

## SONG OF SOLOMON

### INTRODUCTION

There is no book in the Bible on which more commentaries have been written or more opinions advanced. There are four methods of interpretation made by men in their attempt to understand the Song of Solomon.

1. ALLEGORICAL—In the Jewish use of this method of interpretation it becomes the song of God's love for His people. Christians in the third century saw in this book the love of Christ for the Christians and the love of the believer for his Lord.
2. LITERAL—If we accept the words at their face value they express a song of human love of a man and a woman.
3. LYRICAL—Some have said these were love lyrics sang at Syrian weddings.
4. CULTIC—Many say this was a pagan ritual accommodated to the worship of God.

These last two methods of interpretation are not at all likely. The "literal" method of interpretation seems the most likely of the four.

Song of Solomon was written in about 1001 B.C. by Solomon. (1 Kings 4:32) The key word is "beloved," and the key verse is 6:3.

Origen and Jerome tell us the Jews forbid the reading of this book written until they were thirty years old. Song of Solomon is a song of love in Oriental language and imagery. It has changing scenes. Sometimes the scene is set in a garden, at other times in the palace, then in the country amid pastoral quiet and beauty, and in Jerusalem amid the noise of a great city.

Persons involved in Song of Solomon are the bridegroom and king, the bride, a spouse, the daughter of Jerusalem or the court ladies of Solomon's palace.

The Song of Solomon is an allegory under the guise of human love, the love which passes between two loyal and faithful hearts and sets forth the intimate, tender relationship existing between Christ and His people.

**The Song of Solomon in outline:**

The Shulammite maiden lived at Shunem. Her family consisted of a widowed mother with two or more sons and a younger sister, the maiden in this Song. The family shepherded flocks and took care of certain vineyards.

While taking care of the young of the flock she becomes acquainted with a shepherd youth. They met one day while resting their flocks at a wooded area near the girl's home. It was here the shepherd declared his love and found his joy in response to the maiden's heart. Mutual vows of fidelity appear to have been exchanged.

Upon the death of their father, eastern custom says the sons along with the mother assume responsibility for their sister's marriage. The brothers did not look with favor upon the growing intimacy of the young couple and made efforts to hinder their communication. They probably felt they were protecting their sister's reputation. The mother did not share the son's thinking but encouraged the young couple.

One spring day as the young maiden visits the vineyard she is approached by King Solomon from one of his excursions to the north territories. The king was struck by the maiden's beauty and determines to make her a member of his already large harem.

It appears she turns to flee but is seized and committed to the court ladies. She is then taken to a royal residence, perhaps the King's pavilion at a nearby encampment.

It appears that Solomon has her taken to Jerusalem where she is handed over to the care of women. At the royal palace the King renews his attention. The Shulamite is first promised gifts of jewelry and when this offer fails, she is later offered advancement in station among the ladies of the court circle. She continues to preserve her maiden dignity and remains loyal to her betrothed shepherd lover from whom she was unwillingly separated.

All the King's inducements and luxuries of court life mean nothing to the pure soul of this country maiden. Her thoughts constantly dwell upon her beloved. Her heart is full of him and him only.

Solomon comes at last to realize the failure of his advances, something he has never experienced before. Impressed by such virtue and constancy he grants permission for her to return home. Joyfully she sends word to her beloved to come and escort her home. To this invitation the shepherd eagerly responds.

The story ends with a touching description of the homeward journey, their lover's conversation, and their recall of past experiences.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Verses 1-4**

Chapter 6:12-13 gives us the idea that the Shulamite maid was kidnapped, perhaps willingly, by the servants of Solomon. She was taken to the palace of King Solomon, which may have been one of his northern houses.

While confined she cries out in deep longing for her betrothed. As she thinks of her betrothed she dreams of her wedding day. All her girlfriends who share with her in the wedding party also share her estimate of the groom. We can see the girls and the bride frolicking on the green meadows of northern Galilee as they await the wedding.

All this she fantasies as she waits in the King's chambers. She is waiting for a wedding, but not with Solomon.

The Shulamite assures her far off lover that her heart is with him and that her joy is with him. She tells the daughters of Jerusalem of her true lover, whom she speaks of with endearing terms.

### **Verses 5-6**

The maiden is "dark" or "sunburnt." She may have become self-conscious of her darker complexion as she sees the secluded bleached out women of Solomon's harem.

"Black like the tents of Kedar," refers to the descendants of Ishmael who made their tents out of black goat's hair.

The curtains or tapestries of Solomon were those beautiful hangings used in the temple and many royal buildings. She realizes that she is not like all the other maidens and explains her appearance. Her brothers sent her out in the hot sun to care for the vineyard.

### **Verse 7**

In her imagination she has left the chambers of the King and is out in the open fields of her homeland. She can see her beloved shepherd with his flock and in her mind wants to sit down and express her interest in him. She is concerned that the companion shepherds will think that she is a prostitute in search of business.

### **Verse 8**

It would seem that the ladies of the court would like to get rid of their rival. They express jealousy with Solomon's estimate of his newest arrival. Women were given the task of caring for the newborn of the flock and as they mature directing them to the protection of the shepherd's booths.

### **Verses 9-11**

Solomon pays the Shulamite a very acceptable compliment in comparing her to the grace and beauty of an Arabian horse. Tremendous value was placed on horses from Egypt.

Solomon's intentions were to add her to his already large harem. Using his imagination, Solomon sees the charming maiden with a headdress adorned with costly jewels. He wants to overwhelm and impress her with his promises.

### **Verse 12**

King Solomon has made all the provisions necessary for the contemplated wedding or entrance into his harem. The Shulamite is bathed and perfumed with the rare and expensive fragrance of spikenard.

### **Verses 13-14**

It appears her shepherd had gathered the most beautiful and fragrant cluster of flowers and put them in a pouch and had given them to her before she was

stolen away. More precious to her are those flowers than all the riches of Solomon.

### **Verses 15-17**

The Shulamite's imagination hears her lover say that she is beautiful and that her "eyes are like doves." Her eyes are open, transparent, soft, alert, with quick perception, and gentle. She had probably heard this expression before.

The bride then reciprocates saying how "handsome" is her shepherd and how pleasant. Both the outward and the inward view are a source of happiness. In her mind, the green couch of the woodland is much to be desired over the luxuriant couches in Solomon's palace.

It is not uncommon for lovers to dream of their future home. She may be contrasting the splendors of Solomon's guard house with their common home.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Verse 1**

The Shulamite considers herself as but a wild flower. The "rose" was more probably a narcissus or meadow saffron and the "lily" was a scarlet anemone. What she is saying is, "How did you find me among the many maidens of the village? I am so small and ordinary."

### **Verse 2**

She imagines the shepherd's response that she is "like a lily among thorns."

### **Verse 3**

Her shepherd stands out among other young men. She is a flower, but he is a tree. She turns to the women of the harem and describes her relationship to the shepherd. She was in the banquet room of Solomon but she preferred the banquet hall of her beloved—a beautiful vine arbor in the midst of the vineyard.

### **Verse 4**

"His banner over me is love," could mean that "banner" is to be thought of as a standard of protection such as those used in battle. It was a rallying point and

guide to give encouragement and confirm to those on a weary march or those amid extreme conflict.

The Shulamite appears to have lost her appetite and wishes for raisin cakes and citrons. The reference to “apples” in the NASB really should have been translated oranges. Apple trees do not grow very well in Israel. An orange tree fits her description perfectly. The orange tree blossoms have been associated with marriage.

Orange blossoms were once used in the East to revive the bride, much like we would use smelting salts. It is from this custom that orange blossoms have been associated with marriage.

It would seem that Solomon and his court courting made her weak and sick but not of love.

#### **Verses 8-9**

The maiden hears the footsteps of her beloved coming to her but as he nears the maiden’s house, he does not know what kind of reception he will receive.

#### **Verses 10-13**

We see the beloved’s entreaty to his love. He invites her to come with him into the open country, a place of beauty. The winter is over and the spring has come.

#### **Verse 14**

This verse is an entreaty to the bride to come out of her seclusion. In poetic language the shepherd is saying that the maiden is not easily accessible to him because of her brothers.

#### **Verses 15-17**

Keep in mind that chapter 2:8 through chapter 3:5 is a narrative given to the court ladies concerning an incident that happened with the shepherd and her brothers. The brothers did not welcome that shepherd and told him that she has work to do. The traps must be set for the foxes. There is no time for frolic there is work to be done.

She will do as her brothers told her but this would not change her devotion to her lover. She knows where he pastured his flock and when she had finished her work she would go to him.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Verses 1-5**

The Shulamite tells of her reoccurring dream to the women of Solomon's harem that her lover failed to return as promised. She begins a frantic search up and down the streets. The night watchmen appear and she asks them for help. As soon as she leaves the night watchmen she sees her lover and in an instant is in his arms.

She then brings him to her mother's house. Perhaps this represented the place of security, safety and permanence.

### **Verses 6-11**

We now begin an entirely new scene. We are back in northern Canaan where a royal procession approaches. The Shulamite is describing Solomon's royal procession and her captivity.

The "sedan chair" of verse 9 and its description in verse 10 comes from a Hebrew word indicating a state conveyance of elaborate construction, a kind of portable house.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Verses 1-7**

The shepherd now appears upon the scene following the abduction of his loved one. He seems to have discovered her whereabouts and is concerned for her welfare amid the temptations of the Royal Court. He manages an interview with her and encourages the maiden with a fresh declaration of his love. His declaration is a seven-fold description of the maiden.

1. "Your eyes are like doves behind your veil."

He is saying that she is an alert, shy, soft person behind the eyes and the lovely hair.

2. "Your hair is like a flock of goats."

The long silk-like hair of the angora goats of Syria reflecting the sun on their long tresses made a beautiful poetic image.

3. "Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes."

The sheep are white after being shorn and washed.

4. "Your lips are like a scarlet thread."

The natural red color suggests good health. She has a lovely mouth in form but what comes out of it in thought and words is just as beautiful.

5. "Your temples are like a slice of a pomegranate."

No cosmetics are described here. The glow of good health is her appearance. She has a perfect complexion colored with the blush excitement and hidden behind raven black hair making an appealing picture.

6. "Your neck is like the tower of David."

This describes her character. The shepherd wants his bride-to-be to remember who she is and whose she is.

7. "Your two breasts are like two fawns."

The breasts of woman do not have erotic suggestions to the Oriental. The shepherd is saying his bride has reached maturity. He simply admires her physical beauty.

What a beautiful string of pearls to present to his beloved. He promises to come again saying he has more to offer than Solomon, so keep yourself pure and whole and totally lovely.

### **Verses 8-16**

These verses relate to the end of the story and therefore are out of chronological order. This passage contains the response of the shepherd to the maiden's request that he take her back to her country home. The writer of the Song of Solomon is anticipating the closing scenes. The shepherd is asking his beloved to leave the giddy heights of the court of Solomon and share true love with him. It is an invitation to escape.



## **Verses 9-15**

The maiden's attractive qualities are described in these verses. The shepherd does not waste his time in formal compliments, high-flown imagery, and wearisome lists of charms of the girl he loves.

## **Verse 16**

The Shulamite invites her lover to "enjoy the choice fruits that his own loving care had produced." This is a rebuff to Solomon.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Verse 1**

Here is the shepherd's response. He is confident, anticipating the time of fulfillment.

### **Verses 2-7**

These verses bring us back into the palace of the king. It is morning in Solomon's chambers and the Shulamite is relating her dreams to the ladies of the court. She had dreamed that he was there and had opened her door. When she ran to the door he was gone. She ran out into the streets looking for him where she was struck by one of the watchmen. They thought she was a prostitute roaming the street.

### **Verses 8-16**

The Shulamite's dreams were as if it had actually been a real experience. The daughters of Jerusalem understood her need, but they used her dream to needle her. She describes her lover to the ladies of the court. Summing up all she has said, she says "he is altogether lovely." "This is my beloved and this is my friend."

## **Chapter 6**

### **Verses 1-10**

The mocking ladies ask their victim where he has gone. She says that he has not deserted her, he is at his work. He is far away but he is not lost.

Solomon reappears on the scene and resumes his praise of the Shulamite's beauty. This most recent capture is quite unlike the ladies who make up his harem. He cannot bear to look at her eyes, he begs her to turn away from him.

The purity, the constancy, the cold scorn with which she regards the king, is humiliating. The vision of goodness startles him, but there is a better nature in him which is being aroused.

We have reached a very important point in the poem. We are face to face with one of the rescuing influences of life. A true woman, and innocent child, a pure man coming across the path of one who has permitted himself to slide down toward murky depths, arrests his attention with a painful shock of surprise.

Solomon now realizes how far he has fallen. His conscience is warning him of the still lower degradation towards which he is sinking.

Maybe he now sees a beacon light, showing the path up to purity and peace helping him to return to his better self. Solomon seems to set his newest acquisition quite apart from all the ladies of the harem, as his choice and treasured bride.

### **Verses 11-12**

The Shulamite recounts the circumstances of her being kidnapped. It was early spring and she had gone to see the vineyards.

### **Verse 13**

She tells of how Solomon's body guard was running after the maiden. She had been startled by the sudden appearance of the chariots. Solomon, attracted by her beauty, commanded she be brought to him.

The last two lines of verse 13 relate a dance which must have been a source of public amusement for Solomon. She is saying she does not want to become a play-thing for the king.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Verses 1-10**

The “dance of the two companies” is also known as the “dance of Mahanaim.” This dance is described in these verses. The dance was seen going through the gyrations, dressed in a transparent garment of red gauze.

The Shulamite did not want to participate in such a shameless manner. It is reasonable to conclude that the entertainment was given by a professional dancer from among the ladies of the court.

It appears that the Shulamite was planning to make her escape while the attention of the king and his court is diverted. From this point onwards, neither Solomon nor the daughters of Jerusalem take any part in the dialogue. The scene appears to be shifted to the Shulamite’s home in the country where she and the shepherd are now seen together in happy companionship.

### **Verses 11-12**

The bridegroom has come for his bride. Solomon may have given her leave to go back home in Shunem, and perhaps a message had been sent to her shepherd. It is still spring of the year. A pleasant conversation with friends is followed by a night of rest. She is already anticipating their marriage and honeymoon.

### **Verse 13**

The fragrance of mandrakes fills the air. Mandrakes have been associated with love. She may be expressing her love to be given to him in their house by the use of the word “mandrakes.”

## **Chapter 8**

### **Verse 1**

The Shulamite uses the term "brother" to say that if he were her brother she would rush into his arms and kiss him at any time and any place.

## **Verse 2**

She says she would lead him into the house of her mother where after their marriage the mother would instruct them in the art of lovemaking. Such a simple home-like atmosphere is in strong contrast to the aggressive magnificence of Solomon's palace.

## **Verses 3-4**

She seems to be saying to Solomon and the ladies of the court that she is committed to the shepherd as her husband.

## **Verses 5-14**

In these verses the bridegroom is seen coming up from the wilderness with his bride leaning upon him. As they talk together we reach the richest gem of this Song of Songs, the Shulamite's impassioned eulogy of love. She bids her husband set her as a seal upon his heart and as a seal upon his arm, always owning her, always true to her in the outer world.

She has proved her constancy to him, now she claims her constancy to him. The Shulamite proceeds to speak of jealousy which is as "hard as the grave."

If love is treated falsely, it can flash out in a flame of wrath ten times more furious than the raging of hatred, "The very flame of the Lord." This is the only place the name of God appears throughout the Song.

The Shulamite has good reason for claiming God to be on her side in the protection of her love from cruel love and outrage. She has tested and proven the attributes of unquenchable and unpurchaseable love in her own experience.

In the court of Solomon every effort was made to destroy her love for the shepherd and all possible means were employed for buying her love for the king. When true love exists, no opposition can destroy it; when it is not, no money can purchase it.

And so the Song of Songs sinks to rest in the happy picture of the union of the two young lovers.