

Introduction to the Song of Songs

Just how many Bible students have had an intensive study of the Song of Songs? How many have even read this book in the Bible? How often do worshipers hear a sermon based on it? The one hundred and seventeen verses of this Old Testament book are among the most neglected among Christians today.

In the past the book held greater importance among Bible students and scholars. Bernard wrote some eighty-six sermons on first two chapters alone. Origen wrote a ten volume commentary on it in addition to his various sermons using the Song of Songs as his text. Between A.D. 300 and 1000 only nine commentaries were written on the book of Romans while thirty-two commentaries were written on the Song.

Title

There are about three different titles associated with the book which follows Ecclesiastes in the English Bible but precedes it in the Hebrew: The Song of Solomon, the Song of Songs, and the Canticles from the Latin Vulgate. The Hebrew phrase “song of songs” in 1:1 is a superlative meaning the greatest or best song of all. It is comparable to the phrase “*holy of Holies*” in Exodus 29:37.

Authorship

The first verse of the book would seem to answer the question as to who is the author of the Song of Songs: “The song of songs, which is Solomon’s.” Although the Hebrew preposition *lamed* is often used to denote authorship it could have a variety of interpretations. It could mean “to Solomon” or “for Solomon” being written by a court musician for the king. Perhaps even commissioned by Solomon. Again, it could be understood “concerning Solomon” in that it is about him. And the preposition may indicate the Song is like Solomon’s writings or in his style.

In the past few centuries scholars have started to doubt Solomon’s authorship of this book. After all, this book is about love and marriage between two lovers. Solomon was the most renown polygamist in the Bible (1 Kings 11;1-8). Even within the Song he has sixty wives and eighty concubines. Although his name appears seven times he (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12) each is more of an indirect reference concerning him. While it is true the “*king*” is mentioned in 1:4,12 and 7:5 these may be use metaphorically instead of being a literal reference to king Solomon.

Some of taken this Song to be a collection of poetry written by several authors and collected into one work during the Persian period.

It is also noted that out of the one hundred and seventeen verses the woman speaks in over half of them. This fact plus the feminine tone of the Song has caused some to wonder if a woman had not written it. After all, it clearly depicts the woman’s point of view more than the man’s.

There is a Jewish tradition which claims a son of Hezekiah had written the Song.

Despite these hypothetical possibilities, it is most probable that Solomon himself is the author of the Song. He had written over a thousand songs (1 Kings 4:32). He had the musical and literary skills to write it. His fondness for horticulture, agriculture, and nature point to his authorship (1 Kings 4:33).

Date

Just as the authorship has been a point of recent debate over the Song of Songs, so has the date. Since some view this book a collection or anthology of love poetry written by various individuals up to the Greek period, they hold a late date of it’s completion. Some will point to foreign words in the

text. Some fifty words are used in the Song which are not found anywhere else in the Old Testament. However, some of these are in reference to spices, plants, and other items would naturally carry their foreign names. The presence of Aramaic terms is not a reliable indication of a late date. Hebrew had contact with this language as early as the period of the Judges and David. "Linguistic evidence is not conclusive. Attempts to date the book from vocabulary and grammar are inherently weak because of our limited knowledge of the history of the Hebrew language" (Garrett 349).

The wide variety of spices and foreign imports would indicate a time of great wealth and international trade with nations as far away as India. "The various geographical allusions in the book seem to indicate a phase of Heb. history in which the kingdom had not yet been divided. Canticles speaks of such northern locations as Lebanon (S of Sol. 3:9; 4:8; 11,15), Hermon (4:8), Tirzah (6:4), Damascus (7:4), and Carmel (7:5), as though, with Jerusalem, they formed one united kingdom" (Harrison 487). Before the northern kingdom of Israel moved the capital to Samaria during the reign of Omri, Tirzah was the chief city in northern Palestine. The date between 970-930 B.C. will therefore be considered an approximate time of the composition of the Song of Songs.

Canonicity

What method the Jews used to identify the Song of Songs as any inspired book to be included into the Old Testament canon is unknown today. Several reasons have been given for questioning why the book has remained in the Canon. After all, it has no moral and theological teachings. It is secular in content and along with other Old Testament books like Esther, Obadiah, and Nahum, does not mention God. It is not once quoted in the New Testament. However, there are nine other such books in the Old Testament: Judges, Ruth, Ezra, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Obadiah, Jonah, and Zephaniah.

As early as A.D. 95 Rabbi Akiva defended the Song of Songs rightful place in the Canon at Jamnia: "For all of eternity in its entirety is not as worthy as the day on which Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy, but Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies." [Schiffman, Lawrence H., ed. (1998), *Texts and Traditions*, Ktav, Hoboken. pp. 119–20]. In addition, there are four manuscripts of the Song discovered at the Dead Sea. Furthermore in the second century AD the early Christian writer, Tertullian, included it in his list of canonical books.

Methods of Interpretation

No other book in the Bible, except John's Revelation, has had a wider variety of interpretations than the Song of Songs. Saadia wrote over a thousand years ago, "know, my brother, that you will find great differences in interpretation of the Song of Songs. In truth they differ because the Song of Songs resembles locks to which the keys have been lost" (Longman 21). We have divided these various methods of interpretations into allegoric, dramatic, cultic, and poetic.

- **Allegoric**

No method of interpretation for the Song has enjoyed wider acceptance over a longer period of time than the allegorical method. The allegorical method of interpretation replaces the literal meaning with a spiritual one. The Greeks started using the allegory to explain away the literal actions of their gods and goddesses which they came to find deplorable with hidden morals. However, allegories have been used in the Bible as early as Judges 9 where Jotham's fable has the trees choose a king for themselves. It was an allegory to satirize Abimelech and the office of the king. Perhaps Jesus' story of the Vine and the Branches in John 15:1-8. is an allegory. Paul may have used the allegory in his comparison Sarah and Hagar in Galatians.

The Jews were apt to view the Song as an allegory of God's relationship with Israel. The Jews developed the *megilloth* which consist of five readings for the various feasts days of the year. Parts of the Song were read on eighth day of Passover feast to allegorically commemorate the Exodus. One of the most extensive treatments of the Song as an allegory is from the Jewish Targum dated AD 700 to 900. "The Targum, for example, interprets the book in five movements as an allegory of Israelites history. These are (1 [1:2-3:6]) the exodus, Sinai, and conquest; (2 [3:7-5:1]) the Solomonic temple; (3 [5:2-6:11])

Israel's sin and exile; (4 [6:2-7:11]) the return and rebuilding of the temple; and (5 [7:12-8:14]) the dispersion of the Roman Empire and expectation of the Messiah" (Garrett 353). There is some truth to the fact that God had taken the metaphor of the husband and wife and applied it to its relationship with Israel in the Old Testament (Deut. 32:18; Is. 62:4; 63:16; Jer. 3:19; 31:32 Ezek. 16:8). Hosea 2:14, 16, 19; 11:1).

Christianity seems to have borrowed this method to interpret the Song. Hippolytus compared the Beloved to Christ and the Shulamite to the church around AD 200. John Wesley: "it therefore follows that this book is to be understood allegorically concerning that spiritual love and marriage, which is between Christ and the church" (Longman 34). The Catholic church as early as the twelfth century allegorized the Song to promote the veneration of the Virgin Mary. Protestants have been using a historical allegory to show the history of Christianity through to the Reformation. Others have the Song allegorically represent the history of man from David's kingdom to the Second Coming of Christ. Martin Luther held that the Shulamite was Israel in the Solomonic kingdom.

In the New Testament the church is called the bride of Christ (Matt. 9:15; 24:1; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 4:23; Rev. 19:7; 21:2; 22:17). Imagine Jesus saying this concerning his relationship with the church: "*This stature of yours is like a palm tree, and your breasts like its clusters. I said, 'I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches. Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples'*" (7:7-8). This only begins to show the corrupt nature of allegorizing the Song to represent our spiritual relationship between Christ and the church on a sexually erotic level. The allegorical method is now one of the least popular methods of interpreting the Song today. However, in your church hymnals the remnants of this allegory is seen in calling Christ the rose of Sharon or the lily of the valley.

False doctrines of monasticism, celibacy, asceticism all led to the a rejection of the literal interpretation. Therefore, the allegorical interpretations were more of a reaction to give a mild and spiritual meaning to the Song. The physical love expressed between a man and a woman led to the denial of the value of the Song. According to asceticism the flesh is wicked and sex is a necessary evil. Jerome, who authored the Latin Vulgate and embraced an ascetic lifestyle, gave advice to friend in regard to his daughter Paula. He instructs her to have her memorize most of the Old Testament and "when she has done all these she may safely read the Song of Songs but not before: for, were she to read it at the beginning, she would fail to perceive that, though it is written in fleshly words, it is a marriage song of a spiritual bridal. And not understanding this she would suffer from it" (The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, VI. Letter cvii, p 194).

There are many problems with turning the Song into an allegory. Today, "few would argue that the Song was written as an allegory, since it lacks the clues that an author normally provides to alert readers to such intentions in the piece" (Curtis 114). Most of the allegorical interpretations are ambiguous. There is no basis for even a single interpretation. The allegorizing of the Song is more about an individual interpreter's eisegesis by putting his own meaning into the text than exegesis, getting out of the text the meaning God had given. How does anyone really know that the two lips represent the law and the Gospel or the Word of God being represented by kisses? Creating allegories only takes an imagination and only one's imagination.

- **Dramatic**

The first literal method of interpretation of the Song was by Theodore (A.D. 350-428). He was met with condemnation by others. "Anyone quoting verses from the Song of Songs giving them the literal meaning was declared a heretic who had forfeited his portion in Paradise" (Tos. Sanh. XII, 10).

The Dramatic Method is not to be confused with a teacher or staged production. Although it is treated more or less like a play. The Song is about a literal love between a man and a woman in the two character dramatic interpretations. Some hold the Beloved to be Solomon pursuing the woman while others believe it to be a young man with the girl.

There is a three character dramatic interpretation which introduces the love of Solomon and the shepherd boy for the girl. It is often referred to as the "Shepherd Hypothesis." It turns the Song into a love triangle. It is a romance showing true love cannot be bought by great riches and fame. "In 3:1-5, for example, the streets are not streets but the corridors of the palace; the city guards are not city guards

but the eunuchs of the harem; and the daughters of Zion are not what the name implies, Jerusalem girls, but the other ladies of Solomon's harem" (Garrett 360). This view was first promoted by Ibn Era and now I. Provan who has the woman already married to Solomon and is an unhappy member of his harem. In this interpretation Solomon becomes the scoundrel who abducts the girl into his harem. It calls upon one to believe the Beloved would come to the harem and whisper through the lattice work to the Shulamite. The three character plot does not work because the "shepherd" and the "king" are the same: the Beloved

- **Cultic: Fertility**

The pagans had sacred marriage ceremonies between gods and goddesses. The sexual union between these deities were to ensure crop and human fertility for the coming year. The Song is to be a reaction to these. Some even point to Solomon's worship of Astarte in his older age as proof. However, the Bible rejects the idea of sex as a religious act or a means of worship. These pagan practices were a threat to monotheism and the Biblical reaction was teaching the one God.

- **Cultic: Funerary**

Another near east pagan practice was the *marzeah* festival as part of the funerary cult. Death and life are represented with the resurrection of the god. Some see a funeral rite showing the power of love over death in 8:6:

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,
As a seal upon your arm;
For love is as strong as death,
Jealousy as cruel as the grave;
Its flames are flames of fire,
A most vehement flame.*

However, the Bible condemns these in Amos 6:7 and Jeremiah 16:5

- **Poetic: Wedding**

The Arabs have *wasfs* which are erotic poetry cited at weddings. The Song has been considered a collection of wedding songs for the seven-day marriage celebration. In these the bridegroom is referred to as king and the bride his queen. In the Song the man is metaphorically called a king but the Shulamite is never called a queen. The man repeatedly refers to the woman as his bride (4:8-12; 5:1). Furthermore, the Song cannot be divided into seven parts.

- **Poetic: Love**

Finally the Song is being regarded as an anthology or collection of love poetry. These are believed to be from diverse places and authors. How many poems are represented is not clear some see a half dozen to several dozen.

Genre

- **Love Poetry**

Some sixty times the Hebrew words from love appear in the Song. The Song comes from the same genre as Egyptian love poetry. The evidence is overwhelming due to the similarities. This does not mean that Solomon's Song came from Egypt or was copied from the Egyptian poets. The Bible was not written in a cultural vacuum. One thing is sure the Song is not to be compared to other love poetry of the day which was cultic and erotically vulgar. Rabbi Akiva warned, "whoever sings the Song of Songs with a tremulous voice in a banquet hall and (so-treats it as a sort of ditty) has no share in the world to come" (Longman 20).

The Song shares various aspects of the love poetry of Egypt. There is the song of appreciation of beauty (5:10-16); song of longing (8:1-2); song of arrival (2:8); and an invitation (8:14). However, it does differ from Egyptian love poetry in that there is no prayer for the couple's success.

Some common images between Hebrew and Egyptian poetry is: calling the girl "sister", gazelle (2:9); chariots (3:7); gardens and vineyards (4:16); door (5:5-6); limbs compared to precious metals (5:14); breasts (8:10).

- **Wisdom Literature**

The Jewish Bible was divided into the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The Song is included in the last category of Old Testament scripture with Solomon's wisdom literature. "It has been suggested that just as Job explores the riddle of suffering, and Ecclesiastes the riddle of existence, so the Song explores the riddle of love (Gledhill 35). Solomon may have written this poetry to represent the wisdom of true monogamous love and the ideal relationship in the marriage God designed. This would have been in contrast with his polygamy.

Characterization

- **The Woman**

The woman is from the home town of Shulam. It is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible and is believed to be a fictitious country town. Some believe her to be Solomon's Egyptian bride, others David's concubine nurse Abishag, or Naamah, the mother of Rehoboam or Solomon's one true love. For our study the Shulamite is a fictitious character invented by Solomon.

Her self view is one of modesty (1:5-6; 2:1). Her lover sees her as the most beautiful of women (1:8); his bride (5:1); his sister (5:1,2); darling (5:2); and his dove (5:2). She is most likely a young country girl still in her teens.

- **The Man**

He is called "*the beloved*" or "*my beloved*" and is seen by her as desirable (1:2-4). She metaphorically refers to him as "*shepherd*" (1:7) and "*king*" (1:4). He not Solomon, but a literary invention of Solomon.

- **The Women**

The most common is a group of women who are variously identified as "*daughters of Jerusalem*" (1:5); "*daughters of Zion*" (3:11); or "*young women*" (1:3). "In a word, they are city girls, young and naive, inexperienced in matters of love. It is here that they find their functions as a sounding board, a contrast, and students of the women." (Longman 16). Whereas the Shulamite is more experienced in love and from the small country town these are naive city girls.

- **Other Characters**

Additional characters include the Beloved's friends (3:6–11); Shulamite's brothers (8:8, 9) and her mother (3:4,11; 6:9; 8:1). They confirm the woman's choice of the man.

Structure/Unity

Depending on which genre and method of interpretation the Song will either have unity or not. Some see no plot just a collection of love poems loosely attached. Yet the Song has cycles and repetitious images throughout. The reoccurring address to the daughters of Jerusalem (2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4). The repetition of praise poems (4:1-7; 5:10-16; 7:1-10) point to premeditated structuring of the Song. The near identical forms in the Song: "the sprouting of the blossoms (2:12; 6:11; 7:13), the neck as a tower (4:4; 7:5), breasts as fawns (4:5; 7:4), eyes as doves (1:15; 4:1), grazing among the lilies (2:16; 4:5; 6:3), the day blows and the shadows flee (2:17; 4:6), keeping a vineyard (1:6; 8:11), mountains of spices (4:6; 8:14), and many others" (Gledhill 19). This demonstrates unity as does the Song's many repeating themes: "the urgent desire for intimacy, the fear of loss, the celebration of consummation, the happiness of their mutual love, the praise of and delight in the physical beauty, the tensions arising from separation, the desire for public approval of their love, and the longing for its secret consummation."

The song is divided into six cycles in three stages of relationship: courtship (1:2-3:5); wedding and honeymoon (3:6-5:1); and lasting marriage (5:2-8:14). "The wedding cycle, around which the other cycles are balanced, is the literary focal center of the Song" (Gledhill 38).

Theological Importance in the Bible

Why is this book in the Bible? The song is not a work teaching theological doctrines. It is not a prophecy or warning against sexual immorality. Nonetheless, it warns about the danger of love (8:6-7)

and it warned daughters of Jerusalem not to arouse love before its time (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The Song is by no means eroticism. Rabbi Akiva warned, "he who sings the Song of Songs in wine taverns, treating it as if it were a vulgar song, forfeits his share in the world to come". Although a common approach of the times is to find such practical things like how to date or a manual on sexual love in the Song, it is merely a celebration of love and marriage in the Bible. "The power of the Song lies in its ability to draw us into the experience of the couple to participate vicariously in that relationship. In the process we learn significant things about how the one-flesh relationship that God designed is supposed to work" (Curtis 119).

The song is not a promotion of free love. It is filled with sexually intimate language in metaphor which may seem offensive to the western Christian of the twenty-first century. Although the Song does not mention or condemn pre-marital sex or adultery both of these sins are clearly condemned in the greater context of the Old Testament. The Song is not about teaching or moralizing. It is a celebration of sexuality within the proper context: marriage. It promotes monogamy while excluding homosexual love.

Whereas marriage was the creation of God in the beginning. Sin came. Marriage now is not like the perfect innocent couple seen in the naked, but unashamed Adam and Eve. Marriage struggles in a hostile world filled with pornography, immodesty, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, divorce, polygamy, etc. When God brought Eve to Adam he spontaneously broke out into the first love song: "*This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man*" (Gen. 2:23). The Song gives hope for a pure sexual/marital relationship between a virgin man and woman in a broken sin-filled world "*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge*" (Heb. 13:4).

The Song of Songs

The New King James Version

Title, 1:1

1 The song of songs, which is Solomon's.

Act 1: The Courtship, 1:2-3:5

The Shulamite to Herself:

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—
For your love is better than wine.
3 Because of the fragrance of your good ointments,
Your name is ointment poured forth;
Therefore the virgins love you.
4 Draw me away!

The Daughters of Jerusalem:

We will run after you.

The Shulamite:

The king has brought me into his chambers.

The Daughters of Jerusalem

We will be glad and rejoice in you.
We will remember your love more than wine.

The Shulamite:

Rightly do they love you.
5 I am dark, but lovely,
O daughters of Jerusalem,
Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the curtains of Solomon.
6 Do not look upon me, because I am dark,
Because the sun has tanned me.
My mother's sons were angry with me;
They made me the keeper of the vineyards,
But my own vineyard I have not kept.

(To Her Beloved)

7 Tell me, O you whom I love,
Where you feed your flock,
Where you make it rest at noon.
For why should I be as one who veils herself
By the flocks of your companions?

The Beloved:

8 If you do not know, O fairest among women,

Follow in the footsteps of the flock,
And feed your little goats
Beside the shepherds' tents.
9 I have compared you, my love,
To my filly among Pharaoh's chariots.
10 Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments,
Your neck with chains of gold.

The Daughters of Jerusalem:

11 We will make you ornaments of gold
With studs of silver.

The Shulamite:

12 While the king is at his table,
My spikenard sends forth its fragrance.
13 A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me,
That lies all night between my breasts.
14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms
In the vineyards of En Gedi.

The Beloved:

15 Behold, you are fair, my love!
Behold, you are fair!
You have dove's eyes.

The Shulamite:

16 Behold, you are handsome, my beloved!
Yes, pleasant!
Also our bed is green.
17 The beams of our houses are cedar,
And our rafters of fir.
2:1 I am the rose of Sharon,
And the lily of the valleys.

The Beloved:

2 Like a lily among thorns,
So is my love among the daughters.

The Shulamite:

3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods,
So is my beloved among the sons.
I sat down in his shade with great delight,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.

The Shulamite to the Daughters of Jerusalem:

4 He brought me to the banqueting house,

And his banner over me was love.
5 Sustain me with cakes of raisins,
Refresh me with apples,
For I am lovesick.

6 His left hand is under my head,
And his right hand embraces me.
7 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases.

The Shulamite:

8 The voice of my beloved!
Behold, he comes
Leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping upon the hills.
9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.
Behold, he stands behind our wall;
He is looking through the windows,
Gazing through the lattice.
10 My beloved spoke, and said to me:
"Rise up, my love, my fair one,
And come away.
11 For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone.
12 The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of singing has come,
And the voice of the turtledove
Is heard in our land.
13 The fig tree puts forth her green figs,
And the vines with the tender grapes
Give a good smell.
Rise up, my love, my fair one,
And come away!
14 "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret places of the cliff,
Let me see your face,
Let me hear your voice;
For your voice is sweet,
And your face is lovely."

Her Brothers:

15 Catch us the foxes,
The little foxes that spoil the vines,
For our vines have tender grapes.

The Shulamite:

16 My beloved is mine, and I am his.
He feeds his flock among the lilies.

(To Her Beloved)

17 Until the day breaks
And the shadows flee away,
Turn, my beloved,

And be like a gazelle
Or a young stag
Upon the mountains of Bether.

(To Herself)

3:1 By night on my bed I sought the one I love;
I sought him, but I did not find him .
2 "I will rise now," I said,
"And go about the city;
In the streets and in the squares
I will seek the one I love."
I sought him, but I did not find him .
3 The watchmen who go about the city found me;
I said,
"Have you seen the one I love?"
4 Scarcely had I passed by them,
When I found the one I love.
I held him and would not let him go,
Until I had brought him to the house of my mother,
And into the chamber of her who conceived me.

(Daughters of Jerusalem)

5 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases.

**Act 2: The Wedding Procession and
Marriage, 3:6-11**

The Shulamite:

6 Who is this coming out of the wilderness
Like pillars of smoke,
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
With all the merchant's fragrant powders?
7 Behold, it is Solomon's couch,
With sixty valiant men around it,
Of the valiant of Israel.
8 They all hold swords,
Being expert in war.
Every man has his sword on his thigh
Because of fear in the night.
9 Of the wood of Lebanon
Solomon the King
Made himself a palanquin:
10 He made its pillars of silver,
Its support of gold,
Its seat of purple,
Its interior paved with love
By the daughters of Jerusalem.
11 Go forth, O daughters of Zion,
And see King Solomon with the crown
With which his mother crowned him

On the day of his wedding,
The day of the gladness of his heart.

Act 3: The Honeymoon, 4:1-5:1

The Beloved:

4:1 Behold, you are fair, my love!
Behold, you are fair!
You have dove's eyes behind your veil.
Your hair is like a flock of goats,
Going down from Mount Gilead.

2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep
Which have come up from the washing,
Every one of which bears twins,
And none is barren among them.

3 Your lips are like a strand of scarlet,
And your mouth is lovely.
Your temples behind your veil
Are like a piece of pomegranate.

4 Your neck is like the tower of David,
Built for an armory,
On which hang a thousand bucklers,
All shields of mighty men.

5 Your two breasts are like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle,
Which feed among the lilies.

6 Until the day breaks
And the shadows flee away,
I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh
And to the hill of frankincense.

7 You are all fair, my love,
And there is no spot in you.

8 Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse,
With me from Lebanon.
Look from the top of Amana,
From the top of Senir and Hermon,
From the lions' dens,
From the mountains of the leopards.

9 You have ravished my heart,
My sister, my spouse;
You have ravished my heart
With one look of your eyes,
With one link of your necklace.

10 How fair is your love,
My sister, my spouse!
How much better than wine is your love,
And the scent of your perfumes
Than all spices!

11 Your lips, O my spouse,
Drip as the honeycomb;
Honey and milk are under your tongue;
And the fragrance of your garments
Is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

12 A garden enclosed
Is my sister, my spouse,
A spring shut up,

A fountain sealed.
13 Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates
With pleasant fruits,
Fragrant henna with spikenard,
14 Spikenard and saffron,
Calamus and cinnamon,
With all trees of frankincense,
Myrrh and aloes,
With all the chief spices—
15 A fountain of gardens,
A well of living waters,
And streams from Lebanon.

The Shulamite:

16 Awake, O north wind,
And come, O south!
Blow upon my garden,
That its spices may flow out.
Let my beloved come to his garden
And eat its pleasant fruits.

The Beloved:

5:1 I have come to 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.

(To His Friends)

Eat, O friends!
Drink, yes, drink deeply,
O beloved ones!

Act 4: The Honeymoon is Over, 5:2-6:13

The Shulamite:

2 I sleep, but my heart is awake;
It is the voice of my beloved!
He knocks, saying,
"Open for me, my sister, my love,
My dove, my perfect one;
For my head is covered with dew,
My locks with the drops of the night."
3 I have taken off my robe;
How can I put it on again?
I have washed my feet;
How can I defile them?
4 My beloved put his hand
By the latch of the door,
And my heart yearned for him.
5 I arose to open for my beloved,
And my hands dripped with myrrh,

My fingers with liquid myrrh,
On the handles of the lock.
6 I opened for my beloved,

But my beloved had turned away and was gone.

My heart leaped up when he spoke.
I sought him, but I could not find him;

I called him, but he gave me no answer.

7 The watchmen who went about the city found me.

They struck me, they wounded me;
The keepers of the walls
Took my veil away from me.

8 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
If you find my beloved,
That you tell him I am lovesick!

The Daughters of Jerusalem:

9 What is your beloved
More than another beloved,
O fairest among women?
What is your beloved
More than another beloved,
That you so charge us?

The Shulamite:

10 My beloved is white and ruddy,
Chief among ten thousand.

11 His head is like the finest gold;
His locks are wavy,
And black as a raven.

12 His eyes are like doves
By the rivers of waters,
Washed with milk,
And fitly set.

13 His cheeks are like a bed of spices,
Banks of scented herbs.

His lips are lilies,
Dripping liquid myrrh.

14 His hands are rods of gold
Set with beryl.

His body is carved ivory
Inlaid with sapphires.

15 His legs are pillars of marble
Set on bases of fine gold.

His countenance is like Lebanon,
Excellent as the cedars.

16 His mouth is most sweet,
Yes, he is altogether lovely.

This is my beloved,
And this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem!

The Daughters of Jerusalem:

6:1 Where has your beloved gone,
O fairest among women?
Where has your beloved turned aside,

That we may seek him with you?

The Shulamite:

2 My beloved has gone to his garden,
To the beds of spices,

To feed his flock in the gardens,
And to gather lilies.

3 I am my beloved's,
And my beloved is mine.
He feeds his flock among the lilies.

The Beloved:

4 O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah,
Lovely as Jerusalem,

Awesome as an army with banners!

5 Turn your eyes away from me,
For they have overcome me.

Your hair is like a flock of goats
Going down from Gilead.

6 Your teeth are like a flock of sheep
Which have come up from the washing;
Every one bears twins,

And none is barren among them.

7 Like a piece of pomegranate
Are your temples behind your veil.

8 There are sixty queens
And eighty concubines,
And virgins without number.

9 My dove, my perfect one,
Is the only one,
The only one of her mother,

The favorite of the one who bore her.
The daughters saw her
And called her blessed,

The queens and the concubines,
And they praised her.

10 Who is she who looks forth as the morning,
Fair as the moon,
Clear as the sun,

Awesome as an army with banners?

The Shulamite:

11 I went down to the garden of nuts
To see the verdure of the valley,

To see whether the vine had budded
And the pomegranates had bloomed.

12 Before I was even aware,
My soul had made me
As the chariots of my noble people.

The Beloved and His Friends:

13 Return, return, O Shulamite;
Return, return, that we may look upon you!

The Shulamite:

What would you see in the Shulamite—
As it were, the dance of the two camps?

Act 5: Marriage Deepens, 7:1-8:4

The Beloved:

7:1 How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
O prince's daughter!
The curves of your thighs are like jewels,
The work of the hands of a skillful workman.
2 Your navel is a rounded goblet;
It lacks no blended beverage.
Your waist is a heap of wheat
Set about with lilies.
3 Your two breasts are like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle.
4 Your neck is like an ivory tower,
Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon
By the gate of Bath Rabbim .
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon
Which looks toward Damascus.
5 Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel,
And the hair of your head is like purple;
A king is held captive by your tresses.
6 How fair and how pleasant you are,
O love, with your delights!
7 This stature of yours is like a palm tree,
And your breasts like its clusters.
8 I said, "I will go up to the palm tree,
I will take hold of its branches."
Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
The fragrance of your breath like apples,
9 And the roof of your mouth like the best wine.

The Shulamite:

The wine goes down smoothly for my beloved,
Moving gently the lips of sleepers.
10 I am my beloved's,
And his desire is toward me.
11 Come, my beloved,
Let us go forth to the field;
Let us lodge in the villages.
12 Let us get up early to the vineyards;
Let us see if the vine has budded,
Whether the grape blossoms are open,
And the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give you my love.
13 The mandrakes give off a fragrance,
And at our gates are pleasant fruits,
All manner, new and old,
Which I have laid up for you, my beloved.
8:1 Oh, that you were like my brother,
Who nursed at my mother's breasts!

If I should find you outside,
I would kiss you;
I would not be despised.
2 I would lead you and bring you
Into the house of my mother,
She who used to instruct me.
I would cause you to drink of spiced wine,
Of the juice of my pomegranate.

(To the Daughters of Jerusalem)

3 His left hand is under my head,
And his right hand embraces me.
4 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases.

Act 6: Maturity of Love, 8:5-14

A Relative:

5 Who is this coming up from the wilderness,
Leaning upon her beloved?
I awakened you under the apple tree.
There your mother brought you forth;
There she who bore you brought you forth.

The Shulamite to Her Beloved:

6 Set me as a seal upon your heart,
As a seal upon your arm;
For love is as strong as death,
Jealousy as cruel as the grave;
Its flames are flames of fire,
A most vehement flame.
7 Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor can the floods drown it.
If a man would give for love
All the wealth of his house,
It would be utterly despised.

The Shulamite's Brothers:

8 We have a little sister,
And she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister
In the day when she is spoken for?
9 If she is a wall,
We will build upon her
A battlement of silver;
And if she is a door,
We will enclose her
With boards of cedar.

The Shulamite:

10 I am a wall,

And my breasts like towers;
Then I became in his eyes
As one who found peace.
11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon;
He leased the vineyard to keepers;
Everyone was to bring for its fruit
A thousand silver coins.

(To Solomon)

12 My own vineyard is before me.
You, O Solomon, may have a thousand,
And those who tend its fruit two hundred.

The Beloved:

13 You who dwell in the gardens,
The companions listen for your voice—
Let me hear it!

The Shulamite:

14 Make haste, my beloved,
And be like a gazelle
Or a young stag
On the mountains of spices.