

## Falling in Love All Over Again

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### *Song of Songs 6:4-7:13*

The third section of the Song begins with the third Song of Adoration or wasf. Starting with verse four through verse ten is a single unit. An inclusio is seen with two identical Hebrew phrases. The first one is found in verse four: *"Awesome as an army with banners!"* and the second in verse ten: *"Awesome as an army with banners."*

The groom begins praising his bride's beauty in general by comparing her to two prominent and beautiful cities in Israel. First, she is like the city of Tirzah in the north. God took the ten tribes of the north away from Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and gave them to Jeroboam. Jeroboam made Tirzah his capital (Joshua 12:24; 1 Kings 14:17; 15:21). Tirzah continued to be the capital for about fifty years, until Omri became King of Israel. He moved the capital move to Samaria (1 Kings 16:24-28). Tirzah was located about six miles to the north of Shechem. It's Hebrew name comes from a term meaning "pleasant." The second comparison is to the beauty of Jerusalem. In the Psalms Jerusalem is described as *"the perfection of beauty"* out of which *"God will shine forth"* (Psalm 50:2). *"Is this the city that is called, 'The perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth'?"* (Lamentations 2:15).

The second general description of the Shulamite's beauty is the repeated phrase that she is *"Awesome as an army with banners!"* Anyone who had witnessed a massive military parade of colorfully and sharply dressed soldiers with their magnificent banners flying over their heads can easily envision the Shepherd being in awe over the sight of his love.

As the Beloved's second wasf adoring her beauty continues, he begins with her eyes and continues the description until he arrives at her temples or cheeks. First, a single glance from her eyes or at them can "overcome" her husband with their beauty. Next, comes a series of compliments which occurred in his first wasf (4:1-7). Songs often have a repetition of phrases. Just consider the repeated lyrics found in the stanzas of any of the congregation's hymnals. There are some slight variations in these to Songs of Adoration. The groom moves from her eyes to her long, flowing, dark, and curly hair. Which reminds him of the flock of goats coming down Mount Gilead on the east side of the Jordan. The bride's teeth are focused upon next comparing them to sheep shorn of the old coats of wool. So the Shulamite's teeth are white and glistening from the moisture of her mouth every time they come up from behind her lips to form a smile. Not only are her teeth white, her groom notices that she has a perfect matching set of teeth with none of them missing. At this point the Beloved skips repeating the description of her lips and comments on her temples or cheeks. They are reddish orange like slices of pomegranates. The pomegranate was a common fruit in this area of the world.

Having ended the specific areas of her beauty, the husband now describes her in comparison to all other women in verse eight. Some have taken the comparison to the sixty queens and eighty concubines and finally all virgins to be a representation of the three groups of Solomon's harem. It is thus assumed that the Song was written early in his reign instead of toward the end. After all, he had by the end of his reign three hundred concubines and seven hundred queens (1 Kings 11:3). The difference between a *"queen"* and a *"concubine"* is that queens were primary wives who are royalty through whom legitimate heirs to the throne could be fathered by the King. Concubines are not royalty and are considered but secondary wives and often subordinate to the queens. However, the number of wives Solomon had at this time is of little importance. The increasing number from sixty to eighty and to infinity is a literary device used to indicate that the Shulamite is the most beautiful all the women in the whole world. It follows with this by saying she *"is the only one."* This is further support by her unique relation with her mother as the most favored. Solomon then reverse the order of the women in verse eight and has first the virgins, then the queens and concubines praise her beauty. His bride is "blessed."

A term which “combines the ideas of chosen and pure” (Longman 182). She is entirely unique and not another woman turns his head, but she even turns the heads of all other women. She is more beautiful than all the women of the world and all the women of the world praise her as the most beautiful.

This *wasf* is concluded by the Beloved’s comparison of her beauty to that of the celestial bodies seen by all in the heavens (6:10). The Shulamite is like the dawning of the morning. Her beauty is like the white moon shine forth in the darkened sky of the night. She is like the brilliant sun in the clear noon day sky. Notice the term for “*clear*” is the same one used for “*blessed*” in verse nine. Finally there is the repeat of the phrase from verse four to close out this section: “awesome as an army with banners.” The Hebrew phrase can be interpreted in various ways based on the context. Obviously, the context of verse ten places the phrase with astronomical imagery. Therefore, some translators have rendered this phrase: “*majestic as the stars in procession*” (NIV). Her beauty is as spectacular as that of the starry hosts of heaven, not the hosts of an army. Her beauty is not only the finest in all the world, it is out of this world.

Just how important is physical beauty? Remember it is God who made the world and the heavens with all their beauty. He made the beauty of the Shulamite which is compared to the beautiful world and the heavens. “Beauty is a bonus that makes our world a better place...Beauty is a gift on loan to us as it were, to be received and cultivated with joy...we all possess things that we cannot keep. Beauty withers and fades like a flower, and not all the cosmetic lotions of the beautician’s parlour can stem the inevitable ravages of time” (Gledhill 194). Therefore, beauty is important, but it is only a temporary blessing given to mankind this side of Heaven and must be kept in proper perspective. After all, the fleeting beauty of this realm cannot even begin to compare with how beautiful Heaven must be.

Finally the Shulamite speaks. It is springtime once more. The garden she visits is one which is surrounded by nut trees. This seems to be a literal location and not a dream or metaphor. She has made a trip out to the countryside to inspect the progress of the vineyard and the orchard of pomegranates.

Verse twelve is by far the most difficult passage in all the Song to comprehend. Translations have rendered it in a variety of ways. Those who hold to the “Shepherd Hypothesis” believe the Shulamite is being abducted by Solomon in one of his chariots to be forced into his harem as part of the on going love-triangle between Solomon, the Shulamite girl, and her Beloved shepherd. However, the mention of the prince and a chariot is not literal but only a continuation of the royal motif found throughout this section. Instead, as the wife investigates budding and blossoming of springtime in her garden, the sights and smells bring back to her mind the springtime when they fell in love. Her romantic memories flood her heart with emotions of love for her Beloved. “Before the girl knows what is happening, she finds herself in some heightened ecstatic state, as though she is out of the body. She has lost her balance or normal sense of composure, because of the great joy and excitement her lover instills in her. Overwhelmed with ecstasy, she is transported dream-like into the presence of her lover; she imagines she is alongside of him, being taken away in his royal chariot” (Gledhill 200). In her mind’s eye she is swept away to be with her lover, her prince once more.

Although there are no gender markers in the Hebrew for the speakers of verse thirteen. The context indicates the speakers to be the daughters of Jerusalem. They are not with her in the garden. But they are speaking out to recall her back to reality from the fantasy which has been swept into. They want to see her again. For what reason is not spelled out for us?

Using their name for herself, the Shulamite responds to their request. She wants to know why they would like to gaze upon her. Before they can give answer, she proposes a possible motive. “*Why are you looking at the Shulamite, as you look at the dance of the two camps?*” (Holman Christian Standard Bible). The phrase “two companies” are merely meant “two groups” as used in Genesis 32:7. However, it can also be a reference to a literal location, Mahanaim (Gen. 32:2). The implication is that she is not like a dancing girl which goes from one camp to the next to entertain them.

Notice this is the very verse where the girl is designated as the Shulamite and she accepts this designation for herself. Several views have been advanced over the years as to the meaning and origin of this name. One view holds that the town of Shulam is really that of Shunem mentioned in Joshua 19:18. Since David’s concubine Abishag is called the Shunammite in 1 Kings 1:3 than she is the girl in

Solomon's Song. Others note that "the Hebrew word for 'Shulammitte' looks like a feminine form of 'Solomon'" (Curtis 149). Thus she is feminine representation of Solomon. Also the term "Shulamite" is akin to "shalom" which means "peace." Still a more outrageous view is that Shulamite is a presentation of the Mesopotamian goddess named Sulmanitu. In our lesson, the Shulamite is merely Solomon's fictitious character from the fictitious town of Shulam.

Although the daughters of Jerusalem will not be able to look upon the Shulamite, the Beloved will. In his final *wasf* or Song of Adoration the Beloved describes her starting with her feet and ending with the "*roof of her mouth*" (7:1-9). This is the most descriptive and intimate adoration of her body of all three *wasf* which compliment her physical beauty. Notice he has a new term of endearment for his wife: "*O prince's daughter!*" (7:1f). This by no means is a literal reference to her being of royal birth. She is but a vineyard keeper and country girl. He is continuing the ongoing figurative device which began in 1:4 when she called him her "*king*." He is in effect her calling her his "princess."

First, he compliments how nice her feet look in sandals (7:1b). As the poem continues it becomes apparent that he is not describing a clothed woman except for her sandals and possibly a necklace. He makes mention of her round shape of her thighs. They remind him of fine jewels which were crafted in the hands of an expert jeweler. Indeed they were created by an expert designer: God. As he works up her body, he comes to her navel or belly button which serves as a mixing bowl for grape juice. He never tires of its beauty because it is full of physical attraction to him. Her waist is shaped like a bundle of wheat describing her hour-glass figure. It, too, is sexually attractive to him as it is "*set about with lilies*" (7:2). Her two breasts are described using the same metaphors he used of them on their wedding night back in chapter four and verse five. The navel, waist, and breast of his wife would not be visible, except when they are in private and she was in a state of undress. Again her neck is compared to a tower. Here it is like "*an ivory tower*" (7:4a) instead of the tower of David (4:4). Her glistening eyes remind him of the "*pool of Heshbon*" which were located "*by the gate of Bath Rabbim*" (7:4b). "*Bath Rabbim*" could be an actual gate, yet it means "daughter of noble people" (Gledhill 207) and could be a play on the phrase "*prince's daughter*" in 7:1. Heshbon is a well-known ancient city east of the Jordan River and southeast of the Dead Sea. It was known for its artificial fish reservoirs. As grotesque and unflattering as it sounds, comparing her nose to a tower of Lebanon facing Damascus is intended to be a great compliment (7:4c). One might think the Beloved is married to a giant in that her head is like the 1,800 foot "*Mount Carmel*" (7:5a). The mountain marks the end of a range in northern Israel which rims the Jezreel valley and juts up against the Mediterranean Sea. As Mount Carmel crowns a beautiful land, so her lovely head crowns her beautiful body. Continuing the royalty figure, he says her hair "*is like purple*" (7:5b). Purple is the color of a royalty. This may of course be the literal color of her hair by the noble appearance of it in his eyes. He continues the royalty metaphors by self-describing himself as her "*king*" who is trapped by the lovely curls of her hair. Just like both Samson and Absalom were snared and held captive by their own hair.

In verse six the Beloved stops and gives a general reflection of how beautiful he finds her. Everywhere he looks he can only find perfection in his delightful woman.

Having described her attractive features, he makes a proclamation of his desires for her. With verse seven the Shulamite's slender, stately stature is noticed by her Beloved. It is like that of a palm tree. They were known to grow to some eighty to one hundred feet tall. He is not making an illusion to her great height but more likely her excellent posture and slender build. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew term for "palm tree" is also a name worn by two women in the Bible, Tamar. Both Tamars were connected with stories about sexual desire. He returns to the objects of his sexual desire by comparing her breasts to that of date clusters hanging from the palm tree. In verse eight he mentions his longing to take hold of her. As one would shimmy up a palm tree and harvest the dates, so he craves her. Mixing his metaphors the Beloved refers to her breasts "*like clusters of the vine*." Perhaps, he sees himself moving in closer to her and smells her breath which has the fragrance of apples. Next he imagines giving her a deep kiss. The taste of her palate is like the very best grape juice (7:9a).

Suddenly the Shulamite breaks in and picks up where he just left off and invites him to taste of that wine which he finds so delightful (7:9b). The reference of course is to their kissing. The term "*sleepers*" is a metaphor for the two lovers. As the common euphemism for sex today is "sleeping

together.”

Verse ten is the third announcement by the Shulamite of a possessive relationship: *“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.”* The term used here for *“desire”* is found only in two other places in the Hebrew Old Testament. In Genesis 3:16 where God mentions the curse upon the woman: *“your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”* And in Genesis 4:7 where God warns Cain of temptation to kill his brother: *“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”* In all three occurrences the meaning is that of a strong desire. In this case it would appear the wife is recognizing her husband strong desire for her.

The next three verse (7:11-13) represent the Shulamites invitation to her husband to join her in a romantic get away. He is to come away with her to the countryside. The city or town represents in this Song a public environment whereas the countryside is private. He had originally called her away to such a place in chapter two. They are to go out and enjoy the coming of Springtime once again. They are to renew their romantic love. Whereas she could not give herself to him before, they are now married and she can give her love to her husband on this tryst into the countryside.

The chapter ends with a motivation for the Beloved to accept his wife’s invitation for romance in the great outdoors. The smell of the mandrakes is one such pleasure than can enjoy. Mandrakes belong to the potato family. These plants produce a yellow-orange fruit. Throughout ancient times they have been considered an aphrodisiac and often associated with increased fertility in women. Mandrakes are mentioned in the story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel where the later one uses them to conceive Joseph in Genesis 30:14-16. Not only are there beautiful sights and pleasant smells from the mandrakes awaiting them but pleasant fruits to eat of every kind imaginable. All of these will be made available to her lover. This is once again comparable to the garden metaphor where she is the garden. The girl is again taking the initiative in prompting a sexual encounter.

#### **Questions:**

1. To what two cities is the Shulamite compared?
2. Why are there so many repeated phrases in this book of the Bible?
3. How many wives and concubines is Solomon said to have at the time of this Song?
4. What is the difference between a queen and a concubine?
5. How do the queens and concubines and virgins respond to the Shulamite's beauty?
6. Why has she made a trip to the countryside? What happens to her there?

7. Who called the Shulamite back from her daydream? How did she respond to them?
8. What are the various views with regard to the meaning or origin of the name "*Shulamite*"?
9. Matching: The Beloved's description of the Shulamite
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|-----|---------------|----|----------------------------------|
| ___ | Thighs        | a. | Beautiful in sandals             |
| ___ | Feet          | b. | Like Purple                      |
| ___ | Navel         | c. | Pools in Heshbon                 |
| ___ | Waist         | d. | Jewels of Skilled Workman        |
| ___ | Neck          | e. | Like the best wine               |
| ___ | Eyes          | f. | Rounded goblet                   |
| ___ | Nose          | g. | Like apples                      |
| ___ | Head          | h. | Like clusters of the vine        |
| ___ | Hair          | i. | Like the Tower of Lebanon        |
| ___ | Stature       | j. | Like Mount Carmel                |
| ___ | Breasts       | k. | Like a palm tree                 |
| ___ | Breath        | l. | A beautiful city in near Shechem |
| ___ | Roof of Mouth | m. | Heap of wheat                    |
| ___ | Tirzah        | n. | An ivory tower                   |
10. The term "*desire*" in 7:10 is found only in two other places in the Hebrew Bible. Where?
11. What does the Shulamite suggest to motivate her Beloved to join her in the countryside?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. How important is it for a man to praise the beauty of his wife?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How important is it for a married couple to go on a romantic get away?

**Homework:** This week look for the inner beauty in everyone.