

THE BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: SONG OF SOLOMON

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CHAPTER 1

Song of Solomon 1:1 The Song of songs, which is Solomon's-

The key to understanding the Song is to appreciate that we have here a set of dialogues- Solomon to his Egyptian girlfriend, the Egyptian girl to him, words of the daughters of Jerusalem to the girl and the girl to them. And sometimes the words of her brothers who disapprove of her sleeping with Solomon and see themselves as the guardians of her virginity. Breaking up the text into these sections isn't easy, as sometimes the break can occur within a verse. The division of the text between the speakers is made yet more difficult when we consider that some of the words of Solomon may be her imagination of him praising her. I have discussed on Song 6:1,3 how Solomon as the author is thereby mocking her naivety through putting words in her mouth.

The Song begins by the daughters of Jerusalem and the Egyptian girl being in some kind of competition for Solomon; they both state their desire for him, and both of them compare his love to wine (1:2, 4). Note how the Song doesn't begin as a romance is supposed to- with the first meeting, love at first sight scene. As early as 1:2 she comments that "your lovemaking is more delightful than wine". Sex and sexual imagery and allusion fills the song, making it almost verbal pornography in places. This is all a subversion of the whole genre of romance. So the Song begins with the relationship already advanced, or with the woman inappropriately forward, and with intense rivalry between the girl and the "daughters of Jerusalem". The Egyptian justifies her darker complexion to the Jerusalem girls, and praises her own beauty: "I am black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem" (1:5). There's evident aggression from her to them: "Don't stare at me because I am dark!" (1:6). Her despising of the Jerusalem girls is perhaps reflected in 1:6,7, where she asks Solomon: "Where do you rest your sheep during the midday heat? Tell me lest I wander around beside the flocks of your companions!". His "companions" presumably were the daughters of Jerusalem, and

she didn't want to be anywhere near them. She likewise yells at them not to sexually stimulate her lover, Solomon (2:7). And I take "My beloved is *mine*" (2:16) to be the same catty kind of defensiveness. The girl is jealous of how the daughters of Jerusalem admire Solomon, not least because of his fame in Israelite circles: "your name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love you" (1:3); "How rightly the young women adore you!" (1:4). "Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned? Tell us, that we may seek him with you" (6:1) appears none less than sarcasm from the daughters.

So often there's the sense of urgency and haste- perhaps rooted in the girl's fear of competition from the daughters of Jerusalem: "Draw me after you; let us hurry! May the king bring me into his bedroom chambers!" (1:4). This would also explain the quite unabashed sexual seduction practiced by the girl- she begs Solomon to take her to his bedroom right here at the start of the Song (1:4), and later says things like "May my beloved come into his garden and eat its delightful fruit!" (4:16). This is all inappropriate for a romance, and in ancient Israel such forwardness would have been greatly frowned upon. In Proverbs, Solomon often warns against falling for the forwardness of the Gentile immoral woman; and yet he falls for it himself.

We have here and in Ecclesiastes a unique insight into the depth psychology of the man who knows and teaches God's truth, but does the very opposite. In this lies the supreme value of the work. The Song has nothing to say about God, the covenants of promise etc. These things were far from Solomon's heart, even in youth. The language is clearly influenced by that of Egypt, which Solomon was clearly inappropriately involved with from his youth. Indeed the Song "has parallels with Mesopotamian and Egyptian love poetry". Other students suggest it is even based on the celebration of the sacred marriage of the god Tammuz and the goddess Ishtar.

Solomon clearly was aware of the tension between the Egyptian girl whom he loved, and the daughters of Jerusalem- from whom he should've been choosing a wife. The girl says she is merely a common "meadow flower from Sharon", but Solomon responds that in his eyes, "like a lily among thorns, so is my darling among the maidens" (2:1,2). He likens the Jerusalem girls to thorns- he was besotted with this Gentile. Ironically enough, Num. 33:55 had warned that the Gentiles within the land promised to Abraham would be "thorns" to Israel if they married them. And yet Solomon sees the Israelite women as "thorns" and the Gentile as a lily amongst them... . He likewise compares her to them in 6:8,9: "There may be sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and young women without number. But she is unique...". But despite this, the girl seems to always fear Solomon's attraction to the Jerusalem girls. She challenges him: "Why do you gaze upon the Perfect One [as Solomon called her] like the dance of the Mahanaim?" (6:13), the dance of the two camps / lines. She suspects there may be two camps in Solomon's mind.

It was because of the impossible tension between the Egyptian girl and the Jerusalem maidens that there's the constant theme of needing to hold meetings in secrecy, often in the countryside or mountains around Jerusalem ("in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places of the mountain crags, let me see your face", 2:14), and to "go away" in order to be together- e.g. 2:13 "come away my darling; my beautiful one, come away with me!". They appear to have slept together in the open air, beneath the trees: "The lush foliage is our canopied bed; the cedars are the beams of our bedroom chamber; the pines are the rafters of our bedroom" (1:16,17). The same impression of outdoors secret romance is to be found in 7:11 "Come, my beloved, let us go to the countryside; let us spend the night in the villages". 2:17 and 4:6 suggest they spent a night together in the hills, and then before dawn Solomon got back to Jerusalem. 5:2 has Solomon coming to her room secretly at night, wet with the night dew. I suggest that she was living in the harem, being

prepared for her encounter with Solomon- yet she was already having sex with him and he was meeting her secretly.

She has nightmares, reflecting her fears. In chapter 3, the night after sleeping with Solomon she has a terrible vision of Solomon's kingly bed coming to Jerusalem- prepared for the daughters of Jerusalem and not her, and fiercely guarded by aggressive Israelite soldiers. Chapter 5 appears to tell of another dream she has, a nightmare actually, of how Solomon failed to turn up at a night time rendezvous in Jerusalem, and she distraught and desperate wanders around the city, is picked up by the night watchmen, but finally finds Solomon and drags him back to her mother's house [in Egypt]. I find the passage very powerful- it's so imaginable as a nightmare which a girl in her situation would have. Her deepest desire was to get Solomon back to Egypt, into her family... and thus she dreamt of it. And likewise her subconscious awareness of the tension between her and the people of Jerusalem comes out too; yet again she charges the daughters of Jerusalem not to stimulate Solomon.

The daughters of Jerusalem mock her for her nightmare of chapter 3 at the very end: "Who is this coming up from the desert, leaning on her beloved?" (8:5). Solomon has another woman leaning upon him... The allegorical interpretation falls down over the fact that there is no wedding scene. All we have is her nightmares of Solomon marrying the daughters of Jerusalem rather than herself. And the final scene in Song 8 where she faces the blind reality that he has married other women. Solomon wrote the Song, and ends it with him as it were having the last laugh. Her naivety, mocked by the daughters of Jerusalem, characters created by him to mock her, is revealed before all. We expect a romantic song to end with the wedding; but it doesn't. It ends with the couple parting; and this dream wedding is no more than the Egyptian girl fantasizing. The fact the wedding 'scene' or dream comes in the middle of the song rather than at the end is again a subversion of the whole genre of romance. The climax is in the wrong place. And this just indicates how unfulfilling are relationships which flout Divine principles.

Because of all this, there is a sense of on-off relationship throughout the Song. One moment she is sick of love (2:5), the next she claims Solomon had caressed her head with one hand and fingered her with the other (2:6). The very explicit language of 2:6 sits strangely if the Song is intended to be some wonderful romance building up to the climax of marriage. Another example is in 5:8, where after Solomon gives up on visiting the girl one night, she angrily tells the daughters of Jerusalem that as far as she's concerned, they can tell Solomon that she [too?] is sick of love. But when they sarcastically call her "O most beautiful of women" and enquire what she exactly loves about Solomon (5:9), she comes out with a great speech of praise for him (5:10-16). The seeking and not finding him of chapter 5 all suggests he had temporarily rejected her, after she had been lazy to open the door to him (Song of Solomon 3:2; 5:6- these passages are the basis of NT teaching about Christ's rejection of his unworthy bride).

The girl wants to see in Solomon one as dark and Egyptian-looking as herself. Having said that she is "dark" in complexion (1:4,6), she later comments in 5:11 that to her, Solomon is also "dark" [s.w.]. She says 5:11 to the daughters of Jerusalem, as if in defence of her relationship with Solomon, and his choosing her rather than them. In the same way as he tried to see in her an Israelite woman, "O daughter of my princely people" (when she was the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh, 6:12 cp. 7:1), comparing her body parts to various geographical places in Israel (e.g. goats on Gilead, 4:1; the tower of David, 4:4; "as beautiful as Tirzah, as lovely as Jerusalem" 6:4), so she tried to see him as an Egyptian. They were trying to see each other as who they were not... and so the relationship was doomed to failure. Right from the start, the girl feels that Solomon isn't giving her the complete passion of his love: "Oh, how I wish you would kiss me passionately! For your lovemaking is more delightful than wine" (1:2).

The Song ends without the famous final scene which we expect in a romance. The expectation of a wedding and walking off into the sun-

set is subverted by the concluding songs. The girl laments how she can't kiss Solomon publically or be with him without being despised; and longs to be able to take him back to her mother in Egypt (8:1,2). She utters the final warning to the daughters of Jerusalem not to stimulate Solomon, and then breaks down with the lament that jealousy is cruel as death (8:6) and unrequited love is impossible; Solomon's true love cannot be bought by her. The daughters of Jerusalem then speak of how they have a younger sister whose breasts aren't yet developed, but they will care for her until she is ready for Solomon (8:8,9). The Egyptian girl then reminisces in the past tense: "I was a wall, and my breasts were like fortress towers. Then I found favor in his eyes" (8:10). Solomon throughout the Songs has commented positively upon her breasts; and now she is left to lament that that is all just how it was, it's all over now. She then makes the enigmatic comment about how Solomon has a vineyard which he leases out, and yet she is a vineyard which belongs to her alone: "My vineyard, which belongs to me, is at my disposal alone". The Songs have likened her and her sexuality to a vineyard (Song 2:13,15), and her romantic meetings with Solomon appear to have sometimes been in a vineyard. Solomon spoke of her breasts as grapes (7:7). But Solomon's vineyard, she says, was associated with Baal-Hamon- Lord / husband of a multitude. She finally realized that he was a womanizer, who would go on to have over 1000 women in his life... Lord [or husband] of a multitude. Perhaps his 1000 wives and concubines lay behind her reference to the 1000 shekels that Solomon can have for his vineyard (8:12). But now she was splitting up with him, her vineyard was hers alone, her grapes were now solely at her disposal and were not his any more. The final couplet of the Song is one of bitter sarcasm, typical of the worst order of romantic breakup. Solomon says that his "companions"- the daughters of Jerusalem whom she had so hated- are listening carefully to her, as he is. And she responds by telling him to run away, whilst still calling him her "beloved"- for although jealousy is cruel as the grave, her love for him was unquenchable

by many waters. Or perhaps this too is sarcasm. So the Song ends with Solomon in rather a bad light- off to his next women, whilst the Egyptian girl walks off the scene bitterly protesting her love for him and how she's a victim of circumstance and jealousy. Yet Solomon, presumably, authored the Song. I read it therefore in the same way as I do Ecclesiastes- his jaded statement of how life has been for him, how he sought fulfilment of his human lusts but it never worked out, leaving him with a tragic sense of unfulfilment because he had not gone God's way.

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again; he knew Divine truth, but the more he knew it, the more he lived the very opposite, failing to grasp the deeply personal relevance of truth to himself. A whole string of passages in Proverbs warn of the "strange" (AV) woman (Prov. 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 23:27; 27:13). Yet the very same word (translated "outlandish", AV) is used in Neh. 13:26 concerning the women Solomon married. The antidote to succumbing to the wicked woman was to have wisdom- according to Proverbs. And Solomon apparently had wisdom. Yet he succumbed to the wicked woman. He was writing Song of Solomon at the same time as Proverbs. The reason for this must be that Solomon didn't really have wisdom. Yet we know that he was given it in abundance. The resolution of this seems to be that Solomon asked for wisdom in order to lead Israel rather than for himself, he used that wisdom to judge Israel and to educate the surrounding nations. But none of it percolated to himself. As custodians of true doctrine- for that is what we are- we are likely to suffer from over familiarity with it. We can become so accustomed to 'handling' it, as we strengthen each other, as we preach, that the personal bearing of the Truth becomes totally lost upon us, as it was totally lost upon Solomon. And the art of the Christian life is to have the word become flesh in us, as it did in the Lord. To personalize and personally experience the truths we hold. This is why people of low literacy or IQ can make huge sacrifices for their faith in the most simple building blocks of the Gospel which they have personalized and grasped.

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The allegorical view [that Solomon is as the Lord Jesus and the girl as the church] puts the coarse flatteries and language of a seducer into the lips of "Christ", which seems to me inappropriate (especially Song 6:4-10,13; 7:9). Parts of the song are little more than verbal pornography, talking of the vagina, clitoris lips etc. To argue that this speaks of the intimacy of our relationship with the Lord seems simply inappropriate. The allegorical view likes to imagine that these are love songs between two people, the lover and the beloved. But there are many other speakers: (1) the Shulamite; (2) the daughters of Jerusalem; (3) Solomon; (4) the brothers of the Shulamite; (5) the watchmen; (6) the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And no allegorical interpretation has a place for these characters. Nor an explanation for how the song ends in acrimony and relationship breakup rather than marriage and family life together.

We may well enquire why Solomon wrote this song. "Love songs" so often dwell on the theme of how a relationship started well, but ended in break up. And that's what this song is about. But Solomon also has an agenda, of presenting himself as the attractive man who had his way with women and had women fawning over him. And his agenda is clear at the end- for in the final chapter he presents this woman whom he broke up with as rude, manipulative and poncing off to look for someone else. This break up is possibly reflected in how he at a later point built a separate house for his Egyptian wife, because his temple-palace complex was too "holy" for her. Even though after her, he took many other Gentile wives. So I would argue that this argument about 'holiness' was an excuse for expelling her from the temple-palace complex. This Song, along with Ecclesiastes, is part of the spiritual insight we are given into the psychology of those who turn away from God- as a warning to us all. It is preserved for us as a kind of autopsy into Solomon's spiritual death. Read this way, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon are a unique insight into the mind of the flesh as it affects those who know God's Truth. Who wrote the Song of Solomon? Grammatically, verse

1 says that it is Solomon. But much of the Song is the dreamscape of the mind and fantasy and nightmare fears of his lover. Looking back, he read her mind. He saw the processes that were going on there. He saw his mental processes in response to hers, and how it led to disaster. He drew parallels between her and the bad Gentile woman he has described in Proverbs. He perceived how indeed he as the young Hebrew man had been drawn away to destruction. But as in Ecclesiastes he describes himself as the old and foolish king who would not be admonished, so he does nothing with the self understanding he arrives at through composing the Song of Solomon. But there is no hint of his repentance. 1 Kings 11 tells us that he died with his heart turned away by such women, away from God and unto their idols.

Pharaoh's daughter is listed as the one significant wife Solomon had, and we only read of her later- when we learn he moved her out of his palace and into a specially built house for her. So it seems logical to assume Solomon's song was about her.

The Gentile woman of Proverbs is the very picture of the Shulamite. She seeks and finds sexual partners (Prov. 7:26), just as the Shulamite does so openly in Song 1. She wanders the streets at night rather than staying at home, as the Shulamite does in her dreams. She wears sexualized clothing, speaks seductively, and is perfumed in order to sexually stimulate men (Prov. 2:16; 5:3; 7:5,9,11,12,17,21). The bad woman of Proverbs is a prostitute; and prostitutes wore veils (as Tamar in Gen. 38:14,15). Solomon's lover wears a veil (Song 4:1,3; 6:7) which the watchmen angrily pull off her to expose her for who she is (Song 5:7). The Shulamite acts like a very forward woman, if not a prostitute, and her veil may suggest that. And all this leads to the spiritual destruction of Hebrew young men (Prov. 5:5-23; 6:30-35; 7:26). The foreign women of Solomon, taken by him when a young man, led to his destruction. Yet he praises this particular foreign woman for having exactly the appearance of the bad woman he had written about and warned against in Proverbs. He clearly thought it would not happen to him.

And the Song shows how in any case, the relationship came to nothing. We note that the woman of the Song and the good wife of Proverbs are both described by Solomon as a lovely deer and graceful doe; Solomon wanted to see something spiritual and good in this bad woman. The songs are an example of self deception and seeing what we want to see, when humility to God's word would guide our thinking otherwise.

The tension with the "daughters of Jerusalem" is a major theme. Their bitter sarcasm towards the Shulamite is in about every chapter. Sarcasm is actually to be found all through the Song. Song 6:8 refers to queens, concubines and virgins. The next verse speaks of queens, concubines and "the daughters" (Song 6:9). These are surely "the daughters of Jerusalem": "There are sixty queens, eighty concubines, and virgins without number... The daughters saw her, and called her blessed; the queens and the concubines, and they praised her". Harems were comprised of virgins who were prepared for the king and once readied, they slept with him. After this, some were chosen as queens. The others, no longer virgins, were counted as "concubines" if they weren't chosen as queens. The book of Esther describes just such a harem. "The daughters of Jerusalem" would then refer to the virgins in Jerusalem who were being prepared to go and sleep with Solomon, in order for him to choose whether he wanted them as his queen or not. And they were "of Jerusalem", Hebrew women. Hence their jealousy and spirit of bitter competition against this foreigner who had come amongst them.

The Beloved

Song of Solomon 1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for your lovemaking-

The Hebrew suggests the emphasis is upon the "me". He is known for good love making, so she wishes he would love her. And in :3 she recognizes that all the young women love him. She presents immediately as not moral. For what decent woman seeks to attract to herself a man already involved in other relationships, and who has other women

in love with him. Her tensions with those other women, the daughters of Jerusalem, will become ever more apparent as the song progresses.

That the woman should take the initiative in opening the story with a request to be kissed and talking about sex... would have been shocking in contemporary society. It is a dramatic opening to what is supposed to be a romance; immediate talk by a very forward woman of deep kissing, wine and sex. Straight away we are to be shocked; this is not going to be a romance. We are prepared for something very carnal and fleshly, and that is what the book is about. It is in fact pornography in a written form. The symbolism is persistently sexual:

- Come in to – sexual intercourse.
- Embrace – the man caressing and hugging the woman, and possibly penetrating her.
- Fountain, Spring, Well, and Water – the woman and her body.
- Fruit – yield, benefits, and food “choice fruits” - sexual satisfaction.
- Garden – the woman’s body, beautiful, pleasant, and possessed by the man.
- Gazelle or Young Stag – A virile male buck who chases down a doe.
- Hind or Doe – A female deer, and symbol for the female.
- Mountains and Hill – the high points on a woman’s body when she is lying on her back, i.e. her breasts.
- Vineyard – the woman and her body, referring to her capability to satisfy a man.

The Hebrew *dodim* specifically refers to sexual love. Song 5:1 is specific that they slept with each other. And she continues to be incredibly “forward” throughout the Songs, asking Solomon to sleep with her (Song 4:16; 7:13; 8:2). She proudly reflects: “I awakened you” (Song 8:5). This taking of the sexual initiative by the woman was an absolute deconstruction of the genre of romance songs. And she is presented as exactly the fulfilment of the loud and forward Gentile woman whom

Solomon had warned against in the Proverbs. But he fell in love with her and slept with her whilst a young man, whilst writing such sober warnings against this. The purpose of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon is to give us an insight into the psychology of the person who knows God's truth who falls into sin. These books are really an insight into depth psychology. They are a spiritual autopsy on Solomon; that is their abiding value. There's nothing else quite like it in the Bible. And we who likewise know God's truth, who are also tempted to sin, find in them therefore a profound insight into our own likely psychologies and paths of temptation.

"Lovemaking" is s.w. Prov. 7:18, where the bad Gentile woman invites the young Hebrew man to sleep with her undetected by others: "I have spread my couch with carpets of tapestry, with striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let's take our fill of loving until the morning. Let's solace ourselves with loving". Solomon is beyond hypocritical; he appears to think that he can teach one thing and do precisely the opposite. It is beyond narcissism, but rather a kind of playing God to the extent of considering he had no possibility of personal failure and could act as he wished.

Is better than wine-

The criticism of Solomon for marrying foreign women also applies to his first marriage with the daughter of Pharaoh; *besides* marrying her, he married the others too, and the criticisms which follow are spoken in the context of both these actions. Yet Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter in his early days, before he asked for wisdom. This is another indication that Solomon did not start off well and then go wrong; right from the beginning he had this incredible dualism in his spirituality. The Talmud (*Shabbath F, 56,2*) records that "When Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh she brought to him 1000 kinds of musical instruments, and taught him the chants to the various idols". Even when Solomon was young, he evidently loved wine (Song 1:2,4)- which was

later to be something he (temporarily) abandoned himself to. He had a child by an Ammonite girl one year before he became king (1 Kings 14:21)- so his relationships with foreign women cannot be put down to mere political alliances. If the Song of Solomon is about her rather than the Egyptian woman he married, one can only say that one early error, unrepented of, paved the way for his later disasters with foreign women. The Song suggests that he met the foreigner he married whilst walking alone in the countryside- which again proves it was a love relationship rather than a political alliance. The record later describes his building of store cities in the very language used of Pharaoh's using Hebrew labour to build treasure cities (2 Chron. 8:4 cp. Ex. 1:11 Heb.). The influence of his father-in-law was deep, and lasted a long time.

Song of Solomon 1:3 Your oils have a pleasing fragrance. Your name is oil poured forth-

We are baptized into the Name of Jesus, and bear that Name in the eyes of men. The Hebrew concept of a name meant really a renown, an understanding of the person. The Bride comments that "your name is as ointment poured forth" (Song 1:3 AV), likening the name to the smell of perfume. The "scent" of a nation is likewise their reputation, the message they give out (Jer. 48:11; Hos. 14:7). We are the saviour of Christ (2 Cor. 2:16), we bear His Name, and therefore anyone carrying the Name is thereby a witness to Him.

Therefore the virgins love you-

For all her self confidence and forwardness, the girl knows she is up against strong competition from the daughters of Jerusalem. She is far from positive that she as one Gentile girl can overcome that factor. And she sees the only chance of her winning is to get Solomon right away from them, and back to Egypt (:4).

Song of Solomon 1:4 Take me away with you. Let's hurry. The king has brought me into his rooms!-

I suggested on :4 that she considered getting Solomon away to Egypt was her only chance of countering the attraction of the daughters

of Jerusalem. She imagines them leaving Jerusalem together in Song 2:10, and at the end of the story, still this is her desire (Song 8:2). Nothing changed. She was as she was. And yet she fantasizes that thereby she would be Solomon's wife and therefore brought into his "chambers". But the word literally means a hiding place, and we note the desire to be taken away, to hurry as if they are under threat of discovery, rather than being on the way to a wedding. Most of their encounters which we will read of are in the open air, as their relationship is not approved of by others. And so it may be better to read "rooms" as "hiding place", somewhere in the countryside, to which they must "hurry".

She asks Solomon to take her away, and then in her mind "The king has brought me into his rooms!". This was her fantasy; and what makes interpreting the Song of Solomon difficult is that so much of what the woman says is fantasy, and also quite a bit of Solomon's responses. As we see here, changing from talking to Solomon to speaking of him in the third person, almost the whole thing is an insight into fantasy. It is a dreamscape rather than historical reality. They were falling in love with fantasies of each other and how things could be in the future, so strongly that they conclude that this is how things would actually be. Many of the words spoken apparently to Solomon are really the woman saying these things in her mind. We wonder how much of what we read in the Song of Songs actually happened, and how much was spoken face to face; so much is fantasy in the mind of the speakers. It is an amazing psychological insight into fleshly relationships. This is a very common problem with couples in the early stages of their relationship. They fall in love with images and imaginations they have superimposed upon the object of their 'love'. And then there is bitter disappointment when it becomes apparent that these fantasies are never going to be reality. He is going to be the knight in shining armour, surrogate for her father or her older brother... she is going to be surrogate for his mother, cook like her, care for him like she did... rather than loving the person for who they actually are, with above all a spiritual bond between them.

But then love includes fantasy... this is the difficulty. And all this is true in non-romantic relationships too, e.g. often a newly attended church is thought to be the wonderful, ideal community the attender always dreamt of finding, the new dwelling moved into is laden with 'ideal home' expectations... until the neighbours turn out to be awful, the roof leaks, the heating system is found to be inadequate. So much human disillusion with things and relationships is due to investing them with their own images and fantasies. *This is where the absolute Truth of Jesus Christ is so priceless. In Him alone we have Truth that will not disappoint and that will turn out more wonderful than our wildest dreams- and be experienced for eternity.*

Daughters of Jerusalem

We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will praise your love more than wine!-

The daughters of Jerusalem are immediately portrayed as not very spiritually minded either. They know all about wine, which they praised, but they praised Solomon's love for them more than that. This is tacit admission that he did "love" them as well as the Egyptian girl. As becomes apparent at the very end of the Song. "Glad and rejoice" is a phrase used multiple times in the Psalms for how we should primarily be glad and rejoice in Yahweh. But there is no spiritual aspect here in any of the characters. This is demonstrated by the inspired record using terms which are found elsewhere in scripture, and highlighting the lack of spiritual perception of them by the characters.

We can take all of :4 as the words of the Shulamite. In this case, as elsewhere, we see a parallel between "me" and "we". She accepts she is part of a group of other women also in relationship with the lover. She accepts Solomon already has a harem, the [other] virgins love him, she says; but wants to be part of it.

Love "More than wine" suggests the women find wine attractive but Solomon's love even more so. Immediately we get a low moral impression of the young women involved, as wine drinkers. There is no spiri-

tuality in them, never a mention of God in the book / relationship, no attraction to Solomon's wisdom, and no mention of God or any spiritual dimension to the relationship.

Beloved

They are right to love you-

For all her forwardness and self confidence, she recognizes that she has major competition. At this point she knows this but is 'blind' to it on another level; and as the songs develop, we see her bitterly hating Solomon for it later. So true to human relationships; we can be blind to obvious weakness, and that refusal to engage with the reality leads to relationship break up further down the line.

Song of Solomon 1:5 I am dark, but lovely, you daughters of Jerusalem, like Kadar's tents, like Solomon's curtains-

She is very confident of her own beauty, as in Song 8:10. Her claim to Solomon that she is a mere common lily (2:1) and her excuse that she worked too much outdoors is therefore fake humility in order to woo Solomon. She does herself down to him, but in her heart and in her self presentation to the daughters of Jerusalem, she claims herself to be attractive. As an Egyptian she was darker skinned than the Jerusalem girls, and dark skin also spoke of lower social class. But she insists that this is to be no barrier to her winning of Solomon uniquely for herself. She comes over as bold, self justifying to her competitors (the "daughters of Jerusalem") and ever on the initiative; she goes out looking for him (Song 3:1-5; 5:6,7), and propositions him for sex. She is the very fulfilment of Solomon's 'bad woman' of the Proverbs. "Kedar" means "black", and she likes to think that the famed curtains or tents of this Gentile place were as good as any Jerusalem made curtains (Jer. 49:28,29). She never perceives the unique nature of Jerusalem, seeing it as being as good as any other Gentile city. Yet Solomon likes to call her the Shulamite, the Jerusalem girl- counting her as who he wanted to see her as. This is the value of this book; we have a unique insight, at the level of depth psychology, into the mentality and thought processes of

those who wish to go against God's clearly stated will, because they perceive everything in the light of the narrative they wish to believe and act according to. This is the same essential process going on in the minds of all manner of sexual perverts who on another hand know God's truth so well.

Song of Solomon 1:6 Don't stare at me because I am dark, because the sun has scorched me-

She is very self defensive. She says the sun has looked or stared at her, and so they shouldn't look at her askance because of her darker skin. This marked her as a Gentile, or a woman of lower social class. She comes over as anything but humble.

My mother's sons were angry with me. They made me keeper of the vineyards, but I haven't kept my own vineyard-

If her vineyard refers to her virginity or sexuality (as in :14; Song 6:11; 7:13), this could mean that her brothers were angry with her for sleeping with Solomon. Brothers were seen as guardians of their sister in sexual terms (Gen. 34; 2 Sam. 13). The Song concludes, perhaps, with her brothers considering her too young for marriage, and wanting to set her up with a more appropriate husband than Solomon (8:8,9).

And yet the Song concludes with her claiming that her vineyard is her own; and as discussed on Song 8:10-12, keeping the vineyard meant admission into Solomon's harem and keeping the women within it. The connection between this vineyard imagery at the start and end of the song must surely be given due weight. Throughout the song, the vine and its fruit is used as a symbol for her body and sexuality. On this basis we could interpret this early statement of the Shulamite as meaning that she had been the keeper of Pharaoh's harem, a job she got because her brothers were angry with her. She had not kept her own vineyard might mean that she had not been within the harem herself, she was just the madame of the establishment. Or it could be an admission she had not kept her virginity, which is why her brothers were angry with her. Again, the Song opens as an inversion of all we might expect

in a collection of love songs. It begins with deep kissing, sex and wine- and the girl isn't even a virgin. She therefore felt she might be seen by Solomon as too dark skinned, as it were, for him and his harem. But Solomon is not put off by her lack of virginity but rather instead attracted by her experience. His comments that she is 'sealed up' in Song 4 would only then mean that she had been locked up to him: "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a rock-garden locked, a spring sealed up" (Song 4:12-15).

Or we can understand this as a typical trick of 'love'. She was clearly wealthy, the daughter of royalty, judging by her foreign perfume and gold jewellery. But she is playing the 'poor little rich girl' card, asking her lover to overlook her dark skin, pretending she had a complex about it. When in fact Solomon likely found attractive a skin colour different from that of the "daughters of Jerusalem". See on Song 2:1 for another example.

Song of Solomon 1:7 Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you graze your flock, where you rest them at noon; for why should I be as one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions?-

"Who is veiled" can as well be rendered "one who is lost", as LXX. She complains she is just tagging along with the flocks of women companions who were following Solomon as if he were their shepherd and they the sheep; they are the "daughters of Jerusalem". He responds that she should follow their tracks to him (:8), and she will find his special love and attention (:9).

Yet she recognizes that he already has flocks of "companions". But as shepherds rested alone at noon from the midday sun, laying down to sleep somewhere, so she asks where that place is. The request to know where he feeds his flock at noon is perhaps a way of expressing her desire to find him alone and to come to him wherever that was. And with the implication that she wants to lay down next to him alone- a very bold move for a woman just opening her approach to a man. The reply of the daughters of Jerusalem in :8 is therefore mocking her- for they

say that many flocks have followed Solomon wherever he is, so the Shulamite can just follow in the tracks many have followed. She wants to find him alone, but so have many others.

The references to the lover as a shepherd in Song 1:7; 6:2,3 have led some to think that the beloved is also in love with a shepherd. But this is to miss the clear connection in Hebrew thought between a king and a shepherd. David was to shepherd Israel (2 Sam. 5:2) and the seed of David likewise would be a shepherd over all Israel (Ez. 37:24).

Lover

Song of Solomon 1:8 If you don't know, most beautiful among women, follow the tracks of the sheep. Graze your young goats beside the shepherds' tents-

We note how quickly the scenes change in the song- here from palace (:4) to vineyard (:6) to desert scrubland (:8). Likewise she sees herself as being invited to fly over the land of Palestine from its highest points... all of which suggests we are invited into a dreamscape, her imaginations and fantasies, rather than being presented with a narrative of scenes that actually occurred. Her fantasies move at ease and very quickly between various locations in the countryside, Solomon's banquet house, his bedroom, her bedroom, her mother's house, the streets of Jerusalem etc. Although that isn't to say that some of the things she speaks of didn't have some actual reality.

I suggested on :7 that Solomon was not a literal shepherd, but he is here responding to the metaphor she uses in :7. Although he is indeed like a shepherd leading a flock of women, the daughters of Jerusalem, he says that she should follow their tracks to him, and she will find his special love and attention (:9). He encourages her that he finds her the most beautiful amongst all those other women or sheep. She is to come near to his tent, and graze her goats there- perhaps some sexual reference.

"Beautiful woman" is the term used by Solomon in Prov. 11:22 "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, so is a beautiful woman who lacks

discretion". It is the term sarcastically used about her by Israelite competitors (Song 5:9; 6:1). Seeing Solomon's wives were idolaters, they lacked discretion; and yet Solomon loved them and married them. He behaved with women completely opposite to his own teachings. And we have in the Song an invaluable exploration of the psychology and mental processes behind this feature of human nature.

Song of Solomon 1:9 I have compared you, my love, to a steed in Pharaoh's chariots-

Heb. "I count you as...". Again we have an insight into the psychology of a man in love. He sees her as... whatever. He is in love with an image of his own creation, rather than her character. The Song of Solomon is the record of Solomon's romance with Pharaoh's daughter. Of course, this was an explicit breach of the crystal clear commandment not to marry women from Egypt. He should have admired neither the horses nor the women of Egypt; yet he begins his Song with an unashamed breach of the command not to desire either of these things. The unashamedness of Solomon coupled with his spirituality indicates that at this time he was genuinely convinced that what he was doing was deeply spiritual; when in fact it was completely carnal. He totally ignored his own advice about choosing a spiritual woman as a wife. And worse, he encourages her that although he is like a shepherd leading a flock of women, the daughters of Jerusalem, she is in fact his one special one. She is a beautiful mare, in his eyes, amongst all Pharaoh's chariot horses. He thus likens the daughters of Jerusalem to Pharaoh's chariot horses- which were destroyed at the Red Sea. But Solomon doesn't care about this obvious negative connection. See on Song 2:2, where he likens her to a lily amongst the thorns of the daughters of Jerusalem. See on Song 2:12.

But the Hebrew is feminine, a mare, a female horse. Chariots were pulled by male horses, stallions. He is likening her to a female horse harnessed to Pharaoh's chariots, with the other stallions interested in her. Mares were sometimes put amongst the stallions pulling a chariot

to inspire the stallions to pull and run faster. Indeed the GNB interprets just like this: "You, my love, excite men as a mare excites the stallions of Pharaoh's chariots". The imagery presupposes her familiarity with Pharaoh's horses, hinting at her Egyptian origin. This may be his response to her comment that all the [other] virgins love Solomon, and she wants to as well. His response is that all the male stallions will also all be interested in her. So the song opens with the strong hint that neither are committed to monogamous relationship. He was fine with this to the end, but the final scenes show her deeply upset that he in fact has other women in his life.

Song of Solomon 1:10 Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with strings of jewels-

She loves him because of his ointment, and he loves her because of her jewellery (Song 1:2,3,10; 4:4). He says that deep kissing with her gives the same after effect as drinking enough wine that you talk in your sleep afterwards (Song of Solomon 7:9). It's all very human and carnal, based upon the external and not the internal. But this is what Solomon was like. He sees wisdom, even in Proverbs and certainly in Ecclesiastes, as only helpful in that it gives a person a good name and image in this life.

The woman wears expensive jewellery. The style of jewellery and adornment described is distinctly Egyptian. She is no shepherd girl, but a princess- the daughter of Pharaoh. She is specifically called "daughter of the prince" (Song 7:1). She was no peasant girl. Egypt turned against Solomon, harbouring his adversaries even from the time of David and then attacking Judah just five years after Solomon's death, ransacking the temple-palace complex. The relationship with this girl was unwise in every sense, and quite possibly she was sent to Jerusalem by her father in order to lure Solomon into the relationship.

Song of Solomon 1:11 We will make you earrings of gold, with studs of silver-

The speaker of :11 is unclear. Possibly the daughters of Jerusalem are saying that they would have the job of making the earrings of gold that would need to be paid for her dowry- we recall those given for Rebekah. The "we" make us think it could be the daughters of Jerusalem, and they make similar sarcastic comments on the woman's jewellery in chapter 8. Quite possibly they are sarcastically saying that they could make her look even finer, by adding some things to her- specifically by adding the Hebrew borders [Heb.] on her clothes. The Song is shot through with allusion to the Law and tabernacle rituals; he speaks of making her borders [NEV "earrings"] on her clothes, probably alluding to the borders of blue to be worn by the faithful Israelite. Solomon wanted her to look externally like a spiritual woman, and he was going to make her one; many a preacher, teacher, husband, wife, father, mother, child, boyfriend has had to learn the impossibility of this. He wanted to see her as a spiritual woman, and eventually he became persuaded that she was just this. See on Song 3:10.

Beloved

Song of Solomon 1:12 While the king sat at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance-

The girl is not a shepherd girl, she is a prince's daughter from Egypt (Song 7:1), and so she has access to the Jerusalem palace and sees the king sitting at his table. She seems to be secretly boasting that after being intimate with each other, the smell of her perfume can be smelt exuding from him. When she was just one of the many young women being prepared in the harem for their night to sleep with Solomon, after which he would decide whether she became a wife or a concubine.

Nard [Heb.] was the perfume of the wealthy; we recall the extreme cost of the card in Mk. 14:5. This wealthy outsider of different skin colour was surely a Gentile princess, hence her wealth. The spices of Song 4:13,14 which the Shulamite uses in her perfumes are largely not native to Israel. Again we have the impression of a wealthy foreign princess. Such spices had to be imported by Solomon (1 Kings 10:10);

nard / spikenard came from India and was not native to Israel. But they are listed together with the fruit of the "incense tree" (Song 4:13), and incense usually has connotations of idolatry. Solomon's wives offered pagan incense to their gods (1 Kings 11:8 "his foreign wives, who burnt incense and sacrificed to their gods"). She smelt like pagan incense- and Solomon loved it.

Song of Solomon 1:13 My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh, that lies between my breasts-

AV "lies all night" implies they had slept together already at this early stage. Again we note that the entire genre of romance is subverted, consciously so. Sex and marriage are not the climax of the romance, but rather it all starts with inappropriate intimacy. "Is to me" here and in :14 could as well be rendered "is mine"- she is claiming that she has Solomon's heart, and he is not therefore 'theirs'. Love, or lust, or plain obsession with 'getting' Solomon on some level, has blinded her to the fact he has other women already. This idea of "me", "mine...", is a common one with the woman. The whole song opens with her desiring him to kiss *me*, and I mentioned that the Hebrew suggests 'me rather than you / others'. She can hardly express her ownership of Solomon without some defensive or snide comment about the competitors amongst the daughters of Jerusalem.

Song of Solomon 1:14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi-

She again seems to associate vineyards with her breasts or sexuality (:13; see on :6). She seems to associate Solomon as a person with the aphrodisiacs she was using. In this we see her complete focus upon the external, seeing Solomon as a person as only as good as the aphrodisiacs. This collapsing of identity between the person and the external illustrates the degree to which the issue of character and spirituality is so sadly absent in the relationship.

Lover

Song of Solomon 1:15 Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves-

Solomon sees her as a dove (also Song 5:2), and she then says that he has dove's eyes (Song 5:12). They tend to praise each other in the same language. Indeed this is an accurate record of a romance. But the praise is all of externalities, no attention is paid to the character, and there is absolutely no spiritual dimension to the relationship. This says so much about Solomon. This lack of attention to true spirituality means that his love of Divine wisdom at the time was purely of an intellectual, theoretical nature. And this is the warning for us. For he was writing this love song in his youth when he married foreign women, and it was then that he received Divine wisdom and wrote it up in the book of Proverbs. Or more accurately, he is writing up this Song as a description of his feelings for her in his youth.

Beloved

Song of Solomon 1:16 Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, yes, pleasant; and our couch is verdant-

The "verdant" bed they would sleep on may be assumed to be of leaves, in the open air bower they would construct in :17. The Gentile woman invites Solomon, the young Hebrew male, to her bed in the same way as the woman he warns against in Prov. 7:17 "I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon". The Proverbs so frequently refer to the dangers of the house of the Gentile woman; yet the Song shows the Egyptian girl dearly wishing that Solomon would come with her into her bed. And Solomon, just like the foolish young man he wrote about, went right ahead down the road to spiritual disaster he so often warned others about. He warns the young man of the dangers of the Egyptian woman who perfumes her bed with myrrh (Prov. 7:16,17)- and then falls for just such a woman (Ps. 45:8).

The young woman has just introduced herself to Solomon, he likes her- and straight away starts talking of their bed. She pushes herself upon him, and he falls for her. The whole thing breathes superficially and

sensuality. It really recalls the classic scene of the pushy, forward young woman who pushes herself upon the young, handsome wealthy man. They soon talk and do sex, and then break up in acrimony.

Lover

Song of Solomon 1:17 The beams of our house are cedars. Our rafters are firs-

The house can be taken as a bower made of cedar and fir trees, the location of their tryst in the countryside. This continues the idea of :16. So whilst Solomon was still building the temple of cedars and firs, he was making a bower out of such trees in which to secretly sleep with his Egyptian, Gentile girlfriend. This is more that duplicitous hypocrisy, it is the behaviour of a man who has not at all personalized God's truths for himself. The path to this tryst has been hinted at in :7,8. That the king of Israel should need to act in this deceptive manner has much to say about him. He was worried about his image, and wished to give an appearance of interest in the daughters of Jerusalem. Or it could be that Solomon alludes to the house of the forest of Lebanon, Solomon's summer house, which was constructed of so much cedar that it would have required literally the felling of a forest in Lebanon. In which case, this is an invitation to her to come and sleep with him in his summer house beneath the famed "paneled ceilings" (LXX, NEV "rafters").

If these words are the woman's, then she may be fantasizing about a house that Solomon will build for her and the materials used to make it. Solomon did indeed build a house for his Egyptian wife and the use of cedar was typical of his building style as recorded in 1 Kings.

CHAPTER 2

Song of Solomon 2:1 Beloved

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys-

We can understand this as a typical trick of 'love'. She was clearly wealthy, the daughter of royalty, judging by her foreign perfume and gold jewellery. But she is playing the 'poor little rich girl' card, asking her lover to overlook her dark skin, pretending she had a complex about it; pretending she had a low self image as just a common rose, when she has just told the daughters of Jerusalem that she is in fact uniquely beautiful. When in fact Solomon likely found attractive a skin colour different from that of the "daughters of Jerusalem". See on Song 1:6 for another example. The Egyptian girl doesn't rate these common flowers; her lack of confidence in the face of the opposition from the daughters of Jerusalem is expressed again (see on Song 1:3,4), and comes to a climax at the end when she breaks up with Solomon, effectively saying "I knew it would end like this". And yet they are the flowers which are to adorn the restored Israel in the Kingdom of God (Is. 35:1,2; Hos. 14:6-8). Her every word shows her to be spiritually out of step with God's ways and viewpoints. She now feels unworthy of him; just an ordinary common nothing special flower. This kind of oscillation of confidence is true to observed experience of the "in love" period of relationship. The Songs have every reason to believe them to be a record of an actual relationship Solomon had.

Chapter 1 has closed with the couple in Solomon's palace, but now she seems despondent and considers herself just a common lily. Her dislike of the city life was not because she was a country girl- she was a "prince's daughter", daughter of Pharaoh (Song 7:1). She didn't like it because the 'daughters of Jerusalem' were there, her competitors.

It can be no accident that the Lord contrasts the lily favourably with Solomon in all his glory- as if He saw even this unspiritual Gentile

girl as far better than Solomon. This is one of many NT allusions which present Solomon unfavourably.

Lover

Song of Solomon 2:2 As a lily among thorns, so is my darling among the daughters-

Solomon comforts her that he sees her as unique and special. And she, one of many women in his harem, dumbly believes him. This is what is hard to believe in love- that I am unique and special. And this is our difficulty in accepting the love of Christ for us. But Solomon negatively compares the daughters of Jerusalem to thorns, with all their associations with condemnation; just as he did in essence as noted on Song 1:9. Solomon addresses her obsession about "the daughters of Jerusalem" by saying that he sees them as thorns and her as a lily. He likens the Jerusalem girls to thorns- he was besotted with this Gentile. Ironically enough, Num. 33:55 had warned that the Gentiles within the land promised to Abraham would be "thorns" to Israel if they married them. And yet Solomon sees the Israelite women as "thorns" and the Gentile as a lily amongst them... Thorns are invariably connected with spiritual weakness and rejection; it was as if Solomon was saying that he found the daughter of Pharaoh spiritually more attractive than the Jewish girls. This is the basis for the sarcastic comments and tensions between Solomon's girl and the daughters of Jerusalem. And she went along with how he wanted to see her: "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys"; even though her heart was far away in Egypt, she described herself in Jewish terms because that was how he saw her; he calls her his "sister" (Song 4:9), as if she was actually Jewish- whereas she wanted him to be her Egyptian "brother". The relationship was doomed from the start.

Beloved

Song of Solomon 2:3 As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, his fruit was sweet to my taste-

As Solomon considers her the most beautiful amongst all the other women / flowers, so she responds by implying she has plenty of other men but he is the most attractive to her "among the sons"; like a single apple tree that bears fruit amongst the fruitless trees of a forest. She likens him to the apple tree, which is not a native of Palestine and may have been uncommon there at the time. She likes to see him as somehow not solidly Hebrew, just as he likes to see her as Israelite by comparing her to locations in Israel. They were both in love with a false image of the other which they had in their minds. This happens so often. The illicit nature of their relationship, the opposition they both had [she from her brothers, he from the daughters of Jerusalem] heightened the intensity of their passion and commitment- for a time. But there was no lasting cement in their relationship, because it was not based on spirit and truth.

It's hard to imagine what was actually going on in this part of the woman's speech. She speaks of meeting Solomon as a pleasant tree in the forest, then of being with Solomon publically at the banquet house, with a banner of his stated love over her, the ultimate answer to the daughters of Jerusalem whose competition she so feared; and then she is fantasizing about him arousing her with his right hand whilst having his left arm under her head, and then in :8 she hears the voice of Solomon indicating he is running across the mountains towards her. We surely cannot read all these things as descriptions of what actually happened in a short space of time; rather are they her fantasies, her imaginations of her idealized lover- see on :16. If we understand her words as largely the fantasy of imagination, then her whole speeches appear far less confused than if we try to read them as literal statements of what actually happened between the couple.

Song of Solomon 2:4 He brought me to the banquet hall. His banner over me is love-

Seeing their relationship was illicit, and they met outdoors, this appears to be the exaggerated imagery of the love poem. I suggested on

Song 1:4 that the "chambers" to which he brought her was an open air bivouac or bower made from tree branches where they made love and drunk wine. And again here she speaks of him bringing her... to a banquet hall, in their imaginations, the open air bower, where they made love.

But "banquet hall" can indeed mean a "house of wine" (RVmg.). Solomon later turned to alcohol for a while (Ecc. 2:3)- yet his girlfriend says that Solomon took her to the house of wine whilst still young. The seeds of failure were there early on- he preached against wine in Proverbs, and yet still drunk himself.

It is quite possible that this house of wine or banquet room was the building which later developed into "the house of the forest of Lebanon", Solomon's grandiose summer house.

Song of Solomon 2:5 Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am faint with love-

She may be saying that she is so in heat for him, that he must give her his apples / raisins. Clearly this is sexual imagery, and the songs are little short of verbal pornography. The desire for such illicit fruit (for they were not married) in an open air situation recalls the sin of Adam and Eve. Again we have the sense of an open air tryst. "Refresh me" can also be "make my bed" (s.w. Job 17:13 "made my bed"). In this case she is spreading an alluring couch before her would be lover, just as the wicked Gentile woman of Prov. 7:16. And Solomon falls for her, assuming all his truths of wisdom are somehow not binding upon him personally.

The Song of Solomon really isn't the idyllic love song some have made it out to be. Constantly there is fear and contradiction within it; the unsatisfactory ending is but a continuation of a theme of uncertainty and difficulty in the relationship. Throughout the song there are constant interjections of doubt and misunderstanding, and anticlimaxes between the height of love's expression and the depths of doubt. We expect the Song to feature a romance that blossoms into marriage and the

consummation; but all we have is a constant struggle in the relationship, and it all ends in a quite unsatisfactory and unfulfilled way. The sense of lovesickness reflects the unsatisfying nature of it all (Song 2:5, 15,16). She asks him to turn and go away, and then seeks him desperately (Song of Solomon 2:17; 3:1)- having earlier rejoiced at the news of his coming (2:8).

Song of Solomon 2:6 His left hand is under my head. His right hand embraces me-

In fantasy or reality, they were having sex. And the Lord teaches that in this area, the thought is anyway counted as the act.

Song of Solomon 2:7 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, or by the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor stimulate love, until it so desires-

The sentence is left unended and yet begins with an adjuration. We can conclude that we are supposed to end the sentence with a curse for disobeying the adjuration: "I put you under oath, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, if you stir up or arouse love before it is willing, [may you be cursed]". "Until it so desires" refers to "love". The translations that offer "until she desires" are simply reflecting the fact that the Hebrew noun for "love" is feminine. "Until it please / so desire" could mean "until our love is satisfied"; "That you disturb not, nor interrupt our love, until it be satiated". The interruption and distraction of the daughters of Jerusalem is referred to when she complains that the foxes are spoiling the vineyards of the couple.

An oath was typically taken in the name of God in Israel (Dt. 6:13; Josh. 9:18; 2 Chron. 15:14). But again, this woman is portrayed as lacking any spirituality or relationship with God. Her sarcasm turns to angry defence when she warns the Jerusalem girls not to stir up "my love"- i.e. 'Hands off my Solomon!'. In turn, they ask her where Solomon has "turned aside" so that they can come and seek him with her (Song of Solomon 6:1), using a word elsewhere associated with 'turning aside' in apostasy to other gods. They in their turn sarcastically comment to her:

“Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women... that we may seek him with thee?” (Song 6:1 AV), quoting Solomon’s terms of endearment back to her.

It is no coincidence that she calls Solomon a roe and hind in :9. Surely her implication is that the daughters of Jerusalem should get on with their own boyfriends, and not stimulate Solomon away from her.

Song of Solomon 2:8 The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping on the mountains, skipping on the hills-

This is the language of fantasy; and is the basis for her nightmare in chapter 3, when she imagines Solomon coming in glory on a carriage / bed- but it was prepared for the daughters of Jerusalem, and not her. I suggest that we have here an absolutely credible insight into the mental processes of a girl in her situation. It really happened. And Solomon is writing this Song correctly psychoanalyzing her thoughts and what had happened.

Song of Solomon 2:9 My beloved is like a roe or a young hart. Behold, he stands behind our wall! He looks in at the windows. He glances through the lattice-

"Windows... lattice" are literally "gaps". The idea is that they are separated by a stone wall in which there are gaps through which they can look at each other. Again there is a sense of separation between them, and only having their relationship as it were through the gaps. Again, the imagery is unfortunate because a broken down stone wall with gaps is a Biblical picture of the spiritually broken down state of Israel (Is. 5:5; Ez. 13:5,10). But these lovers cared nothing for such concerns. She was locked up in the harem, under guard, but Solomon was coming to have a secret chat with her and to admire her... or so she liked to fantasize.

If we read still as "windows" and "lattice", then again we have the impression of furtiveness, secrecy and a concealed relationship. It's as if he comes to her home as she is looking out for him through the closed window blinds and says 'It's all clear, come with me now, let's dash' (:10). And then at the end of it she has to tell him to "flee" back home

at daybreak (:17). Note she is in a "hiding place" (:14) from which Solomon calls her out. The obvious question 'Why all the secrecy?' is clearly because the relationship was illicit and mismatched.

Solomon in Prov. 7:6 likens himself to a wise man looking out through his lattice window and noticing a man going astray with a woman. But the precise figure is used in Song 2:9 for how his illicit, pagan Gentile girlfriend found his doing this to be so attractive, if not somehow erotic. The connection shows how totally confused Solomon was in his personal spirituality.

Song of Solomon 2:10 My beloved spoke and said to me, Rise up, my love, my beautiful one, and come away-

This is reported speech- her hopes of what her lover would say, her fantasy about his words rather than reality. See on :16. For she had decided at the start that the only way out of the problem with the daughters of Jerusalem was to get Solomon to agree to leave Jerusalem and Israel (Song 1:4). Her heart was in her home in Egypt, and she wanted to get Solomon there. She is presented as the very opposite of Ruth's attitude.

But these may be Solomon's words. By contrast, instead of running off to Egypt with her, he wants to take her on a tour of Israel (as in Song 4:8), enthusing about the sights, speaking of them as the things of "*our* land". He wanted her to be an Israelite, and he spoke to her as if she was, assuming that he could psychologically and spiritually dominate her so that he could have a little of both- his own carnal fulfilment coupled with spiritual satisfaction. How many times has this been worked out in the experience of a spiritual brother enthusing about the beauty of the Truth and spiritual Israel to an Egyptian girl, who only superficially shares his enthusiasm, longing in her heart to have him with her in Egypt.

Song of Solomon 2:11 for, behold, the winter is past. The rain is over and gone-

The romance happened in the spring, the time when Solomon should have been keeping Passover to remember his deliverance from Egypt. But at that very time, he was getting involved with an Egyptian girl.

Song of Solomon 2:12 The flowers appear on the earth. The time of the singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land-

The turtledove is a migratory bird which returns to Israel in April; this confirms that this romance is happening in the spring (:11), the time when Solomon should have been keeping Passover to remember his deliverance from Egypt. "The time of the singing" may refer to the Passover feast, and rejoicing in the destruction of Egypt's chariots which Solomon so admired (Song 1:9). But at that very time, he was getting involved with an Egyptian girl.

Song of Solomon 2:13 The fig tree ripens her green figs. The vines are in blossom. They give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away-

Again we see her wanting Solomon to "come away" from the scene in Jerusalem where the daughters of Jerusalem would always be his competitors (Song 1:4). She has fantasized about him agreeing to this in :10. And so it will ever be in the marriage of believer and unbeliever; the unbeliever will always want to get the believer to "come away" to Egypt. And so it happened with Solomon's heart, finally.

I am not a fan of trying to interpret the Song as an allegory of Christ and His church. But the blossoming of the fig tree is associated with the soon coming of the bridegroom, possibly alluded to by the Lord in His Olivet prophecy. However we must face the problem that the girl wishes Solomon to "come away" not to Yahweh but to Egypt and her idols.

Lover

Song of Solomon 2:14 My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places of the mountainside; let me see your face. Let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely-

I suggested on :9 that they are on different sides of a broken down stone wall, playing peek a boo through the many gaps in it. "Face" is plural, and could be translated "sights", as if he is asking to see her body in a sexual sense. "Let me see your form" is a fair translation; and he asks for her to undress for him in a hidden place outdoors. Again we see the stressed, secretive nature of the romance. And we note this is all a case of premarital sex.

The desire to 'see your face' and the reference to being hid in a cleft of the rock is very much the language of Moses desiring to see God's face whilst hid in a cleft of the rock. The point is, that Solomon's desire for his illicit girlfriend should've been instead redirected into a desire to meet God in the spirit of Moses. This is one of many indirect allusions in the Song to spiritual things, but always to point out that those allusions were utterly missed by Solomon and his lover.

Song of Solomon 2:15 Catch foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom-

I explained on Song 1:6 that the vineyards are representative of her sexuality, which we learn there was guarded by her brothers. It is possible that this verse is in fact her brothers speaking, or her fear of their attempts to catch a "fox" like Solomon from spoiling her vineyard / virginity- which she wants to give him. Or it could be that she sees the 'foxes' spoiling "our" vineyard as the daughters of Jerusalem. The Lord called Herod a fox, so we can conclude that a fox was a derogatory term for a person. Always the love scenes are less than ideal in reality. The vineyards of Solomon and this woman are spoilt by foxes... As Ecclesiastes laments, going the way of the flesh never leads to true satisfaction.

Keil suggests this is "A vine-dresser's ditty". If we don't accept this is the voice of the brothers, then this could be a cry to the foxes to 'clear off'. But why the fear of foxes? Perhaps this is another call for the potential observers, those who would spoil their tryst, to go away- just as the girl shouts such things in her own mind at the 'daughters of Jerusalem'. Their meeting places were in the countryside, and Solomon sees her

work as his- he speaks as if they are joint vineyard keepers in 'their' vineyard where they meet. These rural locations for their meetings explain the many rural allusions in the song. She was a "prince's daughter" with whom Solomon secretly met in the countryside. This to my mind is a more fulfilling explanation than the suggestion that the rural allusions mean she was a simple country peasant whom he had fallen in love with.

There is an undoubted connection between the record of Samson *catching* the *foxes* and using them to destroy *vineyards* (Jud. 15:4,5) and Song 2:15, where Solomon suggests that he and his girl go and catch the foxes that destroy the vineyards. This seems an allusion to Samson, although this Biblical allusion (as noted on :14) puts Solomon in a poor light, comparing him to the sexually out of control Samson, who was destroyed for his infatuation with Gentile women. Both Solomon and his Gentile girlfriend owned vineyards (Song 1:6; 8:11,12), and both were concerned that the fruit would not be damaged (Song 2:13,15; 6:11; 7:12). However, the implication from the allusion was also that in fact Solomon was in the position of the Philistines, worrying about the effect of Samson's foxes. See on Ecc. 7:26

Beloved

Song of Solomon 2:16 My beloved is mine, and I am his-

Solomon had at least 1000 women in his life and got involved with many of them at the start of his reign- it was her wishful thinking that he had eyes for her only, and those fears were expressed in her angry and aggressive comments to the "daughters of Jerusalem" whom she rightfully feared were her competitors- see on:7. As noted on :3 and :13, much of this relationship was based around being in love with an image of the other, in love with an expectation and imagination, an idealization of the other, rather than with the other as they really were. For all her self confidence and scheming, she is also presented as an utter fool in believing that she was really Solomon's "only one". The simple truth of true love is that the beloved is loved for who they are. We all struggle

with this, and this is why we find it hard to believe that the Lord Jesus so loves me- despite seeing me as I am.

He browses among the lilies-

Lilies are representative of the girl's body in a sexual sense (Song 4:5; 7:3; 6:2). But "lilies" plural could mean that she here acknowledges that he is likely at this point sleeping with other "lilies", browsing amongst them. We noted in Song 1 that she fully accepts that others love Solomon. She has nightmares about the situation until in Song 8 she finally tells him to keep his "thousand" and she will keep her vineyard for herself, and they part in acrimony. This is all so psychologically credible. A woman falls in love with a polygamist, believing his unique protestations of love for her- but can't maintain acceptance of that position.

Song of Solomon 2:17 Until the day is cool, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of Bether-

The coolness of the day is the evening. When "the shadows flee away" therefore, does not denote dispersion of the shades of night by the rising sun, but the disappearance of the shadows when the sun sets. She is asking him to finish browsing amongst other women (:16) and return to her that evening for sex. Or we could interpret that there is always the hint of secrecy, of spending the night together in secret and then running away at dawn. This heightened the sense of immediate attraction, but reflected how the relationship could never ultimately work. And her urging of him to just run away is to be understood in the context of her desire for Solomon to run away from the Jerusalem scene, and come with her to Egypt (see on :10,13; Song 1:4). There is no place known as "Bether". The word can mean "division" or according to some readings, "incense". She saw Jerusalem or Israel as surrounded by mountains, and she wants Solomon to leap over them with her and get away. And perhaps she has the idea of getting him to offer incense in such high places. He is out of step with this idea, instead asking her

to jump over mountains and to him in Jerusalem (see on Song 4:8). Always the couple are presented as fundamentally out of step with each other. Or we can take Bether [Heb. *bater*] as meaning 'cleavage' and referring to her breasts, which she likens to 'mountains', as Solomon calls them in Song 4:5,6, just as she boasts of them as 'towers' in Song 8. She is hardly modest, and here again the allegorical approach breaks down.

CHAPTER 3

Song of Solomon 3:1 By night on my bed, I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I didn't find him-

The twice repeated theme of seeking but not finding is the language of condemnation. All the time we get hints in the language used that this Gentile woman is not of God at all, and is the pathway to condemnation. Just as Solomon had warned in Prov. 7. Having slept with him the night before (Song 2;16,17), she now has a nightmare about him having left her. And indeed this is absolutely psychologically likely. Her dream or nightmare reflected her deepest fears. The Hebrew means "nights" in the plural, as if this nightmare was a regular occurrence.

Song of Solomon 3:2 I will get up now, and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I didn't find him-

Her dream reflects the way she **slipped out of the harem, dodging the guards / watchmen, and** walked the streets of Jerusalem whilst he was confined in the palace. Her mother moved to Jerusalem from Egypt, but it wasn't possible for Solomon and her to easily be together in that house (Song 3:4; 8:2). Again [as noted on Song 2:14,15] we have an allusion to spiritual things, but out of context. Jeremiah on God's behalf ran through the streets and squares of Jerusalem to search for men who would love God in truth (Jer. 5:1). But she runs through the same streets and squares looking to turn a man away from God.

The language here recalls Solomon's own warning in Proverbs 7 about the Gentile prostitute who will lead the Israelite male astray: "her feet never stay at home;

now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks". She also says that "I have perfumed my bed

with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon"- the very things used by the Shulamite (Song 4:13,14).

Song of Solomon 3:3 The watchmen who go about the city found me; I asked, Have you seen him whom my soul loves?-

Her difficulty with "the watchmen" [also in 5:7] and their anger with her is understandable if she was in the "house of the women", guarded within the harem- and yet had escaped from it to have a tryst with the king for whom she was being prepared. No wonder she was in conflict with the "daughters of Jerusalem" within the harem. They were being prepared as Esther was to sleep with the king and for him to decide whether they would become one of his queens, or be sent to the house of the concubines. But during the preparation period, she was sneaking out and sleeping with the king.

Constantly she fears the opposition of the people of Jerusalem. Later in this chapter she has another nightmare of Solomon's kingly bed prepared not for her but for the daughters of Jerusalem, and protected by Israelite soldiers. The implication would be that Solomon's marriages to Gentile women were not popular with Israel, and this contributed to the resentment against Solomon at the end of his life (1 Kings 12:11). We note that although she comes over as forward and manipulative, she seems to love Solomon from her "soul" (also in :4), although that love was based upon being in love with an image of a man rather than reality, and was totally based upon externalities.

Song of Solomon 3:4 I had scarcely passed from them, when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, into the room of her who conceived me-

She repeats this in Song 8:2 "I would have lead you into my mother's house". She expresses here her fantasy of getting Solomon to come to Egypt with her. Even in the time of David, when the Edomites were subdued, Pharaoh was very open to supporting the enemies of Israel: "Hadad found great favour in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him as wife the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen" (1 Kings 11:18,19). This is why Solomon's marriage to his daughter at

the start of his reign, not so long after Hadad's establishment in Egypt, was foolhardy. At best it put his wife in an impossibly compromised position of conflicting loyalties, which we sense beginning even during their romance as recorded in the Song of Solomon. For there she so wishes that she and Solomon could live together in Egypt, and decide wholeheartedly for the sake of their romance to be Egyptians and live there in her homeland. Solomon had married Pharaoh's daughter, and so Hadad may have ended up related to Solomon by marriage. This would have put Solomon's wife in an impossible position of conflicted loyalties. That may be one reason Solomon moved her out of the palace area and built her a separate house. See further on 1 Kings 11:21 for Solomon's un wisdom in marrying into Pharaoh's family at this time.

Again we have to note that this is her fantasy, her dream: "I would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house". And dreams do speak of our inner deepest psychological longings. She would only be happy if she caught him and brought him to her mother's house in Egypt. This was her dream. We recall how Isaac brings his wife Rebekah into his mother's tent to consummate the marriage (Gen. 24:67). She did indeed 'catch' him as Solomon himself admitted, he was caught by her beauty. The Hebrew means that she 'laid hold of him' and wouldn't let him go- exactly as the bad woman in Proverbs whom Solomon had written of. Now, writing up this Song, Solomon is perceiving that this is what had happened to him. Her subconscious desire was to bring him to her family home back in Egypt. This was going to be an impossible romance, because Solomon was king of Israel- and his lover had a fantasy to bring him to her family home down in Egypt. And so many relationships start with this impossible conflict of positions.

There is some historical evidence that in Egypt, discussions about marriage were held in the mother's house. Her deepest psychological positions, as reflected in this dream, were that she would get Solomon away from his mother, who had warned him against women like her in

Prov. 31, and into the house of her and not his mother. She says she will not let him go. Perhaps despite the break up of the relationship at the end of the book, they did in fact marry, and Solomon laments that her hands were as bands (Ecc. 7:26) and his relationship with her was a being caught in a net.

She was the fulfilment of what Solomon had written at the same time in Prov. 7:27: "Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the rooms of death". Solomon's wisdom was given to him as a young man, and the book of Proverbs appears to be collections of the various statements of that wisdom. But about the same time, he also got involved with multiple Gentile women who led him astray from God and to idolatry. And now in later life Solomon is writing up the story—for we must keep reminding ourselves that he was the author of this book, now understanding what was going on in her mind and putting those thoughts into her dream which he now describes and imputes to her. The very warnings he gives against the adulteress and Gentile woman were ignored by him; he became the young man who went wrong with women. His girlfriend speaks in the very language of the Gentile woman of Proverbs: "I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house... into her chamber" (Song 3:4 AV). Compare this with "She caught him... come not near the door of her house... her house... the chambers of death" (Prov. 7:13,27; 5:8). We see here the warning for all time; that we can know God's ways in theory, whilst disobeying them in practice, absolutely to the letter. Indeed it may be so that the more we know them, the more strongly we are tempted by our nature to break them. As we mature spiritually, drawing ever closer to the Kingdom, the stakes as it were rise.

Yet Solomon was aware, at least theoretically, of the foolish path he was going down. God had inspired him with the wisdom of Prov. 2:16,17, which warned that wisdom would save a man from the Gentile woman who made a covenant with the God of Israel in her youth (in

order to marry an Israelite, by implication), but soon forgot it. This was exactly the case of Solomon; yet he just couldn't see the personal relevance of his own wisdom to himself. Solomon could write of the folly of the ruler who oppressed the poor (Prov. 22:16)- and yet do just that very thing. The Proverbs so frequently refer to the dangers of the house of the Gentile woman; yet the Song shows the Egyptian girl dearly wishing that Solomon would come with her into her house. And Solomon, just like the foolish young man he wrote about, went right ahead down the road to spiritual disaster he so often warned others about. He warns the young man of the dangers of the Egyptian woman who perfumes her bed with myrrh (Prov. 7:16,17)- and then falls for just such a woman (Ps. 45:8). This woman he warns of appears to want to serve Yahweh, and presents herself in the very language of the tabernacle (Prov. 7:14,16,17). And yet Solomon goes and falls for just such a woman. One can only conclude that the more true spiritual knowledge we have, the more prone we are to do the very opposite.

Song of Solomon 3:5 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor stimulate love, until he so desires-

An oath was typically taken in the name of God in Israel (Dt. 6:13; Josh. 9:18; 2 Chron. 15:14). But again, this woman is portrayed as lacking any spirituality or relationship with God. She seems terrified that the daughters of Jerusalem would sexually attract Solomon, and this fear leads to her further nightmare which follows. Yet it has been argued that 'do not stir up love' means effectively "Do not disturb our lovemaking"; hence TEV "Don't interrupt us now!".

Song of Solomon 3:6 Who is this who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all spices of the merchant?-

Again the imagery of pillars of smoke coming from the desert towards Jerusalem (:1) is the prophetic image for judgment coming. There is always the hint that this relationship leads to condemnation. The spices brought by merchants connect with the merchant trading of Solomon which resulted in these things being brought to him. Clearly this is Solomon in all his God given glory.

The Hebrew is 'Whose [feminine, 'for whom'] is this...?', enquiring for whom is this carriage paved with love. The speaker here could be the daughters of Jerusalem or a narrator. The language of perfume confirms that a female figure is in view, emerging from the desert. The spices or "powders of the merchant" speaks of the women in the harem who had been prepared with powders. It is... another woman, or in fact women, who are coming to marry Solomon. I suggest these words are the teasing of the daughters of Jerusalem. It is part of the beloved's dream, or nightmare. She dreams that she sees Solomon's marriage procession... but not for her, but, for the daughters of Jerusalem. This was her deepest fear, expressed in her dream, that actually Solomon would marry other women. Yet in chapter 1 we read of her fully acceptant, so she thinks, that she is going to be one of a number of wives. But her deepest fear is now revealed as being that he would marry other women.

Solomon's procession is described as approaching from a distance, initially just dust clouds on the horizon, with premonitions of danger—thanks to the mention of the soldiers guarding it. But getting closer the details become apparent. And the description climaxes in the statement that the marriage litter is paved with love... for... the daughters of Jerusalem! The whole scene speaks of how the Shulamite progressively comes to understand that Solomon is in fact also in love with the daughters of Jerusalem and will marry them too. Only in Song 8 do we see the Shulamite facing reality and walking out of the relationship, with the daughters of Jerusalem jeering her. They jeer her with the same question "Who is this coming up from the wilderness?" (Song 8:5).

Song of Solomon 3:7 Behold, it is Solomon's carriage! Sixty mighty men are around it, of the mighty men of Israel-

AV "Behold his bed, which is Solomon's!". She knows his bed, she has slept with him on it... and here, in her nightmare and the kaleidoscope of images which dreams have, she sees it again... protected by the harem guards, prepared for other women. "Carriage" is also "bed". She has been having a secret open air tryst with Solomon on a bed made from leaves under a bower of tree branches. And now she sees with some shock (:6,7) a kingly bed coming toward her... but not for her to sleep with him in. It is for the daughters of Jerusalem (:10)! This continues her vision of fear which she has on her bed at night (:1). The relationship is full of such distrust and fear that the daughters of Jerusalem will finally get Solomon, and she will not.

Song of Solomon 3:8 They all handle the sword, and are expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh, because of fear in the night-

This nightmare (:1) of Solomon's bed advancing as a carriage [hence the confusion in the translations between "bed" and "carriage"] was guarded by Israel's best soldiers. They feared something might happen at night; and at night she had slept with Solomon and they had parted from each other at dawn (Song 2:17). Her nightmare reflects her deepest fears; that the men of Israel were against her relationship with Solomon, and fiercely guarded his kingly bed for the daughters of Jerusalem, and intended to keep her away from it. These men are another form of the night watchmen patrolling Jerusalem at night, whom she imagines had caught her.

Dreams are a kaleidoscope of images. She has just dreamt of the watchmen around the harem walls catching her (:3). And now she sees them guarding Solomon's bed and the women he is going to marry in this wedding. The whole thing is a dreamscape, constructed by Solomon the author, as an insight into the mind of his ex. And he was likely not far wrong.

Song of Solomon 3:9 King Solomon made himself a carriage of the wood of Lebanon-

"Carriage" can also be "bed" as AV. The Egyptian word here used suggests that Solomon really had a relationship with this woman and spoke to her in terms she understood. This failed, illicit romance really happened. For these are the thoughts of the girl in her nightmare (:1). Solomon "made himself" many things (Ecc. 2:4-8). That he had made his own wedding bed is therefore unsurprising. The Shulamite had earlier fantasized of Solomon building a house for her from the wood of Lebanon (Song 1:16). Now she realizes, with shock ['Who is this coming to a wedding... it's Solomon!'], that he had built something of wood from Lebanon for her rivals, the daughters of Jerusalem.

Song of Solomon 3:10 He made its pillars of silver, its bottom of gold, its seat of purple, its midst being paved with love-

Typical of dreams, she sees the bed-in-a-carriage in great detail. "Bottom" can be "canopy", and "seat" can be "cushions"; the silver pillars hold up a canopy over the bed. Solomon's half brother Absalom had slept with David's wives beneath such a canopy, and so the Shulamite in her nightmare is imagining Solomon being prepared for sex with the women he is marrying, in a public way. "He made..." pillars with silver, gold and purple recalls the language of how Solomon made the temple (1 Kings 7:6-8). He admits in Ecc. 2 that he loved making things. His apparent zeal for building the temple was really just an expression of his own native temperament and character type, rather than particular love for God's work. And we must analyze our own service of God to see if we aren't doing the same thing, just serving Him in ways which are convenient and reinforce our own native personality type. Such service is not the service of sacrifice and carrying a cross which is required.

The bed is described in the language of the tabernacle; made of wood, but covered with gold and surrounded by silver pillars, with a mercy seat of purple (3:9,10 Heb.). He persuaded himself that his marriage to this woman was some kind of expression of spirituality. The

bed was made from cedar brought from Lebanon- and yet the same wood was used for the temple (Song 3:9). Such was his dualism. The Song is shot through with allusion to the Law and tabernacle rituals; he speaks of making her borders on her clothes (Song 1:11), probably alluding to the borders of blue to be worn by the faithful Israelite. Solomon wanted her to be a spiritual woman, and he was going to make her one; many a preacher, teacher, husband, wife, father, mother, child, boyfriend has had to learn the impossibility of this. He wanted to see her as a spiritual woman, and eventually he became persuaded that she was just this.

For the daughters of Jerusalem-

The plural "daughters" would suggest Solomon's wedding was in fact to several women at once. Those accepted as "wives" would have been married a few at a time and that is what's described here. I suggested on :7 that this is a nightmare she has on her bed (:1), having slept with Solomon on a bed of leaves in the open air. Now she imagines him having made a luxurious bed... but not for her. For the daughters of Jerusalem, her rivals! There is always the tension with the daughters of Jerusalem, who can be understood as Solomon's Jewish wives, or those who were his Jewish harem. In Song 2 she wants to bring him into her mother's bedroom in Egypt, but this is contrasted in the next Song with Solomon's bed in Jerusalem, prepared for the "daughters of Jerusalem" (3:4,10) whom he should have married. Then, with this bed in the background, he tells her how he especially loves *her* (Song 4:1), trying to persuade her that her fears have no basis in reality.

Song of Solomon 3:11 Go forth, you daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon, with the crown with which his mother has crowned him in the day of his weddings, in the day of the gladness of his heart-

In Prov. 31 Bathsheba lays the law down with him about his girlfriends, about not marrying Gentiles, and about not drinking, yet here we see Bathsheba with all her motherly pride crowning Solomon on the day of engagement to his wives. Note the plural "weddings". Like David,

Bathsheba taught Solomon the principles with great enthusiasm, but she allowed parental pride to make her dismiss the possibility that her son was seriously going astray. But in this nightmare, the Egyptian girl imagines Bathsheba approving Solomon's marriages to the daughters of Zion / Jerusalem

Or perhaps here we have the girl sarcastically commenting to the Jerusalem girls: "Go forth, O you daughters of Jerusalem, and behold king Solomon", and goes on to mock the crown his mother Bathsheba had made for him, wishing instead that he would be under the influence of *her* mother (Song 3:11,4). Her sarcasm turns to angry defence at times, e.g. when she warns the Jerusalem girls not to stir up "my love" (Song of Solomon 2:7)- i.e. 'Hands off my Solomon!'. In turn, they ask her where Solomon has "turned aside" so that they can come and seek him with her (Song of Solomon 6:1), using a word elsewhere associated with 'turning aside' in apostasy to other gods. They in their turn sarcastically comment to her: "Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women... that we may seek him with thee?" (Song of Solomon 6:1), quoting Solomon's terms of endearment back to her.

"Weddings" [LXX "espousals"] stands out as a plural. The picture [perhaps, the nightmare of the Shulamite] is of Solomon marrying or getting engaged to many women at once, apparently with his mother's approval. These wives were apparently the daughters of Jerusalem, for the litter is paved with love for them (:10). All this was a nightmare experience for the Egyptian bride... Her worst nightmare was that Solomon would in the end prefer the local women to herself. Hence her desire to make him love the things of Egypt...

Again we see the kaleidoscope of images typical of dreams. She has fantasized of bringing Solomon down to *her* mother's house in Egypt; now she sees [in her nightmare] *his* mother crowning him with a wedding crown as he marries other women in a mass wedding.

CHAPTER 4

Song of Solomon 4:1

Lover

Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves behind your veil-

Although :1-7 are Solomon praising the Shulamite, there is still the possibility that these are her fantasies- imagining him praising her. It has been observed that such praising of bride and groom by each other was common in high profile weddings at the time; the parties sung or recited a *wasf* praising the beauty of the bride or groom. This still happens in some cultures today, notably Persian culture. So we must entertain the possibility that this is still the woman imagining Solomon praising her, reassuring herself of his love for her after the nightmare of Song 3.

Parts of the Song are very sexually explicit once the fairly obvious allusions are figured out. He's describing the vaginal lips of his girlfriend, his intended spouse (Song 4:1,3,8 etc.); and he has seen "behind your veil", the symbol of her virginity. And yet he glorifies all this in his song. Quite clearly, Solomon was guilty of fornication with the one whom he wished to marry, although the ending of the Song seems to imply the relationship somehow broke up. And this was all right at the beginning of his reign. He seems to have assumed that if *he* thought his behaviour was OK, then it was. It's rather like how he declared the middle court to be "holy" and a kind of extended altar (2 Chron. 7:7)- he doesn't ask God if God would sanctify it, he just decides what is holy and what isn't- Solomon played God, and it led him into sin and loss of faith in God.

I noted on Song 1:1 that the Shulamite acts as a prostitute, and there are many connections between her and the bad woman of Proverbs who is a prostitute. Prostitutes wore veils (as Tamar in Gen. 38:14,15, and this is the sense of Song 1:7 ISV "Why should I be

considered a veiled woman beside the flocks of your companions?"). Solomon's lover wears a veil (Song 4:1,3; 6:7) which the watchmen angrily pull off her to expose her for who she is (Song 5:7). The Shulamite acts like a very forward woman, if not a prostitute, and her veil may suggest that.

Solomon's various descriptions of the Shulamite throughout the Song paint her in the very language used to describe the "Daughters of Zion/ Jerusalem" in Is. 3:18-23: "The Lord will take away from the daughters of Jerusalem everything they are so proud of—the ornaments they wear on their ankles, on their heads, on their necks... their veils... the rings they wear on their fingers and in their noses; all their fine robes, gowns, cloaks... their revealing garments, their linen handkerchiefs, and the scarves and long veils they wear on their heads. Instead of using perfumes, they will stink... instead of having beautiful hair, they will be bald; instead of fine clothes, they will be dressed in rags; their beauty will be turned to shame!". We notice that their veils are twice mentioned; and the Shulamite's revealing veil is likewise twice observed by Solomon. Likewise her perfumes are often mentioned, just as they are in the description of the daughters of Jerusalem in Is. 3. Clearly the Shulamite has been prepared in the harem just as the daughters of Jerusalem. The clear parallels between them show that she was in one sense, one of them. Although a darker skinned foreigner and "prince's daughter" from another land. We are hereby confirmed in understanding her as a member of the harem of "daughters of Jerusalem" being prepared for their night with Solomon which would decide whether they would become a queen or be rejected to the status of concubine.

Your hair is as a flock of goats, that descend from Mount Gilead-

Weddings and pre-wedding celebrations typically featured the bridegroom praising the bride or writing a poem about her beauty. That is what we have here. "Budde says mount Gilead is the S. portion of the range called now the Belqa, which is mostly pasture land. It lies within

view of Judah and Jerusalem". She has her hair down, a sign she was sexually available. Time and again the imagery of the song is distinctly sexually selective and without appropriate modesty in the contemporary culture. And Solomon clearly likes it. Throughout the Song, Solomon describes her in Jewish terms, he likens her to many well-known places in Israel: the Heshbon fish pools, the tower of Lebanon etc., seeing the way her hair draped over her breasts as reminiscent of how Mount Gilead looked (Song 4:1,4). He wanted to see her as an Israelite girl, and so that was how she appeared to him. She even uses similar language in praise of him (Song 1:14).

Song of Solomon 4:2 Your teeth are like a newly shorn flock, which have come up from the washing, where every one of them has twins. None is bereaved among them-

Without dental science, missing teeth would have been common in those days, even in youth. But she apparently had none missing. Here and :3 "your mouth is lovely" suggests they had already been involved in deep kissing.

Song of Solomon 4:3 Your lips are like scarlet thread. Your mouth is lovely. Your temples are like a piece of a pomegranate behind your veil-

When Solomon describes her painted lips as being like a thread of scarlet, he uses two Hebrew words which only occur together in Josh. 2:18, describing how the Gentile harlot Rahab hung the scarlet thread outside her home in order to bring about the salvation of her mother and her family. The people of Jericho may well have understood this scarlet thread or rope as a sign of prostitution. Solomon wanted to justify his Egyptian girlfriend by comparing her to Gentile Rahab. And such sophistry goes on at the beginning of every relationship that leads to a marriage out of the Faith.

Song of Solomon 4:4 Your neck is like David's tower built for an armoury, whereon a thousand shields hang, all the shields of the mighty men-

Solomon had made shields of gold which he hung for display on a tower (1 Kings 10:16,17). The idea is that David's tower was built in terraces, and this is how her neck appeared, with her ornaments hanging on the string of her necklace likened to shields. Solomon may be alluding to his 1000 other wives; he is trying to convince her that she is better than them all. She loves him because of his ointment, and he loves her because of her jewellery (Song of Solomon 1:2,3,10; 4:4). It's all very human and carnal, based upon the external and not the internal. But this is what Solomon was like. He sees wisdom, even in Proverbs and certainly in Ecclesiastes, as only helpful in that it gives a person a good name and image in this life.

"David's tower" is "The tower of the flock, the stronghold of Zion" (Mic. 4:8), the tower from which David surveyed the flock of his people (the tower by the king's high house of Neh. 3:25). It was the practice of the time to hang shields upon such towers (as in Ez. 27:11), and David sees her neck and coins upon it as like his tower.

Egyptian women wore their dowry coins on their necks, and long necks were thought to be sexual. If she has her dowry displayed like that, she was betrothed to another man. Just as she opens the Song by saying that she has not kept her own vineyard, and her brothers were angry with her because of it. She struts her immorality. But Solomon finds this sexually attractive.

Song of Solomon 4:5 Your two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe, which feed among the lilies-

In verses 1 and 3 Solomon has mentioned her veil, but clearly the rest of her body is exposed, quite possibly she is naked apart from her veil. In this case, the veil is being used as sexualized clothing rather than as any form of modesty and screening of the female body from male view. We see again how spiritual things are being subverted for carnal, sexual pleasure.

Breasts as twins means Solomon considered them, after much observation, to be perfectly identical- apparently something he found at-

tractive. Clearly he had at this point explored her naked body, although not married to her. "The lilies" is likewise a sexual allusion; see on Song 2:16. He was ravished with this Egyptian girl, especially with her breasts (Song 4:5; 7:3). Yet at the same time he could confidently exhort in Prov. 5:18-20 AV: "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe (Song of Solomon language); let her breasts satisfy thee... be thou ravished always with her love... And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange (i.e. Gentile) woman?". How, indeed? But 999 women later, it was a different story for Solomon. Solomon writes in Prov. 5:18-20 as if it is of course unthinkable that he should have been ravished by a Gentile woman; but he had been. Beyond mere hypocrisy, this reveals how Solomon saw himself as somehow beyond his own wisdom and a free moral agent. This is a common temptation for those who think that mere possession of God's truth will somehow of itself justify them.

Song of Solomon 4:6 Until the day is cool, and the shadows flee away, I will go to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense-

The myrrh and frankincense were being used as aphrodisiacs, which had their desired effect upon Solomon (:16). And yet they are the language of the temple sacrifices. At the very time Solomon was building the temple and establishing the temple cult, he was using the very same items in his illicit relationship with this Egyptian woman. The mountain and hill are parallel with her breasts (:5), and Solomon promises to make love to her all night "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away".

Song of Solomon 4:7 You are all beautiful, my love. There is no spot in you-

This last phrase is alluded to in the New Testament concerning the spotless nature of the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:27). But upon this has been built the quite unsustainable position that the entire Song is an allegory of the relationship between Christ and His bride. This is simply not sustainable; the sexual allusions, and the final breakup of the

relationship after the unsatisfactory tensions between the two of them all shout out against such an approach. The New Testament quotes the Old Testament in the style of its day; whereby words or verses from scripture were applied out of context to situations. It is simply not true that every New Testament quotation of the Old reveals that the surrounding context of the quotation is also relevant to the New Testament context. Going through all the quotations and allusions, it is obvious that this is just not the case. And it seems to me that this idea that the Song is an allegory is a desperate attempt to whitewash Solomon, despite the clear Biblical condemnations of him.

As he sees her as so entirely beautiful, so she sees him (Song 4:7; 5:16). This mutuality of praise is indeed part of the "in love" period. But it was all a matter of external observation of each other, and because of that, the relationship fell apart.

"No spot" is the language of the sacrifices which were to be "without blemish". Perhaps Solomon hints that she is acceptable to God- but that was only his judgment and not God's.

Song of Solomon 4:8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, with me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards-

The Song is largely a dreamscape, and invitations to come here or go there cannot be taken literally. This reference to Lebanon must be seen in the context of how the Song describes the entire land of Israel, over which the Shulamite was to become queen. From Damascus and mount Lebanon in the north to En Gedi in the south, and from Gilead and Heshbon of Moab in the east to Mount Carmel in the west (Song 1:14; 4:1,8; 6:5; 7:5,6).

The Song has several references to Solomon and the woman as it were leaping around the country of Israel. This is not to be taken literally, it is part of the dreamscape. She dreams of Solomon giving her an aerial view of Israel, dancing upon its highest mountain peaks, looking down upon what was to become her land if she married Solomon.

Doubtless her father Pharaoh had this intention in mind as an outcome of the marriage. So it is out of context to insist that "Come with me from Lebanon" implies the girl was in Lebanon literally. Solomon is saying he will take the girl out from the mountain dens of lions and leopards which seem so inaccessible; perhaps implying that although it may seem impossible for her to get out of the inaccessible harem, he will all the same magically get her out.

These northern mountain ranges, forming the northern border of the land, were famed for their inaccessibility. Perhaps the idea is that although so much was against their relationship, Solomon vows to somehow get her from the most inaccessible point... into his kingly bed in Jerusalem. This is perhaps his answer to her desire that he be like a mountain deer, and jump over the mountains of division, out of Jerusalem and back with her to Egypt (see on Song 2:17).

Or we can understand that Solomon takes her on a tour of Israel, enthusing about the sights, speaking of them as the things of "*our* land" (Song of Solomon 2:10-13). He wanted her to be an Israelite, and he spoke to her as if she was, assuming that he could psychologically and spiritually dominate her so that he could have a little of both- his own carnal fulfilment coupled with spiritual satisfaction. How many times has this been worked out in the experience of a spiritual brother enthusing about the beauty of the Truth and spiritual Israel to an Egyptian girl, who only superficially shares his enthusiasm, longing in her heart to have him with her in Egypt.

Song of Solomon 4:9 You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride-

Even though her heart was far away in Egypt, she described herself in Jewish terms because that was how he saw her; he calls her his "sister", as if she was actually Jewish- whereas she wanted him to be her Egyptian "brother". The relationship was doomed from the start. We note that "sister" is a term of endearment used in Egyptian love poetry. Solomon clearly was well versed in the thinking and language of Egypt. Everything points to him being spiritually rotten from his youth.

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again. He warned the typical young man about being captivated by the eyelids of the Gentile woman (Prov. 6:25); yet it was the eyes of Miss Egypt that he openly admitted stole his heart (Song 4:9; 6:5).

You have ravished my heart with one of your eyes, with one chain of your neck-

In Prov. 25:11,12, especially in the LXX, Solomon likens wise words to beautiful jewellery and necklaces; they are (LXX) set "in a necklace of sardius". But Solomon was blown away by the jewellery of his illicit Gentile girlfriend; he looked on the external, rather than on the internal, despite teaching the value and beauty of the internal. "The necklace you are wearing has stolen my heart" (Song 4:9 GNB). And indeed gentile women did steal his heart away from Yahweh.

The general contrast with Solomon's warnings is marked. Thus Prov. 5:19 "A loving doe and a graceful deer- let her breasts satisfy you at all times. Be captivated always with her love". The idea is "don't be ravished with the breasts of a Gentile and don't have many wives; be content with your first wife". But Solomon was (Song 4:9; 7:3), and he had many wives; he totally refused to see the personal relevance of the truth and wisdom he taught.

Despite his ravishment with Pharaoh's daughter as outlined in the Song, she never fulfilled him; indeed, none of his women did. In the Song he speaks of how he was ravished with this Egyptian girl, especially with her breasts (Song 2:7; 3:5; 4:9; 8:14). Alluding to this he could confidently exhort in Prov. 5:18-20 AV: "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe (Song of Solomon language); let her breasts satisfy thee... be thou ravished always with her love... And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange (i.e. Gentile) woman?". How, indeed? But 999 women later, it was a different story for Solomon. Solomon writes in Prov. 5:18-20 as if it is of course unthinkable that he should have been ravished by a Gentile woman; but he had been. He spoke to others with absolutely no thought as to

whether his words had an application to himself. Effectively he was kidding himself, on a deeply internal level, that he hadn't married out of the faith. The obviousness of all this is in order to drum the warning home to us. How tragic that Solomon should go on to comment that such a person would die for want of instruction (Prov. 5:23). Solomon had all the instruction he could wish for; but he didn't allow it to really sink home one little bit. He hit out on the search for an ultimately satisfying woman, but out of the 1000 he had he never found one (Ecc. 7:28), even when he sat down and analyzed each of them. And even politically, his marriages with all those Gentile women didn't seem to achieve him the support he desired from their home countries; Egypt gave refuge to Jeroboam, Solomon's main rival (1 Kings 11:40), even though he always acquiesced to his wives and even in his very old age he still didn't destroy the idol temples he built for them (2 Kings 23:13).

Song of Solomon 4:10 How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine! The fragrance of your perfumes than all kinds of spices!-

His praise of her is her praise of him in Song 1:2,3. There is a mutuality in the falling in love process, and we see it clearly expressed here. The whole document has every indication that it is indeed a real, historical description of an actual relationship Solomon had.

Here Solomon does the very opposite of what he says in Prov. 27:16; for here he also uses the word for "oil" or "perfumes" about the perfume of his illicit Gentile girlfriend, which he found so attractive. Yet in Prov. 27:16 he warns that a bad woman has such oil; but he falls for her. He utterly failed to personalize his wisdom, it flowed through his mouth and mind without taking any personal lodgment within him. And we must be warned by this ability of human nature.

"Spices" occur often in the Song (Song 4:10,14,16; 5:13; 6:2 and see on Song 8:14). The same word is used in Esther 2:10 of how the virgins in the house of the women, awaiting their night with the king, were prepared with "spices".

Song of Solomon 4:11 Your lips, my bride, drip like the honeycomb. Honey and milk are under your tongue. The smell of your garments is like the smell of Lebanon-

The strange woman has words like a honeycomb (Prov. 5:3); the same words are used: "The lips of the strange [Gentile] woman drop honey". And this is exactly how Solomon found his woman's words (Song 4:11). He refused his own wisdom of Prov. 7:21: "With the flattering her lips, she seduced him". Solomon in Prov. 7:5 argues as if mere intellectual assent to the truths he was teaching would keep a man safe from sexual temptation and the flattery of bad women. But Solomon himself possessed all this truth and failed miserably in this area. The Hebrew literally refers to the smoothness of her lips; and Solomon admired the smoothness of the lips of his illicit Gentile girlfriend (s.w. Song 4:3,11; 7:9). Again we see Solomon doing the exact opposite of the wisdom and theoretical truth he was blessed with.

Song of Solomon 4:12 A locked up garden is my sister, my bride-

I discussed on Song 1:6 how these figures of being closed up may mean she was so far closed to Solomon, but not a virgin. And yet he has in the previous verses been talking of sex with her and she appears to be naked before him as he praises her. So he may be rejoicing that she is a closed garden to every other man apart from himself- when he himself was a polygamist.

AV "my sister, my spouse". Solomon's assumption that he was Messiah, the promised seed of David, presumably led him to assume that he was likewise the promised seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. No less than four times he calls his Egyptian girlfriend "my sister, my spouse" (Song 4:9,10,12; 5:1). This repeated emphasis seems to me to be an allusion to the way in which the patriarchs called their wives their sisters (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:6-11). And yet clearly enough, these incidents were lapses of faith for which they were rebuked. Yet Solomon didn't want to see it like that; they did it, therefore he could. David his father had horses and many wives; therefore he could. His sense of

morality, of right and wrong, was controlled by the precedents set by his worthy ancestors. And so often we see this in supposedly Christian lives- the weak elements of our fathers we tend to feel are perfectly acceptable for us too. We do just what Paul says we should not do- we compare ourselves amongst and against ourselves, rather than against the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 10:12).

A locked up spring, a sealed fountain-

The imagery of water, well and cistern in a sexual context is found on Solomon's lips in Prov. 5:15,18 about the ideal, spiritually minded, Hebrew wife. He likens her both to the wicked Gentile woman of Prov. 7 and also to the idea Hebrew woman of Prov. 5. He wants to see in her a little of both; and that desire for a little of both was his destruction. Just as he calls her his "sister", counting her as a Hebrew when she clearly was not. Having written all that, he now uses these terms about his illicit Gentile girlfriend. Solomon saw her as a "paradise", a garden with rivers and exotic fruits, surrounded by a wall- exactly the language of Eden. And she was a fount of "living waters" (Song 4:12,13,15 RVmg.), the language of Messiah. He saw her as the Kingdom / Eden personified. And yet her response to being described in this way is inappropriate- for she invites him to come and eat the fruit of the garden (4:16), exactly after the pattern of Eve destroying Adam. Yet Solomon didn't want to see this connection; she was the Kingdom to him, just as so many have felt that having their new partner means that *nothing*, not even the Kingdom, is meaningful any more. Although he had slept with her, he considers her locked up and sealed. Again we see how Solomon was in love with an image of this woman which he had in his own mind, and which just didn't correspond to reality.

Song of Solomon 4:13 Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates, with precious fruits: henna with spikenard plants-

The non Hebrew word here used for "orchard" suggests that Solomon really had a relationship with this woman and spoke to her in

terms she understood. This failed, illicit romance really happened. Her "shoots" and "fruits" are clearly allusions to her sexuality.

Song of Solomon 4:14 spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree; myrrh and aloes, with all the best spices-

He presents her as the garden of Eden. And yet he totally fails to take the allusion further, and perceive that by breaking divine law in 'eating' of her in sex, he was setting himself up for a catastrophic fall which would affect not only him but all Israel. The spices of Song 4:13,14 which the Shulamite uses in her perfumes are largely not native to Israel. Again we have the impression of a wealthy foreign princess. Such spices had to be imported by Solomon (1 Kings 10:10). But they are listed together with the fruit of the "incense tree" (Song 4:13), and incense usually has connotations of idolatry. She smelt like pagan incense- and Solomon loved it. Solomon's wives offered pagan incense to their gods (1 Kings 11:8 "his foreign wives, who burnt incense and sacrificed to their gods"). See on "nard" Song 1:12.

Song of Solomon 4:15 a fountain of gardens, a spring of living waters, flowing streams from Lebanon-

It seems likely that Solomon wrote down his inspired Proverbs (a result of the wisdom God gave him) and the Song about the same time. In Proverbs he uses the figure of a well of living water to describe spiritual words and thinking (Prov. 10:11; 13:14; 14:27; 16:22). Yet this is the very figure which he uses concerning his worldly bride (Song of Solomon 4:15). He wanted to see her how she wasn't. He sees her as the garden of Eden, and yet 'eats' in her in defiance of Divine law.

Beloved

Song of Solomon 4:16 Awake, north wind; and come, you south! Blow on my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and taste his precious fruits-

This is an open invitation to Solomon to have sex with her. She sees herself as a living aphrodisiac. She doesn't wish to be a closed garden to him (:14). She is the very fulfilment of the bad Gentile woman of Prov.

7, and yet Solomon refuses to see the connections. He was the young man being led astray, and down to the grave by this woman. She likens her body to her garden which she says is now his; and this is the backdrop for her final statements at the end of the Song that her vineyard is now hers alone, Solomon can have 1000 [women], but her vineyard is now hers and closed to him. This abrupt ending of the Song is surely enough evidence that this is not at all a 'romance for eternity' nor an allegory of the love of Christ and the church.

CHAPTER 5

Song of Solomon 5:1

Lover

I have come into my garden-

As noted on Song 4:16, this clearly means that he accepted her invitation to sleep with her. The garden is the girl, as made clear in Song 4:15 where he calls her a garden with fountains in it, and she responds by asking him to enter the garden and eat from it. His entry into her is therefore undoubtedly an allusion to sexual entry into her, even though they are unmarried. They have sex before marriage and the whole thing is so sensual and carnal- a major difficult for the allegorical, "Christ and the church" approach.

My sister, my bride-

AV "my sister, my spouse". Solomon's assumption that he was Messiah, the promised seed of David, presumably led him to assume that he was likewise the promised seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. No less that four times he calls his Egyptian girlfriend "my sister, my spouse" (Song 4:9,10,12; 5:1). This repeated emphasis seems to me to be an allusion to the way in which the patriarchs called their wives their sisters (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:6-11). And yet clearly enough, these incidents were lapses of faith for which they were rebuked. Yet Solomon didn't want to see it like that; they did it, therefore he could. David his father had horses and many wives; therefore he could. His sense of morality, of right and wrong, was controlled by the precedents set by his worthy ancestors. And so often we see this in supposedly Christian lives- the weak elements of our fathers we tend to feel are perfectly acceptable for us too. We do just what Paul says we should not do- we compare ourselves amongst and against ourselves, rather than against the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 10:12).

The idea of a wife who is also a sister is one of many allusions in the Song to Adam and Eve in Eden. He sees her as Eve and she invites him

to eat her fruit, which he eagerly does. He wants a little of both, the blessings of Eden and also the forbidden fruit.

I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, friends! Drink, yes, drink abundantly, beloved-

The idea may be that they hear some voice urging them as friends and lovers to feast and get drunk on love. For clearly Solomon has entered the closed garden of the previous verses, and they are having sex.

The invitation to drink abundantly is yet another indication of an inappropriate liking of wine in the Song. "Beloved" is plural in: "Eat, friends! Drink, yes, drink abundantly, beloved". Friends and lovers are being invited to also eat and drink as Solomon has just done. Perhaps this phrase is a voice which comes to the Shulamite in her nightmare; at this voice, she awakes (:2) and recounts her nightmare. After Solomon congratulates himself on sex with her, she hears a voice that invites other lovers to do likewise. In this we see the voice of her inner complex about the fact that Solomon is a polygamist and in fact has sex with other women apart from her.

Song of Solomon 5:2 Beloved

I was asleep, but my heart was awake-

After the sex of :1, she again has a nightmare that he has left her, as she does in chapter 3. This is true to life; it is psychologically inevitable that a woman in her situation, with so many reasons to fear she will lose him, will have such nightmares. And her dream reflects her own complex about sex. Solomon has knocked on her closed door, and she hasn't opened to him. She fears that he wanted sex but she didn't give it to him. She fears that she had somehow failed him in the sex they just had (see on :1).

It is the voice of my beloved who knocks-

See on :12 for "dove". At the same time as Solomon was having this romance, at the start of his reign, he was writing up his Proverbs; including Prov. 8:34: "Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at

my gates, waiting at my door posts". This may be an intentional contrast with the bad woman of Prov. 7, who tempts men to furtively enter the doors and gates of her house at night. And Solomon failed in this; for the Song of Solomon speaks of the "gates" of his illicit Gentile girlfriend (Song 7:13), outside which Solomon waited secretly at night (Song 5:2,4). He does precisely what he condemns and warns others against. He failed to personalize wisdom, apparently thinking that mere possession of such Divine truths was enough to justify him, regardless of personal behaviour.

Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my hair with the dampness of the night-

She imagines that he calls her "my undefiled", ignoring the fact she had admitted to not keeping her own vineyard / virginity. He sees her as "undefiled" even though he has just slept with her and she is no longer a closed garden (Song 4:16; 5:1). They both create images of each other which are simply not true to reality, and fall in love with those images rather than reality. In the dream, Solomon has been out all night. We continue to get the impression of the secret, illicit nature of their relationship, unable to be seen in public together (Song 8:1).

Song of Solomon 5:3 I have taken off my robe. Indeed, must I put it on? I have washed my feet. Indeed, must I defile them?-

She is asleep and doesn't want to go and open the door immediately, because she has no attractive robe on, and by walking over the dirt floor to the door, her feet would become dirty. She is aware that Solomon's praise of her has often been of her external adornment with jewellery and clothing, and she fears to be seen by him without them. This is typical of the whole nature of their relationship.

Song of Solomon 5:4 My beloved thrust his hand in through the latch opening. My heart pounded for him-

He apparently spoke or called to her at this time (:6) but she made no response because she was obsessed with putting on her make up. It was this focus upon externalities which cost her the relationship

at that point. Her nightmare reveals the inner truth of the situation and relationship, which unconsciously she recognized. The language of Solomon thrusting in his hand through a keyhole is clearly sexual. She imagines him fingering her and her body responding as in :5. But she feels she hasn't responded to this as she should have done and therefore he had left her. In her nightmare, she is feeling guilt over sexual inadequacy.

Song of Solomon 5:5 I rose up to open for my beloved. My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock-

The scene is true to psychological reality. She fears being seen by him without her attractive clothing and makeup on; but then her love for him gets the better of her. She has begun painting herself with myrrh, but with the liquid still dripping off her fingers, she goes to the door and fumbles with the lock with her slippery fingers. But it is too late. He's gone (:6). The whole scene looks forward to the New Testament pictures of the unworthy not opening immediately to the Lord Jesus when He knocks on their door at His return. Like the foolish virgins, they want time to prepare, rather than trusting in His love and realizing that no amount of external religious preparation can qualify them for Him. Although I deny that the Song is an allegory of Christ and His bride, at this point I would say that this particular scene is indeed used as a parabolic representation of the reaction of the unworthy to the Lord's return. Unless we respond to His coming immediately, then we will not find Him (Lk. 12:36). The immediacy of our response will be a function of our faith in His love for us, and our love for Him—as well as our understanding that we cannot make ourselves acceptable to Him by mere external appearance and cosmetic adornment.

Song of Solomon 5:6 I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had left-

Presumably because he feared being spotted by the night watchmen on patrol. We get the impression a curfew was in place in the city. There is always the sense of fear that they would be caught together (Song

8:1). See on :5. R.V. "My soul had failed me when he spake". This situation is made sense of by understanding she was in the house of the women, being prepared to meet Solomon, when he was meeting her secretly and already sleeping with her. He was indeed obsessed with her to have done that.

He had gone away. My heart went out when he spoke. I looked for him, but I didn't find him. I called him, but he didn't answer-

Notice the sequence here:

While she sleeps at night, the bridegroom comes and knocks [unworthy virgins sleeping instead of being awake; the Lord Jesus comes; Lk. 12:36 uses the same figure, of the Lord's return being like a knock]

She replies that she's not dressed properly, makes excuses about her feet, she can't come and open [the unworthy don't respond immediately]

He tries to open the door from the outside, putting his hand through the latch-hole [by grace, after the pattern of Lot being encouraged to leave Sodom when he hesitated, the Lord will be patient even with sleepy virgins in His desire for their salvation]

Her heart is moved with desire for him [the rejected still call Jesus 'Lord, Lord'; they love Him emotionally]

She starts dressing herself up, and then is overtaken by desire and rushes to the door, her hands dripping all kinds of perfume and make up over the lock as she opens it [cp. the virgins going to buy oil, the unworthy trying to prepare themselves all too late, not trusting that their Lord loves them as they are at the moment of His coming]

But he's gone, he withdraws himself [all too late, the door is shut, He never knew them]

Her soul fails [the shock of rejection]

She seeks him but doesn't find him, calls but he doesn't answer [Prov. 1:28; the rejected call, but aren't answered; they seek the Lord early, but don't find Him. Hos. 5:6 is likewise relevant: "They shall go

with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them"].

She feels tired of her relationship with him ("sick of love").

She is persecuted by the world around her ["condemned with the world"]

The basic point is that if we don't immediately respond to the Lord's knock, we show ourselves to not love Him enough. If we don't open immediately, it's as if we didn't open at all. The Lord wants us as we are, bleary eyed and without our make up, but with a basic overriding love of Him , and faith in the depth of His love, which will lead us to immediately go out to meet Him . This will be the ultimate and crucial divide- between those who believe in the Lord's love for us, who have known the humanly unknowable love of Christ; and those who think they need to prepare themselves to make themselves good enough for Him. Solomon called to the girl through the keyhole: "...my undefiled...". But she doesn't want to immediately come to Him because she doesn't want to meet him with 'defiled' feet (Song 5:2,3). She couldn't believe his words, that in his eyes, she was undefiled. And the enormity of the passion of Christ for us is likewise so hard for us to accept. In Song 3:1 we find the girl again at night, dreaming of having Solomon with her. But when one night he does actually come, she doesn't go to meet him immediately. And there's a warning for us. Like Israel we may 'desire the day of the Lord,' study prophecy about it, write about it, enthuse about it. But when He comes, to what end will it be to us? Will we in a moment drop everything and go to Him, believing that He loves us just as we are? Or will we run off to buy oil, slap make up on...? The tragedy of Solomon's girl was that she started putting her make up on, and then her heart smote her and she opened the door, her hands dropping perfume all over the bolt (Song 5:5 RV). She finally realized that he had loved her for who she was, how she was. But it was tragically too late. He'd gone. We need to learn that lesson now, to know the love of Christ... so that in that moment when we know for

sure 'He's back!', we will without hesitation go to Him with that perfect / mature love, that casts out fear.

Song of Solomon 5:7 The watchmen who go about the city found me. They beat me. They bruised me. The keepers of the walls took my cloak away from me-

Her difficulty with "the watchmen" and their anger with her is understandable if she was in the "house of the women", guarded within the harem- and yet had escaped from it to have a tryst with the king for whom she was being prepared. "The walls" may be the walls of the harem house rather than of Jerusalem. Walls are used in a more figurative sense in Song 8:10 "I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers". The keepers of the walls were therefore the guards of the harem and of the virginity of the candidates within it. And she had sneaked out of it to sleep with the king for whom she was being formally prepared.

The word for "cloak" is only used about the inappropriate clothing of Jerusalem's wanton women (Is. 3:23). She had previously met these men in her previous dream of Song 3, and it's as if they had then given her a warning. But now they beat and bruised her. She lives in constant fear that soldiers guard Solomon's bed from her, and the night watchmen are after her. AV "took away my veil from me" could imply that these men raped her. Then we would read "bruised" in the sense of rape as in Ez. 23:3,8.

I noted on Song 1:1 that the Shulamite acts as a prostitute, and there are many connections between her and the bad woman of Proverbs who is a prostitute. Prostitutes wore veils (as Tamar in Gen. 38:14,15, and this is the sense of Song 1:7 ISV "Why should I be considered a veiled woman beside the flocks of your companions?"). Solomon's lover wears a veil (Song 4:1,3; 6:7) which the watchmen angrily pull off her to expose her for who she is (Song 5:7). The Shulamite acts like a very forward woman, if not a prostitute, and her veil may suggest that.

Song of Solomon 5:8 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I am faint with love-

Her worst nightmare on that night of losing her beloved is that she would then bump into the daughters of Jerusalem, in her bedraggled and bruised state (:7). And so it happens in her dream. Her words here could be read as saying that she is "sick of love" (AV), that she is over it, it's all too much for her, and they need not fear her competition any more. Or, it can be read as "faint with love", as if she defiantly tells them that he is still her beloved, and she is passionately in love with him. The ambiguity is perhaps intentional, to show us the understandable but contradictory feelings within her.

Daughters of Jerusalem

Song of Solomon 5:9 How is your beloved better than another beloved, you fairest among women? How is your beloved better than another beloved, that you so adjure us?-

The daughters of Jerusalem mock her as "fairest among women", repeating Solomon's term of endearment to her. They were clearly aware of his relationship with her. And there she was, without her make up, bruised and bedraggled after being raped (see on :7). So they are being deeply sarcastic. The daughters of Jerusalem seem to be implying she has other "beloveds" and they mock her claims to see anything uniquely wonderful in her beloved Solomon; bear in mind that his Hebrew name meant "beloved". "What kind of a love is your love?" (Heb.) suggests them mocking her belief that she is foolish to think she and Solomon have a unique relationship. Or "What is your beloved before another (beloved)?" may suggest she has had other men before [as she admits when she says she hasn't kept her own vineyard] and will go on to love other men [as she seems to say she will at the end of Song 8, declaring her vineyard as her own to give to others and she wafts away].

Beloved

Song of Solomon 5:10 My beloved is white and ruddy. The best among ten thousand-

David had been described as the chiefest among ten thousand (2 Sam. 18:3), and yet this is how Solomon's illegal girlfriend describes him. He had clearly told her all about his father David- and she evidently pleased Solomon by describing him as being like his father, even though she probably had never known David. He sought a wife who would be a surrogate parent rather than a help-meet. Perhaps she has in view Solomon's 1000 wives. She may imply that he is better and more worthy than them all, and she is his special one. So she naively believes; for all her manipulation and hard headed self confidence, she is a fool to believe this.

We must continually remember that Solomon is the author of the Song. Here he is putting words in the Shulamite's mouth. She describes him as if he is an erotic statue, everything about him is perfect. Whilst this may indeed have been how she saw him, there lacks not vanity in Solomon constructing these descriptions of himself. We note how few verbs there are in her description of him in :10-17. It's all about external appearances, things, nouns, not who the person was or what they did. Solomon describes her likewise in Song 7:2-8.

NEV "best" translates the word for 'banner'- he has the greatest banner among 10,000. She has earlier boasted that "his banner" [s.w.] over me is love" (Song 2:4). Even if Solomon had 10,000 women, she likes to think that his banner for her was the greatest. We see again an insight into human psychology when 'in love'. The most obvious realities- in this case, that he had many other women whom he loved- are recognized but not really engaged with, because of the narrative believed. Which in this case was that Solomon had a special love for her that was unique and greater than what he had for any of his other women. This feature of human psychology explains why people get involved with all manner of damaging situations- entering relationships with addicts, believing against all evidence that their child is in fact an

innocent victim when the evidence is all the other way. This feature of our psychology is to be harnessed positively- Abraham hoped against hope, against all the reasons not to hope, and his hope / faith was rewarded. What matters is choosing the right narrative to believe, and the only ultimately true narrative is the saving love of God in His Son.

The Shulamite is a classic case of cognitive dissonance. On one hand she believes Solomon's protestations of love, on the other, she sees ample evidence that he has many other women in his life. And this creates mental disturbance, as witnessed by her nightmares about Solomon marrying other women. Typically in such a case, the person will try to reduce the inconsistency or contradiction by changing their cognitions to cause greater alignment between them so as to reduce the dissonance. Coping with the contradictory information or ideas is stressful and we seek to avoid or reduce this. They may simply avoid any information that increases the dissonance (confirmation bias) and an 'in love' person will often do this. No amount of facts, figures nor logical argument will mean anything- not even Solomon having hundreds of wives but still claiming to love this new one. Just as a man only watches media that confirms his political views, disregarding other media as biased and untruthful, so the 'in love' person will see only what they want to see and will be aggressive towards any other source of information; and that perfectly explains the tension between the Shulamite and the Daughters of Jerusalem.

Cognitive dissonance is typically experienced as psychological stress when persons participate in an action that goes against one or more of the contradictory cognitions or bits of information they are receiving. In her case, she has to either decide Solomon is a liar in what he is telling her; or somehow reinterpret his love for many other women. His love for those other women, and theirs for him, is a given that she began recognizing was a simple, observable fact. So she has to go the way she does at the end of the Song- removing herself from him, declaring him a liar, being sarcastic to him, telling him to clear off, and look-

ing elsewhere for love. More observations on the Shulamite's cognitive dissonance on Song 6:3.

Song of Solomon 5:11 His head is like the purest gold. His hair is bushy, black as a raven-

The description of him as having a head of gold and then proceeding down his body in description to his feet... all recalls the picture of the idol image seen in Daniel 2. Constantly we have hints that when compared with other scripture, this woman and this relationship are absolutely spiritually fake. His head like gold may refer to the gold crown Solomon wore in the nightmare she had of him wearing a gold crown, given to him by his mother, on the day he married many other women (Song 3:10). But now she sees that as something dashing and beautiful; and we see how selective we can be in our interpretation of imagery, seeing only what we want to see. Her praise of his thick black hair reflects her lack of awareness that his brother Absalom had the same kind of hair, which he was proud of- but it was the cause of his death.

Having said that she is "dark" in complexion (1:4,6), she later comments in 5:11 that to her, Solomon is also "dark" [s.w.]

Song of Solomon 5:12 His eyes are like doves beside the water brooks, washed with milk, mounted like jewels-

Solomon sees her as a dove with dove's eyes (Song 1:15, also Song 5:2), and she then says here that he has dove's eyes (Song 5:12). They tend to praise each other in the same language. Indeed this is an accurate record of a romance. But the praise is all of externalities, no attention is paid to the character, and there is absolutely no spiritual dimension to the relationship. This says so much about Solomon. This lack of attention to true spirituality means that his love of Divine wisdom at the time was purely of an intellectual, theoretical nature. And this is the warning for us. For he was writing this love song in his youth when he married foreign women, and it was then that he received Divine wisdom and wrote it up in the book of Proverbs.

Song of Solomon 5:13 His cheeks are like a bed of spices with towers of perfumes. His lips are like lilies, dropping liquid myrrh-

She has just tried to make herself pretty with liquid myrrh and perfume. She had delayed opening the door to him because of it, and landed herself in so much trouble (:5). She fails to see that attraction is not based on external things like myrrh. But actually they have had no other basis for their relationship. Even she is without her perfume and myrrh and a bedraggled rape victim (:7), she can only think in terms of externalities. For that is all these two have between them.

Song of Solomon 5:14 His hands are like rings of gold set with beryl. His body is like ivory work overlaid with sapphires-

She seems to claim she knows his naked body. But she praises his hands not for the hands in themselves, but because of all the gold rings with jewels which he wears, giving the impression his hands / fingers are gold. Even in her distraught state, she can only think of him in terms of externalities; for that was the sole basis of their relationship.

Song of Solomon 5:15 His legs are like pillars of marble set on sockets of fine gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars-

As noted on :14, even in her desperate situation, she can only praise Solomon for his external appearance. There is no implication that she praises him for his personality or character.

Song of Solomon 5:16 His mouth is sweetness; yes, he is altogether lovely-

She hereby boasts that she has experienced deep kissing with him. She no longer wishes to keep the relationship secret. As he sees her as so entirely beautiful, so she sees him (Song 4:7; 5:16). This mutuality of praise is indeed part of the "in love" period. But it was all a matter of external observation of each other, and because of that, the relationship fell apart.

This is my beloved, and this is my friend, daughters of Jerusalem-

She seems to boast to them that he loves her, he is her friend. She clings on even in her desperation to the myth he had got her to believe,

that he loved her uniquely and not the daughters of Jerusalem, whom he disparaged to her as "thorns" compared to her as a lily (Song 2:1-3). Solomon ought to have considered wisdom his sister and friend (Prov. 7:4), as he had exhorted others; but instead he considers this Egyptian woman to be both those things.

CHAPTER 6

Song of Solomon 6:1

Daughters of Jerusalem

Where has your beloved gone, you fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?-

This is bitter sarcasm. They ask her where Solomon has “turned aside” so that they can come and seek him with her, using a word elsewhere associated with ‘turning aside’ in apostasy to other gods. They sarcastically quote Solomon’s terms of endearment back to her. But with the hint that she’s just another foreign woman and he’s turned aside to her gods.

RV “Whither hath thy beloved turned him?”. The idea could be ‘To which other girl has he now turned aside?’. They mock her idea that Solomon uniquely loves her, when He is a polygamist with perhaps hundreds of girls waiting in the house of the women for their turn to sleep with him. Solomon wrote this Song, and is creating this sarcastic response from the daughters of Jerusalem, putting it in their mouths. He is thereby mocking the naivety of his lover.

Beloved

Song of Solomon 6:2 My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies-

In Song 4:16; 5:1 she has invited Solomon to enter her closed garden and he does so. The reference is to them sleeping together, and the language of beds, feeding and lilies has elsewhere been used in the song for sexual activity. She is therefore telling the daughters of Jerusalem that she has slept with Solomon, and therefore he is hers exclusively (:3). For all her self confidence and forwardness, she is betrayed as a laughable fool to believe this. In Song 7:6,8, Solomon likewise openly talks about their sexual encounters; their relationship is now no longer secret.

The references to the lover as a shepherd in Song 1:7; 6:2,3 have led some to think that the beloved is also in love with a shepherd. But this is to miss the clear connection in Hebrew thought between a king and a shepherd. David was to shepherd Israel (2 Sam. 5:2) and the seed of David likewise would be a shepherd over all Israel (Ez. 37:24).

Her response may mean that yes he has gone to his flock of other women, and thus his macho manliness is seen by her as yet another aspect of his amazing masculinity.

Song of Solomon 6:3 I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. He browses among the lilies-

Being in the lilies has been language elsewhere used in the Song for sex. I noted on :2 that she is retorting to the daughters of Jerusalem that because she has slept with Solomon, therefore he is uniquely hers and this, she thinks is her final answer to her competitors. But of course her argument holds no water. She appears foolish and naive, for all her sexual manipulation of Solomon. And remember that Solomon is the author of this Song- he is painting his ex as a fool to believe him. She has likened herself to a lily (Song 2:1). Possibly she is replying that her man is not with her at this point because he is off with his other lilies, having sex with them ['in the garden', :2] and this makes him even more of a man in her eyes. A classic case of seeing what you want to see, a way of reducing the huge cognitive dissonance she is going through (see on Song 5:10).

The idea is "I am his and he is mine, he who is feeding his flock among the lilies". Although he is off with other women, she likes to think he is still uniquely hers in his affections. Again Solomon is writing this to mock her naivety as discussed on :1.

Lover

Song of Solomon 6:4 You are beautiful, my love, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners-

This may continue the dream she has been having beginning in Song 5:2. Or it may be that now Solomon appears on the scene and

comforts her with expressions of his unique love for her, to calm her after her nightmare. Tirzah was obviously an established city at the time, and was later briefly the capital of the ten tribe kingdom. But it was destroyed at the time of the exile, and this would be evidence that the song indeed dates from Solomon's time, and the Song is not the fantasy of some post exilic writer as the critics lamely claim; see on Song 7:4. Jerusalem was the "perfection of beauty" (Ps. 48:3; 50:2), and yet through this allusion Solomon is showing that unlike for David, Zion was not his chiefest joy, but this Gentile girl was. "Lovely *as* Jerusalem" is another example of Solomon wanting to see this Gentile woman as if she were quintessentially Jewish, "as Jerusalem".

She now imagines Solomon praising her for her unique beauty, despite being with other women. See on :3. Song 6:4-7 repeats Solomon's praise of her in Song 4:1-3. She is remembering his words then and repeating them to herself, when assaulted by the reality of the fact he is with other women. This is totally psychologically credible.

Song of Solomon 6:5 Turn away your eyes from me, for they have overcome me. Your hair is like a flock of goats, that lie along the side of Gilead-

Solomon is defying his own wisdom in Prov. 6:25: "Don't lust after her beauty in your heart, neither let her captivate you with her eyelids". The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again. He warned the typical young man about being captivated by the eyelids of the Gentile woman (Prov. 6:25); yet it was the eyes of Miss Egypt that he openly admitted stole his heart (Song 4:9; 6:5). We note his total inability to be self critical and have a sense of temptation and the possibility of personal failure. This seems to go with the territory of assuming that mere possession of Divine truth somehow justifies us of itself.

She has her hair down, a sign she was sexually available. Time and again the imagery of the song is distinctly sexually selective and without appropriate modesty in the contemporary culture. And Solomon clearly likes it.

Song of Solomon 6:6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes, which have come up from the washing; of which each one has twins; none is bereaved among them-

Without dental science, missing teeth would have been common in those days, even in youth. But she apparently had none missing. Here and in Song 4:3 "your mouth is lovely" suggests they had already been involved in deep kissing.

Song of Solomon 6:7 Your temples are like a piece of a pomegranate behind your veil-

Solomon has seen behind her veil, the symbol of her virginity, for he has entered her closed garden by sleeping with her (Song 4:16; 5:1). But he likes to still perceive her as a virgin. They both create images of each other which are simply not true to reality, and fall in love with those images rather than reality. Although I am no fan of the allegorical interpretation of the Song, it could be argued that this looks ahead to Christ's imputation of righteousness to His bride.

I noted on Song 1:1 that the Shulamite acts as a prostitute, and there are many connections between her and the bad woman of Proverbs who is a prostitute. Prostitutes wore veils (as Tamar in Gen. 38:14,15, and this is the sense of Song 1:7 ISV "Why should I be considered a veiled woman beside the flocks of your companions?"). Solomon's lover wears a veil (Song 4:1,3; 6:7) which the watchmen angrily pull off her to expose her for who she is (Song 5:7). The Shulamite acts like a very forward woman, if not a prostitute, and her veil may suggest that.

Song of Solomon 6:8 There are sixty queens, eighty concubines, and virgins without number-

The Queens were the women of noble birth he had already married; the virgins refer to the women in the house of the women still waiting and being prepared to sleep with him. Solomon boasts that he

has many Jewish queens and concubines, but there is only one woman, the Egyptian, that he truly loves (:8,9); he even calls her his "sister", associating himself thereby with Egypt. See on :13. This is his answer to her nightmare which began in Song 5:2, about the daughters of Jerusalem. Perhaps at that time he had 60 queens and 80 concubines, a number which would later rise to 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3). Solomon wrote this Song; he is painting her as naive to have believed that she was unique despite him having so many other women in his life. He leaves us to join the dots and see her as a fool for believing him at this point.

Song 6:8 refers to queens, concubines and virgins. The next verse speaks of queens, concubines and "the daughters" (Song 6:9). These are surely "the daughters of Jerusalem". Harems were comprised of virgins who were prepared for the king and once readied, they slept with him. After this, some were chosen as queens. The others, no longer virgins, were counted as "concubines" if they weren't chosen as queens. The book of Esther describes just such a harem. "The daughters of Jerusalem" would then refer to the virgins in Jerusalem who were being prepared to go and sleep with Solomon, in order for him to choose whether he wanted them as his queen or not. And they were "of Jerusalem", Hebrew women. Hence their jealousy and spirit of bitter competition against this foreigner who had come amongst them.

Song of Solomon 6:9 My dove, my perfect one, is unique-

Solomon seeks to persuade the girl that really she is his special love, better than all his women of :8. We marvel at her naivety in believing him.

She is her mother's only daughter. She is the favourite one of her who bore her. The daughters saw her, and called her blessed; the queens and the concubines, and they praised her-

This is simply not the case, obviously. She has just had a nightmare about the daughters of Jerusalem mocking her. And she is aware of Solomon's existing harem (:8). And he tries to persuade her that actual-

ly his queens, concubines and the daughters of Jerusalem think she is in fact wonderful. They clearly do not, and she is presented as hopelessly foolish in believing Solomon, who likewise presents himself as no more than a sweet talking womanizer.

The allusion is to "the daughters will call me happy / blessed" (Gen. 30:13); Solomon has a vision of this Egyptian girl as becoming as one of the founding mothers of Israel. But her heart is far from it. He speaks as if she is in fact already this. He is in love with an image and projection upon her which is simply unrealistic and untrue.

Solomon assures her that all his existing harem consider her just as he is telling her she is- the most beautiful and beloved of them all. Or perhaps she is imagining him to be saying this, i.e. the words of Solomon are in fact still part of her own fantasy.

Solomon likes to view positively the fact that she is her mother's only daughter, and therefore her mother's favourite daughter. Yet we know that the woman fantasizes about bringing Solomon back to her mother's house in Egypt. He is not at all factoring in that if she is her mother's favourite daughter, then there will always be a strong pull back to her mother and homeland.

Song of Solomon 6:10 Who is she who looks forth as the morning, beautiful as the moon, clear as the sun, and awesome as an army with banners?-

The reference is to the morning star. This apparently is common Egyptian love poem language. Solomon was clearly very influenced by Egypt from a young age, and likes to try to talk to the girl as it were in her own terms. He presents her as the brightest of all the stars, and more awesome than an entire army. The idea is that although he admits he does have a harem (:8), he seeks to persuade her that she is the brightest of all the stars, she is the **sun** and moon, and greater than an army with banners. The significance of "banners" is that she had rejoiced that his banner over her was love (Song 2:4). He is saying that his banner over her was far greater than that over a whole army of women.

And she appears, for the time being, to believe his story. Which may well have been a standard story trotted out to all his many women.

Or we can read "an army with banners" as NIV "stars in procession". This would fit the context of describing her as one amongst many, the prettiest star amongst many others in the procession of stars.

Song of Solomon 6:11 I went down into the nut tree grove, to see the green plants of the valley, to see whether the vine budded, and the pomegranates were in flower-

AV "I went down into the garden of nuts". Entrance to the locked garden has been used by the couple to reference their lovemaking (Song 4:16; 5:1). He could be implying that he had slept with her in the hope that she was "in flower" and would fall pregnant. He calculated that this was going to comfort her more than anything at this time; he is trying to show that he is very serious about their relationship. "Pomegranates" have been used as erotic imagery in Song 1:6; 4:13. And she uses his reasoning here to urge him to sleep with her in Song 7:12.

Plants, fruitfulness, vines budding, pomegranates etc. are all sexual symbols in the song. Solomon could be saying [or she is imagining him as saying, or the daughters of Jerusalem are imagining him as saying] that he has gone to his other women, the orchard of trees representing his harem. And he was then blown away by his desire for her and how attractive he found her (:12).

Song of Solomon 6:12 Without realizing it, my desire set me with my royal people's chariots-

The idea is that he assures her that the sexual encounter of :11 had made him "beside himself" [NEV "Without realizing it"]. He felt he had been as it were whisked away by the passion she stirred in him, "she put me in the chariots of Ammi Nadib". Perhaps this was an Egyptian phrase. He is by all means trying to persuade her that he found her sexually superlative. We noted the confusion between the carriage / chariot and the marriage bed of Solomon in Song 3:9.

LXX "There I will give thee my breasts: my soul knew it not: it made me as the chariots of Aminadab".

Solomon tried to see in her an Israelite woman, "O daughter of my princely people" (when she was the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh, 6:12 cp. 7:1), comparing her body parts to various geographical places in Israel (e.g. goats on Gilead, 4:1; the tower of David, 4:4; "as beautiful as Tirzah, as lovely as Jerusalem" 6:4), so she tried to see him as an Egyptian. They were trying to see each other as who they were not... and so the relationship was doomed to failure.

Or we can go with RV "my soul (or, desire, RV marg.) set me among the chariots of my princely people". She could be saying that for a moment, she was back amongst her father's chariots, her princely, superior people to whom she wanted to return. This would then be in the same vein as her desire to return to her mother's house.

Daughters of Jerusalem

Song of Solomon 6:13 Return, return, Shulammite! Return, return, that we may gaze at you-

This would appear to be the sarcastic comment of the Israelite girls after the Egyptian girl has run off away from them. They call her the Shulammite, the Jerusalem girl, mockingly. Whilst "Shulammite" is not the exact female form of "Shlomo", Solomon, the inexactness may be because they are mocking her by this term, as if to call her 'Solomon's wannabe lover who didn't quite make it'. For they all know she is a dark skinned foreigner and not really a Shulammite. The girl is presented in Song 5:7 as bedraggled, without her makeup and having been raped. Having made her defence of herself to them, she runs off; and they sarcastically invite her to return so they can look at her. This would assume that the nightmare dream which began in Song 5:2 is here continuing.

Lover

Why do you desire to gaze at the Shulammite, as at the dance of Mahanaim?-

Perhaps the tension between the two groups- the Jerusalem women and the Egyptian girl and her family (see on :8,9)- is behind the enigmatic reference to “the company of two armies” or “the dance of the two camps”. Solomon has to now carefully broker between his Egyptian woman and the daughters of Jerusalem. He asks them rhetorically why they want to gaze at her. The idea is of a girl dancing before two camps, one who support her with encouragement, the other who detest her and shout insults. And Solomon would be saying that he doesn't wish for this competitive situation to arise. He may be implying to the daughters of Jerusalem that they too need fear no competition, and so there need be no dance of comparison. And yet Solomon confirms that indeed this Egyptian girl is a Shulammite, a girl of Jerusalem, Yerushalem. She is one of the daughters of Jerusalem, so he decides; and therefore there should be division between her and the daughters of Jerusalem, as if they were in two camps. Again we observe that Solomon projects an image onto her, as an Israelite daughter of Zion... and believes it. Regardless of the reality.

These words could still belong to the daughters of Jerusalem. The context is the situation described in :11 where Solomon has gone to other women. The rhetorical question could be “why should you look at your own woman when there are so many others who will dance and present themselves to you?”.

CHAPTER 7

Song of Solomon 7:1

How beautiful are your feet in sandals, prince's daughter! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skilful workman-

This continues the lover's praise of the Egyptian girl as she dances in the preceding verse in Song 6:13. But the praise of her is from the feet to the head, rather than from head to foot as in the previous praise of her in Song 4,5 and 6. This might be appropriate to her being praised whilst dancing, as her footwork would be observed. "The turns of your thighs" (Heb.) would also be an observation relevant to dancing, and Song 6 has concluded with the Shulamite at the dance of Mahanaim. "Your feet in sandals" is literally "your steps in sandals", as if her step dancing is being admired. We have confirmed that she was no peasant girl, as some commentators imagine due to misreading the earlier metaphors about Solomon as a shepherd of sheep, but rather a "prince's daughter", likely Pharaoh's daughter. Again we note how physical is his appreciation of her; he sees nothing spiritual in her only the delicateness of her adorned feet, her exquisitely turning thighs, smooth belly (7:3), streamlined neck, commanding nose and deep-sea eyes (7:5). All of which fade and degrade with the passing years. As mentioned previously, it would appear the girl is naked before Solomon and he is praising her.

He describes her thighs as if they had been rounded by a skilled artisan. But the maker of her body, and of all bodies, was God. He is the skillful and beautiful creator, but Solomon doesn't make this obvious point. God is nowhere in his thinking.

Song of Solomon 7:2 Your body is like a round goblet, no mixed wine is wanting. Your waist is like a heap of wheat, set about with lilies-

The comparison with "mixed wine" shows again that Solomon was well acquainted with wine from an early age, and viewed it positively. Perhaps this is why his mother specifically warns him against alcohol in

Prov. 31. His later turning to alcohol mentioned in Ecc. 2 would therefore be an example of how the weaknesses of youth are developed in old age, unless they are cut out of life and thought. Solomon's path to apostasy can be traced as beginning in his youth, rather than as the result of some mid life crisis.

We note how few verbs there are in his description of her in :2-8. It's all about external appearances, things, nouns, not who the person was or what they did. The Shulamite describes him likewise in Song 5:10-17.

Song of Solomon 7:3 Your two breasts are like two fawns, that are twins of a roe-

Breasts as twins means Solomon considered them, after much observation, to be perfectly identical- apparently something he found attractive. "The lilies" is likewise a sexual allusion; see on Song 2:16. He was ravished with this Egyptian girl, especially with her breasts (Song 4:5; 7:3). Alluding to this he could confidently exhort in Prov. 5:18-20 AV: "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe (Song of Solomon language); let her breasts satisfy thee... be thou ravished always with her love... And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange (i.e. Gentile) woman?". How, indeed? But 999 women later, it was a different story for Solomon. Solomon writes in Prov. 5:18-20 as if it is of course unthinkable that he should have been ravished by a Gentile woman; but he had been.

Song of Solomon 7:4 Your neck is like an ivory tower-

The idea is that her neck was very long, and this kind of praise of women is found in Egyptian love poetry. Again we see Solomon influenced by the culture of Egypt. And yet women emphasizing their long necks are condemned in Is. 3:16. Indeed the description there of the condemned daughters of Zion sounds very much like those we are reading in the Song of Solomon about the Egyptian girl.

*Your eyes are like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bathrabbim.
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus-*

Again we note that Solomon likens her to the geography of Israel. She was an Egyptian, but he wishes to see her as an Israelite, he projects this image onto her, and falls in love with the image rather than the reality. Even though as noted above he was very much immersed himself in the language and culture of Egypt. Heshbon at that time was under Israelite control, but soon afterwards it was lost by them (Is. 16:8,9). Again this is evidence that the Song was written indeed in the times of Solomon and not, as the critics claim, much later. See on Song 6:4.

"By the gate of Bathrabbim" could refer to the gate looking toward Rabbath-Ammon on the north side of the city. "The tower of Lebanon" could refer to a tower on the house of the forest of Lebanon.

Song of Solomon 7:5 Your head on you is like Carmel. The hair of your head is like purple. The king is held captive in its tresses-

She has her hair down, a sign she was sexually available. Her hair was purple and "like Carmel" or 'like carmine', s.w. "crimson" in 2 Chron. 2:7,14; 3:14. She presents thereby as a whore. Time and again the imagery of the song is distinctly sexually explicit and without appropriate modesty in the contemporary culture. And Solomon clearly likes it.

"And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart *is* snares and nets, *and* her hands *as* bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" (Ecc. 7:26) is a clear reference back to Solomon's own entanglement with this girl. In his younger days, he had found "the hair of thine head like the purple of a king [i.e. he imagined her to be suited to him, the King of Israel, when she wasn't]; the king is held captive in the tresses thereof" (Song 7:5 RV). Solomon is the author of the Song... it is his own spiritual autopsy. He realizes he was held captive by this Gentile woman, caught by her, just as he had warned in his Proverbs about the danger of the Gentile woman.

Song of Solomon 7:6 How beautiful and how pleasant you are, love, for delights!-

Heb. "among all the delights" could reinforce Solomon's claim that he considered her the most beautiful of all his women; although he carefully says that his other wives also provided "delights". And the Hebrew is literally "How pleasant is the love of this one". He clearly implies that he has already had sex with her, as admitted openly in :8. After the conflict with the daughters of Jerusalem in Song 5,6, the relationship is out in the open, and Solomon is confirming her own statements that they had already had sex (Song 6:2).

Song of Solomon 7:7 This, your stature, is like a palm tree, your breasts like its fruit-

He admires her for being tall. Dark skinned Egyptians were held to be generally taller than Israelites (Is. 45:14), and Solomon finds this attractive.

Song of Solomon 7:8 I said, I will climb up into the palm tree. I will take hold of its fruit. Let your breasts be like clusters of the vine, the smell of your breath like apples-

The allusion is to her nipples as vine clusters. All this sex stuff we would expect after the wedding. But there is nothing at all in the Song to suggest romance-wedding-sex-children-family life. Only premarital sex. Solomon here clearly states that he has had sexual activity with this Egyptian woman. He likens himself to a small man with her much taller than him. Clearly he has been dominated by the Gentile, just as he had warned Israelites not to be. He considers himself free of any personal moral restraint.

Song of Solomon 7:9 your mouth like the best wine, that goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding through the lips of those who are asleep-

He says that deep kissing with her gives the same after effect as drinking enough wine that you talk in your sleep afterwards. It's all very human and carnal. This was all a conscious disregard of Bathsheba's warning to Solomon not to love wine nor to be destroyed by foreign

women (Prov. 31:4). And Solomon published her words in his anthology of wisdom known as the book of Proverbs. He likewise condemns love of alcohol throughout Proverbs, just as he does relationships with Gentile women. But he does the very things he condemns. His wisdom, as he admits in Ecclesiastes, was “far from” him personally. He failed to personalize the truths he knew. And in this he is a warning to all who know God’s Truth. For like him, we can be tempted to assume that mere possession of it justifies us.

He is directly going against the wisdom he had taught in Prov. 7:21: “With the flattering of her lips, she seduced him”.

The Hebrew literally refers to the smoothness of her lips; and Solomon admired the smoothness of the lips of his illicit Gentile girlfriend (s.w. Song 4:3,11; 7:9). Again we see Solomon doing the exact opposite of the wisdom and theoretical truth he was blessed with. Solomon in Prov. 7:5 argues as if mere intellectual assent to the truths he was teaching would keep a man safe from sexual temptation and the flattery of bad women. But Solomon himself possessed all this truth and failed miserably in this area.

We may also enquire as to how did Solomon know about wine unless even at a relatively young age, he knew about the sensation of wine from personal experience? He had again denied his own wisdom: “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red... when it goeth down smoothly” (Prov. 23:31 RV).

Grammatically, “that goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding through the lips of those who are asleep” would imply this is spoken by the woman. In this case, she as it were playfully completes Solomon’s sentence. This would explain the change of gender of the speaker in the middle of the verse.

Beloved

Song of Solomon 7:10 I am my beloved’s. His desire is toward me-

The woman comes over as incredibly naive to believe that indeed, Solomon’s desire is toward her and she is his; despite his admission to

having a harem of women and virgins in waiting to become his wives in Song 6:8. As noted on Song 1, she comes over as self confident, manipulative and forceful of her agenda. But even she is presented as being duped by smooth words. It's a case of "deceiving and being deceived". The allusion is to "your desire shall be for your husband" (Gen. 3:16). The Genesis ideal was that one man and one woman have mutually exclusive desire for each other. But she is going ahead with a relationship with a man whom she knows has a harem, and he likewise accepts that. And it could be argued that the *man* having desire for the woman is in fact an inversion of Gen. 3:16, where the *woman* is to have desire for the man. Both of them are trying to find a way out of the curse, to have a little of both- unrestrained sexual freedom whilst free from the curse for sin. And it doesn't work. She offers him to eat her fruit in her closed garden, but eating it leads to his spiritual death.

The Bride Gives Her Love

Song of Solomon 7:11 Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field. Let us lodge in the villages-

"Lodge" is "pass the night", "among the henna bushes" (Heb.- **the same word is translated "henna" in Song 4:13**). So she is setting up another night together, clearly for sex in bushes thought to be aphrodisiacs. Still they appear to be unable to openly live and sleep together in the palace; for they are still unmarried, and the opposition with the daughters of Jerusalem is still unresolved.

Song of Solomon 7:12 Let's go early up to the vineyards. Let's see whether the vine has budded, its blossom is open, and the pomegranates are in flower. There I will give you my love-

Vines and pomegranates are sexual symbols in Song 1:6; 4:13; 7:9; 8:2. It could be that she urges him to sleep with her because she considers herself fertile. For he has used the figures in this way in Song 6:11, in trying to persuade her that he is very serious about their relationship and is sexually attracted to her in the hope of her getting pregnant. Again we note how forward she is, and "there I will give you my love"

sounds as if she is sexually dominant and has control over Solomon, for all his power and glory.

LXX "there will I give thee my breasts". The language is alluding to the bad Gentile woman of Prov. 7: "Come, let us have our lovemaking until morning; let us revel...". As noted so often, Solomon consciously makes these connections within his writings. He knows that the Gentile woman has indeed led him astray; he perceives so accurately the mechanisms. But does nothing about it in terms of repentance.

Song of Solomon 7:13 The mandrakes give forth fragrance. At our doors are all kinds of precious fruits, new and old, which I have stored up for you, my beloved-

A woman offering a man delightful fruit in a garden recalls again the scene of Adam and Eve in Eden. Solomon on one hand realizes that he has been led to eat the forbidden fruit, with terrible consequences. But never is there a hint at repentance. The emphasis upon aphrodisiacs throughout the Song underlines the impression that these two are only in love on a physical level. If external adornment and drugs are required by them for the enjoyment of their relationship right at the start of it, then there is clearly no bond of personality or spiritual aspect to it at all. And so it proves finally unsatisfactory, and the love song doesn't end with marriage and children as we expect, but with cynical and bitter breakup.

Whose "doors"? The language is that of Mt. 13:52 about a householder who brings forth things new and old. She seems to have in mind his returning with her to Egypt under the influence of her aphrodisiacs and sexuality. That is the continued theme in the next verse (Song 8:1).

CHAPTER 8

Song of Solomon 8:1

Oh that you were like my brother, who nursed from the breasts of my mother! If I found you outside, I would kiss you; yes, and no one would despise me-

"Outside" begs the question 'outside where?'. The reference fits most comfortably to the idea of the house of the women, from which she occasionally slipped out for secret meetings and sex with Solomon.

She deeply wished that Solomon was her brother, i.e. an Egyptian, because in that case their relationship could be much more open, they would not be despised because of their love, and Solomon could come and live in her mother's house back in Egypt (:1,2). The courtship was held in lonely, secluded places, with the fear of being seen and mocked (Song 5:6; 8:1,14; 7:11,12). Clearly she was attracted to Solomon rather than to the God of Israel. Solomon describes her in terms of the geographical features of Israel, he wished her to be as one of the founding mothers of Israel (Song 6:9 = Gen. 30:13). But in the end, she was an Egyptian girl, and her heart was always going to be there. She hates the way she's not accepted in Israelite society, and their relationship has been a series of clandestine meetings in the open air, with her having nightmares in Song 3,5 about the Israelite soldiers and watchmen finding her.

Sin never satisfies. The daughters of Jerusalem and the watchmen (i.e. the prophets? Gad, Nathan? Whoever wrote Ps. 127 as a warning to Solomon?) were constantly watching them and being critical of her (Song 5:7,16; 8:1), they despised her. See on :6. Contrary to what Solomon had tried to kid her, the daughters of Jerusalem did not love and adore her (Song 6:9). They despised her, and the girl now sees things as they really are- straight after having sex at the end of Song 7.

She speaks of her taking the initiative and grabbing hold of and kissing Solomon in the street. This is exactly the picture of the wicked

Gentile woman of Prov. 7:13. Again the point is made that Solomon was blind to his own wisdom, it took no personal lodgment in his own heart. And so it can be with those who hold and teach God's truth today. Even worse, since Solomon is the author of the Song, he hereby recognizes what has gone wrong and does nothing about it.

Song of Solomon 8:2 I would lead you, bringing you into my mother's house, who would instruct me-

We recall how Isaac brings his wife Rebekah into his mother's tent to consummate the marriage. Her desire is still as it was at the start of the Song, as noted on Song 1:4. She wanted to be instructed by her Egyptian mother, not by Solomon; who was in the business of writing his Proverbs at this time to instruct in God's ways. And she wants to be the one who would "lead you" [Solomon], or guide him. She didn't want his instruction, but wanted to instruct him in the ways of Egypt. It is the intended reversal of how Isaac brought and lead Rebecca into his mother's tent (Gen. 24:67). The Shulamite desires instruction from her Egyptian mother; whereas Solomon repeatedly has taught in Proverbs that the spiritual person would seek instruction from God's wisdom mediated through believing parents.

I would have you drink spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate-

This could be an offer of conditional sex, if Solomon were to agree to her returning to Egypt and being under the instruction of her mother. I take Song 8:1-8 to be her fantasy, her desperate dream, for Solomon's return to her and for them to have an open, legitimate, public relationship but on her terms- in Egypt. She dreams of asking him to commit to her ("set me as a seal upon your heart", Song 8:6), but concludes by telling him to flee far away from her, although she still calls him "my beloved" (Song 8:14). It's a tragic, unfulfilled ending.

Song of Solomon 8:3 His left hand would be under my head. His right hand would embrace me-

The conditional tense of "would" is significant. As suggested on :2, it could be part of her fantasy. Or it could also be her attempted ma-

nipulation. She seems to be saying 'I'll have sex with you, as you offered in Song 7:12, *if* you agree to be an Egyptian' (and Song 4:16; 5:1,4-6 would imply they *did* have intercourse). But throughout the Song, Solomon describes her in Jewish terms, he likens her to many well-known places in Israel: the Heshbon fishpools, the tower of Lebanon etc., seeing the way her hair draped over her breasts as reminiscent of how Mount Gilead looked (Song of Solomon 4:1,4). He wanted to see her as an Israelite girl, and so that was how she appeared to him.

Song of Solomon 8:4 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up, nor stimulate my love, until he so desires-

Again she tries to stop the daughters of Jerusalem, the Jewish candidates as Solomon's wives, from being attractive to him. But her bitter adjuration of them is mere words, it has no power.

Daughters of Jerusalem

Song of Solomon 8:5 Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?-

The answer of the daughters of Jerusalem is said as a final triumph. They bid her watch an engagement procession coming into Jerusalem from the wilderness outside the city, with a young woman or girl (see on :8) leaning on her beloved, Solomon [for so his Hebrew name Jedidiah means in Hebrew]. Heb. "whose is this one who comes up...?" is gloating that as in chapter 5, Solomon arrives in a marriage procession-but not for her, the supposedly "beloved", but for another woman.

Earlier in Song 3:3 the daughters of Jerusalem have teased or jeered the Shulamite in the same way, asking her again "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness...?". Then, it was Solomon's wedding procession, and the description climaxed in the statement that the marriage litter is paved with love... for... the daughters of Jerusalem! The whole scene spoke of how the Shulamite progressively comes to understand that Solomon is in fact also in love with the daughters of Jerusalem and will marry them too. Only now in Song 8 do we see the

Shulamite facing reality and walking out of the relationship, with the daughters of Jerusalem again jeering her.

LXX "Who is this that comes up all white...". The woman had earlier feared that her darker skin colour would be a turn off for Solomon. The daughters of Jerusalem now rub this in- that Solomon is appearing with a white skinned woman leaning on him as his partner.

Beloved

Under the apple tree I aroused you. There your mother conceived you. There she was in labour and bore you-

"Aroused" can as well be translated "undressed". The Egyptian girl watches in shock at the engagement procession coming from the desert, realizing with shock that she has been trounced, and all Solomon's words of unique affection were proved untrue as he arrived with his latest girl. Her angry response is totally imaginable. It is, effectively, "But you and me, we had sex together! And now... you're marrying another woman! And she's only a kid, she's not even got developed breasts!". It's the stuff of movies. She even claims they had slept together at the very spot where his own mother both conceived and gave birth to him, as if this was intended to be a defining moment in cementing their relationship. She has likened him to a hind deer, and hinds were known to return to their own birthplace beneath a tree to give birth to their own fawns. She considers therefore that their sex together at that spot was really a unique bond which precluded him from now marrying another woman. Now finally she accepts the reality of the fact that he is a polygamist, and has other women in view.

Lover

Song of Solomon 8:6 Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is strong as death. Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a very flame of Yahweh-

The Shulamite asks Solomon to not have her as another ring on his finger [or bracelet on his arm], but a seal upon his heart. Although at this point the relationship breaks up, Solomon does marry her, and she turns away his heart. A seal implies ownership; and she did in the end want his heart, which was her intention from this point onwards. So in the end, he did set her as a seal on his heart- and the Biblical commentary is that she turned away his heart from God. Her reference to jealousy is to be understood in the context of all the jealousy we have encountered in the Song between her and the daughters of Jerusalem, and her nightmares of Solomon's marriages with other women. That jealousy, and the flashes of fire that come out of it in terms of the difficult relationship between her and Solomon, was going to continue in its cruelty until the grave. And in Ecclesiastes Solomon recognizes this. Again, seeing he is the author of this Song, he is lamenting that indeed this is how it had been with him and her. The cruelty of her jealousy would follow him to his grave. She is saying that love means jealousy- and indeed God's love is often associated with His jealousy. And therefore, she reasons, it's impossible to be in love with a polygamous man without jealousy issues, and the flashes of fire in their relationship were in fact of Yahweh in that His ideal for marriage was being compromised. Solomon wrote this. He put these words in the mouth of his character. He realizes it, writing perhaps now in later life, the reflections of a polygamist. No wonder he had to build Pharaoh's daughter a separate house to live in. Life together was going to be impossible.

"Love is strong as death" may mean that she claims marriage to be unto death, sealed permanently. And therefore seeing he has other women, her jealousy will be cruel as death. Because finally she accepts that Solomon involved with many other women. The cruel jealousy would also refer to that between her and the daughters of Jerusalem, which she suggests will meet Yahweh's flaming condemnation. For "A lightning-flash from Yah" is speaking of Divine judgment (Dt. 4:24 etc.). Solomon was led by this woman into an impossible situation, a

polygamist married to a woman who loves him [so she claims] with the love that has to therefore be jealous. And it will lead to his condemnation. Solomon is the author of all this- he places these words on her lips. He realizes he is going to be condemned because of this woman, but as in Ecclesiastes, he just accepts that and will not come to repentance.

"Love is strong as / unto death" is parallel with jealousy being cruel as / unto sheol, the grave, death. She is protesting that she still loves him, and her parting words call him "Beloved". She says she will love him unto death, but because love and jealousy are linked, she will be jealous unto death. And that jealousy will be like sparks of fire, from Yahweh. And so began an impossible relationship. She loved him to the end of his life, to death, and was jealous to the end of his days- because he was a polygamist. And so he had to live with the flashes of fire from her, which were from Yahweh in that this was judgment for breaking His marital principles. For all his wealth and power, this woman was indeed like bands upon him. It was misery for them both, for life. And he is writing this Song looking back on his life, as the "old and foolish king who will not be admonished", recognizing that.

Or we could read these words as Solomon's words to his new bride with whom he has just arrived, a marriage vow demanding her total loyalty to him. His mention of jealousy was made in the hearing of the Egyptian girl. There was indeed a jealousy as cruel as the grave between the Jewish girls and Solomon's Egyptian lover. And so the Song ends on a most unhappy note; Solomon is unfaithful and the two separate, rather than there being the consummation we might expect. As noted on :21, he is alluding to the language of covenant with God (Dt. 11:18) and applying it to his wife's covenant with himself. He is warning that just as Yahweh is jealous if His covenant is broken, so he will be. And yet he felt free to flout the covenant himself, as he had just demonstrated by doing all this in view of the Egyptian girl he had been so infatuated with.

Solomon made the classic mistake of assuming that his will and word were effectively equivalent to the word of God. In Prov. 6:21 he speaks of the need to bind the law about your heart and neck; but in Song 8:6 he asks his lover to “set *me* as a seal upon thine heart” and arm. And often in Proverbs he uses the language of the blessings for keeping God’s law and turns them into the blessings for keeping *his* law; e.g. “My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart” (Prov. 7:1,2). And we all do the same in essence, whenever we assume that our consciences are effectively the will of God; when we ‘play God’ by allowing our words and will to count as if they are *His* word.

It is *God’s* word that is to be the seal upon our heart. It is that which is to be bound in our hearts and or a sign upon our hearts (Dt. 11:18). That was the real sign of the covenant with God. But Solomon considers that the covenant with Yahweh could be subverted into a binding covenant between his wife and himself. Even though he himself had two timed her and had multiple partners.

Song of Solomon 8:7 Many waters can’t quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned-

Solomon had taught that the sexually unfaithful man will pay all the wealth of his house because of it, and still will not make things right (Prov. 6:31). Solomon claims in this hasty marriage vow that although he is wealthy, he now has found true love with his next wife, which cannot be purchased for money. And yet in the end, he did give all the wealth and glory of his house for his sins, because his wives turned away his heart from Yahweh and his kingdom / house suffered because of it, as he so often laments in Ecclesiastes. And he was indeed utter-

ly scorned after his death (1 Kings 12:11), as he foresaw coming at the end of his life in several passages in Ecclesiastes.

Sarcasm fills the Song of Songs and Song 8 is full of it. Solomon was the most wealthy man on earth at the time, and the Shulamite is saying that even all his wealth cannot now buy her love. She scorns it. In :11,12 she will comment further upon Solomon's way of paying money to those who find and "keep" his potential wives. And probably she alludes to how the women agreed to be considered as his wives because of the perceived financial benefit to their families.

Daughters of Jerusalem

Song of Solomon 8:8 We have a little sister. She has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is to be spoken for?-

The girl has arrived leaning upon Solomon. But she is still a minor and her breasts not developed yet (Ez. 16:7,8). Before her day of being spoken for, the day of actual marriage, the daughters of Jerusalem vow they will prepare her to be a replacement for the Egyptian woman (see on :9).

To speak for a woman meant to ask her to get married. The same Hebrew is in 1 Sam. 25:39 when David sends messengers to speak for Abigail to be his wife. The daughters of Jerusalem are cruelly teasing the Shulamite. Solomon's wedding procession, to another woman or women, is approaching. And, by the way, we have an up and coming small breasted sister, Solomon will speak for her soon. This is getting at the way Solomon has praised the Shulamite for her large breasts and she is confident in her breasts being attractive to him ["my breasts were like towers", :9]; for her breasts are mentioned multiple times in the Song especially in the LXX.

The Song ends without the famous final scene which we expect in a romance. The expectation of a wedding and walking off into the sunset is subverted by the concluding songs. The girl laments how she can't kiss Solomon publically or be with him without being despised; and longs to be able to take him back to her mother in Egypt (8:1,2). She

utters the final warning to the daughters of Jerusalem not to stimulate Solomon, and then breaks down with the lament that jealousy is cruel as death (8:6) and unrequited love is impossible; Solomon's true love cannot be bought by her. The daughters of Jerusalem then speak of how they have a younger sister whose breasts aren't yet developed, but they will care for her until she is ready for Solomon (8:8,9). The Egyptian girl then reminisces in the past tense: "I was a wall, and my breasts were like fortress towers. Then I found favor in his eyes" (8:10). Solomon throughout the Songs has commented positively upon her breasts; and now she is left to lament that that is all just how it was, it's all over now. She then makes the enigmatic comment about how Solomon has a vineyard which he leases out, and yet she is a vineyard which belongs to her alone: "My vineyard, which belongs to me, is at my disposal alone". The Songs have likened her and her sexuality to a vineyard (Song 2:13,15), and her romantic meetings with Solomon appear to have sometimes been in a vineyard. Solomon spoke of her breasts as grapes (7:7). But Solomon's vineyard, she says, was associated with Baal-Hamon- Lord / husband of a multitude. She finally realized that he was a womanizer, who would go on to have over 1000 women in his life... Lord [or husband] of a multitude. Perhaps his 1000 wives and concubines lay behind her reference to the 1000 shekels that Solomon can have for his vineyard (8:12). But now she was splitting up with him, her vineyard was hers alone, her grapes were now solely at her disposal and were not his any more. The final couplet of the Song is one of bitter sarcasm, typical of the worst order of romantic breakup. Solomon says that his "companions"- the daughters of Jerusalem whom she had so hated- are listening carefully to her, as he is. And she responds by telling him to run away, whilst still calling him her "beloved"- for although jealousy is cruel as the grave, her love for him was unquenchable by many waters. Or perhaps this too is sarcasm. So the Song ends with Solomon in rather a bad light- off to his next women, whilst the Egyptian girl walks off the scene bitterly protesting her love for him and how

she's a victim of circumstance and jealousy. Yet Solomon, presumably, authored the Song. I read it therefore in the same way as I do Ecclesiastes- his jaded statement of how life has been for him, how he sought fulfilment of his human lusts but it never worked out, leaving him with a tragic sense of unfulfilment because he had not gone God's way.

The allegorical interpretation falls down over the fact that there is no wedding scene. All we have is her nightmares of Solomon marrying the daughters of Jerusalem rather than herself. And the final scene in Song 8 where she faces the blind reality that he has married other women. Solomon wrote the Song, and ends it with him as it were having the last laugh. Her naivety, mocked by the daughters of Jerusalem, characters created by him to mock her, is revealed before all.

Song of Solomon 8:9 If she is a wall, we will build on her a turret of silver. If she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar-

The daughters of Jerusalem may be sarcastically saying that they will be the door that keeps her within the harem once they have inducted her into it, and the wall that keeps her within it. On :11,12 I discuss the payment for introducing a woman to the harem and keeping her there. "Boards of cedar" were the typical building style in Solomon's buildings, so we can assume the reference is to the house of the women which was also built with cedars. And the daughters of Jerusalem are saying they will keep the new candidate safely within it, unlike the Shulamite who escaped from it to meet secretly with Solomon.

This is the language with which Solomon once described the Egyptian girl. The daughters of Jerusalem vow to turn this young girl into a woman just as good as the Egyptian. The idea of enclosing her and keeping her as a wall may mean that they promise to keep her chaste until the wedding, unlike the Egyptian woman whom they all knew would not have been a virgin at any wedding with Solomon (Song 5:1; 6:12).

Beloved

Song of Solomon 8:10 I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers, then I found acceptance in his eyes-

She is very confident of her own beauty, as in Song 1:5; 8:10. She comes over as bold and ever on the initiative; she goes out looking for him (Song 3:1-5; 5:6,7). She is the very fulfilment of Solomon's 'bad woman' of the Proverbs. She hears how the new queen for Solomon is still a minor and her breasts not developed yet (Ez. 16:7,8). And so she bitterly reflects about her own sexual adequacy and how "I was a wall [with turrets]", and her breasts which she speaks of were "in his eyes as one that found favour" (Song 8:10). For Solomon had repeatedly praised her breasts (Song 2:7; 3:5; 4:9; 8:14). But now she sees that was all surface level; he is going to marry a young girl from the daughters of Jerusalem, once her breasts have grown. And she has had to endure watching the engagement ceremony.

But "acceptance" translates *shalom*. She is saying that in the past, when he admired her breasts, she was seen by him as the Shulamite, the feminine form of 'Solomon'. She "was in his eyes like [the] one who has found peace" / Solomon. Then she was the Shulamite- but not now.

Song of Solomon 8:11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon. He leased out the vineyard to keepers. Each was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit-

This is another parable of a vineyard, of which there are at least two in scripture. The vineyard may refer to virginity or sexuality (as in Song 6:11; 7:13). His 1000 shekels received for it may refer to his 1000 wives. The Songs have likened the Shulamite and her sexuality to a vineyard (Song 2:13,15), and her romantic meetings with Solomon appear to have sometimes been in a vineyard. Solomon spoke of her breasts as grapes (Song 7:7). But Solomon's vineyard was associated with Baal-Hamon- Lord / husband of a multitude. She finally realized that he was a womanizer, who would go on to have over 1000 women in his life... Lord [or husband] of a multitude.

The "keepers" would be the keepers of the "house of the women", whom Shulamite has twice clashed with, at least in her dreamscape in Song 3 and Song 5. By contrast, Shulamite says that she keeps her own vineyard- she is now free from her guards and out of that house. And as she has commented in :7, her love cannot now be bought for money. Or "Each would bring in his fruit [i.e., a virgin] for a thousand pieces of silver" could refer to the harem managers being rewarded for each woman they brought in to it. But now the Shulamite rejects both Solomon and harem life in the next verse: "My vineyard, which belongs to me, is still before me. Keep your thousand [pieces of silver] and the two hundred for those who guard its fruit" (8:12). "Those who guard its fruit" would then refer to the guards of the harem.

It could be argued that 1000 silver shekels for rent of a vineyard was very expensive. Even in mid third century Greece, rental of a vineyard was never more than 20 silver shekels. 1000 shekels was a huge royal grant (Gen. 20:16; 2 Sam. 18:12) and was the cost of a fine vineyard in Is. 7:23: "The fine vineyards, each with a thousand vines and each worth a thousand pieces of silver, will be overgrown..." (GNB). The Shulamite could be saying that Solomon's vineyard, his harem, his being Baal Hamon, lord of the multitude, was grossly overpriced anyway. He was hollow, it was all for show, with far less real value than appeared. And she wasn't wrong. Likewise the 200 shekel payment to the vineyard guards was out of proportion. However we can also read her as saying that the 1000 women were worth only one shekel each- they were cheap women, paid only one shekel to enter the harem. And there is the suggestion that they were rented women, for the 1000 shekels is rental money. She is accusing all the others of being whores, bringing to a peak her struggles with them throughout the Song.

Song of Solomon 8:12 My own vineyard is mine alone-

Perhaps his 1000 wives and concubines lay behind her reference to the 1000 shekels that Solomon can have for his vineyard (8:12), possibly referencing the money given as reward to those who brought girls

into the harem [a shekel / woman]. But now she was splitting up with him, her vineyard was hers alone, her grapes [elsewhere used as symbolic for her nipples] were now solely at her disposal and were not his any more.

The thousand are for you, Solomon; two hundred for those who tend its fruit-

I suggested on :8 that this talk of vineyards forms an inclusio with Song 1:6, where the girl's vineyard is her virginity, which she had given Solomon, much to her brothers' anger. Now she insists her vineyard is hers alone and not his. And he can let his 1000 wives (:11) have his own vineyard. Those who tend the fruit may refer to the daughters of Jerusalem, whom she saw as being responsible for getting the young girl of :8 to get engaged to Solomon, and who were the servants of his 1000 wives. "The thousand" would be an appropriate way for her to talk about the harem. This is the only place in the Song where she addresses Solomon by his name, Solomon- unusual for a wife in those days. She was supposed to call him by some title; recall how queen Esther had to address her husband. To use his first name was rude. But she is telling him things as they are...

Lover

Song of Solomon 8:13 You who dwell in the gardens, with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice!-

This is very hard to interpret, but the idea seems to be that he addresses the Shulamite ["you" is singular feminine in the original]. He sees her as still there "in the gardens", where they used to have their trysts. And he addresses also the listening daughters of Jerusalem, the "friends in attendance" upon the young girl of :8 whom he has just gotten betrothed to. "Let me hear your voice" is the very phrase he has used to the Shulamite in Song 2:14. I take this to mean that he is asking the Shulamite, in the presence and audience of the daughters of Jerusalem, not to forsake him. He still wants to hear her voice. She responds negatively by telling him to go away (:14), and yet still calls him

her beloved. This leads me to the suggestion offered on :14 that this ill-fated relationship only ends for a time; and Solomon does in fact marry Pharaoh's daughter.

We could read this as sarcasm. She says she has her "friends in attendance", when Solomon knew the daughters of Jerusalem hated her. And then "let me hear your voice" could be sarcastically saying 'Speak on, speak your truth girl, just carry on'. On the other hand, he did love her to some degree, and we can read this as if he wants her with him, so he can hear her voice. She likewise replies by asking him to go away, but still calls him her "beloved". And in the end they do marry, although it was a disaster.

But the 'enclosed garden' has been a figure for virginity, and entering the garden means sex. It's as if Solomon now addresses other women in the gardens, and the attendant friends, the daughters of Jerusalem, and asks them to attend to his voice, his voice of crooning love. Hence the Shulamite sarcastically responds in :14 by telling him to indeed clear off to them.

Beloved

Song of Solomon 8:14 Go away, my beloved. Be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices-

"My beloved" is male singular. These are the words of the woman, telling Solomon to go away, and to race on to his next tryst. Earlier she has invited him to be like a gazelle or young stag on the mountains of Bethel or cleavage, her own breasts (Song 2:17). Now she tells him to do the same on other mountains which have spices on them. The same word is used in Esther 2:10 of how the virgins in the house of the women, awaiting their night with the king, were prepared with "spices". Gazelles have a way of twisting and turning in a totally unpredictable way... and that was how she felt he was, always on the move, darting here and there in his endless search for sexual gratification. And so he was. Yet what happened to Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter? Despite this breakup, they did marry, and then Solomon built her a separate

house at a later point. I suggest that in writing this Song, he is looking back to their initial relationship and explaining how all went so wrong at the start, and how he now understands her motives for the relationship.

The Song ends abruptly, with the relationship at an end. The entire book has no particular plot or storyline. It begins with her talking about sex, and after various breakups and tensions, they abruptly leave each other. And this is the path of so many who live their lives without God in their relationships. There is no real plot, it's all about present pleasure, and so it ends. We are left feeling this, and seeing how this sad, vain, pointless, painful experience of "love" falsely so call will play its part in the disillusion and depression of Solomon in later life. We have the record of that in Ecclesiastes, and it is a picture of our postmodern, immoral age.

The final couplet of the Song is one of bitter sarcasm, typical of the worst order of romantic breakup. Solomon says that his "companions"- the daughters of Jerusalem whom she had so hated- are listening carefully to her, as he is. And she responds by telling him to run away, whilst still calling him her "beloved"- for although jealousy is cruel as the grave, her love for him was unquenchable by many waters. Or perhaps this too is sarcasm. So the Song ends with Solomon in rather a bad light- off to his next women, whilst the Egyptian girl walks off the scene bitterly protesting her love for him and how she's a victim of circumstance and Israelite jealousy. Yet Solomon, presumably, authored the Song. I read it therefore in the same way as I do Ecclesiastes- his jaded statement of how life has been for him, how he sought fulfilment of his human lusts but it never worked out, leaving him with a tragic sense of unfulfilment because he had not gone God's way.

We may well enquire why the Song was written and preserved. For who wants to keep such a record of a failed relationship, of passion which turned to pain? It is here that Divine inspiration comes into play. For the recording of it was inspired, as was the record of the nihilism of

Solomon in Ecclesiastes, for our learning. That we might see the end of sin, of thinking that mere possession of God's truth is enough, and not personalizing it. Another take is that the girl was indeed the daughter of Pharaoh (Song 7:1), and despite this stormy start to their relationship, the break up of Song 8 was only temporary and they did in fact marry; see on Song 3:4. Indeed he found her hands were as bands, as he laments in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs about the bad woman. And yet the Song of Songs is preserved as a record of how unspiritual relationships don't ultimately work. For she turned away his heart from Yahweh to the idols of Egypt. In the end, despite the apparent victory of Solomon's lust and power at the end of the Song, it is she who wins. For she turns his heart away from Yahweh and Israel, and to her idols and Egypt.



About the Author

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