

Song of Solomon

1:1

The text of the book shows that Solomon is indeed the author; this is evident in the references to plant and animal life in connection with Solomon's knowledge (cf. 1 Kings 4:32-33). Solomon is also mentioned often in the text (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12) and is referred to as a king (1:4, 12; 7:5). The text further includes references to places that 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 its opening words: 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 it 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 causes us to seek him also (compare Luke 19:10 and 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 merely 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 Solomon's palace 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 with others. Her confidence was shaken, and she felt unattractive and ugly because of her rugged, weather-beaten appearance (vs. 6). It is not helpful to compare ourselves with those around us, their attractions, their situation, etc. The Shulamite did the right thing, however, and turned to Solomon, the king, spoke to him directly, and said, "Tell me where I can 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 her soul loves (vs. 8) and discovers that although she may be 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 identifies him as the king and her lover. She reflects on the privilege of such a precious relationship. Her perfume (v. 12) wafts towards him and catches his attention. The scent 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-forth of compliments has brought the couple to a quiet place; his house of wine, or perhaps a 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 refreshment from sickness, and 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 see his beauty, and he sees his own beauty reflected in us (Psalm 90:17). How gracious is our Saviour, and how eager to

commend us. He gives us his righteousness and credits us with its beauty. He gives us faith and credits us with the power of that faith (Hosea 12:3).

2:8-17

This section presents 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 and 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. While she hides from him, he stands behind the "wall," looking through the windows, trying to catch a glimpse of her and encourage her to come 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 mountains (vss. 8-9), overcoming obstacles, but she is the only obstacle, and perhaps the hardest to overcome. He must conquer her heart, and he does so by reasoning with her (vss. 11-13) and by pleading with her (vs. 14). She comes out and walks with him, but little things on her mind (little foxes, vs. 15) distract her, spoiling the relationship. She is assured that, despite her failures and annoyances, "he grazes among the lilies"—expressing a mutual relationship. This expression appears twice, with variation, in 6:3 and 7:10, to show its relationship to 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 to enjoy 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 in the book introduces a sudden change of mood. There has been a period of absence. "Night after night," she longs for his presence and 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 lies 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, of failure and disappointment. The resolve and intensity of her love, however, are 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 occurs twice outside the Song of Solomon (Genesis 24:28 and Ruth 1:8) and refers to a place where she can discuss and plan the wedding and ensure that the proper propriety of the relationship is observed—it is a place of security for the young women (vs. 5). Here she exhorts the Court Women not to stir up love until the appropriate time, thus ending the second main section.

There are periods in life when 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 and 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 couple's courtship. This short section is one poem, beginning with the wedding procession. Three themes run through this poem: luxurious wealth, unrivalled beauty and absolute security.

The section begins with the question, "Who is this?" It is the bride. The pillars of perfumed smoke rising from the wilderness, mingling with the dust of the trail, give 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's 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, and the security of his protection.

4:1-7

The language he uses in this section, from verses 1 to 5, means little in modern culture, which is very different in both 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). 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 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, which are like pieces of a 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) indicate 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 that clothes us and for Christ's beauty in us, even faintly at times. Should we not love him with this intensity?

4:8-16

Solomon has pursued the Shulamite, "come with me" he calls (vs. 8). Lebanon was inaccessible, a hiding place, but also a place of danger, with lions and leopards. She is hiding again (see 2:14), although she loves him. She looks to him, though timid and shy ("one glance"), and that look "captivates" 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 reluctant to seek the Saviour, but one look in prayer reveals the heart's feeling and captivates our Saviour's heart (see Psalm 138:3).

For the first time, he calls her "my sister, my spouse," pointing to a love and affection between peers and equals (sister) and, at the same time, to the intimate love of marriage. His joy overflows (vss. 10-15); the smell of her perfumed oils is better than all perfumes. The repetition of "my sister, my spouse" (vss. 9, 10, 12) confirms the nature of this relationship—it is a marriage union with the bond of siblinghood.

Her lips and 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) echoes 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, not places where we play the harlot, as we read of Israel (Hosea 2).

4:16-5:1

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

The king's acceptance is as joyful as her invitation, and he replies with "I am come" (5:1), indicating they are already together. Here, the king takes full possession of the garden (his wife), and the succession of verbs 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.

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

The girl tells the story as a past experience. It seems most likely that this was a dream (5:2). In the end, she wakes 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 *felt* than *real*. The relationship is still intact.

In this dream, however, she discovers something about her love that takes her by surprise: an unexpected apathy and indifference toward her husband. She acknowledges her responsibility and recounts the story with an increasing sense of urgency, beginning with an emphatic "I" and continuing "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 tendency to be spiritually lazy and indifferent. It should also instill in us a sense of urgency to be diligent in our walk with our Saviour (1 Peter 4:7, 5:8). And it should 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, indicates he is speaking of the whole (see Judges 20:1, “Dan to Beersheba”).

This reference, then, to all of Israel, points to the nation’s power and the fear it could provoke; it is “terrible as an army with banners” (vs. 4). She has conquered his heart, perhaps also the idea 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, 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 among 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 of mutual enjoyment, of the pleasure of intimacy and fellowship. Sometimes it is she going to his garden (2:5; 8:13), and sometimes it is he going to her garden (4:12-13).

Throughout the book, the girl has been hiding from him, shy and awkward. But as she comes to know him (and as we come to know our Lord), she shows greater effort and initiative, pursuing 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, springtime signified the awakening of nature and the stirring of her love (2:11-13). Here she goes to where she knows he will be and where she can meet with him, to see whether 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, “I found myself overcome by joy.” Remember, back in chapter five, her indifference had left her cold, 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 *others* called her to “come back” (vs. 13a)—four times.

7:1-9

In 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 for 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 (4:1-8; 5:10-16; 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 it are 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, a theme has developed around 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). Perhaps there is 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 her personality is reserved only for him, and he “delights in her” (vs. 6).

Let us, 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 set 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), proactive (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 signifies mutual and exclusive belonging—they belong to each other and no one else. He has given her security, and with it, confidence.

There are lessons here for the believer's prayer life. Through the book, we discover that the girl has gained confidence in him, which 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 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 her faith was weak. Let us 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, as close as they can be 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 celebrate with him the power of love (vs. 6-7). These verses bring the whole theme of love to a fitting conclusion and look beyond the present experience of love to 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 reveals herself as a thinking, articulate individual who speaks well of love's unstoppable power. In verses six and seven, which clearly form a unit, she describes love as strong, jealous and vehement, like a flaming, unquenchable fire. She compares love to the relentless power of death, which overcomes all and everyone, and which holds tenaciously like the grave. Just as death obtains its object and the grave holds it, so the ardour (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 from the girl's brothers. They play the role of "big brother" and step in to protect her. We were first introduced to the brothers 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, and so does her beloved (vs. 10).

There is no mention of other little sisters. The most probable interpretation is that this "little sister" is the girl of the story, and the brothers are fulfilling 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 doubt on her chastity, or at least their confidence in her character (vs. 9).

If she proves to be well defended with a firm and strong character—"a wall" (vs. 9) that keeps people out—then they will encourage and strengthen her. If her character is weak, unprotected, and leaves herself open—or is 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; what matters is what our Lord thinks, and this Shulamite has “found favour 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 by 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 remain 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 is now at home. However, there is one small matter he wants resolved. He is aware that she has real friends who know her well and 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 appears earlier in the book (2:17), indicates agreement with him. “Make haste” (AV) is better translated as “flee.” It is an invitation for them to flee from the company and noise of the companions and come, as it were, to the invitation of her perfume; the mountains of spices (4:10). The book ends with a love that is well established and solid.