

The Song of Solomon and its True Interpretation

by Jeremy James



There is an obligation on all of us as born-again Christians to strive continually for a greater understanding of God's Word. Even into his old age the Apostle Paul was studying the Scriptures. When he asked Timothy to bring him various items which he had left for safekeeping at Troas, he singled out "the parchments" for special mention (2 Timothy 4:13).

We also know that prophets like Isaiah recorded prophecies which they could not themselves have fully understood. No doubt they reflected on these verses afterwards and pondered their possible role in God's future plan for mankind.

Some great theologians, notably Martin Luther, were greatly perplexed by the Book of Revelation and even asked why it was included in the canon. However, we understand the symbology of that remarkable book today and are greatly blessed by the insights that it gives into End Time events.

There still remains one book which has not yet acquired a consistent and universally shared interpretation. This is *The Song of Solomon*, a work which to many is so allegorical that they have despaired of ever learning, with any certainty, what it actually means.

- PART ONE -

We won't rehearse the countless opinions, mostly speculative, about its possible meaning. Some of the commentators we examined are highly regarded, and rightly so, but a clear insight into this particular book seems to have eluded them. Disparate interpretations accumulated at such a rate that, writing in the first half of the 19th century, Adam Clarke, the Methodist theologian, saw fit to group them into six categories, as follows:

1. It is an epithalamium on the marriage of Solomon with the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and is to be understood in no other way. (An *epithalamium* is a congratulatory song, sung to a newly married couple, wishing them abundant blessings and marital joy.)
2. It is an allegory addressing God's treatment of the Hebrews as He brought them out of Egypt through the wilderness to the Promised Land.
3. It is intended to represent the incarnation of Jesus Christ, or his marriage with human nature.
4. It represents Christ's love for the Church or elected souls, and their love for him.
5. It is an allegorical poem on the glories of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.
6. It is a collection of sacred idyls, the spiritual meaning of which is not agreed upon.

Further interpretations have been offered since then, as well as variations on those already proposed. The popular view today is that the Song of Solomon, taken as a whole, is a marital ode or set of odes (an 'epithalamium') written by Solomon to celebrate his marriage to the love of his life. As such it is a spiritual allegory expressing the love that Christ has for his Church.



As we shall see in a moment, this interpretation is not supported by the text. The general approach to this book has been greatly influenced by several working assumptions which sent scholars off in the wrong direction: (1) Solomon, as a type of Christ, must be the hero and lover; (2) The woman (“the Shulamite”) must represent the Church; (3) The text must be understood throughout to express in various ways the joy of marital love; (4) The woman can have only one suitor; and (5) as an epithalamium or marital hymn it requires that Solomon and the Shulamite be husband and wife.

A new interpretation

We can summarize our fresh interpretation of *The Song of Solomon* as follows:

The Song of Solomon is an account by Solomon, possibly amounting to a confession, of an attempt he made to add to his already large harem a beautiful woman who was betrothed (in her own estimation) to another man, and her attempts, as well as those of her true love, to escape the clutches of Solomon and become reunited.

The account, from start to finish, consists entirely of actual events and actual people. There are only three speakers in total in the *The Song of Solomon*. The once widely-held view that the ladies in Solomon’s court constituted a “chorus” is not valid.

This interpretation places the three ‘actors’ in the following roles:

- (a) Solomon is a type of the carnal man. He also represents the world and its endless material attractions.
- (b) The Shulamite is a pure-hearted soul who lives only for love. As such she represents all who love God in truth. She is prepared to lose everything to be with her beloved.
- (c) The man she loves is a simple shepherd. His love for her is pure and unconstrained. He represents the love of God for righteous men and women.



The dramatic narrative runs broadly as follows:

Canticle 1: The woman is in Solomon's palace, surrounded by her maids-in-waiting. She confides to them that her true love is a shepherd who lives in the hill country near Gilead. She was taken by Solomon as one of his many wives, but her heart longs to be elsewhere. Solomon tries to impress her with flattering words and romantic rhetoric. He may have heard the rumor that the woman loved someone else. This is probably a difficulty he had met with many times before but usually his charm, wealth and reputation broke down all resistance. In her mind she is composing a letter which she intends to send to her true love.



Canticle 2: The woman and the shepherd exchange letters. They long to be with each other. Their plans take shape and he makes the long and tiring journey to Jerusalem to rescue her. She appears to confide to some of her ladies-in-waiting that he is coming for her. He climbs up to the window of her suite and urges her to make haste.

Canticle 3: She makes her way out of the palace under the cover of darkness. Somehow their rendezvous is delayed and she wanders about trying to find him. She asks the night watchmen if they had seen him. When they finally meet, they realize they have delayed too long and Solomon's men are coming to bring her back. Solomon places her under house arrest and assigns a military guard of sixty men around her quarters. He also decides to marry her without further delay and put an end to all this shenanigans. Wedding invitations are sent out.



Canticle 4: We are given an extensive account of the loving words spoken to his beloved by the shepherd during their brief moments together before Solomon's men arrived. The imagery expresses the intensity of his love for her.

Canticle 5: The shepherd knows his time is short. He makes another valiant attempt to rescue his beloved before the wedding. He eludes the guards and manages to get as far as her bedroom door but he can't undo the lock. He keeps at it for some time but hears the guards and decides to flee. When the guards have gone she manages to get the door open and make her way into the street to look for her shepherd. Alas, the night watchmen who walked the street caught sight of her and realized what she was up to. This time they would forcibly apprehend her before Solomon's soldiers arrived. In the course of doing this they struck her and seemingly inflicted an injury. The king is furious with her and interrogates her in front of his wives, concubines and ladies-in-waiting. He can't understand why she is behaving like this. The woman tries to explain why she loves the shepherd.

Canticle 6: She is made to endure this interrogation, even though it is grossly demeaning. Solomon offers to find the shepherd for her (why?) but she suspects his intentions are not honorable and gives a vague reply. Solomon tries flattery once again but she has switched off. In her mind she goes over the wonderful words spoken to her by the shepherd. Meanwhile the shepherd is thinking of her and what she will have to endure at the palace. He is comforted with the knowledge that God will protect her.

Canticle 7: In this lonely moment, burdened by a combination of grief and stress, they both find solace in thoughts of one another. Using vivid poetic imagery, he gives a beautiful account of his love for her. Throughout this whole ordeal they think of each other as husband and wife.

Canticle 8: In these closing verses she reflects on the events which led to this tragic situation, how Solomon got to hear of her beauty and set out to win her hand in marriage, seemingly by seeking permission from her family. Somehow she succumbed to the pressure and found herself at the palace. Once there she realized what a terrible mistake she had made.

We are not told how the entire saga ended. Did she go ahead with the planned marriage to Solomon? This is highly doubtful. Did she escape and live happily ever after with her shepherd spouse? We can't be sure, but this too is doubtful. Solomon may have had him killed, just as his father had killed Uriah to gain Bathsheba. Or perhaps she was kept thereafter at the palace as a concubine rather than a wife. Solomon would have lost face had he let her go. It would have appeared to all Israel that a simple shepherd had gotten the better of him.

Before proceeding to a verse-by-verse exposition of the text, we should note that the only well-known Bible commentator who promoted this *shepherd lover* interpretation, as far as we can tell, was William MacDonald (who has authored a very fine commentary on the entire Bible). However, he avoids the most challenging aspects of the Biblical narrative by resorting to dream sequences. These enable him to ignore, for example, the violence inflicted on the Shulamite and the attempts by her shepherd lover to free her from the palace. His approach is largely speculative, and he ascribes many quotations to the wrong person.



- PART TWO -

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

At the top of each cell in the righthand column we give the name of the speaker. It is important when interpreting this book to understand who is speaking in each verse, as otherwise great confusion will result. There are only three speakers in all.

Canticle 1

[1] “The song of songs, which is Solomon's.”	Solomon King Solomon claims authorship.
[2] “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.”	The Woman She is speaking about the man she loves. The reference to him in the third person suggests that all subsequent references to him in the second person are what she intends to say when she sees him next.
[3] “Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.”	The Woman This man is her true love. The “virgins” are unmarried maidens seeking a husband. They too would fall in love with him were he not spoken for.
[4] “Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.”	The Woman In her imagination she tells him that King Solomon has taken her into his palace. Perhaps she is writing him a letter. The “virgins” in the previous verse are therefore her maids-in-attendance. She wants her true love to come and fetch her. She believes the maids-in-attendance would gladly go with her.
[5] “I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.”	The Woman She calls her maids-in-attendance “daughters of Jerusalem.” Presumably they were born and raised there, while she came from another place. She says her skin is “black”, something that must have been unusual in the palace or among Solomon’s many women.

<p>[6] “Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.”</p>	<p>The Woman She attributes her dark skin to the time she spent in the sun. Her brothers (“my mother’s children”) seem to have assigned her to tend to a vineyard, which would necessitate spending long hours outdoors. We are not told here why they were “angry” with her. [See 8:6]</p>
<p>[7] “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?”</p>	<p>The Woman Her true love is a shepherd and tends a flock. She wants to know where she can find him. Presumably at noon he would allow his flock to rest in the shade. She says she would end up getting lost if she tried to find him. This is why she wants to know his exact location at noon. (Either she will seek him herself or send him a message.)</p>
<p>[8] “If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.”</p>	<p>Her True Love He seems to have received her message and is sending a reply. He reassures her that, if she has difficulty finding him, she was to go to the tents where the other shepherds assembled and wait for him there (“feed thy kids”).</p>
<p>[9] “I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.”</p>	<p>Solomon King Solomon tries to woo her and win her affections. He compares her to one of his favorite sights, namely, the fine horses bred by Pharaoh in Egypt.</p>
<p>[10] “Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold.”</p>	<p>Solomon He uses conventional and unconvincing metaphors to flatter her.</p>
<p>[11] “We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.”</p>	<p>Solomon He also promises to spoil her with the most expensive clothes and outfits.</p>

<p>[12] “While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.”</p>	<p>The Woman As she sits with the king “at his table” she knows her great beauty has an effect on him, but this is not something she can control.</p>
<p>[13] “A bundle of myrrh is my wellbeloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts.”</p>	<p>The Woman She thinks of her true love and this has a calming effect on her, like “a bundle of myrrh”. She thinks in particular of his tender touch in the night.</p>
<p>[14] “My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi.”</p>	<p>The Woman The Hebrew word which is translated “camphire” is <i>kopher</i>, a highly significant term which can mean ransom, covering or redemption. The lid on the Ark of the Covenant is the <i>kopher</i>, while Noah’s Ark was covered inside and out with <i>kopher</i> or pitch-bitumen. Seemingly, the Hebrew word can also mean henna, a plant with a strong scent: “a shrub or low tree, with fragrant whitish flowers growing in clusters like grapes” [Brown Driver Briggs]. Even if the plant is not specifically henna, the context tells us that she is referring to a fragrant or attractive flowering plant (“<u>cluster</u> of <i>kopher</i>”).</p>
<p>[15] “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes.”</p>	<p>Solomon King Solomon continues to woo her with sweet words taken straight from the lover’s almanac.</p>
<p>[16] “Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed is green.”</p>	<p>Solomon The Hebrew word which is translated “green” is <i>ra’anan</i> (Strong’s H7488), which can mean luxuriant, fresh, verdant or green. However, Solomon is hardly referring to the color of the marital bed but rather to the luxuriant or fertile quality of their love-making. Again, the accent in this verse is on sensual beauty, pleasure and sexual intimacy.</p>

<p>[17] “The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir.”</p>	<p>Solomon The king reminds her that he lives in a magnificent palace. She was bound to be happy and content if she lived with him.</p>
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Canticle 2

<p>[1] “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.”</p>	<p>Her True Love He describes himself as a flower of the field, a very humble image. This is not a man who is filled with his own importance.</p>
<p>[2] “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.”</p>	<p>Her True Love He sees his beloved as a flower of the field, a “lily” just like himself. Alas his beloved is currently among “thorns”, the rich elite up in Jerusalem.</p>
<p>[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, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”</p>	<p>The Woman The common trees of the wood cannot be compared with the “apple tree”, which bears nourishing fruit. His love feeds her heart. When she is with him it’s as though he is sheltering her from the oppressive heat of the day.</p>
<p>[4] “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.”</p>	<p>The Woman The “banqueting house” was where he fed her with his love. His love was like a shelter or banner which covered them both.</p>
<p>[5] “Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.”</p>	<p>The Woman She reflects with great tenderness on the love he has for her and its powerful effect. The pressing together of these apples of love produced a delightful cider that made her “sick” or drunk with love.</p>

<p>[6] “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She reflects on the time they lay together with deep affection in their special meeting place, their “banqueting house”. She relives in particular the wonderful feeling she experienced as his arms embraced her.</p>
<p>[7] “I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She knows he is coming to find her and bring her back with him. She asks her maids-in-waiting to let him rest when he arrives after his long journey.</p>
<p>[8] “The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> He has arrived! She hears his voice and was thinking fondly of him as he made his way over the hills and mountains to reach her.</p>
<p>[9] “My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> He is outside her section of the palace, behind the wall. Presumably he is anxious not to be seen by the palace guards. He must have been fit and athletic to have gotten that far, “like a roe or a young hart.” He is even peering in through the window.</p>
<p>[10] “My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He calls her to join him, to gather her things and flee. There is a great sense of urgency here.</p>
<p>[11] “For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He has timed his visit well. Spring has arrived and the weather is congenial for their journey.</p>
<p>[12] “The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle [<i>turtledove</i>] is heard in our land;”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He is a little nervous. She might hesitate. So he mentions the things which he knows will delight and entice her, the covering of wild flowers in the meadows and the birds singing in the countryside that she loves so much.</p>

<p>[13] “The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He continues with his enticing words, reminding her of the beautiful pastoral perfume that she never found in the city. Then he calls her once again to rise and come away with him.</p>
<p>[14] “O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He longs to see her face and hear her voice. She may be hiding herself, her heart beating nervously, as she realizes that, by doing this, she will be rejecting the great king.</p>
<p>[15] “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He then reminds her of the wonderful job she did caring for the vineyard, keeping away the small animals and vermin which caused harm to the vines and their tender fruit.</p>
<p>[16] “My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She has made her decision. She is going back with him! “My beloved is mine, and I am his!” She is going to where he lives, among the wild flowers of the countryside.</p>
<p>[17] “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She urges him to make haste. They want to cover as much ground as possible before daybreak. She knows that as soon as her absence is discovered, Solomon will send his men after her. <i>Bether</i> means “separated.”</p>

Canticle 3

<p>[1] “By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> Having waited for him for so long, when she finally got an opportunity to flee with him they somehow became separated. When she reached the place where they had arranged to rendezvous, he was nowhere to be found.</p>
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<p>[2] “I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.”</p>	<p>The Woman She is distraught. Having left the palace grounds she wanders about the city in the dead of night looking for him.</p>
<p>[3] “The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?”</p>	<p>The Woman She is approached by the city guards, who must have thought it strange to see a woman wandering about the streets at that hour. She asks them if they have seen the shepherd.</p>
<p>[4] “It was but a little that I passed from them, but 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, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.”</p>	<p>The Woman She actually managed to find him! She clung passionately to him and longed to be back in their own village, away from this critical situation. She knew the guards would report her and very soon a search party would track her down.</p>
<p>[5] “I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.”</p>	<p>The Woman There is a touch of hysteria here. She repeats the same words spoken in Canticle 2, verse 7. When she last spoke those words, everything was so promising and her heart glowed with joy at the prospect of meeting her beloved. Now that she is finally holding him, alas, their plans are falling apart.</p>
<p>[6] “Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?”</p>	<p>The Woman She sees Solomon's men coming for her with great fury, seemingly with Solomon himself at their head.</p>
<p>[7] “Behold his bed, which is Solomon's; threescore valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel.”</p>	<p>The Woman She is brought back to the palace and placed in Solomon's bed chamber. This time he was taking no risks: sixty well-trained soldiers stood guard around it.</p>

<p>[8] “They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> The scene is upsetting for her. She has suddenly gone from a state of peaceful expectation to a place of luxurious imprisonment with armed guards standing around the bedroom suite.</p>
<p>[9] “King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon.”</p>	<p><i>Solomon</i> Solomon was determined to marry this woman before she caused him any more trouble. The chariot was the centerpiece in the bridal procession.</p>
<p>[10] “He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.”</p>	<p><i>Solomon</i> The bridal chariot was finished with the most opulent and magnificent trimming that money could buy. This particular chariot was probably used also in his previous wedding ceremonies.</p>
<p>[11] “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.”</p>	<p><i>Solomon</i> The royal proclamation goes forth, calling all the noble families to attend this hastily arranged wedding.</p>

Canticle 4

<p>[1] “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> These would appear to be the words of tenderness that he shared with her before they were rudely parted by Solomon’s men. As a shepherd his metaphors and imagery are drawn from nature and the countryside.</p>
<p>[2] “Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He mentions flocks of sheep which are of the finest quality. This is <u>not</u> an image that Solomon would have used!</p>

<p>[3] “Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> Compare the rich and sincere character of these images with the staid ones used by Solomon in Canticle 1.</p>
<p>[4] “Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> This image is closer to the kind that Solomon might have used, but a rural shepherd who sees the tower of David for the first time would be very impressed.</p>
<p>[5] “Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> Again he uses images familiar to a shepherd.</p>
<p>[6] “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> <u>He</u> uses the same opening words, when speaking to her, that <u>she</u> used to address him in Canticle 2, verse 17. When she used them they were full of hope. Here he uses them to remind her that he was not giving up hope, that he will continue to wait for her and live daily in the fragrance (“myrrh” and “frankincense”) of their love.</p>
<p>[7] “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He sees her true spiritual beauty, unlike Solomon, who saw only her carnal aspect.</p>
<p>[8] “Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> In these verses (8-15) he is overcome by the intensity of the love that he has for her. He reminds her that she is <u>his</u> espoused wife. Then he calls on her with great urgency to leave Jerusalem (“Lebanon”) with him and get far away from the city. He wants her to travel east with him, to his homeland and live in the sight of <u>his</u> mountains where the wild cats roar.</p>

<p>[9] “Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.”</p>	<p>Her True Love Again he calls her his wife and even uses the word “sister” to emphasize the permanent nature of their marital relationship. It is also a way of saying they are of one flesh. His intense love for her is aroused by the sight of even one bead in her necklace. (This is certainly not something Solomon would have said!)</p>
<p>[10] “How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!”</p>	<p>Her True Love He repeats the key words, <i>spouse</i> and <i>sister</i>. He also stresses that it is her <u>love</u> that matters most to him, not her flesh. He has never known another love like it.</p>
<p>[11] “Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.”</p>	<p>Her True Love Here he conveys the powerful effect on him of just one of her kisses. The “Lebanon” in this verse refers to the region around Mount Hermon, not Jerusalem. [Jerusalem is called Lebanon in a few places in the Bible because so many of the majestic cedars of Lebanon were used in the building of both the Temple and Solomon’s palace.]</p>
<p>[12] “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.”</p>	<p>Her True Love His spouse and “sister” is forever his. The fountain of her love is for him alone.</p>
<p>[13] “Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard,”</p>	<p>Her True Love He emphasizes the exceptional fragrance of her love, its unfailing fruitfulness.</p>
<p>[14] “Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:”</p>	<p>Her True Love The image at verse 13 is expanded.</p>

<p>[15] “A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> The only love that gives him life is her love. Jesus used this image in reference to himself! See John 4:10 (“...he would have given thee living water”) and John 4:14 (“but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”)</p>
<p>[16] “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She asks the wind to blow her fragrance all the way to where her beloved tends his sheep. In saying this she is confirming the sanctity of their marital relationship and her unwavering fidelity.</p>

Canticle 5

<p>[1] “I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: 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, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He reminds her of their lovemaking, of the overpowering effect it had on both of them. He experienced a joy and sweetness unlike any he could ever have imagined.</p>
<p>[2] “I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> Somehow the shepherd has made his way to the bedroom where she is sleeping. He may have slept rough for several days (“dew” and “drops of the night”) after they were separated and is now making another bold attempt to rescue her.</p>
<p>[3] “I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He tells her that he is not leaving without her. He will only put his coat back on when he is leaving with her; he has washed his feet to make it easier to enter the palace and will not defile them again until she leaves with him.</p>

<p>[4] “My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.”</p>	<p>The Woman He tries to gain entry to the room but the lock won't give way. As he did this, she felt deeply moved by what he was trying to do.</p>
<p>[5] “I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.”</p>	<p>The Woman She got out of her bed and tried to undo the lock from the inside. The reference to myrrh in this verse would appear to be erotic.</p>
<p>[6] “I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.”</p>	<p>The Woman She actually succeeded in getting the door open, but he was gone. Presumably the noise of their activities had alerted the palace guards and, on hearing them approach, he decided to run and hide.</p>
<p>[7] “The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.”</p>	<p>The Woman Once again she sets off to find her beloved in the streets of the city. This time the city guards were not going to risk incurring Solomon’s wrath. They struck her, seemingly causing an injury, and forcibly took away the garments that she needed to walk about at night.</p>
<p>[8] “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.”</p>	<p>The Woman Back in the palace, she begs her maids-in-waiting to get an urgent message to her beloved. She wants him to know that she tried to get out of the room and join him.</p>
<p>[9] “What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?”</p>	<p>Solomon The king is furious. He interviews her and asks, in effect: “What is so great about this guy? Why are you so determined to be with him? After all, there are plenty of eligible young men in the world. And why do you make these dreadful accusations about me? I’m only trying to help.”</p>

<p>[10] “My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She tries to put into words the special qualities which set her beloved apart from other men.</p>
<p>[11] “His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She is not blessed with a poetic gift but she strives as best she can to explain why her shepherd love is so special.</p>
<p>[12] “His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 11]</p>
<p>[13] “His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 11]</p>
<p>[14] “His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 11]</p>
<p>[15] “His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 11]</p>
<p>[16] “His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She concludes by addressing, not Solomon, but her maids-in-waiting. She possibly had lost all respect for Solomon at this stage and didn’t want to describe her beloved to him directly.</p>

Canticle 6

<p>[1] “Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee.”</p>	<p>Solomon Solomon asks the woman where she thinks her beloved may have gone. He offers to help her find him. (A strange offer indeed.)</p>
<p>[2] “My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.”</p>	<p>The Woman She gives what must have seemed to Solomon an evasive answer.</p>
<p>[3] “I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.”</p>	<p>The Woman She wants Solomon to know he is wasting his time trying to win her heart.</p>
<p>[4] “Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.”</p>	<p>Solomon Solomon tries flattery, comparing her to a great army, sensing perhaps her great inner strength! He also compares her to two cities, Jerusalem and Tirzah. The latter was the main city in upper Israel at that time.</p>
<p>[5] “Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead.”</p>	<p>The Woman, quoting her beloved In her mind she drowns out the words spoken by Solomon by recalling the true expressions of love made by her shepherd. He compared her with true sincerity to the flocks of Gilead.</p>
<p>[6] “Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them.”</p>	<p>The Woman, quoting her beloved Her shepherd spouse was comparing her to what, in his eyes, was the most perfect manifestation of natural beauty in the world.</p>

<p>[7] “As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman, quoting her beloved</i> He also compared her to the fruit most associated with romantic love, the pomegranate.</p>
<p>[8] “There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He knows his spouse will be interrogated in the court of Solomon. She will be surrounded by sixty queens (wives of Solomon) and eighty concubines, along with countless pretty maids.</p>
<p>[9] “My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He thinks of her in her plight, alone among so many. Yet he is confident that they will see just how special she is, glimpsing the same qualities that he sees in her and praising her character.</p>
<p>[10] “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He imagines her standing there, in the midst of so many, and yet unshaken. Her purity is her protection. [See verse 6:4]</p>
<p>[11] “I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He seeks to calm himself by thinking of the wonderful times he wandered down into the valley to seek her out and watch her from a distance.</p>
<p>[12] “Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He suddenly feels greatly reassured. <i>Amminadib</i> [Strong’s H5971] means the common people or, with reference to Israel, the people of God (cf. Exodus 15:13 and Deuteronomy 32:36). He knows God is with her and that His strength will uphold her.</p>

<p>[13] “Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He cries out to his beloved, calling her to return. His heart yearns to see her again. As he does so, he thinks of all the people assembled in Solomon’s court and asks what they see when they look upon his beloved. Though they may not know it yet, they are looking at a powerful adversary. His beloved will be able to withstand them, just like an army. Better still, she is like two armies, so victory is assured. [See verses 6:4 and 6:10]</p> <p>He calls her his ‘Shulamite’. This is a pet name or diminutive with a meaning similar to ‘my little dove’ or little peace-filled one.</p>
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Canticle 7

<p>[1] “How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! the joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning [<i>skilled</i>] workman.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He launches once more into a poetic eulogy, extolling the beauty and wonderful qualities of his Shulamite spouse. Verses 1-9 are full of imagery rooted in a pastoral setting. The locations are those found in or near the hill country where he lives. [See Isaiah 52:7]</p>
<p>[2] “Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor: thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 1]</p>
<p>[3] “Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 1]</p>
<p>[4] “Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim: thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 1]</p>

<p>[5] “Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple; the king is held in the galleries.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 1]</p>
<p>[6] “How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 1]</p>
<p>[7] “This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 1]</p>
<p>[8] “I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples;”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 1]</p>
<p>[9] “And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.”</p>	<p>[See comment at verse 1]</p>
<p>[10] “I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.”</p>	<p>The Woman It's as if she hears his distant expressions of love. She knows in her heart that he thinks about her constantly.</p>
<p>[11] “Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.”</p>	<p>The Woman She too yearns to be with him and to walk in the fields just as they did before Solomon came and separated them.</p>

<p>[12] “Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She ponders the special times they had together and the places they both loved to visit. She assures him, in her thoughts, that she will once again lie with him in love.</p>
<p>[13] “The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.”</p>	<p><i>Her True Love</i> He seems to reply to her secret invitation, telling her that the land is filled with fruit and the joy of harvest. His own plot is bountiful and he can smell the mandrakes. This plant is noted for its aphrodisiac properties. Its scent must remind him even more strongly of his beloved. We know he is expecting her because he has “laid up” many choice fruits for her.</p>

Canticle 8

<p>[1] “O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, I should not be despised.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> The woman reflects on the events that led to her predicament. Just as her beloved thinks of her as his sister, she likes to think of him as her brother. If it were so, their relationship would be permanent and immune to interference. What is more, her proximity to him would not cause her to be despised.</p>
<p>[2] “I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> If he were her brother she would be able to bring him into her home. It would be the most natural thing in the world. Once inside they would be able to live as husband and wife.</p>
<p>[3] “His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She refers back to verse 2:6, indicating that the love they had known outdoors would be shared indoors.</p>

<p>[4] “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She refers back to verses 2:7 and 3:5, again indicating that the relationship they had before would be renewed in her mother’s home.</p>
<p>[5] “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth that bare thee.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She sees herself at the start of their relationship, leaning on his arm. She then thinks of his mother, the woman who brought this wonderful man into the world and into her life. She thinks of him as the precious fruit of the apple tree.</p>
<p>[6] “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She wanted confirmation that their love bond was unbreakable and asked that he display on his arm some sign of his total commitment to her. People must be made to understand that she belongs to him. Otherwise other suitors will come along and try to win her heart. This will only promote jealousy and conflict.</p> <p>It is quite possible that he failed to do this and so gave the impression that she was still looking for a husband. We can also see here why her brothers were “angry” with her in verse 1:6. They believed they were entitled to arrange her marriage to Solomon.</p>
<p>[7] “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She knows beyond all doubt that their love for each other is unquenchable, that it is priceless, and that nothing in the world can be compared to it.</p>
<p>[8] “We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She elaborates on the circumstances that led to their awful predicament. Her older brothers had made plans to find her a husband once she became old enough to be espoused.</p>

<p>[9] “If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> They wanted the very best for her. They apparently envisaged her in a fine house befitting a woman of great beauty. “Wall” in this context means chaste and “door” means promiscuous.</p>
<p>[10] “I am a wall, and my breasts like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favour.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> She matured into a startling and chaste beauty. Word went round and Solomon got to hear about this highly desirable creature. Once he saw her he immediately decided to add her to his bevy of wives.</p>
<p>[11] “Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> Solomon was a highly successful businessman and had many commercial enterprises. He rented out a vineyard at Baal-hamon and expected the keepers to give him a thousand pieces of silver annually for the privilege. (This reference to business and profit is a sign that Solomon was someone who got what he wanted and was greatly concerned with material things.)</p>
<p>[12] “My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> The vineyard that she tended must have been close to where Solomon’s was located. The number “two hundred” would seem to denote the total annual payment made to the workers who looked after Solomon’s vineyard.</p>
<p>[13] “Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it.”</p>	<p><i>The Woman</i> This is a critical verse. The English translation does not seem to capture what is intended. In essence she is saying: Solomon's servants obeyed his voice and she too was obliged to hear it. In short, when she was ordered by her family to accept Solomon’s proposal of marriage, she felt she had no choice but to accept it. The brevity of the verse is a sign that any reference to this awful mistake caused her great distress.</p>

[14] “Make haste, my beloved,
and be thou like to a roe or to a
young hart upon the mountains
of spices.”

The Woman

She calls out with a broken heart to her
beloved, begging him to come quickly
and take her home.

- PART THREE -

What is the purpose of this extraordinary book? We are given a clue in the very last verse:

**“Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe
or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.”**

Compare it with the second last verse of the Bible:

**“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly.
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:20)**

Here the Shepherd reassures the Bride that he **will** come quickly!

The Song of Solomon is not about the Church as such but about all who love God. In this age, those who love God also love and revere His Son, Jesus Christ. It is a mistake, however, to claim that the Song of Solomon is referring to the Church per se. The book must have been accessible to the Old Testament saints and could not have contained any explicit statements about the Church. The Apostle Paul confirmed that the Church was a mystery until Christ came on earth. Rather ***The Song of Solomon*** is celebrating the love of God for all righteous men and women, a love we can experience only if we value and esteem it above everything and anything this earthly world can offer.

In this book, Solomon himself symbolizes all that the world can offer, but the Shulamite didn't want any of it! She had known true love and would lose everything to regain it. She was even prepared to endure with patience the awful humiliation and suffering which came with her decision.



The fact that the book never mentions the Temple, the sacrifices or the priesthood is also significant. This makes it incredibly “Gentile friendly”, an Old Testament book – like *Ecclesiastes* – which a non-Jew could read and study and not feel excluded from its central message. Seen in this way, the book left open the possibility that God might one day reach out to the Gentiles just as He had reached out to the Jews.

We should ask why Solomon wrote this book. After all, it cast him in a very poor light! The answer may lie in the widely held view that he repented of his apostasy toward the end of his life. There is some support for this in the comment made by Jesus: “**Even Solomon in all his glory...**” (**Matthew 6:29**) It is doubtful whether Jesus would have referred to him in these terms had he died an apostate. If he did repent then it is possible that this book was connected in some way with his change of heart.

As he looked back over his life – as recorded in the book of *Ecclesiastes* – he saw nothing but vanity. Perhaps he continued with his review and remembered the Shulamite, a woman who was prepared to lose everything for love. This was a person who lived for something that completely transcended his bleak, materialistic view of the world. As he considered this remarkable woman, he may have come to the realization that, for all his astonishing wisdom and knowledge, he had never known the pure unconditional love that she had for her beloved.

He would have seen also how his own covetousness had added to her misery and humiliation. The wisest man of all time was unable to discern what this simple country lass could see with perfect clarity. And what she saw made him realize that he was, in reality, a fool among fools.

In his old age, perhaps twenty or more years after he had met her, he came to understand what she had and what she represented. He finally understood what her motivation had been. Overcome by a true conviction of his own sinfulness, he repented before the LORD God of Israel.

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Ireland
February 5, 2022

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