make sure that the proper propriety of relationship is observed—it is a place of security to the young women (vs. 5). Here she exhorts the Court Women that they do not stir up love until the appropriate time, thus ending the second main section.

There are periods of life where the Saviour seems absent, or when we cannot see him clearly through the clouds of life. These are times when our search for him intensifies, when our love for him deepens, for we don't know what we have until we have lost it.

3:6-11

The last section (1:2-3:5) was the courtship of this couple. This short section is one poem and begins with the wedding procession. Three themes run through this poem; luxurious wealth, unrivalled

beauty and absolute security. Notice these with regard to Christ.

The section begins with the question, "Who is this?" It is the bride. The pillars of perfumed smoke rising up out of the wilderness mixed with the dust of the trail gives a sense of the unreal—the beauty of this woman is *"out of this world"* (see also 6:10).

But the focus shifts to Solomon (vs. 7), because the luxury is his, he made the chariot (vs. 9); her security is in his presence, she rests in his authority and protection (vss. 7-8), and he enjoys his royal security and fears no evil (vs. 8). The daughters of Jerusalem are invited to "come out and see" king Solomon in his procession (vs.11). The view is a "wedding" of a king, wearing his royal crown. It is this, and only this, that brings "gladness" to the king heart. He has wealth, royalty, luxury and beauty, but he left it all to seek her, as Christ did for us, and his gladness is found only in her.

This is our King, who came from "out of the ivory palaces" (Psalm 45:8), to seek his bride. We, his people, satisfy his heart (Isaiah 53:11). We can rest in the knowledge of his love, the luxury of his spiritual gifts, the security of his protection.

4:1-7

The language that he uses in this section, from verse 1-5, does not mean much in modern culture which is very different both in time and geography. There are four of these "songs" in the book; one describing the male's body (5:10-16) and three describing the female's body (4:1-7; 6:4-7; 7:1-7), and they were common wedding songs at that time. However, the theme is important—it is his intense sense of attraction to her and his love for her—a picture of Christ's intense love for us. Verses 1 and 7 form a frame for the song, "behold you are beautiful my love...there is no flaw in you" (vss.1, 7).

Her **eyes** are peaceful, delicate and pure. She has long black **hair** that flows down like a flock of goats meandering down a mountainside (vs. 1). She has beautiful white **teeth** like a sheep bleached for shearing. Her **lips** are distinctive—like a scarlet thread (vs. 3). She has an attractive **mouth**. The "**temples**" speak more broadly of the sides of the face are like pieces of pomegranate. We can conclude quite simply, that despite her fears that she is weather-beaten (1:5) she has beautiful rosy red cheeks. The **neck** is likened to a tower, perhaps the tower mentioned in Nehemiah 3:25 "the tower projecting out from the king's high house." The **two breasts** (vs. 5) is a reference here is that her beauty is not only in colour, and ornamentation but also in

symmetry—there is poise and balance in her bodily figure (vs. 2).

Pause and meditate on how intensely our Saviour loves us. Not for our own beauty, but for the righteousness of Christ which clothes us, and for Christ's beauty in us, even faintly at times. Should we not love him also, with this intensity?

4:8-16

Solomon has pursued the Shulamite, "come with me" he calls (vs. 8). Lebanon, was a place that was inaccessible, a hiding places, but also a place of danger; lions and leopards. She is hiding again (see 2:14), although she loves him. She looks to him although timid and shy ("one glance"), and that look "captivated" his heart (vs. 9). One look of faith to the Saviour, "captivates" his heart and fills it with joy. We might be timid, unsure and shy and reluctant to seek the Saviour, but one look in prayer indicates the feeling of the heart, and it captivates the heart of our Saviour (see Psalm 138:3).

For the first time he calls her "my sister, my spouse," pointing to a love and affection among peers and equals (sister), and at the same time the intimate love of marriage. His joy overflows (vss. 10-15); the smell of her perfumed oils are better than all

perfumes. The repetition of "my sister my spouse" (9,10,12) confirms the nature of this relationship—it is a marriage union with the bond of siblinghood.

Her lips, and her tongue are described as the sweetness of honey (Vs. 11), perhaps with the idea of enticement (see Proverbs 5:3). He knows, it is the enticement of purity for she is a "garden enclosed," a "spring shut up" and a "fountain sealed." (Vs. 12). The "locked garden" in springtime (4:12, see also 2:17ff) has echoes of Eden and the ideal marriage. But this garden is locked, it is closed to the public, as our hearts should be places of love reserved only for the Saviour, and not playing the harlot that we read of regarding Israel (Hosea 2).

4:16-5:1

This section began with Solomon giving a description of his bride (4:1-7), and then directly telling her how she has affected his heart, (4:8-15). Solomon is speaking from 4:1-5:1 and the only interruption in his words is the voice of the girl inviting him to take possession of "his garden" (4:16).

The king's acceptance is as joyous as her invitation and he replies with "*I am come...*" (5:1), which indicates they are already together. Here the king

takes full possession of the garden (his wife) and the continuation of verbs one after the other shows the happy fulfilment of the marriage union; "I have come...I have gathered...I have eaten...I have drunk" (5:1). Remember the term "sister-spouse" is used only in this section (see 4:9,10,12), and here he uses it for the last time highlighting the intimacy of this event.

4:16-5:1 brings us to the very heart of the book; the exact middle of the Hebrew text. It is the consummation of the relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite. She is in fact his garden, and he has come into his garden. Now it is time to "awake" (2:7; 3:5), now is the time for the wind to "stir" up the fragrance of the garden. Now she invites him, "let my beloved come..." (4:16), and he comes with joy (5:1).

This image of a garden is important in Scripture as a place of pleasure (Isaiah 58:11, 61:3; Genesis 13:10; Ezekiel 28:13, 31:8ff). But particularly in this book; where, in 2:3 she hints at a garden, sitting under the apple trees and in 8:13 he is dwelling in his garden. Throughout history, from the time of the Church Fathers, this image of the garden has been used to speak of the beauties and pleasures of the Church—"the planting of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:3). Others have referred to the individual Christian as the garden—

John Owen, the English Puritan said that the "souls of the saints are the garden of Jesus Christ, the good ground...a garden for delight."

5:2-6:3

In this section we have a discussion between the girl and the *daughters of Jerusalem, or women of the court*. The Shulamite is in a state of panic because she has lost her beloved (5:2-8). This turns to boastful joy as she describes him (5:10-16), and later a settled contentment as she discovers him again in "his garden" (6:3).

The girl tells the story as an experience in the past. It seems most likely that this was a dream (5:2). In the end she awakens and discovers that he is still with her (6:1). Her beloved was never really gone from her (although it seemed so). His absence was more a *felt* than *real*. The relationship is still intact.

In this dream however, she discovered something about her love, that takes her by surprise; she has an unexpected apathy and indifference towards her husband. She owns her responsibility and recounts the story with an increasing sense of urgency, beginning with an emphatic "*I*" and continues "*I slept...I arose...I opened...I sought him...I called him...I am sick...*" (5:2-8).

This should teach us about ourselves, our own tendency to be spiritually lazy and indifferent. It should also instil in us a sense of urgency to be diligent in our walk with our Saviour (1 Peter 4:7, 5:8). And it should also encourage us that Jesus has promised never to leave us (Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5). In periods of spiritual drought and barrenness, remember that the Saviour is still with us, he will not leave nor forsake us.

6:4-10

The phrase *"terrible as an army with banners"* will serve as our marker for this section. It appears at the beginning and end (6:4, 10). Solomon begins the poem with the word *"beautiful"* (Vs. 4), and he compares her to two cities, Tirzah and Jerusalem. Tirzah was a significant city in the north in Solomon's time and an early capital of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 15:21; 16:6-23; 2 Kings 15:14-16). The use of the city of Jerusalem the southern part of the country—he is speaking of the whole (See Judges 20:1 *"Dan to Beersheba"*).

This reference then, to all of Israel, points to the power of the nation, and the fear that such a nation could provoke; it is *"terrible as an army with banners"* (Vs. 4). She has conquered his heart,

perhaps the idea also of holding him captive (see Matthew 11:12). He speaks of the power of her eyes; they overwhelm him (see 4:9).

While Jesus loves his church with a sacrificial love, this book of the Song of Solomon, encourages the individual believer to think of Jesus as singularly theirs. There may be "threescore queens, fourscore concubines, and virgins without number," (Vs. 8) but his girl is unique. Of the three levels in his devoted women, (queens, concubines, and maidens) his dove, his undefiled, "is singular." In the darkness she is fair as the moon (Vs. 10).

6:11-13

In verses eleven and twelve the girl is speaking. The garden in the book speaks of a place mutual enjoyment, of the pleasure of intimacy and fellowship. Sometimes it is her going to his garden (2:5; 8:13) and sometimes it is him going to her garden (4:12-13).

Throughout the book the girl has been hiding from him, shy and awkward. But as she grows to know him, (and as we grow to know our Lord) she shows more effort and initiative and pursues him. Her purpose in visiting the garden is "to see the fruits...whether the vine flourished, and the

pomegranate budded." The verb "to see" suggests lingering and investigation. Earlier, the springtime pointed to the awakening of nature, and represented the stirring up of her love (2:11-13). Here she went to where she knew he would be and where she could meet with him, to see if their relationship has borne fruit.

Verse 12 is interesting. She went down into the garden and was overcome by a wonderful experience; "I went...and before I knew it," she said, she found herself overcome by joy. Remember back in chapter five, her indifference had left her cold and lonely and lovesick (5:8), but now, in contrast, her pursuit of him is richly rewarded with surprising and surpassing joy. Let us pursue our Saviour and find our joy and excitement in him alone. So taken up with her beloved, lost in her own world as we might say, that the *other* call her to "*come back*" (Vs. 13a)–four times.

7:1-9

Chapter 7 and the first four verses of chapter 8, there is a beautiful exchange between the man and his new wife. It follows the question, "what will you see in the Shulamite?" (6:13). In answer Solomon launches into his third and final descriptive poem

(7:1-9). She responds with an open declaration of her love to him (7:10-8:4).

Solomon begins this section (7:1-9) with reference to fourteen different parts of the female body and, unlike the others, begins with the feet (5:10-16; 4:1-8; 6:4-10). This descriptive poem, more than any of the others, highlights characteristics of her noble personality (prince's daughter, vs. 1), elegant posture (tower of ivory, vs. 4; palm trees, vs. 8), and strength of character (tower of Lebanon, vs. 4). Her strength of character will become clearer in her response (7:10ff).

She is, as he clearly states at the beginning, skillfully crafted (7:1). Here his admiration is directed, not to her, but to the one who crafted her. Her beauty, then, and his enjoyment of her beauty is the gift of another, as with the Christian also. We have nothing to boast in because we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:9-10).

Throughout the book there has been a theme develop on the eyes. At the beginning they were likened to shy and innocent "dove's eyes" (1:15; 4:1). Then one glance of her eye was captivating, even disturbing (4:9). Now, love settles into a calm and tranquil relationship and her eyes are like pools into which he can gaze and contemplate the hidden

depth of her personality (vs. 4). Then Perhaps there is a significance in the fact that a “tower” is placed on either side of the eyes because they must be guarded. Her eyes are not for everyone’s gaze. The depth of the personality is reserved only for him, and he *“delights in her”* (Vs. 6).

Let is as the children of God pursue our Lord Jesus, that we might grow in him.

7:10-8:4

The girl’s response to Solomon’s loving description is equally rich (7:10-8:4). It begins with verbs; urgent and action-packed, (*“let us go...”* Vs. 11-12) which sets the scene for a settled and fruitful marriage (Vs. 13). The tone of this poem is very different from what we know of her previously. Here she is confident (7:10), pro-active (7:11-12), unreserved (8:1) and decisive (8:2), characteristics we have not seen in the girl before (See 1:5, 2:14 etc.).

The expression *“my beloved is mine and I am his”* (2:16) has become her anthem. It is one of mutual and exclusive belonging—they belong to each other and no one else. He has given her security and with that, confidence.

There are lessons here for the believer's prayer life. Through the book we discover that the girl has gained confidence in him, and this has encouraged her to address him more directly; "come..." (11a), "let us go forth" (11a), "let us lodge" (11b), "let us get up early" (12a), "let us see" (12b). The imperative "come" at the beginning was used previously only by Solomon to invite her (2:10-13). Now she invites him. Also, at the first he commanded her to "go forth" (1:8). Here, she commands him to "go forth" and they will go together. Such a change from those early days when her knowledge of him was limited and she her faith was weak. Let seek to know him, to grow in confidence and faith in him and then we will be able to come to him in prayer with confidence according to Hebrews 4:16.

8:5-7

This short section contains a cluster of voices from all sides; Solomon, the Shulamite, the court women, and the Shulamite's brothers are also heard for the first time. But all these voices point us to the relationship between Solomon and his bride. The section opens with a view of closeness, or as close that they can get in public without reproof (8:1). In 8:5 the Shulamite is coming on the elbow of her husband. This question, "who is this?" or "what is

that?" was asked before (3:6; 6:10), and on this occasion it focuses our attention on the Shulamite.

She pleads with him that she might be inseparably united to him and to celebrate with him the power of love (Vs. 6-7). These verses bring the whole theme of love to a fitting conclusion and looks beyond the present experience of love to the future horizons. This was no one-off love affair, this love has a future, as ours has with our Lord Jesus.

This woman, whom the king has taken to himself, appeared at the beginning of the book to be shy and insecure. Here she manifests herself as a thinking, articulate individual who can speak well on the unstoppable power of love. In verses six and seven, which clearly form a unit, she speaks of love as strong, jealous and vehement as a flaming, unquenchable fire. She compares love to the relentless power of death, that overcomes all and everyone and it holds tenaciously like the grave. Just as death obtains its object, and the grave holds it, so the ardor (the jealousy) of true devotion will not give up until it obtains and holds its object. We love him because he first loved us, and this is the love that unites us with our Saviour (1 John 4:19).

8:8-10

These verses present an unexpected objection to the marriage by the girl's brothers. They play the role of "big brother" and step in to protect her. We were first introduced to the brother back at the beginning when they made her the keeper of the vineyard. At that time the girl was not convinced that they had her best interests at heart. Here again, she disagrees with them, so also does her beloved (vs. 10).

There is no mention of other little sisters, the most probable interpretation then is that this "little sister" is the girl of the story and the brothers are performing their responsibility towards her (Genesis 24). They still think of her as a child, too young to marry. She is also a liability; *"what shall we do...if?"* (Vs. 8b). They cast a question over her chastity, or at least their confidence in her character (Vs. 9).

If she proves to be well defended with a firm and strong in character— *"a wall"* (Vs. 9) that keeps people out—then they will encourage and strengthen her. If her character is weak and she is unprotected and leaves herself open, or easily seduced— *"a door"*—then they will take responsibility and protect her. But the girl quickly responds (vs. 10), declaring herself to be a wall and mature. She has a good character and is eligible to marry.

But what does Solomon think? It does not matter what others think, it matters what our Lord thinks, and this Shulamite has “found favor in his eyes.” The discussion is over. In the final analysis, what her brothers think does not matter (8:10). The world will not understand, we will be mocked and ridiculed, even from those of our own family, but we live before God.

8:11-14

The book ends with a dialogue between the girl and her beloved (11-14). Out of nowhere she mentions Solomon’s many vineyards (“a thousand” vs. 12), which were a source of revenue. Her single vineyard, which she stresses is her own, is nothing compared to Solomon’s extensive properties. The contrast also focuses on the control of the vineyards; his are lent out, whereas hers remains under her own control.

To his delight, the Shulamite had come to “*dwell in the garden*,” a reference to the earlier designation of him as her garden (4:15-16; 6:2). The word “dwell” suggests that she permanently resides there and that she is now at home there. However, there is one small matter he wants resolved. He is aware that she has real friends, who know her well and who listen to her. While he is her husband, he does not want to

be left out of her circle of friends, he wants to know her heart—he wants both her body and soul.

Her reply, which has appeared before in the book (2:17), indicates agreement with him. “Make haste” (AV) is better translated to “flee.” It is an invitation for them to flee from the company and noise of the companions and come, as it were, to the invite of her perfume; the mountains of spices (4:10). The book ends with a love that is well established and solid.