

SONG OF SONGS

Study Guide

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Like the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, wrote the Song of songs from a confessional standpoint – not encouraging us to live as he lived, but to learn from his mistakes so that we do not repeat them. Even though Solomon was so wise it does not mean that he was always successful, faithful, or obedient to the wisdom that G-d had afforded to him. Solomon saw so much in his life as a futility - something that does not satisfy or have lasting purpose. He had wealth, opportunity, and ability. He was the king with authority, and, he confessed, he did not hold back his hand from anything that he wanted (Ecclesiastes 2v10). Solomon was not bound by wealth, lack of opportunity etc... he could do, and get, whatever he desired. And he did. After it all he said (paraphrased): “It was all in vain, it was all meaningless.” (Ecclesiastes 2v11) Solomon eventually got to the point where he concluded that to fear G-d and to keep His commandments is the only thing in life that truly satisfies, lasts, and endures for all of eternity (Ecclesiastes 12v13-14). Solomon did not always live with this mindset but, as he reflected on his life, he concluded that to obey G-d was the only correct and wise thing to do.

Many people will come away from reading the Song of songs and want to interpret it through one, or both, of the following two lenses:

1. *This book reveals G-d's love for Israel.* Throughout the Bible G-d does indeed speak of His covenantal relationship with Israel as a marriage. There is no evidence supported by the text, however, that would lead us to understand this book as having anything to do with G-d's relationship with Israel. Nothing in the book supports this allegorical interpretation.
2. *This book reveals Yeshua's love for the church.* (Nothing in the book supports this statement either).

What we do see, throughout the song, is that it is a story of a couple (the Shulamite and her beloved Shepherd husband) who had a wonderful relationship until a crisis, and a subsequent separation, struck it. The Shulamite was taken into Solomon's palace, presumably as his conquest bride (3v7-11), but she was unhappy and discontent there. She desired the love, the relationship, and satisfaction that she found in her husband/Shepherd. Solomon simply took her, believing that she was going to be a source of joy and satisfaction for him. This was a major obstacle that put the Shulamite and her husband's relationship in jeopardy, but, as we conclude the book, we discover that they were able to overcome the obstacles and eventually be reunited.

With G-d we can overcome the obstacles, trials, and attacks upon our marriages. Even if both parties are not committed to the marriage and only one is fully committed, and begins to act faithfully, it will bring about G-d's Presence, in a mighty way, upon the non-committal spouse - bringing about a change so that each person can, hopefully, grow in their commitment to the marriage. This is part of faith. When we are faithful (and even when we are faithless) G-d ALWAYS responds faithfully (2 Timothy 2v13).

Solomon uniquely wrote this Song (which is above every other song) in order to share with us wisdom and principles on how to build and maintain a G-dly marriage – a marriage between one man and one woman. This book does not relate to a historical event and nor is it told as a narrative, but rather it is a poetic song, scripted like a play, in order to provide marital counsel to the reader.

Marriage is a very important covenant. All covenants have one thing in common – to manifest G-d's glory. G-d uses marriage to describe His relationship with Israel (Isaiah 54v5, Hosea 2v16-20). Messiah Yeshua is called the bridegroom and we, the believers, are called His bride (Ephesians 5v22-33). Those who marry (just like anybody who has ever lived - Job 5v7) will have trouble in this world (1 Corinthians 7v28), but, in marriage, hardships and troubles can be tackled together. Through hardships, and overcoming obstacles, love can actually flourish and grow, and our marriages can be very powerful testimonies of love.

Marriage, however, is under attack – and this is not something new. Many people want to know how to get out of a marriage and still be pleasing to G-d. Biblically, the only ground for divorce is adultery (Matthew 5v31-32, Matthew 19v8-9). One should not however commit adultery in order to get out of the marriage. Solomon reveals to us important principles that lay the foundation for how marriages can overcome obstacles - bringing about a glorious change in the relationship between the man and his wife.

Note:

1. A successful marriage is one that is pleasing to G-d and glorifies Him. We need to choose to have the marriage that G-d intends for us to have. This requires spouses praying together, reading the Bible together and assisting each other to grow in their understanding of the Word of G-d.
2. Being dissatisfied in a marriage does not happen by chance. It happens when either one or both people in the marriage are building their own lives without consideration of their spouse – they are doing their own thing or going their own way. Marriages that are struggling mean that the individuals within it (either one or both) have succumbed to the world's mindset rather than the mindset of Scriptural truth.

Chapter 1

Verse 1: *“The Song of songs, which is to Shlomo (King Solomon):”*

Song: This is a song. It is a type of play which is put to music, and the words which are sung tell a story. The Scripture is not presenting it as a historical event. (e.g. A parable, taught by Jesus, was not a literal happening but we can learn from it.) Having had 700 wives (1 Kings 11v3) Solomon was not really acquainted with the Biblical model for marriage – one man and one woman together until death. Solomon desired this though. Solomon had numerous women, but this number was not satisfying to him – rather he looked for that one right woman.

The three main characters in this Song are:

1. The woman who is called the Shulamite

2. Solomon, the king
3. A Shepherd

Solomon beheld the glorious and G-dly relationship between the Shulamite and her Shepherd husband. He thought that if he took the Shulamite for himself he would experience the same kind of joy he saw in the relationship between her and the Shepherd. He did not think of her feelings and nor of those of her beloved. This is very similar to what David, his father, did when he took Bathsheba (Solomon's mother -2 Samuel 12v24) away from her husband - thinking that that would bring him joy (2 Samuel 11).

Verse 2: (The Shulamite): *"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth- for your love is better than wine. "*

Note: Poetry often speaks of things in a symbolic manner. By comparing love to wine (the first of many symbolic comparisons throughout this book) this verse sets the stage for us to interpret this song symbolically and not literally. Set on this foundation we therefore can conclude that *"let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth"* should not be interpreted literally but symbolically.

Kisses are related to kindness/love.

Mouth is synonymous with words. Her desire is for him to speak kind and loving words to her.

Love is being symbolised as wine.

Wine, oftentimes, is synonymous with gladness, happiness, or joy. There is a very specific process that grapes have to go through in order to make them into wine. It is a process that takes great patience and time. A good wine gets better with age and time. Building a G-dly marriage does not just happen but, here too, just like as with wine, there is a formula (process) or methodology that is required – a strong marriage needs to be based on Scriptural, G-dly, truth.

Verse 3: *"The fragrance of your oils is good. Oil poured out is your name. Therefore, virgins love you."*

Oil: It was used as a perfume, a fragrance.

The fragrance of your oils is good: She is not talking about his literal smell but is talking about the fragrance of his character, the essence of who he is. In those days (and even in Judaism today) there was a blessing for a good smell (Genesis 8v21, Genesis 27v27)

Name is synonymous with character (Proverbs 22v1, see also Ecclesiastes 7v1). Character is established by what a person does – their deeds. His deeds are like *oil poured out* – they are pleasing and acceptable to her.

Virgins: Righteous young women. They love him because of who he is, and because of what he does. He is the type of man that they want to marry.

Verse 4: *"Draw me after you and we will run. The king has brought me into his chambers.'*

(The Chorus): *'We will be glad; we will rejoice in you. Your love is better than wine. Upright ones love you.'"*

Draw me (pull me) after you and we will run: Usually this expression implies that someone is not happy with where they are at. She is asking for a change.

The king has brought me into his chambers: The Shulamite is in the palace, in the living quarters of the king (i.e. Solomon). She does not want to be in this place but wants to be taken away by her beloved to a different place.

Note: This verse lays the foundation for the right way to interpret this song.

We: Possibly the virgins (see verse 3)

Upright ones: The love that the Shepherd and the Shulamite share is a G-dly, good and upright love. Those who are righteous put their stamp of approval on this relationship.

Verse 5: (The Shulamite speaking to other women): *“Black am I, but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem - as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Shlomo.”*

Black am I: She calls herself black because she has skin that has been darkened by the sun. 3000 years ago, women of distinction, modesty or propriety would not go out and purposefully get a suntan.

Comely: Suitable. She is like an oasis in the desert - she meets a need and satisfies.

Daughters of Jerusalem: They are also primary characters in this song. The Shulamite communicates with them and teaches them.

Tents...curtains: They meet a need by providing privacy and protection to a household. They serve a purpose and accomplish their task. She is saying that she can accomplish what a wife should. She can serve the purpose of her spouse. Just as the curtains of Solomon were wonderful in his house so too can she fulfil her marital obligations wonderfully in hers.

Verse 6: *“Do not look upon me because I am black, because the sun has tanned me. The sons of my mother were angry with me and they set me to tend the vineyards, but my vineyard I did not care for.”*

Do not look upon me: In this context it means to not look down on her, judge her, because of her skin colour. It was not her objective to tan herself. The colour of her skin was beyond her control.

The sons of my mother: There appears to be a problem in the relationship between her and her brothers. She does not call them her brothers, but she distances herself from them in the way she refers to them (Much like in the parable of the prodigal son - the older son refers to his brother, when speaking to his father, as “this son of yours” - Luke 15v28-30). The Shulamite’s brothers looked down on her and did not see her as much of a woman, or as someone to be valued. They were like so many men who look at things in an inappropriate way. Men look to the outward, but G-d looks to the inward (1 Samuel 16v7).

They set me to tend the vineyards: She was made to work hard.

My vineyard I did not care for: She was so busy doing the bidding of others that she had no time to tend to her own outward appearance.

Verse 7: *“Tell me, the one whom my soul loves, where do you graze? Where do you make them lie down at noontime? For why should I be like one veiled, upon the flocks of your friends?”*

Tell me...where: A woman can often feel insecure in a relationship (especially if she does not know where her man is or what he is doing) as she bases things on how she feels rather than on the reality itself. In a relationship men tend to be driven by sight. Women tend to be driven more by how they feel rather than by what they necessarily see. Sometimes these feelings cause them to perceive reality differently. Males and females are not the same. There are significant differences between us.

Note: In verse 8 the Shepherd is going to address her insecurity in a very significant way for us.

My soul: This word speaks of **great** emotion, feelings, or sincerity.

Where do you graze: The implication is that she is asking him where he grazes his flock of sheep. She wants to know where he will be. She wants to be with him there – she does not want to be in the king's chambers.

Where do you make them lie down at noontime: She wants to know the little details about his life so that she can feel like she is a part of it.

Why should I be like one veiled: The Shulamite does not want to feel like she is wondering around blindly searching for him.

Upon the flocks/herds of your friends: Nor does she want to have to find out from his friends where he is and what he is doing.

Verse 8: (The shepherd): *“If you do not know, the beautiful one among women, go out in the footsteps of the flock. Shepherd your young flock by the dwelling places of the shepherds.”*

The beautiful one among women: The first way the shepherd allays her insecurity is to uphold and affirm her. He reassures her by saying that, in his mind, she is the most beautiful of women.

Go out in the footsteps of the flock... by the dwelling places of the shepherds: The implication of this is that he is reassuring her that he will be exactly where he should be, doing what he should be doing. He was not angry with her because of her insecurities and doubt, and nor did he forbid her from checking up on him. G-dly men do not exploit insecurity, but they try to bring comfort in the midst of it.

Verse 9: *“To a filly in Pharaoh's chariots I liken you, my spouse.”*

A filly in Pharaoh's chariots: Pharaoh had the best horses for his chariots. The Shepherd likens the Shulamite to one of those mares.

My spouse: Darling. By using this word, he is upholding the relationship that he has with her.

Verse 10: *“Your cheeks are comely in their rows. Your neck is like beads.”*

Comely: Suitable, fitting, or appropriate.

Note 1: He describes this woman in many different ways that are hard for us to comprehend. This teaches us another very important principle that is foundational in the way that we should view this song - it does not matter what someone else thinks about our spouse. Love is subjective and it is a private matter.

Note 2: Another important principle to note is that he does not describe his spouse erotically or in a sexual manner. Usually when he describes her body and anatomy he does so in a way that diverts the reader's attention from that part of her body to, generally, a picture of something beautiful and wholesome from nature. When we understand what those images of nature are conveying to us we realise that what is being taught is holy, G-dly, and highly moralistic.

Verse 11: *“They are rows of gold; they are made with little dots of silver.”*

Gold...with little dots of silver: Beautiful and costly jewels.

Verse 12: (The Shulamite): “While *the king is in his party my perfume gives forth its fragrance.*”

The king is in his party (this word can also mean ‘reclining’): They are apart. When the king was at his party, or reclining, she was not with him.

Perfume: Nard; probably spikenard.

Gives forth its fragrance: As long as the king was away she gave forth a pleasing fragrance. Perfume is intended to draw one to the wearer. She wanted the Shepherd, and not King Solomon, to be drawn to her.

Verse 13: “A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me; between my breasts it (he) lies.”

My beloved: She is not referring to King Solomon but to her beloved, the Shepherd.

Between my breasts: This is simply a poetic way to speak of the place where her heart lies. This separation has caused her to long for him and she is holding this longing in the secret place of her heart.

Verse 14: “A cluster of henna is my beloved to me in the vineyards of Ein Gedi.”

A cluster of henna... in the vineyards: She is saying that her husband is unique.

Ein Gedi: An oasis in the desert. It is situated on the western shore of the Dead Sea.

Verse 15: (The Shepherd): “Behold you are beautiful, my spouse. Behold you are beautiful. Your eyes are like dove’s eyes.”

Behold you are beautiful: Repetition shows emphasis. He is emphatically reaffirming her.

Dove’s eyes: Her eyes reminded him of something he found beautiful in a dove’s eyes. Doves are paired for life and they are constantly watching each other. When we fix our eyes on something or someone then that is what we think about. A dove is constantly thinking of his/her spouse.

Verse 16: (The Shulamite): “Behold you are handsome my beloved, even pleasant! Our bed is refreshing.”

Pleasant: Their love and their intimacy (“our bed”) is pleasant – it is highly appropriate/fitting. *Re-*

refreshing: Their relationship breeds life. It is refreshing to them.

Verse 17: “The beams of our house are cedar. Our furniture is fir.”

Cedar: This is the wood that the temple was constructed from. It alludes to holiness, that which is related to, and pleasing to, G-d. Their love was strong. It was a shelter for them, protecting them from the elements.

Note: Cedar and fir tree wood came from Lebanon.

Chapter 2

In the marital relationship the husband and the wife each have their own different roles to fulfil. It is only when we are in the right place, doing what we ought to be doing, that we will be able to properly fulfil the role that G-d has given to each of us. It is in this place that we will receive His provision and His anointing.

Throughout this book, the Shulamite is constantly wanting to leave the location she finds herself in to go to where the Shepherd is (the right location). When she is not where she is meant to be she displays a degree of uncertainty or doubt. The Shepherd responds to her by frequently affirming her and assuring her that he would always be where he ought to be, doing the things he ought to be doing.

Verse 1: (The Shulamite): *“I am a rose of Sharon; a lily of the valleys.”*

Sharon: The area known as the Sharon has to do with a place that is most fitting for roses.

Lily: The word **יושבת** is used here. It can be translated ‘rose’. In English, this word is also frequently translated lily (Note: regardless of how it is translated we know that it is speaking of beautiful flowers). This kind of flower is found in the valleys and not in the mountains.

Note: In a physical sense the Shulamite is not where she wants to be or where she should be. This, however, does not change her identity. Physical circumstances (or physical location) did not change her – she remained faithful to G-d (and her spouse). When she describes herself, in this way, she is simply affirming that being taken into Solomon's house did not change who she was and nor did it limit her access to G-d's provision. G-d's provision allowed her to overcome obstacles and flourish - despite her physical location.

Verse 2: (The Shepherd): *“As a rose is among the thorns thus is my spouse among the daughters.”*

A rose among the thorns: There is a great difference between the thorns on a rose bush and the rose itself. Here we see another example of the Shepherd affirming his spouse. To him she is unique. He likens her to a rose. Taking it a step further, he likens the rest of the women to thorns when compared to her.

Thorns: Thorns speak of opposition, but they also speak about protection. Thorns protect the beautiful blossom of a rose.

Note: It is very important for a man to convey that he sees his wife as unique, different, and special in comparison to all other women.

Verse 3: (The Shulamite): *“As an apple is among the trees of the forest thus is my beloved among the sons. In his shadow I delight, and I will sit. His fruit is sweet to my cheek.”*

An apple (tree) is among the trees of the forest: Most trees in a forest do not provide anything other than shade. An apple tree in the forest is unique, it is a treat. She is saying that he, in his uniqueness, provides for her.

Thus is my beloved among the sons: She recognises that he, too, is different or set apart from the other men. She compares him to a fruitful apple tree among a forest of ordinary trees.

Note 1: They are both affirming that they see something special in each other. When we said “I do” we entered into a marital covenant – an institution ordained by G-d. Only with this person will we be able to fulfil G-d's purpose in this marital covenant.

Shadow: The shade of his shadow is a comfort to her. She is taking comfort/delight in him and not in someone else.

Note 2: Another serious pitfall for marriages is when someone else, other than our spouse, meets a need/s in our lives. A marriage is in a dangerous place when one of that marital relationship (whether the husband or the wife) begin to find satisfaction in spending time with another individual of the opposite sex. This emotional connection is wrong, and oftentimes it can be laying a foundation damaging to the marital covenant. We need to guard ourselves from having that type of interaction (finding pleasure, satisfaction, our needs being met etc) with another individual who is not our spouse.

Cheek: Can be translated ‘mouth’ or ‘palate’. She is affirming that this relationship brings sweet satisfaction to her. This does not mean that our relationships are always going to be sweet, but our relationships should be a source, as much as possible, for pleasure and delight. Like the Shulamite, we too need to acknowledge and cherish those times of delight we have with our spouse.

Verse 4: *“I have been brought to the house of wine; his banner over me is love.”*

I have been brought to the house of wine (love): In chapter 1v4 the Shulamite was unhappy with where she was - the king having forced her into his chambers- and she wanted out. In contrast to that the shepherd brought her to the house of love.

Banner: Speaks of victory or dominance. He did not demand or force her to submit to him but she, willingly and joyfully, submitted to him because of the love he had demonstrated toward her (Ephesians 5v25, Ephesians 5v22). When the husband demonstrates love, and the wife responds in submissiveness both are drawn closer to the L-rd. By drawing closer to the L-rd the couple will also draw closer to each other, gaining a great deal of satisfaction that comes from a heavenly provided intimacy that most marriages sorely lack.

Verse 5: *“He sustains me with raisin cakes, he pampers me with apples, for I am lovesick.”*

He sustains me: She is talking about his provision. This phrase also hints to a degree of regularity – regularly he provides special things for her.

Pampers: In modern Hebrew, this word refers to upholstery. Without padding a chair would be uncomfortable and eventually become displeasing to sit on.

Raisin cakes: Today we would call it a dessert – treats eaten on special occasions.

Lovesick: When a person longs for home we call them “homesick”. Here the Shulamite is longing for the love she had with the Shepherd. We could call her “lovesick”. She is unhappy in the king’s chambers.

Verse 6: *“His left hand is under my head and his right hand hugs me.”*

His left hand is under my head: This shows a degree of support. He thinks of his spouse first. This attitude, that he has, leads to closeness, and to deep (heartfelt) affection.

Right hand: The right hand shows integrity and an uprightness.

Hugs: Embraces

Note: He is expressing two things to her:

1. His understanding of her need to be supported by him. She feels more secure when she knows that he is putting her and her needs before his own.
2. As he draws her to him it is done with honesty and integrity and not for selfish reason. i.e. He is not embracing her (loving her) manipulatively in order to get his own way.

Verse 7: *"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the deer or the ibex of the field, do not stir up love until it fulfils its desire."*

I charge you: A charge is something to be taken seriously and is associated with taking an oath.

Daughters of Jerusalem: Women of uprightness. Although love is able to overcome obstacles it can, very easily, be harmed. If we thoughtlessly violate the principles of the marriage covenant it can damage our marriage and make it very hard to be repaired. Here the Shulamite is counselling these women that marriage needs to be guarded and taken care of.

Ibex: A type of deer.

Do not stir up: Do not agitate or wake it up. Do not allow things to interfere with the roles and the Biblical perspective that we should have in regard to our marital relationship.

Note: The enemy is constantly wanting to attack the covenant of marriage. The purpose of a covenant (including a marriage covenant) is to glorify G-d. Is G-d pleased with our marriages? Within our marriages are we fulfilling what G-d has called us to fulfil, and, in so doing, are they bringing glory to Him?

Verse 8: *"The voice of my beloved, behold this one! He comes skipping over the mountains and jumping over the hills."*

Behold: She is making a public proclamation and calling everyone to pay attention to him. Even though it may be in different areas, humans (male and female), by nature, tend to have insecurities. She is affirming something about him that he needs to hear.

Mountains and...hills: In this context they relate to obstacles. A man needs encouragement from his wife - testifying of her confidence in him that he will be successful. A wife's lack of confidence in her husband will undermine their relationship and wound him.

In the same way that a man needs to affirm his love for his wife, a woman needs to affirm that her husband is capable, that he is competent and that he will accomplish what he has set out to do. That is what the Shulamite is doing here. She is proclaiming her confidence in his ability to overcome obstacles. This is a source of great encouragement for him.

Verse 9: *"My beloved is like a deer or a stag. Behold this one stands behind the wall. He is looking through the window, he is gazing through the lattice."*

Deer: Young and powerful

Wall: This wall is a wall of separation.

Looking...gazing: He is assessing the situation, and trying to figure out how to overcome this separation that has occurred between him and her. She believes he is going to solve this problem and bring them back together.

Verse 10 *"My beloved answered, and he said to me, 'Rise up my spouse, my beautiful one, come.'"*

Rise up...come: He is making the preparations for them to be reunited. She needs to respond to his call.

My beautiful one: Once again he affirms her.

Verse 11: (The Shepherd): *“For behold the winter has passed, the rain is over, it has left.”*

Winter: A time of gloom. Winters are not comfortable but are necessary to produce a glorious spring – i.e. fruitfulness.

Verse 12: *“The flowers appear in the land; the time of singing has arrived, and the voice of the turtledove can be heard in our land.”*

Note: All of this is foreshadowing a change that is coming. There is going to be a new reality. Problems, hardships, and attack are going to come to an end, and they are going to experience a new chapter of love. This love is going to be stronger because of what they have had to overcome.

Verse 13: *“The fig tree sends forth her figs. The vines, with the tender grapes, give their fragrance. Arise come my spouse, my beautiful one, you come.”*

These verse foreshadow their reunion. The season is at hand. She is going to need to respond to what he is going to make a reality.

Verse 14: *“My dove in the cleft of the rocks, in the hidden stairs, show me your appearance. Let me hear your voice, for your voice is pleasant and your appearance is comely.”*

Comely: He is telling her that she is unique, she is like an oasis in the desert – hidden away.

Verse 15: (Chorus; the response of various people): *“Seize for us the foxes, the little foxes, that destroy the vineyards. Our vineyards are tender grapes.”*

Foxes: Foxes are a threat as they bring destruction.

Little foxes: The small things, the things that we may think are insignificant, are the things that destroy our relationships.

Destroy: A destructive word.

Tender grapes: Grapes that need the greatest care and protection.

Verse 16: (The Shulamite): *“My beloved is to me and I am to him; he shepherds his flock among the roses.”*

(He) is to me and I am to him: An expression that shows his leadership in her life. First (and foremost) he is to her – and then she says: “I am for him”.

Shepherds his flock among the roses (also can be translated lilies): He takes his sheep to the best places, to the places where they like to graze.

Verse 17: *“Until the day blows by and the shadows flee, my beloved, turn and be like a deer or a stag above the mountains of Bether.”*

Blows by: Passes

Mountains of Bether: The mountains around Jerusalem. To get to Jerusalem these mountains have to be overcome. The word *Bether* in Hebrew is a word for separation (“cut in two”).

Note: She believes that he is going to overcome the mountains of separation.

Chapter 3

In the book of Genesis (Genesis 2v21-24) Adam had to give something of himself in order to receive a wife. Giving caused him to receive – this is a very important Biblical truth (Luke 6v38). A G-dly husband will search for ways to give to (or to provide for) his wife, realizing that, in the end, it is going to be a blessing for him.

Ephesians 5v28 reveals to the man that his wife should be thought of as his own body, his very flesh. As a husband gives of himself for his wife he himself will also be blessed.

In this chapter we see two different, but related, acts.

1. The first act (Verse 1-5) relates a dream that the Shulamite dreams and it reveals her strong desire to be reunited with her husband (her beloved shepherd – who, incidentally, is not Solomon).
2. Verse 6-11 presents to us a picture of **Solomon’s** desired wedding day. The Shulamite was hurt and frustrated by her separation from her beloved. It was wrongly attempted to be fulfilled by Solomon on his wedding day with the Shulamite.

Verse 1: “*Upon my bed, in the nights, I have sought the one whom my soul loves; I have sought Him, but I have not found him.*”

Upon my bed: We sleep in a bed and when we sleep we frequently dream. The context for this section is set in the fact that she is in bed and, while there, she is having dreams of her beloved.

Nights: Written in the plural. It shows a reoccurring theme - that at night-time she dreams repeatedly about her beloved. Being reunited with her beloved is at the heart of her dreams.

My soul loves: This speaks about an intense, G-dly, pure, and holy love.

I have not found him: This gives us hard evidence **against** the fact that her beloved one is Solomon. It would not be hard for her to find Solomon. He is in the palace. People who serve Solomon always know where he is so she would have an easy time finding him. The Shulamite is not separated from Solomon but from her beloved shepherd.

Verse 2: *"I will rise up and I will go through the city, into the markets and into the streets. I have sought him, the one whom my soul loves, but I have not found him."*

Note: Once again we need to remember that this is a (bad) dream. She is saying that in the midst of the night she rises up and leaves the place where she is staying. She goes through the various streets and into the markets looking for her beloved.

I have not found him: This separation, as well as her overwhelming desire to find him, is underscored over and over again.

Verse 3: *"The night watchmen find me, the ones who go throughout the city: 'The one whom my soul loves have you seen?'"*

Have you seen: She is asking for help, assistance, and counsel from the night watchmen (This would make no sense if her beloved was Solomon).

Verse 4: *"A little bit further I passed by them until I find the one whom my soul loves. I seize him. I will not let go of him until I have brought him to the house of my mother to the room of my parents."*

I find the one whom my soul loves: Remember that this is not reality. She is not actually finding the one she loves. Dreams can often be very frustrating.

The house of my mother: She wants to take him home.

The room of my parents: This is a place where she feels safe and secure – again this underscores that she is not comfortable and does not feel secure where she currently is. She wants to go back to how she felt as a small child. When a child has a bad dream they often go to their parents room to find comfort and to feel safe again.

Verse 5: *"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the deer, by the young deer, do not stir up love until it has its desire."*

Note 1: This is a repetitive verse where she, the primary speaker (i.e. the Shulamite), addresses the chorus – the daughters of Jerusalem (those upright, or righteous, women).

Charge you: She wants them to take an oath.

Young deer (rock/desert goat): These are very skittish and are easily frightened. A deer or mountain goat flees when they are startled by the presence of other individuals. What the Shulamite is alluding to is the fact that love is very precious and can, very easily, be adversely affected.

Note 2: Love is very fragile. Many things are able to attack it and damage it. For this reason, we need to have safeguards around our marital relationship.

Stir up: Wake up

Until it has its desire: Until it is completed.

Note: We enter into section 2 of this chapter. The Shulamite is retelling the account of Solomon, on his wedding day, and the great joy that he has. She is speaking of his wedding almost as if she is an outsider. Usually, the bride is the focus on the wedding day, but here we see that all the attention is focussed on Solomon.

Verse 6: *“Who is this one coming up from the wilderness as pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense from every type of powder of the merchants?”*

Who is this one: Despite the fact that this is written in the feminine, context demands that the subject of this question (as answered in verse 7) is Solomon. This verse is not just addressing Solomon but is also emphasising the manner in which he presents himself.

Wilderness: Speaks of dependence, but it can also speak about emptiness – that which has nothing there, something that is lacking.

Perfumed: Solomon is strongly perfumed. The Shulamite’s beloved is not richly (nor superficially) perfumed, but his perfume (which is related to his inner qualities – good name and character, see 1v3) is like oil poured out.

Verse 7: *“Behold! It is the bed belonging to Solomon. Sixty mighty men are around it, the heroes of Israel.”*

The bed (couch): In ancient Egypt, the king or queen would not walk from place to place. More often than not their servants would carry them from place to place on a portable couch which they would either sit or lie down on.

Heroes: The mighty ones, men of renown.

Verse 8: *“All of them are holding a sword. They are all trained in war, and every man has his sword upon his side - from the fear of nights.”*

Holding a sword: They are prepared for opposition.

Fear of nights: Fear of the unknown. Solomon wants this day to happen, but he is not sure that it actually will. By surrounding himself with soldiers it shows us that he is concerned that something (or someone) will interfere with his plans.

Verse 9: *“The portable couch that the King Solomon made for himself from the wood of Lebanon.”*

The portable couch: A very luxurious and transportable couch. This word speaks of splendour and glory.

The wood of Lebanon: The temple was constructed from the wood of Lebanon (1 Kings 5). Solomon made this couch from that same material.

Verse 10: *“Its pillars are made with silver; it has gold upholstery, and it is a chariot of purple. Its midst is paved with the love of the daughters of Jerusalem.”*

Silver...gold: Costly, Lavish.

Purple: A royal colour.

Midst: Interior

Its midst is paved: What it seems to suggest here is that Solomon’s couch has been used many times before. This should not surprise us. 1 Kings 11v1-3 reveals to us what kind of women Solomon loved, as well as telling us that he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Solomon was not a one-woman man. He was a man that knew many women. The Shulamite, here, is just the next woman in his line of conquest. This couch was not uniquely designed for his wedding to the Shulamite, rather it is something that he has used time and time again for the same purpose.

Daughters of Jerusalem: The daughters of Jerusalem (within the context of this song) are women, candidates for marriage, who are being instructed on how to find a G-dly spouse. The lesson we

can learn here is that we should save ourselves for our spouse, so that our love does not devalue and become something that is quickly passed over.

Verse 11: *“Go forth and see, O daughters of Zion, King Solomon: who has been crowned by his mother for the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart,”*

Go forth and see: She is instructing them to go and see if this is what they really are looking for (or are wanting) in a spouse.

Crowned by his mother: Everything has been done for Solomon.

His heart: Solomon did not think of his wives hearts but only of his own. Everything was about him and his happiness. The Shulamite felt as if she has been taken for Solomon’s sake. He is not thinking about her (what would make her happy) but he took her for himself - this is his objective. (Unlike Solomon, the Shulamite’s beloved – the shepherd – praises her rather than exalting himself).

Chapter 4

Note: When the shepherd praises the Shulamite’s appearance (which he does more so in this chapter than in any other) he describes her in a very unique way. We need to realize that there is nothing sensual or erotic in his descriptions of her. He describes her beauty in a way that is not necessarily always a physical beauty, but also includes the inner beauty of what her life conveys to him.

Verse 1: (The Shepherd): *“Behold you are beautiful my spouse. Behold you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats coming down from Mount Gilead.”*

Spouse: Relates to a special relationship, probably a covenantal relationship.

Beautiful: Repetition shows emphasis. He emphasises that she is beautiful to him. This could mean that he sees her as beautiful in a visual way, but it can also mean that he sees her as appropriate, fitting, or suitable. She completes him.

Doves: Doves are attractive and usually found in pairs.

Behind your veil: A veil speaks of her modesty.

Note 1: *Your eyes are doves behind your veil* can also be translated as “Your eyes are doves behind your lock of hair.”

Hair: We know Biblically that the covering of a woman's head is indeed her hair (1 Corinthians 11v5-15) - it also alludes to her modesty. She does not promote or call attention to herself.

Coming down: A word of movement, her hair is flowing down.

Mount Gilead: This is an area of Jordan today.

Note 2: The Shepherd finds her beautiful and describes her in terms of what he finds beautiful. We must not allow others to dictate to us what is beautiful, fitting, appropriate or right for us.

Verse 2: *“Your teeth are like a flock (of sheep) that is shorn, coming up from the washing. All of them are bearing twins, and not one of them is missing.”*

Shorn: Shaved, Properly groomed.

Washing: Clean, white.

Bearing twins: An image of fruitfulness.

Missing: Caused to be bereaved, suffering a loss. She has not lost anything - her teeth speak of that which is fitting (they are paired up symmetrically) with nothing missing.

Verse 3: *“As a scarlet thread are your lips, your mouth is comely. As a section of a pomegranate so are your temples from behind your veil (or behind your lock).”*

Scarlet: Scarlet yarn was part of the temple service and had to do with purifying (Leviticus 14v3-7). The Shulamite speaks clean, pure words. She speaks words that are soothing and words that heal.

Mouth: In the Hebrew text this word contains the same letters that spell ‘desert’ or ‘wilderness’ (מִדְבָּר). However, this word does not mean either of those two things. The root word, in Hebrew, for speaking is דָּבַר – the final three letters of the word that spells desert. וּמִדְבָּרֶיךָ (as the full word is written in the Hebrew text) could be translated "and from your words." But here, parallelism demands that it is not, "from your words" but the ׀ converts the root verb into a noun. (In actuality, the ׀ may be the abridged form of the Hebrew word מִן which is the word "from"). Hence (because it is in the form of a noun and not a verb), it, therefore, is referring to the place where words go forth from, i.e. the mouth.

Pomegranate: Speaks of fruitfulness, something that is pleasing.

Verse 4: *“As the Tower of David is your neck, built for an armoury. A thousand shields are hung upon it and every shield is for a mighty warrior.”*

Neck: The neck is a type of foundation for the head. In the Bible, the neck can also refer to a person's character – e.g. If someone is stiff necked it refers to a lack of humility and stubbornness (Exodus 32v9, Isaiah 48v4, Acts 7v51). The Shulamite is not stiff necked. She has a strong foundation. She holds her head up despite what she has been through.

An armoury: Holding her head up is likened to an armoury -she has defensive weapons at her disposal.

Verse 5: *“Your two breasts are like two young deer, twin deer, that are feeding among the roses.”*

Breasts: Biblically speak of womanhood.

Two young (strong) deer: The image here is not so much a description of her body but alludes to something about her womanhood. Like her, young deer are beautiful, but they are very skittish and shy.

Twin deer: Twin deer are rare – they are not seen every day. Deer make sure that they are not being watched, and are constantly looking out for others. Most scholars see this as an image of her womanhood - she is very private. She displays modesty.

Verse 6: *“Until the day blows by and the shadows flee away I will come to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.”*

The day blows by: A Hebrew idiom for the passing of a day until its end.

Myrrh...frankincense: They are fragrances that are part of the temple service and relate to holiness - things that are set apart for a specific purpose.

Note: She is a woman of modesty. Intimate times are rare, but they occur at the appropriate time and have been set apart for a specific purpose. Reading these descriptions of her do not draw our attention to her physical beauty but focusses our attention on how wonderful the very essence of her is. Her inner beauty and character is what is predominantly attractive to him.

Verse 7: *“All of you is beautiful my spouse, there is no blemish in you.”*

Blemish: This is a word used, in other places of Scripture, in regard to examining an animal for sacrifice – if it is without blemish it can be offered up to G-d (Leviticus 22v17-22). The shepherd is not saying that the Shulamite is a woman who is perfect in appearance. What he is saying is that she is appropriate, and that there is nothing in her that disqualifies her before G-d. G-d affirms her (she is a G-dly woman), so he does as well.

Men, particularly, need to affirm their wives in this regard - recognizing that she is the one that G-d has selected for him and, because of that, she is fitting and appropriate for him. Women desire and need to hear these words from their husbands.

Verse 8: *“Come with me from Lebanon, bride; with me from Lebanon you come. Look out from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the den of lions and from the mountains of leopards.”*

Lebanon: Lebanon is understood Biblically as a place of exile (similar to Egypt and to Babylon) Lebanon is not where the children of Israel, for the most part, were called to inhabit.

Look out: This word is a unique word and is used in relation to seeing things from another perspective.

Note: A few mountains are listed here (*Amana, Senir and Hermon*). The perspective from a mountaintop is very different to the perspective from a valley. The shepherd is encouraging the Shulamite to leave the place where she currently finds herself in order to see the situation (or even see herself) from a different perspective. The implication is that if she does this it would increase her knowledge and would give her encouragement.

Amana: A word for faithful, and also a word used for truth.

Senir...Hermon: These are mountains near the region of Babylon (another reference to exile).

From the den of lions: She sees herself in a place that she cannot get out of. She feels stuck in her situation, but he is encouraging her that through their togetherness, their unity, she can begin to see things differently and hope can be restored, within her, for a wonderful reunion.

Verse 9: *"You have taken my heart my sister, bride. You have taken my heart with one look of your eye, with one link of your necklace."*

Taken: Captured – she has taken his heart in its fullness; she has captured the very essence of him.

With one look of your eye: When they look at one another they communicate understanding by just a glance of their eyes.

One link: Just a very small portion of who she really is captures him.

Note: He is reaffirming his undivided commitment to her.

Verse 10: *"How beautiful is your love my sister, bride. How good is your love - better than wine. And the fragrance of your oil is from every spice."*

Wine: Wine gets better with age. Wine is precious and is used at times of celebration and joy.

Oil: In chapter 1 oil represented his character, his good name.

From every spice: There is a completeness, a wholeness, a totality to her character - she lacks nothing.

Verse 11: *"A honeycomb dripping is your lips, bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of frankincense."*

Honeycomb: Her voice and words are very satisfying and pleasing to him. He longs for conversation with her. A foundation for good intimacy is to have the ability to connect with each other through conversation. Poor communication with our spouse will lead to a lack of connection, and an inability to know what our husband/wife is thinking or feeling in any given situation. It is so important that we listen to our spouse so that we can get to know them and start to recognize how they are feeling. This helps us to minister to one another. We can deal with the hurts, pains, and frustrations of our spouse, becoming sources of comfort and help to them.

Be a good listener - not wanting to always share things, but also wanting to hear things.

Honey and milk: This speak about her sweet words. He hears her words, and he finds them desirable- like a honeycomb.

Frankincense: An important spice used in the temple service. Her fragrance is not only pleasing to him, but it is also an offering up to G-d.

Verse 12: *"A garden locked up is my sister, bride; a wave locked up from the spring that is sealed."*

My sister: At the foundation of this relationship is purity and wholesomeness. The basis for a pleasing relationship, in its fullness, is a relationship that displays holiness and innocence.

Wave: Strong

Locked up: He is affirming that she is sealed to everyone except him. What happened in the past is just that - it is in the past and none of it should make any difference to the relationship in the pre-

sent. Frequently couples have to overcome something, that has happened, that has severely damaged their marriage. Here he is saying that those things are over and are no longer relevant for him – those things are behind them.

Verse 13: *“Your seedlings are like an orchard of pomegranates, with a variety of fruit, as henna with spikenard.”*

Orchard: The orchard that she has seeded, so to speak, is a summation of her life. Not only is it fruitful, with many different delicacies, but it also has a fine fragrance - these perfumes of henna and spikenard.

Verse 14: *“Spikenard and saffron, a reed and cinnamon, with every tree of Lebanon, with myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.”*

Chief: The best.

Note: He, in a very dynamic way, was saying that anything one could want was found in her. She has it all – all the fragrances, trees, fruit, and spices. She lacks nothing. For her this is an assurance that she does not need to worry about her spouse looking elsewhere for satisfaction– he has found what he wants in her. He has found what is good and pleasing to him. It is so important (particularly for men) to convey this, sincerely, to their spouse. She/he need to know that they are the very best.

Verse 15: *“A spring of gardens, a well of living waters that flow from Lebanon.”*

A spring of gardens: Speaks of abundance

Living waters: Water is a source of life. The Shulamite is G-d's provision to him, and he is acknowledging that.

Lebanon: Israel received water from the north.

Verse 16: (The Shulamite) *“Wake up north and also come south. Blow upon my garden with his spices - let them flow. Let my beloved come to his garden, and let him eat the fruit of delicacies.”*

North ... south: This is speaking about a northern wind and a southern wind. The wind blows for the sake of removing things (erasing the past), but wind can also be a source of increasing one's ability to smell something.

Note: The shepherd has affirmed the Shulamite and has pointed out why she is still the one for him. What happened does not change anything. Secure in the shepherd's affirmation, the Shulamite is now wanting to give all of herself to him. She does not want to hold anything back.

When there is mutual security and surrender in a marriage any obstacles that come against the marriage can be more easily overcome.

Chapter 5

Verse 1: (The Shepherd): *"I have come to my garden my sister, bride. I have gathered my myrrh with my spices. I have eaten from my forest with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk. (Partake and) Eat friends. Drink and become drunk with love."*

I have come to my garden: This foreshadows that these two (the shepherd and the Shulamite) are going to come together. Here it is as though they have been reunited, although it has not happened yet.

Garden: **A garden is a place of provision.** As a married couple we should be constantly providing for one another. We need to be sensitive, paying attention, to what our spouse needs based upon the circumstances.

A garden is a place of care – There is a process to gardening. If we do not follow the correct methodology (planting, weeding, watering etc) then there will not be much of a harvest (provision).

My sister, bride: Marriage is a relationship founded in love. We love because G-d has commanded us to do so. There is a big difference between the love a brother has for a sister and the love a man has for his wife. In order to have that unique, intimate love it needs to be first founded upon an innocent love, one that we express within a family. In the absence of pure love we will not be able to develop the other. Many times, relationships are more governed by the second love (that intimate love between a man and a woman) and it is not founded upon the right basis – this G-dly love that we should have.

Myrrh: A pleasing, expensive fragrance. It speaks of that which is satisfying. He has gathered satisfaction from her. He has found value in her.

My..my...my: This is repeated, in this verse, and shows emphasis. He understands that she is the one for him. We need to acknowledge that our spouse is G-d's choice and gift for us.

Garden...forest: Some Bibles translate this word as 'honeycomb', but the word actually means forest. Love changes over time (It has also been compared to wine which also changes over time). Forests are also a place of provision. They are larger than gardens and their provision is more long term.

Honey: Honey is sweet, and it is a source of joy. It is something additional that is added to a dish. He is saying that she is that topping in his life. She turns an ordinary dish into a dessert.

Wine: In this book it is a reference to love.

Milk: Milk is synonymous with sustenance, nourishment. It causes growth and sustains life. He is saying here that she, in many ways, is the foundation of what/who he has become. He is acknowledging her and the wonderful influence she has in his life.

Drunk with love: The consumption of too much alcohol influences the person causing them to have a different perspective and a different behaviour. What he is saying here is that this love is abundant. It is an influence in his life. She causes him to see things differently and to behave differently.

Verse 2: (The Shulamite): *"I am sleeping but my heart is awake. The voice of my beloved! He is knocking. 'Open for me my sister, my spouse, my dove, my innocent one. My head is full of dew and my locks drip of the night.'"*

Heart: Place of thoughts. She is thinking.

Open: He wants to come in. This again foreshadows them coming together.

Innocent one: She is in the palace. She has been taken by another man, but in his eyes she is still innocent - none of that has changed his love, commitment and how he sees her.

Dew: Dew is heaviest at night. When morning dawns the sun causes it to dry up.

Of the night: They are separated. There is something that is between them.

Verse 3: *"I have removed my tunic; how can I dress it again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?"*

Note: The Shulamite is quoting the Shepherd. It is a verse that should be understood as his words of assurance to her. He is saying that he is there to stay, and this verse leaves us anticipating their wonderful reunion.

Removed my tunic: He has prepared himself to go into her chamber.

Defile: Dirty

Verse 4: *"My beloved sent forth his hand from the door, and my innermost being hummed concerning him."*

Sent forth his hand from the door: He put his hand on the door (latch) in order to go in.

Innermost being: A word speaking of her inner condition/the feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Hummed: She was excited.

Verse 5: *"I rose up to open for my beloved; and my hand dripped with myrrh, and my fingers also of liquid myrrh. It passed over upon the locks of the door."*

Note: She is in the room, asleep, but she hears his voice. He tells her that he is there, and he asks her to open up for him. She rises up, in this verse, to do exactly that.

Myrrh: A pleasing scent, synonymous with this feeling of love (this occurrence that is pleasing, joyful, and satisfying).

Locks: The bolts that fasten the door. She is trying to open the lock, but her hands are oily with this myrrh, this incense, that she has on them. Her difficulty in opening the door is a common experience within dreams, where sometimes the simplest of actions cannot be carried out.

Verse 6: *"I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn and passed. My soul went out from me with his word. I have sought him but have not found him; I have called to him but there is no answer."*

My beloved had withdrawn: The reason why he was not there, when she opened the door, is because this passage should be understood as a type of dream.

I have sought him but have not found him: The dream reveals to the reader the Shulamite's strong desire to be reunited with her Shepherd. It also reveals, by his words, his desire to remain with her (We learn of their feelings for one another in the midst of their separation).

Dreams can be very frustrating. When she eventually opens the door, and he is not there, it informs the reader that their separation continues. Perhaps this is saying we should not take for granted the time we have with our spouse.

Verse 7: *"The keepers found me, the ones who go about in the city. They struck me and wounded me; they lifted up my veil from upon me - the keepers of the walls."*

Keepers: The watchmen of the city represent the perspectives of others. The Shulamite loves the Shepherd deeply. It is a strong love, that can only be expressed within the covenant of marriage, and it is not going away. The watchmen are annoyed that, instead of being satisfied with Solomon, she is pursuing her love of the Shepherd - which in their eyes is not good and is deserving of punishment.

They lifted up my veil from upon me: This is an image of shame. Their actions shame her.

Keepers of the walls: This is a different group of people. Walls are emphasised here – walls separate. Walls in a house are thin, but walls around a city are thick and strong.

These walls emphasize this separation between the shepherd and the Shulamite. Society is trying to push and keep them apart. Likewise, the world attacks and beats against marriage.

Verse 8: *“I charge you, Daughters of Jerusalem, if you are to find my beloved what should you say to him? Tell him that I am lovesick.”*

Note: This is her pushback/response to society.

Lovesick: When we are missing home (because we are away from it) we call this ‘homesick’. In much the same way she is separated from and missing the one she loves. She calls this ‘lovesick’.

Verse 9 (Friends/Chorus): *“How is your beloved unique from other ones, fairest of women? How is your beloved better than other beloved ones, that thus you have charged us? “*

How is your beloved better than other beloved ones: Either they are asking her what makes him, personally, unique in comparison to others, or they are asking what makes his love so unique.

Thus you have charged us: They are wanting to know why she said she missed him so much that it has caused her to feel like she has a sickness.

Verse 10: (The Shulamite): *“My beloved is clear, and he is ruddy. He is the chief of ten thousand.”*

Clear: Pure, No additives

Ruddy: This is the same word that is used to describe King David as being ginger haired (1 Samuel 16v12). The use of this word is simply relating to us that her beloved is like King David (David means beloved, or one who is loved).

Chief (head): This word is related to being lifted up - like a flag is lifted up.

Chief of ten thousand: He is above ten thousand others. He is special and unique.

Verse 11: *“His head is of a unique gold, and the locks of his hair are curly. They are black as a raven.”*

Head: His crown, so to speak.

Unique gold: He is unique and precious to her.

Verse 12: *“His eyes are like the doves by the streams of water, that are washed in milk and sitting in their place.”*

Note: The imagery used here is like that of fine gems that are laid into their place. His eyes are beautiful, like gems set in their place.

Verse 13: *“His cheeks are like a bed of spices and towers of ointments; his lips are like the lily that drips liquid myrrh.”*

Cheeks: Speaking about his face.

Towers of ointments: Smooth in texture.

Myrrh: She is his myrrh (chapter 4v6) and he is her myrrh. Myrrh is something precious, a pleasing fragrance. Once again we see how they affirm each other.

Verse 14: *“His hands are like golden wheels, which are filled with beryl. His stomach is like carved ivory, inlaid with sapphires.”*

Beryl: This is a gemstone

Sapphires: She is describing him in terms of something precious.

Verse 15: *“His ankles are like pillars of marble, laid upon the planks of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon with the choice cedars.”*

Ankles: This could just mean the lower part of his legs (i.e. below his knees).

Planks: The same word used for planks here is the same word used for the planks that were used to build the tabernacle. She is describing him in a very majestic way. His life is a life of praise and adoration to G-d.

Verse 16: *“His mouth is sweet. All of him is desirable. For this is my beloved, this is my spouse, O Daughters of Jerusalem.”*

Note: She has described him from head to toe but ends her praise of him by going back up to his mouth. This is to emphasize how important and how pleasing words can be.

Chapter 6

Verse 1: (The Chorus): *“Where has your beloved gone, O beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned that we might seek him with you?”*

O beautiful among women: There is a change. Earlier it had been the shepherd affirming the Shulamite and speaking to her in these terms. Others are now affirming her and have come to appreciate her.

That we might seek him with you: They are also now affirming the relationship and the coming together between the Shulamite and the Shepherd. They are affirming that he is indeed beloved, and that she is the fairest among women (beautiful).

Note: The reader should understand (by this literary tool) that what this is teaching us is that this relationship is good.

Verse 2: (The Shulamite): *“My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the bed of spices, that he might shepherd among the gardens, in order that he might glean roses.”*

His garden: This is a preferred place. It foreshadows (because his garden is her) the reunion of the two of them.

Shepherd among the gardens: She is affirming that he is faithfully doing what he should be doing, and he is doing it where he should be doing it – in the most pleasant place. He is not only fulfilling his role as the shepherd, but the implication is that he is also getting things ready for their coming together again.

Verse 3: *“I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me, the one who shepherds among the roses.”*

I am for my beloved: We need to be for our spouse (within our own thoughts and heart we can know if we are fully committed to our spouse or not). If we are not working toward being for him/her then we are living in disobedience. Our relationship with G-d will not be dynamic or pleasing if we do not have a good marriage. A good marriage does not mean that we are always giving in to our spouse and what he/she wants, but it is living in a way that demonstrates G-d’s best for our spouse.

My beloved is for me: She is no longer insecure about his love for her, but she is confident and sure of it.

Shepherds among the roses: He is positioned to shepherd in a good and desirable place. G-d wants to bring our marriages into a place where our love can grow and mature. This growth and maturity leads to marriages that have a G-dly testimony, and marriages that can manifest the glory of G-d.

Verse 4: (The Shepherd): *“Beautiful are you, my spouse, as Tirzah. You are an oasis. As Jerusalem you are awesome, as a banner risen up.”*

Tirzah: Most scholars agree that Tirzah was a beautiful city. Tirzah is a word that has to do with desire or want. He finds her desirable.

Oasis: Comely. It simply means ‘That which is pleasing’.

A banner risen up: This speaks of victory. The warriors were able to be victorious because they were disciplined, had the right plan and were able to execute it. In marriage we need to be disciplined in executing G-d’s plan, in order for there to be a response from G-d. It is G-d who provides a change and that change leads to victory - meaning that we are enabled to fulfil the purposes of G-d within our marriages.

Verse 5: *“Remove your eyes from before me, because they embolden me. Your hair is like the herd of goats that flow down from Gilead.”*

They embolden me: When he makes eye contact with her it overwhelms him and strengthens him in his pursuit.

Herd of goats that flow down: This would have been a beautiful sight to see. Goats are graceful and assured in their steps. Goats do not fall or trip as they travel along.

Gilead: Gilead is in Jordan

Verse 6: *“Your teeth are like a herd of young (female) lambs that go up from the washing, all of them bearing twins - none of them are bereaved.”*

Twins: Speaks of fruitfulness, producing offspring.

None of them are bereaved: None of their offspring is going to be lost or suffer grief. Fruitfulness and safety are found in her and in their relationship.

Verse 7: *“As a section of pomegranate is your temple behind your hair.”*

Your temple: Someone’s temple is not a part of the body commonly thought about. The Shepherd is highly observant and pays attention to every detail related to his spouse. Nothing about her is insignificant to him. We need to pay attention to, and spend time with, our spouse.

Hair: Can also be translated ‘veil’.

Verse 8: *“Sixty are queens, and eighty are concubines. Virgins are without number.”*

Note: One of the reasons that Solomon had so many queens, concubines, and virgins (1 Kings 11v1-4) was that he did not find satisfaction in them.

Sixty: The number ‘six’ has to do with grace and is also related to favour. The Shepherd is saying that within their covenant marriage he finds favour and experiences grace when he is with her.

Concubines: To financially support widows or young orphan girls (who had not yet married) was a type of prestige and a source of pride and respect for wealthy men. The Shepherd is saying here that he gains honour and respect from others because of his relationship with her.

Virgins: Unmarried, young, righteous women. He is implying that he does not need to look for anyone else. No other women could provide him with what he has found in her.

Verse 9: *“One is my dove, my innocent one. One is she of her mother, for she is pure to the one who bore her. The daughters look at her and they praise her. The queens and concubines they also praise her.”*

One: Speaks about her uniqueness

She is pure to the one who bore her: Her mother sees her as pure, natural, wholesome. Her beauty comes from a G-dly heritage.

Daughters: The implication is ‘of Jerusalem’.

Praise her: This word means ‘happiness’, but it can also imply a sense of appraising or blessing.

They praise her: A different word for praise is used here. They are praising and blessing her because of who she is in this covenant marriage.

Verse 10: (He is still speaking about her): *“Who is this one who appears like the dawn, and as beautiful as the moon? She is as bright as the Sun. Awesome as a banner that is held up.”*

Bright: Pure, natural, clear.

Awesome: Powerful

Banner that is held up: A banner held up signifies victory. Victory, in a marriage, comes from executing G-d’s plan in that marriage. A victorious marriage is one that G-d is pleased with, and one that brings honour, praise, and glory to Him. This kind of marriage is the most satisfying marital relationship.

Verse 11: *“I will go down to the garden of nuts, to see the refreshing stream. To see if the vine has blossomed and if the pomegranates have budded.”*

Nuts: This is like a walnut or a peanut. Nuts are pleasurable, enjoyable and a delicacy to eat. In literary language we are being told that the time is right for them to come together. Things bud and bloom in spring. Spring is associated with love.

Verse 12: (This is possibly the Shulamite speaking): *“For my soul did not know that you had placed me among the chariots of a generous people.”*

Chariots: Chariots and weapons of war (the equipment needed for victory) could only be built when, and if, resources/budget allowed. People had to give generously in order to allow a victorious army to be built up. This verse encourages us to be those who also generously and wisely invest in our marriages in order for them to be victorious.

Verse 13: This is chapter 7 verse 1 in the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 7

Communication that is uplifting and encouraging is very important. Those things that are neither uplifting nor encouraging should not be made an emphasis of our conversation but should become matters of prayer.

Verse 1: (The chorus- in this case, men who have observed this relationship): *“Return, return O Shulamite! Return, return and we will look upon you! What do you see concerning this Shulamite, as the dance of the camps?”*

Note: The Shulamite woman is being addressed here.

Look: They want to see her, to gaze upon her. These men have matured and are now affirming her as a G-dly woman who is pleasing to G-d.

What do you see?: They are asking amongst themselves what their perspective is concerning the Shulamite woman.

Dance: Dancing here is used as a term of joy, of satisfaction, of pleasure.

Camps: The word used here (mahanaim) refers to military camps. Soldiers dance when they have achieved peace and victory. The battle has ended in a wonderful way and they dance joyfully because of it. This foreshadows the peace and the victory that this couple are going to experience. It is a victory which will be a source of great joy for them.

Verse 2: (The Shepherd): *“How pretty are your feet in shoes O daughter, O generous one. Your thighs are curves like jewels, a work of the hand of a craftsman.”*

Feet in shoes: This implies that she demonstrates generosity and is a blessing to others (those “outside”).

Thighs: These represent a person’s midsection, and they move a person from place to place. This shows direction (where someone is going). She is moving toward something that has been skilfully prepared and has a beautiful outcome.

Jewels: Jewels (diamonds and other stones) need to be cut and polished in order to make a beautiful and valuable product.

Verse 3: *“Your navel is like a rounded goblet which does not lack any mixed drink. Your stomach is a heap of wheat that is enclosed with roses.”*

Mixed drink: In other cultures, even in our day, there are a variety of drinks which are mixed which have nothing to do with alcohol. These drinks are pleasing and satisfying and are often drunk at times of happiness and joy.

Stomach: Stomachs are related to digestion. He is not so much as giving us an image of her external/physical appearance but is conveying to us that **what she does** is done with much effort, preparation, and hard work, and this leads to a harvest (outcome) that is pleasing.

A heap of wheat: Those 'heaps of wheat' take much work - the ground has to be prepared, seed needs to be sown and then the harvesting takes several weeks. These heaps are then built from what is harvested.

Enclosed: Fenced in

With roses: She does not simply do the job well, but she does it with great care and detail.

Verse 4: *"Your two breasts are like young deer, the twins of a mother deer."*

Breasts: Oftentimes (and there is much support for this – even in extra-Biblical writings) breasts are synonymous with femininity and, simply, the essence of a woman. He is revealing that when he examines the very essence of her womanhood he finds it a blessing. It is pleasing and rare - just like it is rare to see a *mother deer* and *twin fawns*.

Verse 5: *"Your neck is like a tower of ivory, and your eyes the pools of Heshbon upon the gates of many daughters. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon that looks towards Damascus."*

Neck: Neck has to do with stature. It holds the head up.

Ivory: Ivory was something precious. Her statue, her behaviour, is something very precious. Usually ivory is carved - so once more there is an emphasis on preparation.

Pools... upon the gates: She stands out. There is something pleasing and refreshing about her in comparison to others.

Many daughters: She exceeds her counterparts. He finds her unique in comparison to others.

Your nose: He is not speaking about the size of her nose, but rather about her scent (character). She has a scent that goes well beyond. She has great influence.

Verse 6: *"Your head upon you is like Carmel. Your hair upon your head is purple that the king prepared for his furniture."*

Carmel: A beautiful mountain range of Lebanon, coming into Israel, along the Mediterranean.

Purple: Purple is a royal colour. Hair, for a woman, shows significance. Hair speaks of a woman's modesty and of her glory (1 Corinthians 11v14-15) In a very symbolic way he is speaking here of royalty. She has a rare quality of royalty about her. People take notice of her and of her behaviour because she is so unique.

The king prepared for his furniture: Royal furniture is the very best furniture money can buy. He is esteeming her by emphasising that in regard to women she exceeds them all.

Verse 7: *"How beautiful, how pleasant, is our love with all of its delights."*

Our love: The love that they share together.

All of its delights: The love that they experience makes everything in their life a delicacy, something that is a source of joy and satisfaction.

Verse 8: *“Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts giving forth clusters.”*

Palm tree: Upright

Breasts: Speaking again of the essence of her as womanhood.

Clusters: Clusters have beauty associated with them and they give off a pleasant scent.

Verse 9: *“I have said I will go up upon the palm tree, and I will take hold of the fruit of the palm tree. For let your breasts be as clusters of a vine, and the fragrance of your nose as apples.”*

Note: He is affirming her publicly. He lauds her for her character, her stature, the very essence of her life.

Verse 10: *“Your gums are like the best wine that goes to my beloved straight away, that glides the lips of those who were sleeping.”*

Gums: In modern Hebrew most say, ‘the roof of your mouth’. This is the source of taste.

Straight away: She provides him with what is pleasing without any interruption.

Glides the lips of those who were sleeping: Sometimes they would put fine wine upon the lips of a sleeping individual, and this would keep the lips in a good condition. This would also be pleasing as the tongue would taste the tops or bottoms of the lips with this fine wine on it. This was a way of showing care or concern for an individual. It showed that someone went the extra mile. Her love, to him, is not concerned with only the major things but also with all the small details.

Verse 11: (The Shulamite): *“I am for my beloved and to me is his passion.”*

Passion: A strong desire. A woman's behaviour can influence and cause her husband to behave in a way that shows his desire, passion, love etc to her. Our behaviour (not in a manipulating way) toward our spouse is so important in bringing about Godly change to our spouse.

Verse 12: (The Shepherd): *“Come my beloved, let us go forth into the field. Let us lodge in the villages.”*

Staying simply (in the fields and villages) does not cause a great sum of money to be spent.

Verse 13: *“We will rise up early to the vineyards. Let us see if the vine has sprouted, and if the small grapes have opened up, and if the pomegranates have budded. There I will give my love to you.”*

Rise up early: Shows a preference – that want to be found working from early in order to produce wine (throughout the song wine has been synonymous with love). They are committed to doing the things that produce love.

I will give my love to you: Notice the foreshadowing of their reunion. If the time is right and if things have blossomed and budded then they will partake of their love.”

Verse 14: *“The mandrakes are giving off their fragrance, and at our gates are all types of delicacies- both new and old. My beloved, I have hidden you.”*

Mandrakes: In Genesis 30v14-17 we see that mandrakes were related to marriage and brought about conception - the next generation. Biblically, prophetically, whenever there is a reference to the next generation we should think about the coming of Messiah (a Kingdom event). The union of the Shepherd and the Shulamite is a key event. Here we see a lifting up of marriage and how important marriage is.

Giving off their fragrance: The time is right to be united.

Gates: A gate is a place of entrance. This foreshadows that they are about ready to enter into this new phase of their relationship together.

New and old: That which they have not experienced together in their relationship is now going to be experienced (the 'new'). The old (that which once formed part of their relationship) is going to be regathered up and enjoyed again.

Hidden: When things are very valuable we hide them away in order to keep them safe. This is also a word used for a special piece of matzah that is hidden, for a time, over Passover. It is revealed/brought into the light at the high point of the Passover Seder. What he is saying here is that their love had been hidden, she had been concealed from him, but at the right time their great love (that had been concealed) was going to be exposed or revealed.

Chapter 8

In this chapter we see the coming together again of the Shepherd and the Shulamite. We are going to see what was said about their love and why they were able to overcome this attack on their marriage. Having overcome, their love is stronger, more powerful, and more satisfying. It is an even greater testimony of G-d's power and presence in their lives.

Verse 1: (The Shulamite): *"Who will set you as a brother unto me? As one who nursed at the breast of my mother? I would find you outside and I would kiss you, and they would not scorn me."*

Who will set you as a brother unto me: There is a degree of insecurity within women in regard to their relationship with their spouse. The Shulamite is wanting to feel secure. People do not want to destroy the relationship between a brother and sister and nor are siblings shamed if they are seen together publicly. The Shulamite is wanting to feel that same security and confidence one would have within a familial relationship.

Nursed at the breast of my mother: She is again alluding to the common union found between siblings. With her spouse she wants this same type of union (relationship) which society affirms and does not attack.

They would not scorn me: In one sense she publicly belongs to King Solomon (see chapter 3v6) – he had come with his soldiers and swords in order to take her.

What she is saying here is that she wants her relationship with the shepherd to be recognized so that she can feel secure publicly. She does not want to worry about what others are saying or what others might do in coming against their relationship.

Verse 2: *“I would lead you and I would bring you to the house of my mother, where she taught me. I would give you drink of spiced wine with pomegranate juice.”*

House of my mother: A place of security, a place where she felt safe, her home.

She taught me: The same things that she experienced growing up in regard to a marriage (between her mother and father) she wants to experience with him now. The point that we should glean from that is this: if we are married and have children our marriage is going to greatly influence how the children perceive marriage, and how they will behave in regard to their own marital commitments.

I would give you drink: When we drink we find satisfaction. Quenching our thirst also brings joy. She is affirming that she would be a provider, a giver, an investor in this relationship for the purpose of bringing joy to her spouse. When a man makes his wife feel secure she behaves in a way to bring him satisfaction and joy.

Verse 3: *“His left hand is under my head, and with his right hand he embraces me.”*

His left hand is under my head: He supports her. The first thing that he does in thinking about intimacy and growing close to her are thoughts not of his comfort but of hers.

Embraces: Hugs

Verse 4: *“I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, do not stir and do not wake up love until it fulfils its desire.”*

Do not stir and do not wake up: Do not let anything interfere with covenantal love. It is precious and fragile and should not be treated lightly or carelessly.

Verse 5: (The Chorus): *“Who is this coming up from the wilderness, laying upon her beloved one? Under the apple tree I will awaken you -in the place that your mother was in labour for you, and there she gave birth to you.”*

Note: This verse speaks of their reunion – in chapter 3v6 Solomon came up from the wilderness for the day of his marriage. The same imagery is used here but this time in regard to the Shulamite and her beloved Shepherd.

Wilderness: That which is empty, that which has nothing. Being in this place caused her to depend on and trust G-d. Through all that she went through she relied upon the L-rd and He brought them back together.

Apple: A place of joy. A place that has a pleasing fragrance. It is a place of preference. This is what the Scripture is saying - she is in her preferred place, not in the palace with King Solomon. She did not have her head turned by Solomon's wealth or power, but her preference was for the Shepherd. He was not a wealthy man, but he was a G-dly man.

He knew how to be faithful to his flock and, therefore, how to be faithful to her.

Under the apple tree I will awaken you: She has found a safe place with him. Through this relationship she has found security.

Gave birth: This image testifies of a new life, a birth. Although Solomon had attacked this relationship, by taking her into his inner chambers, that has past and she has been given a new start, a new beginning, with her beloved.

Verse 6: *"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arms. For as strong as death is love, and as hard as Sheol. Jealousy is like a flame of fire that flames."*

Seal: Speaks of ownership, possession, or responsibility. The Shepherd is not domineering over her, but she is happy to be willingly surrendered to him within this relationship.

Heart: One thinks with the heart. She wants everything that he thinks about or does to be done taking her into consideration. Men are wise when they involve their wives in the decision-making processes.

Arms: Normally when this word is used, especially in Hebrew culture, it is used in regard to holding something. We find here that it is another term for embracing. Arms can also be synonymous with deeds/actions.

As strong as death is love: Love brings about the death of some things (especially those things done before marriage that would now exclude our spouse). The same thing happens with our love for G-d. When we love G-d many things also need to change, things no longer appropriate in keeping with the covenant or commitment between ourselves and Him.

As hard as Sheol: Love brings about the death of those things that are destructive.

Jealousy: A wrong experience of love is jealousy. Jealousy can destroy those things that are good in a relationship.

Flame: Emphasised twice.

Verse 7: *"Many waters cannot quench love, and streams are not able to sweep it away. If a man were to offer all of his net worth for love it would be utterly despised."*

Many waters cannot quench love: True love overcomes (1 Corinthians 13 - love perseveres, love overcomes, love endures)

Net worth: All of his possessions (i.e. all of the things that make up his portfolio or estate)

Utterly despised: Solomon (an exceedingly wealthy man) is saying here that every single thing a person has accumulated in life is less valuable than the love that can be found in a G-dly marriage. This love is far superior to anything that money can buy.

Verse 8: (The Chorus -her brothers are speaking): *"A little sister we have and breasts she does not have. What shall we do to our sister in the day that he speaks of her?"*

Note: In chapter 1 her brothers had not appreciated the Shulamite for who she was. They had evaluated her in a very secular way - comparing her to other women and implying that a woman's value was seen in her outward appearance.

Breasts: The essence of a woman. They had not appreciated their sister. They had viewed her with a kind of contempt and saw her as insignificant in comparison to other women.

The day that he speaks of her: Meaning when a man wants to marry her. They had thought that she was not much of a catch (undesirable), but now they are seeing a man taking great interest in her. They need to provide her with a dowry, but they had not been prepared for it. She is very valuable, and they had been unaware of it.

Verse 9: *"If she is a wall we would build concerning her a castle of silver. If she is a door then we would enclose her with a border of cedar."*

Wall: There are two different Hebrew words for wall. One word refers to the wall inside your home. The wall referred to here, though, is that of a wall that surrounds a city. The walls of a city were built for defence. Without that wall a city is vulnerable – it would not have adequate security.

Castle of silver: Their perspective toward the Shulamite is changing. They started off thinking she was not much of a woman but now they have heard she is desirable, and they were totally unprepared for that.

Note: There is a quick change in the text. We do not worry about things with little value, however those things of great value we want to lock up or hide away. The greater the value the greater the protection we afford it. They are now saying that they would secure her in a castle of silver in order to protect her.

Cedar: The same type of wood that was used for the temple. These brothers are now exalting her and are recognizing her value as a G-dly woman.

Verse 10: (The Shulamite): *"I am a wall, and my breasts are towers. Then I will be in his eyes as one who has found peace."*

I am a wall: As a good wall she has great value.

My breasts are towers: They thought her womanhood was not much but in fact she was a woman above others (a tower is higher than the other types of buildings around it)

Peace: Fulfilment. Finally she is being recognized for who she is – the spouse of the Shepherd. The reunion is complete.

Note: The following verses are summary verses. They help us to understand the greater wisdom that Solomon wanted to impart to us.

Verse 11: *"There was a vineyard to Solomon in Baal Hamon. He gave the vineyard to those who would take care of it, the vineyard workers. Every man was to bring forth from its fruit 1000 pieces of silver."*

Baal: Means 'owner' or 'husband'.

Hamon: Means 'many'. Baal Hamon implies that Solomon was a husband to many.

Vineyard: Synonymous with grapes, wine, and, therefore, love.

1000 pieces of silver: These vineyards were extremely valuable from a monetary standpoint.

Verse 12: *“My vineyard is before me and a thousand (pieces of silver) is given to you Solomon, and two hundred to those who tend its fruit.”*

My vineyard is before me: If the Shulamite is speaking she is saying that she belongs to no one except her beloved.

Some understand this as the Shepherd who is speaking, in which case he would be referring to the Shulamite as his (“My vineyard is mine’). Solomon had all the wealth and all the women, which he had profited financially from, but the Shepherd kept his vineyard for himself.

Verse 13: (The Shepherd) *“The one who dwells in vineyards, your friends listen to your voice. Make me to hear it!”*

Dwells in vineyards: She is now dwelling in the place where he has invited her to be.

Listen: This is a term of admonition or instruction.

Verse 14: (The Shulamite): *“Flee my beloved, and you be like a young deer among the young deer upon the mountains of spices.”*

Mountains of spices: This talks about the partaking of love. She is now where she is supposed to be and, once he has joined her, they will enjoy the mountains (not mountain) of spices together. The Scripture speaks, in beautiful imagery, of them coming together - not in a garden, but in gardens of abundance.

Solomon had his vineyards, great wealth, and many wives but they did not bring him lasting joy. The Shepherd had his garden and very little material wealth, from a worldly perspective, but with the Shulamite, in the beautiful covenant of marriage, he found great joy. She satisfied him and he satisfied her. We too can have a G-dly marriage that brings glory to G-d by being a testimony to others. G-dly marriages bring joy, satisfaction, and pleasure into our lives –even influencing the lives of others.