

# Triennial Torah Study – 3<sup>rd</sup> Year 22/09/2012

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| <b>Num 20</b> | <b>Hosea 3-7</b> | <b>Song of Sol 6-8</b> | <b>Romans 12-13</b> |
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## The Rebellious Act of Moses and Aaron (Numbers 20)

When the people arrive in Kadesh, decades have passed since the last chapter! Kadesh was the same location where Israel rebelled against entering the Promised Land. Back when the spies brought their evil report, God had told the Israelites they would be in the wilderness 40 years. These years have been long and bitter, with rebellion upon rebellion (compare Ezekiel 20:13-24). And now it is the 40th and final year of their wandering. Nearly all the people who were 20 years and older at the time of the exodus have died out. Miriam, at around the age of 130, dies as this final year begins (verse 1).

Sadly, those of the younger generation proved just as rebellious as their parents (Ezekiel 20:18-24). When they complained to Moses that they had no water, Moses and Aaron went to the tabernacle to ask God what to do. And God gave some straightforward instructions: Take the rod; gather the assembly; speak to the rock where the people can see. That shouldn't have been too hard to follow. But Moses had finally had it. He was, after all this time, completely fed up with the Israelites—"You rebels," he called them (verse 10). And while this was understandable, his anger got the better of him.

After so many years of being browbeaten by the people, Moses and Aaron, perhaps in a momentary lapse, became puffed up. Moses didn't say, "God will give you water." No, he said, "Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" (verse 10). And he struck the rock instead of speaking to it, just as he had done nearly 40 years before (see Exodus 17:6). Only this time, God had not told him to strike it. Nevertheless, he even struck it twice. God labeled this a lack of faith, saying, "You did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel" (verse 12). Apparently, then, it wasn't that Moses and Aaron didn't believe water would come out by merely speaking, but they didn't believe God's earlier warnings about the seriousness of following His instructions exactly. Or, perhaps more accurately, they didn't believe that these warnings applied to them—as if their closeness to God gave them some leeway. However, as they should have known, just the opposite is true. Those in leadership positions are held to stricter accountability—to

set the right example for everyone else. Moses and Aaron called the people rebels. Yet they rebelled against God's words themselves (verse 24; Romans 2:1). Neither would enter the Promised Land. Aaron died above their next encampment on Mount Hor at the age of 123 (verses 25-28; 33:38-39).

There is a vital lesson here for us. We are never too old to be tested. None of us are ever so perfect that we don't have lessons to learn. And no matter who we are or what position we have, we are not excused from obeying God—a fact the Israelites desperately needed to know.

Verses 14-21 of chapter 20 record Moses' attempt to negotiate peaceful passage through Edom's territory. He even offered to pay Edom for any of the land's resources they used in route. But Edom rebuffed Moses' offer. This is one of several acts of antagonism Edom shows toward the descendants of Jacob. Old grudges die hard, and sometimes they never do unless God intervenes.

### **Hosea 3**

Thankfully, after a long exile (Hosea 3:4), the Israelites will finally be reunited with the true God in the Land of Promise (verse 5). The time when all Israel returns to God will be a magnificent period of peace (2:18), when weapons of war will be gone (Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3), and when there is rain in due season (Hosea 2:21; Leviticus 26:4) and agricultural abundance (Hosea 2:22). Then, the people of Israel will at last know their God (verse 23). In Hosea 1:11, the name Jezreel, again meaning "'God scatters (seed)'... is [this time] used as a promise (meaning the Lord will bless Israel by giving their nation many people, just as a big harvest comes when many seeds are scattered in a field)" (Word in Life, note on 1:4).

### **Cataloging Israel's Sins (Hosea 4)**

As Israel went through its final rulers, Hosea's preaching continued. The prophet now lists many of the sins of Israel, evident in his own day as well as in the end time.

Verse 1 mentions an absence of truth, mercy and knowledge. Actually, the phrase "no truth or mercy" can also be translated "no faithfulness or loyalty," as it is in the New Revised Standard Version (see Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, Old Testament Section, "Loving-Kindness," explanation of Hebrew *hesed*). God had been faithful and loyal, but the Israelites hadn't—to God or to each other. Concerning their lack of knowledge, as we read earlier in the book of Amos, "They do not know to do right" (3:10). Thus, it was not knowledge in general that they lacked, but right moral knowledge. Hosea 4:2 mentions violations of five of the Ten Commandments. And the people's unrestrained murder causes the land to "mourn" (verses 2-3) because the land is defiled by it (Numbers 35:33-34). In our own day, criminal justice systems often fail to appropriately deal with murderers—contributing, along with wayward societal values, to high murder rates. Worse still, consider the "legal" murder of well over a million unborn children every year in the United States alone.

References to the people's "unfaithfulness" clearly illustrate a fundamental truth obscured within traditional Christianity today—that in a covenant relationship with God, human beings have obligations divinely imposed on them. And God holds people to those expectations. Of course, the behavior He expects from people for their part of the covenant relationship is all for their ultimate good.

Hosea then turned his attention to the priests and prophets, the ones responsible for teaching the people moral standards. The Hebrew of verses 4-5 of chapter 4 isn't clear and has been variously translated. The New Living Translation renders it as: "Don't point your finger at someone else and try to pass the blame! Look, you priests, my complaint is with you! As a sentence for your crimes, you will stumble in broad daylight, just as you might at night, and so will your false prophets. And I will destroy your mother, Israel."

Jeroboam I, under whom the northern kingdom had formed after the death of Solomon, had rejected the true Levitical priests, and many of them had left and gone back to Judah where they had a better chance of teaching the truth and practicing God's way of life (2 Chronicles 11:13-16). Jeroboam had appointed his own priests from other tribes instead of doing it God's way (1 Kings 13:33; compare 12:31). Furthermore, there were false prophets in the land. Many of these priests and prophets claimed to represent the true God but, of course, did not. The situation parallels that of religion today, with all manner of people serving as supposed ministers of God throughout the world yet who really don't serve Him—indeed, don't even know Him, rejecting His holy laws.

In Hosea 4:6, we learn that the lack of knowledge noted in verse 1 is the reason God's people are destroyed. And we also learn that their lack of knowledge is due to a willful rejection of God's truth by the religious leaders. How true this is today! Many preachers today teach in direct contradiction to God's Word, even though they ought to know better, supposedly having studied the Bible. They refuse to accept that the Bible means what it says. Perhaps some indeed do know better but have selfish motivations for continuing to misrepresent the Bible's teachings.

In verse 8, the priests are seen glorying in the nation's lawlessness because this allows them to "eat up the sin" of the people. In Hosea's day, this referred to sin offerings. The more people sinned, the more they brought sin offerings that the priests could eat, thereby providing these counterfeit priests with some of their livelihood (compare 6:6; 8:11-13; 1 Samuel 2:12-17). Even today, some try to relieve their guilt for their own sins through monetary offerings to a church—and there are religious leaders who actually encourage this type of thinking, though not directly stated.

Next, God addresses the spiritual harlotry of His people (Hosea 4:10-14). They turn to false religion, following worthless popular custom rather than worshiping God the way He intended (see Jeremiah 2:11; Matthew 15:9). Also, they become enslaved to habits and addictions, including alcohol, drug and sexual addictions (Hosea 4:11).

Judah is then given a warning to not follow Israel's evil example (verse 15). At this point in Hosea's prophecy, it appears that Judah was not mired in one of its idolatrous periods. It seems likely that

chapter 4 was written either while Uzziah still reigned over Judah or during his son Jotham's reign. In any event, God tells Judah not to go up to Beth Aven (verse 15), "which means 'House of Iniquity'... a sarcastic reference to the important religious center Bethel, which means 'House of God' (see Amos 5:5)" (The Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 15). Yet Judah had sinned in other respects, and God knew they would soon follow in Israel's footsteps (5:5).

Chapter 4 ends with a reference to Ephraim, which afterward becomes a routine reference to the people of the northern kingdom and their descendants throughout the remainder of the book. Ephraim was God's firstborn (Jeremiah 31:9), spiritually speaking, and instructions or warnings given to the firstborn would also apply to the rest of the family, because the firstborn is considered responsible for guidance and leadership.

### **Judgment to Come on Israel and Judah (Hosea 5)**

As mentioned earlier, from this point on in the prophecy, the tribe of Ephraim gets special mention. It is Ephraim that receives the greatest condemnation. The Bethel altar was in Ephraim, which meant that it played a leading role in influencing the whole nation. And, being the leading tribe of Israel, Ephraim "is used here to represent the entire northern kingdom" (Nelson Study Bible, note on 4:17-19).

The reference to "snare" and "net" in verse 1 is to tools for trapping prey. "The figure is that of people being hurt, as if hunted and trapped, by the religious and civil leaders of the day" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on verse 1). Mount Tabor was in the northern part of the northern kingdom while Mizpah was in the extreme south, just north of Jerusalem. "From top to bottom, from north to south, seemingly on every hill in the land, idolatrous traps were set to ensnare the Israelites in sin" ("Gotcha!," Word in Life Bible, 1998, sidebar on 5:1).

Israel is pictured wallowing in spiritual harlotry (verses 3-4). Hosea says, "They do not know the Lord" (verse 4). As we later learn from the apostle John: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). Israel, refusing to obey God, does not know Him. The people "seek" the Lord, wanting the benefits of His blessings (verse 6), but they aren't prepared to follow His ways (verse 7). They have even corrupted their children (verse 7)."The 'illegitimate' children [as the NIV renders it, 'pagan' in the NKJV] are literally 'strange' (zar). Their parents' sins have twisted them as well. Never suppose that our sins have no impact on our children. They do!" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on verse 7).

Hosea then turns his attention to Judah. Gibeah and Ramah (verse 8) were strategically important cities of the tribe of Benjamin on the northern border of Judah (Benjamin was a part of the kingdom of Judah). Beth Aven apparently being a reference to Bethel through a play on words—common in the Hebrew Bible—the warning is even more important since Bethel was on the southern border of Israel, close to the Benjamite cities. "Thus Benjamin faced a dual challenge: to resist the corrupting

spiritual influence of the North, and to prepare to resist the Assyrians who would soon invade Israel” (note on verse 8). Yet Judah’s leaders are also shown to be behaving badly. Hosea likened them to someone who moves the boundary lines of property, intent on stealing (verse 10). Therefore, God pronounces judgment on both nations (verses 10-12). End-time Judah, the Jews of today, have likewise followed the modern descendants of ancient Israel in many sins.

We next see Israel and Judah looking to Assyria for help. While Hosea preached, Israel began paying tribute to Assyria (2 Kings 15:19-20) and Ahaz of Judah sought assistance from Assyria (16:5-9). The reference to King Jareb (verse 13) is uncertain. There is no historical Assyrian reference to such a king, but the word jareb meant “warrior,” “fighter,” or “he will contend.” Some translate “King Jareb” as simply “the great king.” Most commentators believe this to be a reference to Tiglath-Pileser III. Yet, as the prophecy is likely also, or even primarily, for the last days, the reference would seem to apply first to the end-time Assyrian ruler, apparently the coming European dictator referred to in the book of Revelation as “the beast.”

Verses 14-15, while perhaps having some application to the ancient Assyrian invasion, refer mainly to the coming Great Tribulation, as Hosea 6:1-3 makes clearer. (We will examine this further in our next reading, which includes these verses.) In fact, it appears that Israel and Judah are shown here being devastated at the same time (5:14). This did not happen in ancient times, but it is going to happen in the future. The chapter ends with God going away until His punishment has its intended effect of bringing Israel and Judah to repentance.

### **Fleeting Faithfulness (Hosea 6)**

At the end of chapter 5 we saw Israel and Judah being punished together, at the same time, for their failure to follow God’s ways and God telling them that He would leave them until they repented.

Chapter 6 opens with Hosea presenting what Israel will finally say. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary concurs with the view that verses 1-3 are connected to the previous chapter: “For three verses, Hosea gives the words of Israel in their day of repentance. The section carries a close relationship in thought with 5:15, which notes that this time of repentance will come only with the beginning of Christ’s millennial reign. Israel as a nation has never yet prayed like this.... After the inserted words of repentance, Hosea returned to his main theme of warning the people against their sin” (note on verses 1-3).

Verse 1 uses the analogy of sickness and God’s healing power—healing the “sickness” and “wound” of 5:13. The Bible has much to say about physical sickness and God being our Healer (e.g., James 5:14-15; Psalm 103:3).

However, Scripture also uses sickness as a metaphor for spiritual problems, which seems to be the primary usage here in Hosea. The Dictionary of Bible Imagery states: “The book of Isaiah begins with an oracle that uses the imagery of ‘wounds and bruises and open sores’ (Is. 1:6) to

describe the effect of God's judgment on the nation of Israel. Other prophets use similar language. Jeremiah often uses pictures of disease and healing to describe the destruction and subsequent restoration of Jerusalem (e.g., Jer. 10:19; 14:19; 15:18; 30:12-17; 33:1-9; see. also Mic. 1:9). False prophets who proclaim an optimistic future are said to 'dress the wounds of my people as though it were not serious' (Jer. 6:14 NIV; see also Lam. 2:13-14). The prophet Nahum uses similar terms to describe the fate of the Assyrian capital, Nineveh (Nah. 3:18-19). Along the same lines the prophet Hosea uses pictures of sickness and sores to illustrate the effects of invading forces on the territories of Ephraim and Judah (Hos. 5:8-15)" ("Disease and Healing," 1998, pp. 208-210). In writing to Timothy and Titus about their tasks as ministers, Paul employs the analogy of health for the spiritual condition of the Church and for good doctrine, using the word "sound," which has the meaning of "good health" or wholesome (Titus 1:9, 13; 2:2, 8; 1 Timothy 1:10; 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3).

Some have speculated that the references to "after two days" and "the third day" refer to the resurrection of Christ. This is based on the false assumption that Christ was in the grave for only one day and two nights (Friday evening to Sunday morning), not three days and three nights as He prophesied (Matthew 12:40; compare Jonah 1:17). "Jonah 1:17, to which Christ referred, states specifically that 'Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.' We have no reason to think these days and nights were fractional. Nor is there any basis for thinking that Jesus meant only two nights and one day, plus parts of two days, when he foretold the length of time He would be in the grave. Such rationalization undermines the integrity of Jesus' words" (Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?, p. 14).

What, then, is meant by the prophetic statement, "After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up"? We should view it in context. As we've already seen, being raised up in Hosea 6:2 is parallel with a humbled and repentant Israel emerging in verse 1—around the time of Christ's return—from the terrible punishment described at the end of chapter 5. So the period of punishment to which Hosea refers is not of his own day. Rather, God enables him to look down through the ages to the end time. The book of Revelation mentions a coming period of three and a half years of horror unparalleled in human history. The first part of this period is a time of punishment on Israel called "Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7) or the "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21-22). It is followed by the Day of the Lord, of which Isaiah 34:8 states, "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion." Introduced by dramatic heavenly signs (Revelation 6:12-17), the Day of the Lord would thus seem to be the final year leading up to Christ's return.

Observe also that it is a time for punishing Israel's enemies, thereby "raising up" Israel. Therefore, since the Day of the Lord is the last year of three and a half years, Israel must be punished in the Tribulation for the first two and a half. Interestingly, there are other passages where days are used to represent years in prophecies dealing with Israel (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). Hosea 6:2 is no different when it states that "after two days" (i.e., after two years) and "on the third day" (i.e., during

the third year—indeed, halfway through it as we’ve seen), God will raise Israel out of the Tribulation, reserving the final year before Christ’s return to rain destruction on Israel’s foes.

Israel will finally recognize its need to “pursue the knowledge of the Lord” (verse 3), the lack of which has brought them destruction, as earlier stated (4:6). We are then told that the coming of God is as certain as the sun’s rising (6:3). In the same verse, we are told, “He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.” The Nelson Study Bible states: “The latter rains of Israel came in the spring and caused the plants to grow. The former rains came in the autumn and softened the ground for plowing and sowing” (note on 6:3). This ties in with the seasons for God’s annual festivals (see Leviticus 23). When God came the first time in the person of Jesus Christ, He fulfilled the spring festivals—“like the latter rain.” When He comes the second time, He will fulfill the fall festivals—“like the former rain.” And since Christ fulfilled the spring festivals on the very days the festivals occurred, it seems logical that He will fulfill the fall festivals on their calendar dates as well—though we can’t know this for sure (for more details see God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind).

In the meantime, God reflects on the fact that any repentance of Israel and Judah before their ultimate repentance of the end time would be short-lived—as fleeting as fog or morning dew (Hosea 6:4). God doesn’t just want Israel’s sacrifices and religious rituals (Isaiah 1:11-17; 43:22-24; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Amos 5:21-25; Micah 6:6-8). While He had commanded that they be kept, they were only valid if offered in a right spirit (Psalm 51:17; 107:22; Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5). God wants mercy. The Hebrew word translated mercy in verse 6 (*hesed*) is the same word used for “faithfulness” or “love” in verse 4. Israel was not merciful or faithful in love, and Hosea goes on in verse 7 to describe their crimes.

“Even Ramoth Gilead and Shechem, which were cities of refuge where manslayers could find asylum, had been contaminated by bloodshed” (Nelson, note on verse 10).

### **A Cake Unturned (Hosea 7)**

In chapter 7 we see Israel’s widespread corruption. Again Hosea warns Israel of its failure to heed the warnings. Samaria, the capital, may be representative or symbolic of the whole nation.

Hosea uses “fire” and “oven” in several similes here (verses 4-8). The word in verse 6 translated “baker” in the New King James Version is translated as “passion” or the like in other versions. “The people in their zeal for this sin were compared to a heated oven—a striking illustration of lust. The oven was so hot that a baker could cease tending the fire during an entire night—while the dough he had mixed was rising—and then, with a fresh tending of the fire in the morning, have sufficient heat for baking at that time. In...verses [5-7] the prophet gave an example of the kind of sin that resulted from such inflamed passion: the assassination of the king. Hosea saw it happening on a special day, a festival day, for the king. During the festivities the ringleaders planning the crime became drunk, and the king with them. Keeping the figure of the oven, the prophet stated that the hearts of the plotters were hot with desire to perform their treacherous deed. Each time they were

near the king, their hearts flamed up, as they contemplated their deed. They waited during the night, however, with their passion smoldering like the baker's fire, anticipating the morning" (Expositor's, note on verses 3-7). "The background of these verses is the political turmoil of the northern kingdom. During a 20-year period (752-732 b.c.), four Israelite kings were assassinated (see 2 Kin. 15)" (Nelson Study Bible, note Hosea 7:4-7).

Israel's sins were not only internal, but extended to their relations with other nations. The language of verse 8 ("mixed himself") indicates that entanglement in foreign alliances, and adoption of their ways, was deliberate on Israel's part. "The Israelites associated with and adopted heathen people and customs. a cake not turned, i.e., like a pancake that is burned on one side and uncooked on the other and is therefore altogether useless" (Harper Study Bible, 1991, note on verse 8). There is certainly a parallel here for Christians. Spiritually, while we are to interact with the world, we are not to become entangled in it or adopt its ways, particularly its ways of worship. Quite the contrary, God says, "Come out from among them and be separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

In mixing with the nations, Israel sought help from Egypt and Assyria, flitting back and forth between them "like a silly dove" (Hosea 7:11)—foolishly forgetting that their real help should have been from God. If they had followed God, they wouldn't have needed to go to other nations. Yet they even plotted against God (verse 15).

Paradoxically, God says, "They return, but not to the Most High" (verse 16). This shows some kind of repentance, but not to the true God. He says, "They did not cry out to Me with their heart when they wailed upon their beds" (verse 14). So just who do they cry out to in a form of repentance? Notice this regarding their assembling together (apparently a religious service) for grain and new wine: "God sent a drought that took away Israel's grain and new wine. Yet instead of turning to Him in repentance, the idolatrous Israelites demonstrated their devotion to Baal. [In fact, many mistakenly equated Baal, meaning "Lord," with the true Lord.] According to Canaanite religious beliefs, prolonged drought was a signal that the storm god Baal had been temporarily defeated by the god of death and was imprisoned in the underworld. Baal's worshipers would mourn his death in hopes that their tears might facilitate his resurrection and the restoration of crops" (Nelson, note on v. 14). Perhaps another way to look at this is to think of people assembling in congregational worship services praying, "Give us our daily bread," yet refusing to obey the true God and practice His ways.

This would have served as quite an indictment against the Israelites of Hosea's day. Yet even so, religious people of the modern nations of Israel usually pray to a totally false concept of God as well (with worship customs curiously similar to those ancient Israel adopted from the Canaanites)—and will cry to this "Lord" loudly when trouble becomes hard. Only when they rediscover the true God of the Bible and call upon Him will God ultimately deliver them. Thankfully, God will make sure that they do at last rediscover Him.

"I Sought Him, But I Could Not Find Him" (Song of Solomon 5:2-7:10)

We come now to the fifth major section of the Song. It begins at 5:2, which clearly describes a different scene entirely from that of the previous verses, but there is dispute as to where this section ends. Many have noted the obvious similarity between verses 2-8 and the earlier dreamlike unit of 3:1-5 (the third major section of the Song). Both segments begin with the woman lying in bed at night. Both describe her rising, probably in mind rather than literally, to search about the city for her beloved, whom she can't seem to find. Both mention her being found by the city watchmen. And both segments show her afterward issuing a charge to the daughters of Jerusalem. There are key differences though. The former passage apparently concerned multiple instances ("By nights..."). The current one gives no such indication. In the former case, the woman was merely wondering in desperation about where the man was when she went to look for him. In this later passage, the man arrives at night, is apparently turned away by the woman, and then leaves, whereupon she then goes out in a desperate search for him. In the former passage, the woman was merely found by the watchmen. Here they abuse her. In the former unit, the woman immediately found the man and declared her intention for union with him. Here she does not immediately find him; so resolution is lacking. In the former sequence, the woman's charge to the daughters of Jerusalem was a repeat of the refrain to not awaken love until it's acceptable; and this (3:5) formed the end of the unit. Here the charge is that if they find him to tell him that she is lovesick; and this (5:8) clearly does not form the end of the unit since the daughters respond to her charge in the next verse. Where, then, does this later unit end; and how are we to understand it?

Determining the end of the major section of the Song that begins at 5:2 involves following the story flow, considering the symmetrical parallel with the aforementioned third major section of the Song (3:1-5) and observing a chiasmic structural pattern that begins at 5:2 and recognizing where this pattern concludes. Let's take these one at a time.

First the story flow. Verse 9 is clearly the response of the daughters of Jerusalem to the Shulamite's charge in the preceding verse, as they mention her charge explicitly. Observe that their response is a question about why her lover is so special. This then sets up the Shulamite's description of her lover in verses 10-16 (the last verse explicitly addressing the daughters). The daughters then respond in 6:1, and the Shulamite answers them in verses 2-3. Verse 3 here, concerning the mutual possession of the lovers, appears to be a refrain (see also 2:16; 7:10). This and the fact that the man's praise speech beginning in 6:4 is not introduced has led some to consider 6:3 as the end of the unit. Yet we should consider that the man's earlier praise speech beginning in 4:1 is not introduced and appears to continue the same unit as that begun in 3:6. Indeed, 6:2-3 seems to convey a return of the lover, so that his speaking thereafter would follow naturally from that (though shepherd-hypothesis advocates view this differently, as we will consider shortly).

The man's praise of the woman beginning in verse 4 continues through verse 9 with the mention of queens, concubines and "daughters" praising her. Some see this as a section ending, taking the next words in verse 10, "Who is she...?" to begin a new section, parallel to these words occurring at the commencement of the central and final major sections of the Song (see 3:6; 8:5). However,

the question in 6:10 seems most likely to be the words of the queens, concubines and daughters just mentioned in verse 9 (or the man quoting them)? making it a continuation of the same section. (Note also that verses 4 and 10 end the same? the full context indicating that these are the bracketing verses of an inclusio.)

Verses 11-12 are difficult with respect to who is saying them and what they mean (verse 12 does follow from verse 11). Some note the parallels between verse 11 and 7:12 and take these verses to be the beginning and end of an inclusio. However, the theme and scene of 7:12 obviously continues beyond it. Still, Song 6:11 could be the beginning of a new section, but there is no clear break to indicate this. Indeed, some have argued that verses 11-12 are a response to the women in verse 10.

Verse 13 is taken as a new section in modern Hebrew Bible chapter divisions; which are the same as in the English versions throughout the Song except here. (What English Bibles number as 6:13, Hebrew Bibles number as 7:1? and Hebrew verse numbers are all one number higher than in English versions throughout chapter 7.) Yet while 6:13 (English numbering, which we will adhere to throughout) does appear to go with the praise song that follows in chapter 7, perhaps inspired by the dance of 6:13, this verse; especially if the word rendered “return” is properly translated; would seem to be a call in response to the previous verse (or at least a response to seeing the Shulamite, who appears in verse 10). So there seems to be no break here. The praise sequence in chapter 7 then continues through the middle of verse 9, where the woman breaks into the thought (which we will examine more shortly). She then makes a statement in verse 10 similar to the refrain of mutual possession in 2:16 and 6:3. The woman’s call in 7:11 to come away could then denote a continuation of the same section or, particularly if verse 9 refers literally to sleep, the start of a new section. We will stop here to go to the next ending determinant.

The second factor here is the symmetrical parallel with the third major section of the Song, the dreamlike unit mentioned above (3:1-5). The wedding and consummation appear to form the fourth and central section of the Song (3:6?5:1). On either side of that segment are these similar dreamlike sequences. Note that the former section went from the woman’s panicked loss of her lover to the joy of reuniting with him. In parallel, we would expect the panicked loss of her lover in the latter section to conclude with a happy reunion. It does; but not right away. Still, despite the longer length of the latter section in reaching resolution, it is sensible that its conclusion should come with the reunion. This could conceivably come with 6:3, but all is not clearly resolved until the implied sexual union of 7:9.

Third is the issue of the apparent chiasmic structure of this section, as discovered by Dr. Craig Glickman. Recall the chart from his book *Solomon’s Song of Love* showing the symmetrical outline of the entire Song (an adaptation of which is reproduced in our introduction). Well, he also provides an expanded diagram of each major section; which greatly helps in comprehending the structure of the current section. The diagram for this section (see chart in ADOBE PDF or IMAGE format) reveals that the unit beginning at 5:2, with the Shulamite sleeping alone, continues through

7:9, where it is implied that the lovers are sleeping together. However, the refrain of verse 10 appears to complete the thought here. Looking at the chart, consider that another form of this refrain also occurs in 6:3 as a transition to the central subsection of the chiasm (i.e., from subsection c to d). Thus, it also seems logical as a transition at the end of the chiasm leading into the next major section. Dr. Glickman himself groups 7:10 with the next section, as the beginning of the second section from the end, because another form of the refrain occurs near the end of the second section from the beginning (in 2:16). Still, he does view 7:10 as transitional from the current unit. Indeed, he generally regards the section breaks as transitional, at times with some overlap, rather than as hard and fast (and that may well be the case). Note that there are seven subsections within this unit; as detailed in the chart.

It may be noted that this unit (5:2-7:10) is by far the longest unit in the Song; set symmetrically opposite to what is by far the shortest unit in the Song (3:1-5). It is not known why the Song was composed this way; but it has the very interesting effect of making the actual center of the Song (4:16-5:1) fall at the end of the central unit (3:6-5:1) rather than in the middle of the central unit. It also serves to stress the greater magnitude and impact of events in this longest section as compared with the earlier problem in the shortest section.

Now let us proceed into what is happening within this unit, starting with the first subsection (5:2-8). The man knocks to be let in at night after the woman has gone to bed and is sleeping (5:2-3). If the Song is arranged chronologically, this episode would seem to occur after the couple is married; unlike the previous dreamlike sequence, which appears to have preceded their wedding. Of course, this is assuming that the apparent sequence of the wedding and the wedding night in 3:6-5:1 concerns a real and present event rather than a dream or wish for the future; and that 5:2-7:10 is not a flashback to the premarital courtship or engagement period. Indication that the couple is married is found in the fact that the man is seeking entry very late at night, when the dew makes his hair wet (5:2). Some argue that this is still during the seven day wedding festival and that the man is late in coming to the bridal chamber, having been reveling with his friends. But the setting may well be sometime later, in the couple's private home.

Some might argue that if the two lovers are married, the man would not need to be let into a shared bedroom with his wife. However, even if a private home is meant, it is possible that he is without a key. Furthermore, women in that society may have had their own quarters separate from their husband; as evidenced by Abraham's wife Sarah having had her own tent (see Genesis 24:66-67; compare also 31:33). Alternatively, some read Song 5:2-6a as heavy with double entendre; the idea being that the man and woman are already lying in bed together and that he is actually seeking sexual entrance while she is sleeping. Verse 3 may speak against that, though, since the woman doesn't want to put on a robe or get her feet dirty after having washed them; which seems to imply having to get up to open the door of her quarters. Yet it could be that she is referring to a possible need to rise briefly after sexual relations.

Of course, even if the man is literally standing outside his wife's door, the implication of this section seems to be that he desires sexual relations; not that he just wants to come in to sleep. As Dr.

Michael Fox points out: "While 5:2 clearly begins a new dramatic sequence...the similarity between the motifs of this unit and those of the preceding one shows that the placement of the units is not random. In the preceding unit the girl was called a 'locked garden' (4:12). Here too the boy's entry to the desired place is prevented by a 'lock,' and here too the girl is willing 'to open' to him (5:5-6; cf. 4:16)" (The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs, p. 142).

The tenor of the woman's response in 5:3 is unclear. Perhaps she is really sleepy and tired. Some fault her for being lazy, indifferent, cold and unreceptive. Yet it is reasonable that she would be quite groggy, lethargic and even incoherent if awakened late in the night. On the other hand, the husband, if he is literally outside the door, could be faulted for showing up so late; though perhaps his job required it in a later setting. Or, if he is already in bed with her, he could perhaps be faulted for insensitivity. (Those who see this passage as representing Christ and the Church, with some even thinking Jesus referred to the knocking on the door here in Revelation 3:20, fault the woman exclusively for failure to properly respond to her husband? though this may be a misapplication of the passage.) Others see the woman's response as teasing or playful; that is, her complaint is not genuine and she really intends to let her husband in, as we see her desiring him in verse 4 and in verse 6 saying her heart leapt when he spoke. (Thus the problem that develops would be a misunderstanding, and no one's particular fault.)

In 5:4, the word translated "latch" here literally means "hole" and "of the door" is not in the Hebrew. Where the NKJV says the woman's "heart yearned" for the man and the KJV has "bowels were moved," forms of the Hebrew words *me'ah* and *hamah* are used. As Lloyd Carr notes: "The basic meaning of the word [*me'ah*, Strong's no. 4578] is the internal organs generally (2 Sa. 20:10; Ps. 22:14), or the digestive tract (Jon. 2:1f.). But several texts use the term to refer to the procreative organs [sometimes rendered 'loins' by translators], either male (e.g. Gn. 15:4; 2 Sa. 7:12) or female (e.g. Ru. 1:11. In Gn. 25:23; Ps. 71:6; and Is. 49:1, *me'eh* is used in parallel with *beten*, the common word for womb). The focus of the thrill is specifically sexual" (The Song of Solomon, Tyndale Commentaries, p. 135, note on Song 5:4). *Hamah* (Strong's no. 1993) means to make a loud sound or, by implication, to be in commotion or tumult. Some see the word in Song 5:4 as meaning "moaned," "roiled" or "seethed." Yet it should be pointed out that the two words together can simply connote sympathy: "The Hebrew expression...is used elsewhere to express pity or compassion (e.g., Isa. 16:11; Jer. 31:20). It was not used to express sexual arousal as some scholars maintain" (Bible Knowledge Commentary, note on Song 5:3-4). Yet it may be that the phrase could, in context, be taken in an amatory sense. Perhaps, as with other verses here, a double entendre is intended.

In 5:5, the Shulamite says that she arose for her beloved and that her hands and fingers dripped with liquid myrrh on the handles of the lock. This is understood in one of three ways among natural interpreters. Some see the woman getting out of bed and quickly splashing or rubbing on myrrh as perfume so that it was all over her hands and got onto the lock handle when she touched it. Others see the myrrh as having been left on the lock handle by the man as a token of affection, this being earlier a symbol for him in 1:13, the myrrh getting onto her hand because of touching the handle.

Sometimes cited in this regard is the first-century-B.C. Roman poet Lucretius. In his work *On the Nature of Things*, he said, “But the lover shut out, weeping, often covers the threshold with flowers and wreaths, anoints the proud doorposts with oil of marjoram, presses his love-sick kisses upon the door...” (quoted by Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia Commentaries, p. 168, footnote on 5:2?6:3). Of course, this was written around 900 years after the Song and in a very different cultural setting. Still others see an erotic metaphor in 5:5. The man’s lips are said to drip liquid myrrh in verse 13.

When the woman at last opens for her lover in 5:6a, whether this means that she literally arises to let him in, does so in a dream or, in a metaphoric sense, becomes receptive to sexual union, it is too late. He is gone! It would seem that whether the woman was genuinely sleepy in her earlier response or was being coy, the man takes her lack of immediacy as a rebuff. Thus we have a problem between the lovers. As Shakespeare wrote, “The course of true love never did run smooth” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act 1, Scene 1). Some recognize this episode as representative of a period of sexual adjustment to each other in marriage. Upset at the man’s departure, the woman seeks and calls for him in similar imagery to that of 3:1-5. It seems likely that at least 5:6b-7 contains a dream or daydream-at-night sequence similar to that of the prior passage; especially given the lack of reaction to being struck by the watchmen in verse 7. Perhaps finding her lover gone sent her into the dreamlike mode described previously.

How are we to understand the abuse by the city watchmen here? They strike and wound her and strip off her light overcloak, as the word translated “veil” in the NKJV is thought to mean (this being a different word from that often translated “veil” in 4:1). Again, a literal interpretation does not seem likely. Those who take this literally and see the Shulamite as the bride of Solomon should consider the implausibility of city watchmen assaulting the queen of Israel.

Would they not recognize her? How would she even have made it out of the palace? As for the Shulamite being a designation for a woman not married to Solomon, this still does not explain her being able to roam the streets at night; much less the striking and stripping and lack of reaction to this mistreatment. Thus we look to a dreamlike, figurative interpretation here. Recall that in the parallel of 3:1-5, the watchmen seemed to signify the woman’s own sensibilities, her mental and emotional governors that took hold of her, helping her to see things rationally (i.e., she “got a grip” on herself). In the present case, we should consider that the woman is perhaps wracked with guilt for effectively chasing her lover away, even if unintentional. Thus, through the mental and emotional patrol of her mind, she essentially beats herself up and is left miserable over what has happened.

Her message then in 5:8 to the daughters of Jerusalem is to tell her beloved that she is lovesick. That is, she doesn’t want him to have the wrong idea, thinking she doesn’t want to be with him (sexually, the whole context implies). Rather, she desperately longs for him, ailing from desire. A few translators take the words here to have the Shulamite charging the daughters to not tell her beloved that she is lovesick; out of embarrassment over her foolish actions in searching for him (e.g., Fox, p. 146, note on 5:8). Yet this denies the clear sense of longing here and is probably not

grammatically accurate. (More on this will follow in the comments on 8:4.) As noted with regard to Song 2:5, Egyptian love songs 6, 12 and 37 describe the symptoms of lovesickness. Observe the latter: “Seven days have passed, and I’ve not seen my lady love; a sickness has shot through me. I have become sluggish, I have forgotten my own body. If the best surgeons come to me, my heart will not be comforted with their remedies. And the prescription sellers, there’s no help through them; my sickness will not be cut out. Telling me ‘she’s come’ is what will bring me back to life...” (Papyrus Chester

Beatty I, Group A, in William Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 320-321).

In 5:9, the beginning of the second subsection of the current unit (verses 9-16), the daughters of Jerusalem, whom the Shulamite has just addressed, respond to her; their words likely being sung by the chorus. They refer to her as “fairest among women” or “most beautiful of women” (NIV)?as they also do in 6:1. This descriptor was earlier given in 1:8, where it was not clear whether the daughters of Jerusalem or the lover was speaking. Some contend that the use of this phrase by the women is sarcastic; especially followers of the shepherd hypothesis who see the other women here as members of Solomon’s harem. As for the daughters asking what is so special about the Shulamite’s lover, some see their query as sincere (deeming them her friends) while others view it sarcastically as well. Shepherd-hypothesis adherents sometimes point out that this verse creates a problem for those who see Solomon as the woman’s true love; for would not the women already know all about him? Yet it could be that their question is a mere literary device to give the woman an opportunity to extol the attributes of her beloved.

This she does in the verses that follow. In a wasf (again, a song of descriptive praise cataloging a person’s physical characteristics) in 5:10-16, the Shulamite sings of her beloved’s body from head to toe. She starts out in verse 10 with his overall general appearance, “white and ruddy” describing the reddish tinge of healthy white skin (compare 1 Samuel 16:12; 17:42; Lamentations 4:7; and “chief among ten thousand” referring to his distinguished appearance (not to being king). She later concludes summarily, “Yes, he is altogether lovely” (Song 5:16). “And in between, she compliments ten aspects of her beloved. This number underscores his worth in her eyes, since ten, like seven, is a number used to signify perfection” (Glickman, p. 100)?ten signifying a full enumeration, there being ten fingers of the hands. The aspects here are: 1) head (verse 11a); 2) hair (verse 11b); 3) eyes (verse 12); 4) cheeks (verse 13a); 5) lips (verse 13b); 6) arms (verse 14a); 7) “body” or abdomen (verse 14b); 8) legs (verse 15); 9) countenance or stature; 10) mouth or speech.

Let’s note a few particulars here. “Gold” denotes the precious quality of his head, not to being blond, as the man’s hair is black (verse 11). Observe that the longest description is given of the man’s eyes (verse 12), which are compared to doves, just as the man drew the same comparison with the woman’s eyes (see 1:15; 4:1). The “lilies” the man’s lips are compared to in 5:13b are often thought to be reddish in color, perhaps lotuses or anemones; and this goes for the mention of the same flowers throughout the Song (though it could be that the comparison is due to shape rather than color). The word translated “body” in verse 14b is a form of me’ah, the word used

earlier in verse 4 in reference to the innards of the abdomen. Obviously the word must also be applicable to the exterior or it could not be praised as something visible in verse 14. Some believe an erotic reference is intended by the woman here. Yet we should note that she is not speaking directly to her lover in private but describing him to other women. (Of course, this may all be part of her dream.)

After reaching the legs in the downward progression of praise (verse 15a), the woman mentions the man's "countenance" (NKJV) or "appearance" (NIV). While the word rendered countenance could refer to facial expression, the comparison with Lebanon and its cedars (which are great and tall) implies appearance more broadly. In fact, it seems likely that the legs, being long and sturdy, lead to mention of the man's great stature and bearing. The concluding focus on the mouth being sweet in verse 16 seems a regression from the downward progress of the wasf. It may mean that consideration of all his qualities has led her to desiring to kiss him. Or, since the lips were earlier mentioned in verse 13b, the man's "mouth" in verse 16a may refer to another aspect that does not fit in the bodily description; his speech, as the mouth often connotes in Scripture. This, she tells the daughters of Jerusalem in verse 16b following the wasf, is her lover and this is her "friend"; i.e., her companion, stressing not just their sexual relationship but also their general togetherness and closeness. All of this, she tells them, makes him a man to be desired (thus explaining her lovesickness).

In 6:1, beginning the third subsection of the present unit (verses 1-3), their interest is clearly piqued. They are now enthusiastic about finding him. Some consider the women the Shulamite's friends indicating their support for her in her search. Yet others see this as the women of Jerusalem (or other harem girls in the shepherd hypothesis) expressing their own desire for this wonderful man just described to them. It is interesting to note that they ask her where the man has gone, as if she knows (when she has been searching for him).

More surprising, though, is her response in 6:2-3?wherein she relates exactly where he is. And just where is that? Some think that the man here going to his garden to "feed his flocks" means that he has returned to his regular job; the shepherd to his shepherding of flocks or, if Solomon, that he is engaged in his duties as king. This, however, ignores the context of the Song. The man going to "his garden" and the beds of spices to feed (the italicized "his flock" in verses 2 and 3 in the NKJV is not in the Hebrew here) is surely related to the end of the former unit, where the man going into his garden of spices referred to sexual union with the woman (see 4:9?5:1). We are later told that the woman dwells in the gardens (8:13). The man's gathering of lilies (6:2) ties in to his gathering of myrrh and spice (5:1) and to his feeding among the lilies (6:3)?the latter probably referring to the woman's lips (as with 5:13) or other physical charms, she herself being the beds of spices of 6:2. Verse 3 is the refrain of mutual possession reversed from 2:16, where the man grazing among the lilies is first mentioned. This passage, it would seem, has nothing to do with the man being away at his regular job. Rather, in answer to the women questioning the Shulamite about where her lover is that they may seek him, she seems to be emphatically answering, "He is with me" and "He's mine" (some seeing the implication as, "...and is not available for you").

Just what is happening here? Recall in the earlier dreamlike sequence of 3:1-5 that the woman, after getting hold of herself (pictured by the watchmen finding her) immediately found her beloved, probably indicating that he was never really lost. Similarly, in the present sequence, it appears that after the lover is gone and the woman seeks for him with pangs of guilt (pictured by the watchmen striking her), she describes her desire for her lover and then finds that he is not really gone after all. Perhaps the man being “gone” concerned him being emotionally withdrawn after what he perceived as a sexual rejection by his wife. And now that she has reached out to him, he is again expressing his love as always, physically, companionably and, in the verses that follow, in praise of her. The women of Jerusalem may have never been literally present; merely a sounding board for the woman’s feelings. Or it could be that the withdrawal period was unresolved by the next day and she was actually speaking to her friends about trying to resolve the problem. In fact, this one episode could be representative of a lengthy adjustment period in marriage; where a number of such episodes occur. In any case, things work out; the man returns (emotionally if he never actually left physically). The mutual possession refrain “indicates that the emotional distance had been overcome on her part and she was confident that it had also been overcome on his part. All that was needed for a complete reconciliation was a statement of forgiveness or acceptance from the lover” (BKC, note on 6:1-3). And that comes next.

In the fourth and central subsection of this unit (6:4-10), the man now praises the woman in verses 4-9, beginning with a *wasf*, some of which is repeated from 4:1-7. Shepherd-hypothesis advocates see this as another attempt at seduction by the interloping Solomon, considering that the elements repeated from the beginning of chapter 4 show that he was speaking in that previous section as seducer as well. Yet we have already noted in our comments on 3:6?5:1 the major difficulties with the beginning of chapter 4 being spoken by someone other than the woman’s true love. Both sections, 4:1-7 and 6:4-9, are more reasonably attributed to the woman’s lover (which could be Solomon in a positive sense).

In 6:4 the man compares the Shulamite to the cities of Tirzah and Jerusalem; pointing out that she is as “awesome as those with banners” (“those” here possibly denoting “armies” or “hosts,” as commonly translated, though this is not explicit in the Hebrew). Comparing a beautiful woman to cities probably sounds strange to us today. But people still speak and sing of certain cities as beautiful, exciting or loved in an idealized sense. Jerusalem was described elsewhere as “the perfection of beauty” (Psalm 50:2; Lamentations 2:15) and “beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth” (Psalm 48:2). However, comments Tom Gledhill, “the resemblance is not so much in physical beauty...but in royalty, power and stature. Tirzah was an ancient Canaanite city, mentioned in Joshua 12:24. Jeroboam I moved his capital there at the time [soon after Solomon’s death] of the schismatic breakaway of Israel from the Solomonic dynasty which ruled Judah. Omri later established Samaria as the capital of the Northern Kingdom [1 Kings 14:1-20; 16:8-26?this all showing that the Song likely dates to before the transfer of the capital to Samaria and probably before the divided monarchy period]. The site of Tirzah [now Tell el-Farah, six miles north of Shechem] has been described as one of great natural and rustic beauty. Jerusalem of course was the capital of the Davidic Kingdom of Judah [and all Israel ]. It is possible that we are meant to

perceive connotations from the etymologies of these names. Tirzah [which was also a woman's name (Numbers 26:33; 27:1)] comes from a root meaning 'to be pleasant' [lovely or delightful] (hence: Mount Pleasant). Jerusalem means something like 'a foundation of [peace or] well-being.' Later, in 8:10, the girl describes herself as one who brings shalom, that is well-being, peace and security. We say that a city in a prominent position has a certain 'aspect.' So also our girl 'looks out' with grandeur, dignity and loftiness [compare 6:10]. Her aspect is awesome, yet pleasing. Tirzah may be regarded as the archetype of the delightful garden city, whilst Jerusalem, perched on its fortified rocky outcrop, represents imposing impregnability" (The Message of the Song of Songs, p. 191).

The New American Commentary states regarding the lover's words at this time of reunion and reconciliation: "His awe of her is as great as ever; if anything, it has increased. She is compared to Tirzah and Jerusalem, the two greatest cities of the early monarchy, in all their splendor. The meaning is that she inspires awe and wonder in him; and, as in his comparison of her to David's tower [in 4:4? which the city imagery may hark back to, considering the other repeated references in this section], he is still aware that he [or anyone else] cannot storm her by force (the walls of the city were its prominent feature). The request that she turn away her eyes [in 6:5a] further expresses his sense of her power. She can unnerve him with a single glance" (p. 417, note on verses 4-5a).

Regarding the eyes in 6:5a, we may recall that the man in his previous wasf compared the woman's eyes to doves (4:1a). It may be that he does not repeat this in the present wasf, as he does other elements, because the woman has already turned and applied the same picture to him in her own wasf (5:12). So he elevates the praise in this case; telling her that her eyes overwhelm him. She is just stunning; a knockout, we might say today. The man's praise then in 6:5b-7 is essentially repeated from his earlier wasf (see 4:1b-2, 3b). He, as Dr. Glickman points out, "praises her hair, smile, and lips in [almost] exactly the same way he did on the wedding night. He tells her again that she is his...darling companion [6:4], and dove [verse 9]. This is not for lack of creativity; it's a poetic way to communicate that his appreciation for her has not diminished since that time" (pp. 110-111). Thus we seem to have more of the reconciliation of the lovers here. (Some, however, see the wasf repetition here as following formal custom during the seven-day wedding festival, which they consider to still be ongoing at this point.)

Song 6:8-9 presents us with a difficulty that, as explained in our introduction, impacts the identification of the characters in the Song. In verse 8 we have mention of 60 queens, 80 concubines and numberless maidens; the point in the next verse being that the Shulamite outshines them. Who are these women? Many take them to be Solomon's harem before it reached a later size of 700 royal wives and 300 concubines (see 1 Kings 11:1-3). The maidens here are sometimes taken to be ladies in waiting; many of whom would supposedly later become concubines. If the various women in these verses, or any of them, do represent Solomon's harem, it is most likely that Solomon is not the lover in the Song; a point in favor of the shepherd

hypothesis and of the alternative two-character progression, which sees a nameless groom portrayed as King Solomon.

Yet it could be that the reference is to the wives and concubines of rulers near and far. A number of commentators point out the general quality of the women here. Gledhill, for instance, states: "The queens, concubines and virgins are mentioned in order of decreasing rank, but their numbers increase in ascending scale, sixty, eighty, beyond number. The numbers must not be taken literally; it is merely a literary device to indicate an indefinitely large number. All these gorgeous females are usually considered to be members of Solomon's harem. But the reference is more general. There is no mention of the king at all" (p. 193). The New American Commentary says: "The increasing numbers (sixty, eighty, a countless multitude) are typical wisdom technique" (p. 417, note on Song 6:8-9). "Note that the sixty and eighty are respectively three score and four score [as the KJV writes these numbers], as in the wisdom formula, 'For three..., even for four' (footnote on verses 8-9; see Proverbs 30:15, 18, 21, 29; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). Interestingly, the large number started with in Song 6:8, 60, is also used for the armed guards in 3:7?so the number may well be representative.

The only problem here is that the queens and concubines are said at the end of verse 9 to praise the Shulamite; and the parallelism here identifies the virgins as the "daughters," most likely meaning the daughters of Jerusalem referred to throughout the Song. This would seem to limit the queens and concubines to Jerusalem as well, particularly as they are portrayed as speaking of and to the Shulamite. It may, however, be that the queens and concubines are the consorts of foreign kings visiting Jerusalem; either all at once at some grand occasion (perhaps even Solomon's wedding to the Shulamite) or in smaller groups over an extended period of time. This would give these women exposure to the Shulamite as the wife of Solomon; particularly since she would at this stage be the only one. So it is quite possible that a young Solomon, prior to his polygamous corruption, is the lover in the Song. Yet even if the women mentioned here are not his harem, it is not required that Solomon be the lover. A nameless man and woman could still be portrayed throughout the Song. Of course, in this case the praise from several score of royal consorts would likely be figurative (that is, the man would be saying that all other women would have to admit that the Shulamite outshines them? whether or not they actually do).

The Shulamite here is not classed among the increasing numbers of other women. Rather, she, as the man's "perfect one" and the "only one" (verse 9), is in a class all by herself. ("My dove, my perfect one" is repeated from 5:2). The woman is likewise said in 6:9 to be the "only one of her mother, the favorite [Hebrew *barah*] of the one who bore her." There is a question here as to whether the woman is the only daughter of her mother. (We know she had brothers.) A favorite only daughter is an oxymoron, but the word *barah* here can mean "pure" (just as it is translated "clear" in verse 10), which may better parallel the man's description of the Shulamite as "perfect" or "undefiled." "Speaking of the girl from the mother's point of view accentuates the girl's youth and innocence" (Fox, p. 153).

There is some question as to who is speaking in 6:10. Some, as is reflected in the NKJV speaker annotations, argue for the man still speaking, particularly given the repetition of “awesome as...with banners” from verse 4 (indicating an inclusio). Yet the phrase “Who is she...?,” parallel to its occurrence in 3:6 and 8:5, seems to denote some surprise and evidently comes from someone who is not already speaking with the Shulamite; as the man has been. As the women of the chorus (representing the daughters of Jerusalem ) apparently sing 3:6 (and probably 8:5 too), it seems most likely that they sing 6:10 as well. This follows the context here well. The man concluded verse 9 with mention of the daughters and royal consorts praising the Shulamite, effectively introducing verse 10 as conveying their words. Of course, it could be that the man is quoting their words in concluding his own praise section. (Either way, the praise section does include verse 10.)

The Shulamite, we should recall, earlier sought help from the daughters of Jerusalem while she was in distress over the apparent separation from her lover. Now she is utterly radiant? giving real cause for surprise. Perhaps the idea is to see them saying, “What have we here?,” wondering why she is now so happy. There is also a contrast here with the perceived disdain of the daughters for the Shulamite in the opening of the Song. The New American Commentary says: “The woman is so thoroughly transformed that the girls hardly recognize her. They describe her beauty as like that of the moon and sun, but they do not use the usual vocabulary for these bodies. The word for ‘moon’ here [lebanah, alliterative with Lebanon and lebonah (frankincense)] is related to the word ‘white’ and contrasts with her self-description in 1:5, where she asks the Jerusalem girls not to chide her for her dark skin. She is also said to be like the ‘dawn’; the word used here is a play on the word in 1:5 for ‘black.’ The word for ‘sun,’ which is related to the word for ‘heat,’ seems to imply that she is too dazzling to behold. In a Cinderella motif, the woman who was very ordinary is now extraordinary in her beauty and breathtaking to behold” (p. 418, note on 6:10). Additionally, we may have the concept here of her light breaking forth after a dark and troubled night.

Based on the opening and close of the apparent inclusio here, Glickman draws an interesting comparison: “‘Fair...as Tirzah, as lovely as Jerusalem,...as awe-inspiring as bannered hosts’ begins the praise in 6.4 and parallels the conclusion of the praise [in verse 10:] ‘fair as the white moon, pure as the blazing sun, awe-inspiring as bannered hosts.’... Since Tirzah was a magnificent city in northern Israel...yet not deemed as glorious as Jerusalem, it seems natural to see the moon describing Tirzah, the sun describing Jerusalem, and the bannered hosts bringing balance to both descriptions but taking its specific meaning from the different contexts [in the latter case perhaps referring to the stars].... So both the beginning and ending of this section praise Shulamith as representing the best of Israel in its glory. The symbolism of the moon, sun, and eleven stars (or twelve, counting Joseph; Revelation 12:1) in the dream of Joseph, where they represent the Israel comprised of Jacob, his wife(s), and Joseph’s eleven brothers, adds further support to this view (Genesis 37)” (p. 213). If this association is valid, as seems plausible, it would lend support to the idea that the Shulamite represents, in a typological sense, the nation of Israel or spiritual Israel (spiritual Jerusalem), the Church.

The description in this section of the uniqueness of the woman along with the comparison of her appearance to celestial grandeur resembles Egyptian love song 31: “One, the lady love without a duplicate, more perfect than the world, see, she is like the star rising at the start of an auspicious year. She whose excellence shines, whose body glistens, glorious her eyes when she stares.... She turns the head of every man, all captivated at the sight of her.... When she comes forth, anyone can see that there is none like that One” (Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Group A, in Simpson, pp. 315-316).

As was earlier noted regarding the next two verses, 6:11-12 (the fifth subsection of the current unit), it is difficult to know who is speaking here and just what is meant. Murphy comments: “Verses 11-12 represent a sudden break with the preceding song of admiration [though some see a response here to verse 10, as we will see]. It is difficult to determine who is the speaker. Since the woman is the garden to which the man comes in 5:1, the verse might be attributed to him. On the other hand, the blooming of the vine and blossoming of the pomegranates are repeated in an invitation uttered by the woman in 7:13. The difficulty is compounded by the obscurity of v. 12. One may draw a parallel with chapter 7, where the man’s resolve to be united with the woman follows a song of admiration (...[verses 7-8 after verses 1-6]). So also, 6:11-12 might represent his coming to the woman after the praise of her beauty in the previous verses. However, v.11 can also be understood as spoken by the woman who recalls a former tryst with the man. She gives a specific purpose to her visit to the garden: to see if the flowers are in bloom, etc. In the language of the Song, this sign is associated with love. The man

spoke of the awakening of nature in the famous Spring song of 2:11-13, and it has been pointed out that phrases of 6:11 are repeated in 7:13 (spoken by the woman). The visit to the garden may be intended as a real visit to a real garden by the woman; the language about the blossoms would then suggest that the purpose is a rendezvous with the lover” (pp. 178-179, note on verse 11).

However, Murphy also points out that “the association of the nut-garden with the valley is not clear. The garden [if literal] could hardly contain a valley. It must [again, if literal] be a vantage point from which to see the valley in bloom, which occurs in the Spring as a result of the winter rains. But perhaps we are simply confronted with a profusion of images (garden, valley, vines, pomegranates) that have no spatial connotation” (p. 176, footnote on verse 11). Or perhaps the garden, as already postulated, is figurative of the woman’s body, so that a fertile valley would not be out of place here in an erotic connotation. We will come back to verse 11 after considering the next verse.

Regarding verse 12, “commentators are unanimous that this verse is the most difficult in the Song and one of the most difficult in the Old Testament to make sense of.... The words themselves are all common, all but the last used well over 100 times each in the Old Testament, but the syntax is elusive” (Carr, pp. 151-152, note on verse 12). Consider the Hebrew transliteration and the literal rendering:

Lo? Not (I know/knew not) yada 'ti I  
know/knew naphshi my soul (my being or  
myself) samatni set me chariots  
merkabot chariots  
'ami my people (or Amminadib, a proper name) nadib  
prince

Some put the first three words together as meaning “I do not know myself (anymore)” or “I did not know myself”, or “I am beside myself (with joy).” They then take the next two words to be “She set me in (or as) chariots” or “You set me in (or as) chariots” (there is no preposition here in the Hebrew). Others put the first two words together as meaning “I knew it not (when)”, that is to say, “Before I knew it...” These interpreters then take the next three words to mean “My being (implying my thoughts and feelings) set me in (or as) chariots.” Placement in a chariot implied royal acceptance and public exaltation (compare 1 Kings 20:33; 2 Kings 10:15). Regarding the phrase ‘ammi-nadib, there has long been dispute as to whether it should be taken as two words or as one word, a proper name. On the two-word view, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament explains, “Some have taken it as a construct phrase consisting of the word ‘people’ (?am) and nadib, a word often rendered ‘prince,’ but more appropriately taken as noble, generous or willing” (p. 186, note on verse 12). Thus the NKJV rendering: “the chariots of my noble people.” However, it should be noted that the word nadib is typically translated “prince” (ruler) almost immediately after in 7:1 (bat-nadib here understood as “daughter of a prince,” though some consider it “noble daughter”). A conceivable alternative is “set me in the chariots of my people’s prince”, which would seemingly be spoken by the woman of being accepted by the man regaled as king (or as actually king if Solomon). Yet another possible meaning is “set me in the chariots of my people as prince”, which would be the words of the man referring to being made to feel like a king, sitting as king at the wedding feast or perhaps being actually crowned king if Solomon (though there is no other indication of an actual coronation).

The proper name interpretation, which is followed by the King James Version, goes all the way back to the Greek Septuagint translation. The same commentary continues: “Many have understood the word to be a proper name, Amminadib, taken as a variant of the more frequently attested Amminadab [see Exodus 6:23; Numbers 1:7; 2:3; 7:12, 17; 10:14; Ruth 4:19-20; 1 Chronicles 2:10; 6:22]. This rendition certainly is possible, and, if correct, the figure of Amminadab would [it is supposed] have a similar function to [the mysterious] Prince Mehi in Egyptian love poetry. The latter is a well-known lover, who is also associated with chariots. However, two factors speak against this view. One, it is something of a last resort to appeal to a proper name in a difficult text. Second, the Amminadab of the Bible has no special connection with love, and there are no other tales or evidence to suggest that another Amminadab had those connections” (pp. 186-187, note on Song 6:12). However, it may be significant that Nahshon of the house of Amminadab was the chief of Judah following the Exodus and that the ruling lineage of Israel, that of David and Solomon, was traced back to him (see the scriptural references above). Considering this, it is possible that being set in the

“chariots of Amminadib” is perhaps a figurative reference to being made royalty. However, Amminadab’s name is nowhere else used this way.

How, then, are we to understand verses 11-12? Most see the woman speaking here (as the NKJV does)?primarily because verse 13 seems a response to her. Adherents of the shepherd hypothesis usually claim that the woman in verses 11-12 is recalling her abduction into Solomon’s harem?in response to the women in verse 10 asking how she happened to be there among the princesses. The idea is that she was roaming about in the outdoors near her home when she came among the king’s retinue and was taken away. Others think the woman is merely expressing how it is that she came to be a bride, that she went from enjoying the springtime of love with her beloved (compare 2:10-13) to being exalted to a queen in their wedding (either figuratively or, if she is Solomon’s bride, literally). Some who see the woman as Solomon’s bride view her as dreaming of her homeland and desiring to visit there and that her desires materialize later in the Song. The thought here is that Solomon’s duties have kept them apart and that she wants him all to herself on a vacation away from palace life; the chariots being either the means of actually fleeing away or representing her mental flight of fancy.

Yet, as noted earlier, it seems likely that the garden imagery has a sexual connotation, as elsewhere in the Song. Or perhaps the blossoming here more generally relates to the budding of the loving relationship (as in 2:10-13)?which would include amatory expression in the case of a married couple. The Bible Knowledge Commentary states regarding 6:11-12: “These verses tell the story of the couple’s reconciliation from the beloved’s [i.e., the woman’s] point of view. She knew that he [her lover] had ‘gone down to his garden’ (v. 2). So she went there to see if their love was still in bloom (v. 11). As a person would look in the spring for new growth, buds on grape vines, and pomegranate blossoms, so she looked for fresh evidence of their love. When she found him there his first words were words of praise (vv. 4-10), indicating that their love was in fact flourishing” (note on verses 11-13). The chariots imagery in verse 12 would then simply mean that she is now exalted and overjoyed after a period of distress. The Shulamite in such case would seem in verses 11-12 to be responding to the women’s question in verse 10 about why she is now so radiant. Tommy Nelson interprets verses 11-12 as the Shulamite’s words in this way: “I went to find out if there was still hope for fruitfulness in our relationship, and before I knew it, my soul, my love, my husband, Solomon had fully forgiven me!” (The Book of Romance, p. 148). Thus we have the continuing theme of reconciliation.

On the other hand, it could be the man speaking in verses 11-12 (as the NIV notes). Consider again the chiasmic structure of this section (as shown in the chart from Glickman displayed earlier in our comments on the current unit). Here we see that 6:11-12 is symmetrically parallel with 6:2-3, which concerns the man going to his garden; an apparent reference to the woman (see also 8:14). Glickman sees 6:11-12 as referring to the woman now going to the garden, which as described above may well be the case, but it could again be the man. And if so, perhaps the reference is to the exact same thing as in 6:2-3, with him describing how overjoyed and exalted it made him feel to be reconciled and intimate with his wife once more. Note also the vine (or vineyard) as an image

of the woman in 1:6; though it may be that the man could be pictured this way too (as could perhaps the loving relationship between the two).

Song 6:13 transitions into the next subsection of the present unit (6:13-7:5 or 7:6). Recall that Hebrew Bibles label this verse 7:1. Again, it is not obvious who is speaking. "It seems a fair conclusion to suggest that the first and second halves of the verse are spoken by different parties as we move from an imperative directed at the Shulammitte to a sentence that seems to question the command. In the first parallel line, noted by the fourfold repetition of the verb return ([shubi]), the speakers are plural and request that the Shulammitte come back into their presence so that they may get a close look at her" (NICOT, p. 191, note on 6:13, English numbering). Just who the plural speakers are is not clear. Note that the NKJV attributes the words to the man and his friends. This is likely based on the fact that "the verb form in the next colon [in the Shulamite's response] is masculine: Why should you look?" (Carr, p. 154, note on verse 13). The sudden introduction of other men here, though, seems rather odd. (Some even take these other men as the admirers of the Shulamite in 7:1-5. But other men praising the sexual charms of a married woman in those verses seems extremely unlikely.) It should be recognized that the masculine plural can indicate a group comprising men and women (as long as the group, typically speaking, is not exclusively women; but see the relevant comments on 2:7). Since the daughters of Jerusalem have been mentioned several times, it seems simplest to view the group of 6:13 as them and the man. Shepherd-hypothesis advocates see the group as Solomon and his other harem girls. Alternatively, a chorus of both women and men (as was suggested for 3:6-11) could be singing the first part of the verse; perhaps representing the wedding guests generally if these verses are still in the wedding context (though that is questionable).

The opening of 6:13 is heavy with alliteration: Shubi, shubi, ha-Shulamit; shubi, shubi. Following this are two forms of the word hazah ("gaze") and then ba-Shulamit. This is, we should note, the only verse in the Song (and in all Scripture) that actually uses the term Shulamite; spoken by those calling to her and by herself or the man in reply. As explained in our introduction, this word could perhaps refer to a person from the town of Shunem. Others suggest a person of Shalem or Salem ?i.e., Jerusalem. Yet it seems odd that the woman would be designated this way when the daughters of Jerusalem are not called the daughters of Salem. As our introduction further details, the term Shulamite seems more likely to be a female form of the name Solomon; the Solomoness, as it were; both being related to the word shalom, meaning peace and well-being. Perhaps this was a pet name for the actual bride of Solomon or a figurative title for a bride portrayed as a queen. Others have proposed a meaning, based on an expanded sense of shalom, of perfect one, completed one or consummated one. This would tie in to the meaning of the Hebrew word for bride or spouse in chapter 4, kallah, literally denoting one who is complete. It should also be pointed out that some have seen the term Shulamite here as a reference to another person. As Gledhill explains: "Others have suggested that the girl senses a rival here, that she is being upstaged by a Shunammite who is being recalled by her companions. But it is all too easy to explain away awkward verses by positing yet another intruding character, and thus adding to the

complexity of the story” (p. 203). The term most likely refers to the principal woman throughout the Song; the one who in 8:10 finds “peace” (shalom) with her beloved.

There is dispute as to the specific sense of the repeated Hebrew word *shubi* in 6:13. The NKJV translates it “return”; as if she is going away and the call is for her to come back. Yet the word could have the meaning of “turn” or “turn around”; implying that she is facing away and is asked to turn so as to be seen (or so that her attention is redirected). Verse 10 saw the woman radiant in her happiness over her reunion with her lover. Verses 11-12 is likely either the woman or the man giving details of their happy reconciliation in the deepening of their loving and sexual relationship. Verse 13 in this vein is then thought by many to be calling for the woman to return from the revelry of her thoughts. Alternatively, it could be that the man and the chorus are calling for her return in a further unfolding of the reconciliation. Some, however, think that the woman is being called back from daydreaming about her distant home. Others, in a different take, believe the woman is retiring from the wedding festivity (perhaps going with her husband to the bridal chamber) and is being asked by all the guests to come back or make an about face so that they may continue to behold her resplendence mentioned in verse 10. Others, though, considering the mention of a dance at the end of the verse, interpret the word *shubi* as meaning turn in the sense of dancing; i.e., whirl or, as Marvin Pope in his Anchor Bible commentary has proposed, leap (though many reject this translation). Still others interpret *shubi* here as a call of “again” or “encore”; which would imply some activity being engaged in (the dance it is thought).

The latter part of verse 13 is usually thought to be the response of the Shulamite (as in the NKJV), speaking of herself in third person and asking what the onlookers would see in her as related to the dance mentioned here. Some see her being self-effacing or playfully fishing for compliments here, asking what there is to behold about her as she dances a dance; setting up the *wasf* or praise poem of the verses that follow. Others contend that there is no dance; that she is rebuking the onlookers for wanting to gaze on her as they would on some camp dancer (see below). However, the beginning of the *wasf* with praise of the woman’s feet in sandals (7:1) seems to indicate that she does dance here. On the other hand, some attribute the words here to the man (as the NIV does). It is clear that he would not be asking what there is to see in the woman. So his words are taken as either a rebuke for others gawking at her or a simple acknowledgement of their awe. Dr. Glickman takes the *mah* at the beginning of the second part of 6:13 not as “what” but, as at the beginning of 7:1, as meaning “how”; seeing the man as commenting to the group, “How you gaze in awe upon Shulamith...” (p. 186).

What is the “dance of the two camps”? The NIV has “dance of Mahanaim,” leaving the concluding phrase untranslated. Mahanaim was a place on the east side of the Jordan River near Bithron (2 Samuel 2:29), which some have identified, as we earlier noted, with Bether in Song 2:16. Mahanaim derived its name from the stay there of Jacob and his family in Genesis 32? “Two Camps” denoting either his own family’s and that of God’s angels or, as some view it, his family here split into two companies. Since this episode ended with the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau, Glickman takes the reference to mean any dance in celebration of reconciliation (p. 216). That

could perhaps be hinted at here. However, it should be pointed out that while Genesis 32:2 and other scriptural references to Mahanaim present the term as a proper name, Song 6:13 uniquely uses the term with the definite article; ha-mahanaim meaning “the two camps” as opposed to the geographic reference (just as you wouldn’t say “the Chicago”).

Rejecting the geographical reference, some see in the terminology of the two camps a woman dancing between military companies, entertaining troops in a promiscuous sense and deem that the Shulamite does not want to be viewed like this. Others, however, consider it some sort of belly dance the woman would perform for her husband (considering the visibility of the body parts implied in the wasf that follows). This was not necessarily in private. (Recall the 1956 movie *The Ten Commandments*, where the daughters of Jethro danced before Moses, as would have been common in that society. See also Judges 21:16-24.) Some take the dance here to be part of the seven-day wedding festivities. J.G. Wetzstein’s observations in the 1800s of Syrian Arab wedding traditions, which may have been passed down from biblical times, included special dances accompanied by poems or songs, including a sword dance by the bride accompanied by a wasf (see Franz Delitzsch, “Appendix: Remarks on the Song by Dr. J.G. Wetzstein,” “Commentary on the Song of Songs,” Keil & Delitzsch’s Commentary, pp. 622-626). Some have argued that the two camps could be two lines of people between which the woman is dancing. Or perhaps the two sets of family and friends at the wedding are meant (if that is even the context here). There is simply no way to know.

We proceed next to the wasf (the descriptive praise song cataloging physical virtues) in Song 7:1-5 (and perhaps verse 6), which extols the woman not from head to toe (as in other cases) but, just the opposite, from toe to head. It has been argued, reasonably so as we have noted, that the praise begins with the feet because she is dancing the dance mentioned in 6:13 (attention thus being drawn to the feet first). That she is dancing and not undressed in bed, as some believe, is likely from the mention of her feet being in sandals. Some even think the “curves” of the woman’s thighs in 7:1 refers to movement, though this is disputed. The implied visibility of some body parts here, as noted above, has led some to envision her not in thick robes but in the more revealing garb of a belly dancer; form fitting with diaphanous veils. Some, it should be pointed out, regard “navel” and the waist in verse 2 as actually denoting a lower area. If so and if the dance is before a plurality of onlookers, the description would be from the mind and not from what is actually seen at the time. Some, however, take her to be dancing nude (which would only be proper before her husband in private), yet the sandals would seem to argue against that. But who knows?

In any case, it seems most likely (as in the NKJV speaker annotations) that the woman’s true love, her husband, is singing the words here. Note particularly the description of her breasts as twin gazelle fawns (verse 3), which is repeated from the man’s earlier praise in 4:5 (likely given immediately before or during the wedding night)?just as 6:5-7 repeated elements from that same time (see 4:1-3). In the former repetition, the man was essentially telling the woman that he feels the same about her as he did previously; and the idea would be the same here, thus continuing the theme of reconciliation and reunion. Of course, shepherd-hypothesis advocates usually argue that

the beginning of chapter 4 was Solomon's seduction; and some of them see him speaking here at the beginning of chapter 7 too. Yet others among them, as well as some followers of the two-character progression, take the end of verse 5, "a king is held captive by your tresses," to mean that the "king" could not here be speaking. Yet this is rather weak reasoning, as he could easily be speaking in third person; whether this is Solomon as seducer, Solomon as lover or another represented as Solomon (just as the Shulamite is often thought to be speaking in third person at the end of 6:13). Some, in consideration of the group calling to the Shulamite at the beginning of 6:13, understand the same group to be speaking in 7:1-5. Some argue for a group of young men in both cases. But the idea that they would be praising the woman's intimate parts as the husband looks on is untenable, being inappropriate and even dangerous; particularly if these are, as some bizarrely imagine, young men catcalling the queen while King Solomon looks on! As with the shepherd hypothesis generally, we should ask why lustful desire would be set to lengthy, beautiful poetry to be sung. Others argue for the daughters of Jerusalem singing admiringly in 7:1-5. Again, however, the intimate references and the repetition already noted in the description of the breasts argues strongly for the husband; and the mention of the king in verse 5 does not at all rule him out.

Furthermore, Glickman points out that this wasf is one of tenfold praise; signifying a full enumeration; set in symmetrical parallel within the present unit to the tenfold praise of the woman for her beloved in 5:10-16. This parallel strengthens the identification of the current praise segment with the man; it being his praise for the woman in turn. The ten elements in this wasf are: 1) feet (verse 1a); 2) thighs (verse 1b); 3) navel (verse 2a); 4) waist (verse 2b); 5) breasts (verse 3); 6) neck (verse 4a); 7) eyes (verse 4b-c); 8) nose (verse 4d-e); 9) head (verse 5a); 10) hair (verse 5b-c).

The comparison of the woman's neck to an ivory tower in 7:4a recalls the man's earlier comparison of her neck to the tower of David, described as an armory, in 4:4. The mention of ivory may be intended to convey the sense of gleaming rather than pure whiteness. This nevertheless seems a rather odd way of describing a woman black of skin, as some contend the Shulamite is based on her describing herself as having dark skin in 1:5-6. Indeed, as she plainly stated there, her darkened skin was a result of working outdoors. It may be that significant time has passed since her initial appearance in the Song; so that she is no longer so dark (compare also the likening of her to the white moon in 6:10).

The woman's eyes are described as "the pools in Heshbon by the gate in Bath Rabbim" (7:4bc)?this being a town 20 miles east of the Jordan River in the territory of Reuben, now called Hesban. "Heshbon, once the royal city of King Sihon (Nu 21:26), was blessed with an abundant supply of spring water. Bath Rabbim ('daughter of many' [or 'daughter of great ones']) may have been a popular name for Heshbon" (NIV Archaeological Study Bible, note on Song 7:4). Biblical archaeologist Bryant Wood has noted regarding this site: "Remains from the period of the divided monarchy, the Iron II age (ca. 900-600 B.C.), were also found. Pottery from the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. came to light in two sites on the mound. One is an open-air water reservoir which is undoubtedly the largest such Iron Age reservoir on Jordan's East Bank. The sections uncovered

indicate that it is 50 feet square and 18 feet deep with a capacity of nearly 300,000 gallons. It was probably one of the pools mentioned in Song of Solomon 7:4” (“The Israelites and the King’s Highway,” *Archaeology and Biblical Research*, Spring 1990, p. 41).

The comparison of the woman’s nose to “the tower of Lebanon which looks toward [faces or overlooks] Damascus” (7:4d-e) is problematic for a few reasons. First, we don’t know what is meant by the object of comparison. Some suggest a fortification in Jerusalem built of Lebanon cedars, as was Solomon’s national armory, named “the House of the Forest of Lebanon” (1 Kings 7:2)?though the dimensions of this particular building do not resemble a tower (yet a tower may have protruded from it). In line with this is the suggestion that the tower was a fortification on the north side of Jerusalem that faced Damascus ?as Jerusalem’s northern gate was later known as the Damascus Gate. Others suggest an otherwise unknown mountain fortress in the high Lebanon range to the north of Israel. And still others think the Lebanon mountain range itself is in mind; towering above the land around.

The second, and larger, problem here is applying the imagery to the woman. How, we may wonder, is her nose to be compared to any of these things? Of all the descriptions in the various *wasfs* in the Song, this one probably seems to our modern sensitivities to be the most outlandish; a great tower or mountain protruding from a woman’s face hardly seeming something beautiful. Some suppose the fortification imagery to symbolize her face being set against the invasion of her person by unwanted advances (particularly with the Syrians of Damascus having been at times enemies of Israel). Others take the comparison to be with a scene of awe or grandeur; mountains or a grand fortress on a mountainside; though having no relation to shape or actual appearance.

Yet just as some specifics of appearance are intended in the other descriptive comparisons, that would also seem to be the case here. Dr. Carr says that the Lebanon range, “solid limestone and 10,000 feet high, hardly seems an apt comparison for a lady’s nose. The simile has given commentators no end of trouble. Prominent noses are not normally considered especially beautiful. Delitzsch...took this to mean ‘symmetrical beauty combined with aweinspiring dignity,’ since it ‘formed a straight line from the brow downward, without bending to the right or left.’ This is hardly convincing. Lebanon (cf. 3:3; 4:8) is one of several words derived from the Hebrew root *laben*, ‘to be white’ (cf. ‘frankincense,’ 3:6). It was probably the whiteness of the limestone cliffs that gave the mountain its name. This suggests that the imagery here is associated with the colour of her nose rather than its shape or size. Her face is pale, like the ivory tone of her neck, not sunburnt (cf. 1:6)” (p. 159, note on 7:4). This seems reasonable, as verse 4 would then have “ivory tower” set in parallel to “tower of Lebanon,” which in Hebrew sounds like “white tower.” Yet the fortification concept of resisting ingress also seems applicable here in both cases; as in 4:4.

Some take the comparison of the woman’s head in 7:5 to Mount Carmel, in the northwest of Israel, as a reference to her holding her head high. However, the more likely comparison is to Carmel’s beauty and lushness, the mountain being heavily covered with forest as the woman’s head was covered by her beautiful hair, which is next described. The description of her hair as purple could refer to the lustrous highlights of her flowing locks in flickering lamplight (as she

danced perhaps), her hair being earlier compared to goats that were most likely black or dark brown (4:1; 6:5). Or “like purple” may point to her hair’s richness or regal quality, purple dye being expensive and used by royalty; thus a fitting twine to figuratively bind a king (captivating the man).

The next sentence in 7:6, beginning with “How beautiful...” (NIV), may conclude the wasf of the previous verses, forming an inclusio with the “How beautiful...” of the opening in verse 1. Some, however, take it as the opening of a new subsection. It is, in any case, transitional. The next subsection (7:6 or 7:7 to 7:9 or 7:10) is the last subsection of the present unit. Those who view verses 1-5 as spoken by a group believe the lover (or Solomon as seducer in the mind of shepherd-hypothesis advocates) breaks in at verse 6, introduced by the mention of “king” in verse 5. Yet it seems more likely that no break in speaker has happened here. that the lover sings 7:1-5, 7:6 and 7:7-9a.

Verses 7-8 speak of shinnying up the woman as a palm tree to take hold of her breasts; as the phrase the KJV and NKJV render “go up to” is literally “go up in” or “go up into” (J.P. Green’s Literal Translation), usually understood as “climb” (NIV). Clearly the man here is intending sexual intimacy with the woman. Some see this section describing present sexual relations between husband and wife. That seems likely in terms of the formerly parted couple coming back together; now fully; particularly with the remark about sleepers, as we will see. However, some argue that the intimacy is not here actually renewed; merely thought of and not realized until after 8:4 or after the end of the Song. Some, of course, argue that the couple has never been married; that the intimacy of 4:16?5:1 was a wish for the future, not yet a reality. And the intimacy here in 7:7-10 and in the next sections is viewed that way as well. Then there are the followers of the shepherd hypothesis, who see Solomon here continuing his attempted seduction of the woman. How, though, would an interloping seducer be privy to the experience of kissing her, as implied in what follows? The rejoinder is typically that it is pure fantasy on his part.

The end of verse 8 describes the fragrance of the woman’s nose as apples or a similar fruit; “nose” being the proper translation of the word translated “breath” in the NKJV (this being the same word translated “nose” in verse 4). Yet the breath coming from her nose may well be in mind. A similar statement occurs in Egyptian love song number 12: “The scent of your nose alone is what revives my heart” (Papyrus Harris 500, Group B, translated by Fox, p. 21). Fox comments: “A gesture of affection frequent in the ancient East (including the Far East) was the nose kiss, in which the couple would rub faces and smell each other’s nose” (p. 97, note on 1:2). Others see the breath of passion here.

The wording of 7:9 makes it clear that a change of speakers takes place in the middle of this verse. After the description of the interior of the woman’s mouth as wine, she breaks in and says that the wine goes down smoothly for her beloved. Those who understand a two character progression here see the man speaking his erotic intentions to the woman and then her joining in, completing his sentence; saying that she is happy to give him the enjoyment he seeks. This ties in well to her statement about the wine flowing smoothly over or through the “lips of sleepers.” Some emend the text here to read “lips and teeth” (e.g., NIV). But there is no need for that. The word

“sleepers” denotes those who sleep together; married lovers, which strengthens the argument that the couple is married here. Glickman translates the end of the verse to say, “as we fall asleep” (p. 187). He stresses that this completes the theme of the unit. It began with the woman waking from sleep separated from her beloved when he desired physical relations with her (5:2-8), and it now concludes with the two falling asleep together after physical union.

Those who adhere to the shepherd hypothesis view this in a completely different way. They see Solomon pressing his seduction through the beginning of verse 9 to the point that the woman can no longer take it. Her breaking into the verse is then seen as her telling the lustful king that the wine of her mouth is not for him but for her true love, who is not actually present. However, the sleeping imagery does not fit so well in this interpretation.

Finally here we consider 7:10. As noted earlier, it seems to reasonably conclude this unit? though it could transitionally open the next. Song 2:16 was the first occurrence of the refrain of mutual possession sung by the woman. She reversed it in 6:3, transitioning into the central subsection of the unit we have here been covering. There she said, “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.” Now in 7:10, at the end of the unit, she declares, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.” Shepherd-hypothesis advocates take this as her final stand for her true love in opposition to Solomon’s advances. But why, we should ask, has the woman here changed the refrain to conclude with not her lover’s possession of her but, it is now stressed, his desire for her? The simplest explanation is that his desire for her has just been expressed in the preceding passage; which argues strongly against the shepherd hypothesis. We should also observe that in the previous two instances of the refrain, the lover is described as feeding among the lilies, which may imply kissing (see 5:13). In 7:10 there is no mention of that? perhaps because it is already clearly implied in verse 9. This again favors the two-character progression. In this view of the present unit, we see that the man had initially desired the woman but, after perceiving her as refusing him, was gone; whether actually or just emotionally. But after she expressed her longing for him, he followed with expressing his undiminished love for her again, his great admiration for her, and now his intense desire for her anew; accompanied, it would seem, by kissing and sleeping together.

We should also note that the Hebrew word used here for “desire,” *teshuqah*, occurs in only two other places in the Old Testament in Genesis 4:7, where sin is pictured as wanting to get at Cain, and, more significantly, in Genesis 3:16 in the judgment on the primal couple, Adam and Eve, where the woman was told that her desire would be toward her husband who would rule over her (not always in a good sense it would seem). Now the Shulamite says that she belongs to her beloved and that his desire is toward her. Some see here an implied reversal of the Edenic judgment; that is to say, that through the loving admiration and desire of a good husband, the curse is mitigated or even alleviated (perhaps paralleling the reconciliation and relationship healing that has occurred in this section).

In reading the next unit, where we note more about verse 10 up front, we will see the lovers go away together for the purpose of deepening their love and intimacy.

“Come, My Beloved, Let Us Go Forth to the Field” (Song of Solomon 7:11-17)

In this short unit the woman invites her beloved to join her in a trip into the countryside in the bloom of springtime. (That she is speaking is clear from the wording.) In the symmetrical arrangement of the Song, as explained by Dr. Craig Glickman in *Solomon’s Song of Love*, this sixth major section of the Song (second to last) is parallel to the second major section (2:8-17), in which the man asked the woman to come away with him into the country in springtime. Thus there is a reversal of roles in her now taking the initiative to lead their love to a new level. Interestingly, the refrain of mutual possession was part of the conclusion of the former section (2:16) expressing the total commitment of the couple and its order reversed within the reconciliation of the previous unit (6:3). Now a changed form of that refrain in 7:10, emphasizing desire, occurs right before the present unit as a transition into it (or right at the beginning of it according to Glickman). Some see the present unit as progressing further toward the sexual intimacy the lovers sought at the end of the former unit. Others, however, believe sexual union was achieved in the former unit, but that now the woman is seeking to deepen their love and intimacy.

Shepherd-hypothesis advocates, believing 7:9-10 is the Shulamite’s rejection of Solomon’s unwanted advances, take the current unit as her then addressing her true love and purposing to return with him to her childhood home (given the reference to her mother’s house in 8:2). How he is suddenly present in this view is unclear (perhaps she has sought him out without any description). Some deem him still absent. Commentator Franz Delitzsch decries this view, and the three-character drama generally, quite sternly: “The advocate of the shepherd hypothesis thinks that the faithful Shulamith, after hearing Solomon’s panegyric [or elaborate praise, given earlier in chapter 7], shakes her head [in verses 9-10] and says: ‘I am my beloved’s.’ To him she calls [in verse 11], ‘Come, my beloved’; for, as [19th-century German commentator H.G.A.] Ewald seeks to make this conceivable: the golden confidence of her near triumph [in resisting the king] lifts her in spirit forthwith above all that is present and all that is actual; only to him [her absent true love] may she speak; and as if she were half here and half already there, in the midst of her rural home along with him, she says, ‘Let us go out into the fields,’ etc. In fact, there is nothing more incredible than this Shulamitess, whose dialogue with Solomon consists of Solomon’s addresses, and of answers which are directed, not to Solomon, but in a monologue to her shepherd; and nothing more cowardly and more shadowy than this lover, who goes about in the moonlight seeking his beloved shepherdess whom he has lost, glancing here and there through the lattices of the windows and again disappearing” (“Commentary on the Song of Songs,” Keil & Delitzsch’s *Commentary*, note on 7:12). Indeed, where has this shepherd been throughout the woman’s ongoing struggle in the palace? Feeding his flock? Why has he not contended with Solomon regarding his imprisoned bride? Appeal might be made to the shepherd as emblematic of Christ away in heaven. Yet the shepherd lad himself is not in heaven. And if Christ were on earth, would He not strive for His Bride; for His people? Would Christ always be sneaking around? Even while in heaven, Christ actively intervenes for His Bride! He does not stand impotently by and leave the Church to face Satan’s temptations alone. Given all this and other factors we have previously noted, the shepherd hypothesis just does not seem very likely.

We also might wonder why, if the couple is already married in the three-character view here, would the woman wish to return to the house of her mother (if this phrase be understood literally). Would she not want to return with her beloved shepherd husband to their shared home after this terrible ordeal? Of course, some shepherd-hypothesis advocates argue that they are not yet married. In that case, we should wonder at the erotic implications of this section.

Some advocates of a two-character progression believe that the lovers in this section are not married and that, in a rather different picture, they are trying to slip away to be alone together for intimacy; the presumption being that they can't where they are and that if they were married they would simply go to their bedroom. Yet why would the Song be celebrating an unmarried couple sneaking off to the woods for premarital sex? Such a theme would not have been condoned in ancient Israel, particularly among those who canonized Scripture. Some see the unmarried couple merely imagining future intimacy here; but given the detailed fantasizing it would be better for the two not to meet in private!

We ought to recognize, moreover, that the presumption that a husband and wife could at any time just go to their bedroom for fulfillment is a false notion. Even today it is common for married couples to want to "get away" from regular duties and routines to be freer to concentrate on their relationship and enjoy togetherness unencumbered. Many, understanding a "getaway" in mind here, believe the wife is seeking to go on a vacation with her husband; to travel into the countryside or, more specifically, to visit her childhood home. Some even think she desires a permanent move. Still others comprehend the picture here as being that of the newly married couple leaving the wedding feast with its temporary bridal chamber to go to their home, i.e., to their new life together.

Many, it should be realized, understand the Shulamite to be speaking of the outdoors metaphorically; so that the couple's bedroom is in actuality (or at least in the main) the setting for intimacy. The use in verse 13 of "our gates" or "our door" (NIV) would seem to argue for this. As commentator Tom Gledhill points out: "We have met this theme of love in the countryside before (2:8-13). The whole of nature seems to be sprouting and blossoming, and the two lovers want to be part of that. Their love has blossomed and become fragrant, they are ripe for love. Love in the springtime is a common literary motif. It seems to suggest that powers and urges that have long lain dormant can now burst forth unhindered and without restraint. The imagery seems to indicate that there is a time and a season for everything. There were times when restraint was necessary, but now it is the time to embrace [Ecclesiastes 3:1, 5]. Romance in the great outdoors is also a picture of untrammelled freedom and of closeness to nature. The literary fiction reminds us of our creatureliness and of our unashamed delight in participating in the natural order of things" (The Message of the Song of Songs, pp. 211-212). Furthermore, we should recall the metaphor in 2:10-13 of the springtime of romance following a "winter" period of separation. Even so, here in 7:11-12 the springtime romance follows a period of trouble in the relationship; a winter of separation of a different sort.

In 7:11, the sentence “Let us go forth to the field” has a bit of a wild connotation to it. Recall the earlier adjurations by the gazelles and does “of the field” (2:7; 3:5)?an image of lovers in the open country. “Let us lodge in the villages” in the latter part of the verse may seem a bit tamer. But we should realize that the word rendered “villages” here, kepharim, while it can refer to unwalled villages, occurs two other times in the Song in both singular and plural form in reference to fragrant henna plants (1:14; 4:13). Thus some see the end of 7:11 as meaning “Let’s spend the night among the henna bushes” or even “among fragrant surroundings.” Perhaps a pun is intended with villages. In any case, the henna bushes would seem to more closely follow the other metaphoric imagery here. “Of course,” as Gledhill continues, “the fantasy of the lover’s love-making is an illusion, which must not be punctured by a crudely literal interpretation, where all such romantic notions are too rapidly frustrated by the intrusions of nettle rash, soldier ants, bumble bees and stony ground, to say nothing of ragged urchins peeping through the undergrowth” (p. 212). That is to say, nature as the setting for love is an idealized picture.

The wording of 7:12 appears to be taken from 6:11, as both mention going to see if the vine has budded and the pomegranates are in bloom. The parallel mutually affirms the sexual and relationship connotations of both passages; as does 6:11’s parallel with going to the garden in 6:2. We should also recall the vineyards in 7:12 as symbolic of the woman in 1:6 and 8:12. There, the woman says in 7:12, she will give the man her love? dodi here referring to her loving acts or affections, the context here being clearly a sexual one.

This is magnified in 7:13 with the mention of “mandrakes,” alternatively spelled “mandragoras.” In Hebrew, the spelling is *duda’im*, which is closely related to *dodi* in verse 12. Indeed, the Hebrew meaning seems to be “love plant,” and it is sometimes called a “love apple.” The word occurs in Scripture only here and four times in Genesis 30:14-16, where Rachel and Leah used mandrakes while competing to produce offspring for Jacob. Yet in the Song “it is their property as a sexual stimulant that is in view, here, and not their aid to reproduction” (Gledhill, p. 212). Not that these lovers really need an aphrodisiac; as stimulated with one another as they already are. The mention of mandrakes is most likely a literary device to clarify that sexuality is the real meaning here behind all the plant and springtime imagery.

Commentator Othmar Keel points out: “The plant occurs frequently in Egyptian pictures from the New Kingdom (1540-1075 B.C.)....The ancient Egyptian love song also describes the effect of the love apple. The man sings: ‘If only I were her Nubian maid, her attendant in secret! She would let me bring her love apples [i.e., mandrakes]; when it was in her hand, she would smell it, and she would show me the hue of her whole body’ [Cairo Love Songs, Group B, no. 21]. The woman’s skin is described in another love song: ‘Your skin is the skin of the mandrake, which induces loving’” (The Song of Songs, Continental Commentaries, pp. 257-258, note on 7:13a).

Another of the Egyptian love songs mentions mandrakes in an interesting parallel to the blossoming of love we have seen: “If only my sister were mine every day, like the greenery of a wreath!... The reeds are dried, the safflower has blossomed, the mrbb flowers are (in) a cluster (?), the lapis-lazuli plants and the mandragoras have come forth.... {The blossoms from Hatti have

ripened, the bsbs-tree blossomed,...the willow tree greened. She would be with me every day, like (the) greenery of a wreath, all the blossoms are flourishing in the meadow...entirely” (Cairo Love Songs, Group B, no. 21E, translated by Michael Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, p. 38).

The mention of all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, at the couple’s gates or doors has been seen by some as a metaphoric reference to marital relations during the wedding feast. Marvin Pope notes in his *Anchor Bible* commentary that there is a “Talmudic reference to hanging fruits in the bridal tent (TB [Babylonian Talmud] Abodah Zarah 12)” (*Song of Songs*, p. 650, note on verse 14b, Hebrew numbering). Even beyond this, the figurative meaning of the whole passage provides the basis for the primary way the wording should be comprehended here. The varied delectable fruits, new and old, are synonymous with the acts of love she is offering at the end of verse 12. This would seem to strongly imply that the couple is already married; for the old pleasant fruits symbolize the aspects of their physical relationship already experienced that they will continue in. The new implies new elements to be brought in to their lovemaking; perhaps introducing more romance, more adventure, more romping and play (as symbolized by journeying to the wild outdoors).

In Song 8:1, the woman expresses her desire that her lover be like her brother; note the “like” (or “as”), not that she wants him to actually be her brother. This may be playing off the man’s earlier affectionate references to her as “sister” (4:9-5:2). “Who nursed at my mother’s breasts!” in the next line of 8:1 may imply on some level that she wishes she had known the man her whole life; that she had grown up with him (so that she would not have missed any time with him). Yet the main reason she wishes he were like her brother (or, rather, that he would be viewed like her brother) is explained in the latter part of the verse; she wants to kiss him freely in public. As *The New American Commentary* states: “The point is that she wishes she were free to display her affection openly. In the ancient world this would have been impossible for a woman with any man except a father, brother, or other near relative, the kissing of whom would not be construed by the public as a quasi-sexual act. The freedom to kiss in public would not apply to her husband” (p. 424, note on verse 1). *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* concurs but explains that this is deduced mainly from the passage itself: “The verse likely reflects some kind of cultural norms for public intimacy. That is, it might be permitted to touch, hold hands, and kiss a brother, but not a lover (or perhaps even a husband) since the latter, as opposed to the former, would have erotic implications, likely thought unseemly in public. The problem, however, is that we must infer this custom from the verse since we do not know in any kind of detail the customs of the day” (p. 204, note on verse 1). Of course we do see this in later Middle Eastern custom. *The New American Commentary* further notes: “Fox (*Song*, 166) incorrectly assumes that this [verse] proves that the couple ‘is not betrothed, let alone married.’ But the open display of affection between the sexes is frowned upon in many societies (e.g., traditional Oriental [i.e., Eastern] society) regardless of whether the couple is married” (p. 424, footnote on verse 1).

In 8:2, we have the image of the woman desiring to lead the man into her mother's house, a picture we saw earlier in Song 3:4. In the NKJV and other English versions, the word "lead" here is rendered in the subjunctive form as "would lead"; following, as with the verbs in the two prior lines at the end of verse 1, from the beginning of verse 1. That is, if the man were perceived like her brother, then she would kiss him in public, would not be despised for doing so and, in the present clause, would lead him and would bring him to her mother's house. We have already, in commenting on verse 1, made sense of why the man being as the woman's brother would allow her to kiss him openly. But why would it enable her to lead him to her mother's house? Why should she not be able to freely do this anyway, since this implied going to a place of privacy? It could be that the issue of concern, though not spelled out here, was that of leading him by the hand. Recall her dreamlike thoughts in 3:4: "I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother." Perhaps, as noted above, a married couple holding hands was also looked down upon. Others, however, interpret this differently. In *The New American Commentary*, Dr. Duane Garrett contends: "The mood of her words here [at the beginning of 8:2] is not subjunctive but indicative and indeed determined, as shown by the juxtaposition of the two verbs; and it should be translated: 'I will lead you; I will take you to the house of my mother.' Since she cannot express her love with a kiss openly, she will express her love much more fully privately" (p. 425, note on verse 2). The latter interpretation seems likely given the connotations here; since there seems to be little question that she is indeed going to lead him to this place as she desires.

Some, as noted above, take the mother's house here to be the couple's literal vacation destination, it being referred to as the Shulamite's mother's house because; as explained in our previous comments on 3:4?either her father was not in the picture (compare 1:6) or young women were considered to be raised in their mothers' homes (compare Genesis 24:28; Ruth 1:8). Alternatively, some see the woman as desiring to move back home or near home, taking the man with her (this supposedly being their logical residence together if he were like her brother). Of course, we must not forget the amatory subtext of this unit. The mother's house, taken literally, seems an odd choice for a romantic rendezvous. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says that in Song 8:2 the Shulamite "playfully assumed the role of an older sister (I would [or will] lead you; the verb *nahag* is always used of a superior leading an inferior) and even the role of the mother. The lady of the house would give special wine to the guests. So the beloved [i.e., the woman] shared the characteristics of a sister, an older sister, and a mother in her relationship to her husband. The Song also portrays the lovers as friends (cf. 5:1, 16). Thus the lovers had a multifaceted relationship" (note on 8:2-4).

In trying to make sense of the mention of the mother's house here, we should also recall the earlier use of the imagery of the woman taking the man to her mother's house in 3:4; which was followed by the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem in 3:5 (likely concerning physical relations), just as the current use of the mother's house imagery in 8:2 is followed in verse 4 by a form of the same charge. In our comments on the earlier passage, we noted the possibility that the reference points to a groom visiting a bride's parents' house as initiating a marriage. Some might apply that in the present case to the couple being not yet married and looking forward to the intimacies of marriage.

Yet, if they are already married, the imagery could imply that they want to be as if newly married (on a second honeymoon, we might say today). Alternatively, it was noted in the prior case that some interpret “mother’s house” or “motherhouse” as meaning the womb, which would make the reference a sexual one.

It was also pointed out, though, that the next phrase in 3:4, “and into the chamber of her who conceived me,” made the womb meaning difficult, as the mother’s womb would then seemingly be meant instead of the girl’s (but not out of the question since the girl could have been referring to the same part of her own person as that in which her mother conceived her). A similar difficulty with respect to the womb interpretation occurs in 8:2, the next clause seeming to refer more directly to the mother: “she who used to instruct me.” However, this phrase, *telammedeni*, could also be translated as “you would teach me” (Jerusalem Bible; Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia Commentaries, p. 180) or “you will teach me”; thus referring to the man. Some wish to emend the Hebrew text here. Gledhill comments: “The troublesome *telammedeni* can easily revert to *teladeni* by dropping the ‘m,’ thus meaning, ‘she gave me birth’” (p. 216)? seen to correspond to “her who conceived me” in 3:4 (and similar meanings in 6:9 and 8:5). But dropping a consonant from the Masoretic Text is unwarranted?

as is the Greek Septuagint changing the entire line in 8:2 to repeat the phrase from 3:4. It seems more likely that the wording in 8:2 was carefully chosen to be close to the former wording in 8:2 but with a significant difference. The wording may even be intentionally ambiguous as to person. In one sense, the Shulamite, who was reared and taught by her mother in the ways of love, will now take on the role of teacher of her husband in the bedroom. Yet on the other hand, the woman who was formerly taught by her mother will now learn much more about the ways of love from her husband assuming the teaching role. Thus, the indication may be that they will instruct one another in their shared adventure.

Concerning the giving of wine to drink in the next line, this may refer on some level to the role of the lady of the house playfully assumed, as mentioned above. Of course, this should be seen in a figurative sense. “The second line of the verse utilizes the by-now-well-attested theme of drinking intoxicating liquids to signify physical intimacies (1:2; 5:1; 7:9). Sexual activity is both sensual and intoxicating, and so is drinking spiced wine and pomegranate wine”

(NICOT, p. 204, note on 8:2). Note particularly that she refers to the juice of her own pomegranate. This is clearly an erotic symbol. We earlier saw the woman’s sexuality represented as an orchard of pomegranates (4:13). And note the symbolism in one of the Egyptian love songs, where trees of an orchard are describing lovers meeting there: “The sister and brother make {holiday}, {swaying beneath} my branches; high on grape wine and pomegranate wine are they, and rubbed with Moringa and pine oil” (Turin Love Songs, no. 28, in William Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, p. 312).

In verse 2 “there is also an interesting word/sound play between ‘I would make [or ‘will have’] you drink’ (?a??aqeka...) and ‘I would...kiss you’ (?e??aqeka...) in 8:1” (NICOT, note on verse 2). And

this follows “emsa”, aka (“I would find”) in verse 1. Moreover, “‘pomegranate (rimmoni), and ‘right hand’ (wimino) [in verse 3] have similar sounds” (Gledhill, p. 216).

Song 8:3 repeats the statement in 2:6 (about the man holding the woman) that preceded the refrain of adjuration to the daughters of Jerusalem in 2:7. It now precedes an altered form of that refrain. Some, as in the NKJV translation, take the words in both cases as referring to present reality, which is reasonable. Others see in both cases a wish, translated, “Oh, may his left hand be under my head and his right hand embrace me” (Glickman, pp. 178, 188). This is also quite reasonable. In the latter case, the realization of the desires expressed in this unit would still be yet to come; perhaps immediately following without direct comment. It is even possible that the ambiguous wording, though the same, could allow for a wish in the former case and present reality in the latter; the context being different.

The present unit concludes in 8:4 with an altered form of the adjuration refrain to the daughters of Jerusalem that concluded earlier units in 2:7 and 3:5. In this case there is no mention of the gazelles and does of the field as before. Perhaps more interestingly, as Dr. Glickman notes, is that the refrain at 8:4 “replaces the word rendered ‘not’ (im [literally ‘if’ but meaning ‘not’ in oath formulas]) that precedes ‘arouse’ [or ‘stir up’] and ‘awaken’ in the earlier refrains with a different word (mah).... Most translations note that this new word preceding ‘arouse’ and ‘awaken’ (mah, ‘what, why, that’) can on rare occasions indicate negation. Then they translate 8.4 like before: ‘Do not arouse...until it pleases.’ But in light of the subtle but very instructive differences in the occurrences of other refrains...the translator must consider whether the variation yields a change of meaning as well. The grammars and lexicons that suggest this new word may imply negation can cite examples only where the negation arises out of a rhetorical question like, ‘How can I do this wrong?’ meaning ‘I can’t do this wrong.’ But that rarely occurs, and it would be awkward that the imperative ‘promise me’ (or ‘swear to me’ [or ‘I charge you’]) would introduce it. Furthermore, if Shulamith had wished to request a promise ‘not to arouse,’ she could simply have used the same word for ‘not’ she used in the earlier refrains.... Quite significantly, the only other place where [mah] follows the verb ‘promise me’ [or ‘I charge you’] (in 5:8), it bears the sense of ‘that’” (pp. 226-227). Let’s note that third adjuration out of the four in the Song: “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick” (5:8; compare 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The Hebrew word rendered “that” in 5:8 is mah. As noted earlier, some see here a negative sense: “do not tell him.” But most understand the meaning as “that” in the positive sense (i.e., “that you do” or “that you will”)?which makes a good deal more sense. With this usage in the third adjuration, “the songwriter appears to intentionally prepare the reader for the different sense of the refrain in 8:4, when mah occurs twice” (Glickman, p. 227).

Thus 8:4 seems to more reasonably be translated as “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir up and that you awaken love when it pleases” (not “until it pleases” as before? since the Hebrew word here can mean either when or until depending on the context). Glickman, understanding mah as denoting adverbial intensity, translates 8:4 as follows: “I want you to promise me, O young women of Jerusalem, that you will surely arouse, you will surely awaken

love when love pleases to awaken.” The previous wording of the refrain in 2:7 and 3:5, seeming to be a warning against premarital intimacy (and perhaps even against stirring up loving feelings too early in a relationship), is valid and important. But it is also important to not hold back from love and intimacy when the right person and marriage at last does come. The Song thus gives us the appropriate balance: “No way” before its time and “all the way” when it’s time! Glickman comments: “Perhaps in light of the obvious benefit of acting when the time is right and Shulamith’s unfortunate experience on the night recounted after the wedding night, she desires to state the refrain in its positive form here. In light of the instructive transformations of other refrains in the Song, the resounding encouragement to seize the opportunity for real love when the opportunity arises is a climactic conclusion to this refrain” (pp. 227-228).

As the curtain rings down on this unit, it is not clear whether the lovers are already together in their intimacy or whether they are heading off together (literally or figuratively) for that purpose.

“Set Me as a Seal Upon Your Heart” (Song of Solomon 8:5-14)

We come now to the concluding section of the Song, which evidently looks back on the relationship and also looks ahead. In considering the unit’s opening in 8:5a, we should recall that the third unit of the Song closed in 3:5 with the adjuration refrain to the daughters of Jerusalem and the next, the fourth and central unit (probably concerning the wedding of the couple), opened in 3:6 with “Who is this coming out of the wilderness...”; this being likely a reference to the woman (compare also 6:10). Even so, the unit before the present one closed in 8:4 with a form of the adjuration refrain and this last unit opens in verse 5 with “Who is this coming up from the wilderness...”; clearly defined in this case as the woman, since she is “... leaning upon her beloved” (same verse).

Recall from our comments on the preceding unit that some believe the couple was there heading off on a romantic getaway to rekindle their romance; some understanding the destination to be the woman’s childhood home. Proponents of the shepherd hypothesis see the couple leaving the palace and harem in Jerusalem and permanently returning to the area of the woman’s childhood home. In either case, 8:5 is often considered to be the couple coming up from the wilderness in approaching the childhood home. Taking verses 8-9 to be the words of the Shulamite’s brothers is considered to buttress this view; the idea being that these words are spoken during a visit to the home of the woman’s family. This is part of the reason that some attribute verse 5 (as the NKJV does) to an unnamed relative; often viewed here as witnessing the couple’s arrival at the country homestead. The other reason is that the speaker is taken to be the same in the latter part of the verse; where the speaker, a single individual, is deemed from the wording to have been present at the birth of the person being addressed. This is likely a mistaken notion, as we will see.

Furthermore, we should consider that the Song is not a drama in the sense that we might expect a brief walk-on role. It is a song sung in parts; and it seems odd that there would be a man waiting to sing this one small part. (Though one man singing here who also sings elsewhere with a male chorus is perhaps conceivable.)

Others who believe the lovers leave on a getaway vacation, whether to the countryside generally or to the woman's childhood home particularly, see verse 5 not as early in the getaway but as the end of it. That is, they see here the man and woman returning to Jerusalem from vacation (which is understood to have occurred between verses 4 and 5 without description). In this view, the beginning of verse 5 is read as being spoken by residents of Jerusalem; most likely the chorus representing the daughters of Jerusalem, who were just mentioned in verse 4. This would parallel the chorus of women singing, as they probably do, "Who is this [or she]...?" in 3:6 and 6:10.

Some, as we earlier saw, recognize the getaway intended by the woman in the previous section to be purely figurative, so that no literal trip was being proposed. In this view, the husband and wife were either going to their new life together after the wedding feast or, more likely, intending after a period of trouble in marriage to reconnect with one another in their own home and bedroom. This could mean that the beginning of verse 5 is to be understood figuratively as well; the man and woman returning from the countryside signifying their reemergence among people after a period of private lovemaking. Or the man and woman coming up from the wilderness together might signify their reunion after the period of distress. The Bible Knowledge Commentary states: "A final picture of the Song's couple is presented here. The wilderness or desert had two symbolic associations in the Old Testament. First, the wilderness was associated with Israel's 40-year period of trial. In their love the couple had overcome trials which threatened their relationship (e.g., the insecurity of the beloved, 1:5-6 [more so in 3:1-5]; the foxes [if that was really a problem], 2:15; and indifference [or perhaps simply misunderstanding], 5:2-7). Second, the desert or wilderness was used as an image of God's curse (cf. Jer. 22:6; Joel 2:3). The couple's coming up out of the wilderness suggests that in a certain sense they had overcome the curse of disharmony pronounced on [the primal couple] Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:16b)" (note on Song 8:5). Along these lines, the first emergence from the wilderness in 3:6 perhaps symbolized coming from the betrothal period separation and difficulties and, in the wedding ceremony, inheriting the "Promised Land" of marriage. This second emergence from the wilderness could be seen as a renewed inheriting of that Promised Land; a renewed marriage. Only now their emergence from the wilderness is not merely through the institution of marriage (as symbolized by the public wedding) but through leaning on each other, working out their difficulties and growing together in love and intimacy (shown by the two coming up together privately). Again, it would make sense here that the chorus sings the beginning of verse 5; not as literal witnesses of a return from the wilderness, but as friends noting the special togetherness of the couple. The NIV lists the singers here as the "Friends"; referring to the chorus.

Who, then, is singing in 8:5b, who is being addressed, and how is this part of the verse to be understood? As mentioned above, the NKJV attributes both parts of the verse to a relative? thought, because of the wording in the latter part, to have been present at the birth of the person being addressed. (The idea is that the speaker points to a literal apple tree and says to one of the newly arrived lovers, "That's the spot where you were born [or conceived].") There are a few points we should observe.

First of all, the object suffixes of this verse are all masculine; the “you” addressed being apparently the man. Some dispute this, however, on a thematic basis. They correctly point out that other references to being brought forth by the mother in the Song apply to the woman (3:4; 6:9; 8:2). There is, however, an earlier mention of the man’s mother in the context of the wedding, she being the one who crowns him and thus sends him off into marriage (3:11). And this may apply here in a figurative sense with the woman as the speaker, as we will see momentarily. Yet another reason people insist on the man not being the one awakened and brought forth, in either a literal or figurative sense, is that they find this difficult to reconcile with the man as a type of Christ (or God in Jewish allegory). How, in a spiritual sense, could the woman, as the Church or Israel, (or a relative, for that matter) have wakened Christ (or God); Would it not be the other way around? Of course we then get into disputes about Israel or Mary giving birth to Christ. And would this not also be an issue with the mention of the mother in 3:11? Or how about the woman proposing to lead the man in 3:4 and 8:2; Indeed, a preconceived notion about spiritual parallels should not be the basis for ignoring Hebrew grammar. Marvin Pope in his Anchor Bible commentary correctly points out that the retention of the masculine suffixes in the Jewish Masoretic Text here despite this running counter to centuries of Jewish allegorical interpretation, supports a solid early tradition for the masculine suffixes (Song of Songs, p. 663, note on verse 5c). This is not to say there is no typology here; but it probably should not be applied strictly to every line or passage. It thus seems best to take the grammar of 8:5b at face value and understand the man as the one being addressed.

Second, the phrases in verse 5b represent key themes in the Song. “Awakened” occurs earlier in the adjurations to the daughters of Jerusalem about not awakening and then awakening love (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) and also in the erotic central passage of the Song, where the woman calls for the north wind to awake and blow on her garden (4:16). The “apple tree” (or a comparable fruit tree, as it is not certain just what fruit is meant by the term “apple” in both places; some suggest apricot) was used of the man as being the place of love and intimacy in 2:3; the fruit there and in 2:5 being symbolic of sensual pleasure. And being brought forth by the mother is, as already noted, mentioned of the woman in 3:4, 6:9 and 8:2 (the former and latter verses here occurring in a sexual context and perhaps having an erotic meaning). So it seems most likely that the sentence in 8:5b is to be taken in a figurative sense of sexuality; especially on the heels of an emergence from the wilderness that is also probably a metaphor concerning the relationship. Surely a relative is not making all these erotic connections. This is most likely private communication between the lovers; probably the woman (as the NIV notes) speaking to the man, as per the grammar. As before, some of the prior references alluded to concern the experience of the woman; though both were involved in these and there may be a mutual application, especially as the last section concerned the woman taking the initiative to lead the man in a renewal of romance and intimacy.

Third, the repetition near the end of the verse seems to emphasize not just being conceived, but the labor of birth, as the NIV translates it. As Dr. Craig Glickman explains: “The word for ‘to labor’ in birth [as he translates it] may also mean ‘conceived’ or simply ‘to be pregnant.’ The noun derived from the word means ‘labor pains,’ which favors the meaning of the verb as ‘to labor’ in

birth. Perhaps the songwriter intends both meanings, having a play on words with a single word” (Solomon’s Song of Love, p. 228). Here, again, may be a figurative picture of the pain of labor giving way to the joy of new life.

Putting all of this together, it would seem that the woman is telling the man that she awakened him sexually during the delight of intimacy with him and that he was born anew through this experience (or perhaps that he was, so to speak, born to be loved by her). More specifically, she may be speaking of having re-awakened him sexually in a rebirth during their recent intimacy; the idea possibly being that she herself has followed the pattern of his mother in giving new life to him (in their revived relationship) after going through a period of distress. Directing attention toward the apple tree, besides its implication of sensual delight, would seem to indicate a return to the joy of love in the opening section of the Song (again see 2:3). That is to say, after coming up from the wilderness in a renewal of marriage, the lovers find that they have arrived back at the love they once knew. This truly is a beautiful picture. Of course, it is contingent on seeing some chronological progress in the Song from the beginning until this point. A number of interpreters deny this, but it helps a great deal in making sense out of what is being described throughout.

Continuing the apparent theme of renewing the marriage (as, again, coming up from the wilderness in 8:5 was an image previously associated with what seems to be the wedding of the couple in 3:6-11), we are next, in 8:6-7, given a call to renewed commitment and an abstract description of the nature of love, which in context refers to the various aspects of the love between a man and woman in marriage; including the mutual attraction, passionate desire, romantic feeling, companionship, concern, and commitment that bind them together. As the pronouns in verse 6a are masculine singular, it is clear in context that the woman is speaking to the man; and, given the “for” here, that she speaks through the end of verse 7 (as is generally acknowledged).

She asks him to set her as a seal on his heart and on his arm (verse 6a). Engraved stone or metal seals, used for identification (Genesis 38:18) and signature purposes, were carried on one’s person; just as people in the Western world today don’t leave home without wallet and driver’s license. The word for “seal” in Song 8:6 “is an Egyptian loanword. Such objects could be worn on strings about the neck (Gen 38:18) and thus lie over the ‘heart’; they were also worn as rings on the hand (Jer 22:24)” (Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs, Hermeneia Commentaries*, p. 191, footnote on Song 8:6). Interestingly, the boy in one of the Cairo Love Songs may have used similar imagery: “If only I were her little seal-ring, the keeper of her finger! I would see her love each and every day...{while it would be I} who stole her heart” (Group B, no. 27 or 21C, translated by Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and The Egyptian Love Songs*, p. 38). Here the picture is of perpetual closeness with the person loved.

Song 8:6, however, does not mention the finger but the “arm.” Some picture a bracelet. Yet a ring on the finger could be meant if the word literally translated “arm” is interchangeable here with “hand,” “just as in 5:14 ‘hand’ was understood as ‘arm’” (Murphy, footnote on 8:6). Yet the nuance of “arm” is surely deliberate in this brilliantly crafted work. If the woman herself is pictured as a seal, then it would seem she wishes to be over the man’s heart (in private affections) and on his

arm (in the sense of holding onto his arm and being presented on his arm in public). Their arrival in 8:5 was marked by her leaning on him, evidently on his arm. On the other hand, “set me as a seal upon your heart...upon your arm” may have the sense of “impress me as a seal onto your heart and arm.” In this case, the idea is that she be indelibly stamped onto his heart (that is, onto his emotions and inner commitment) and onto his arm (meaning, as with God’s commandments in Deuteronomy 6:6-8, onto his actions). And, considering the identification imagery, she may have been asking that the man be completely identified with her; that in observing him, all would see a man wholly devoted to her (her name being figuratively tattooed on his arm, as we might think of it today). Moreover, there may be a sense here of a mark of ownership; that the man would willingly belong, and be seen as belonging, to her (in this apparent recommitment to marriage with its mutual possession).

The remainder of Song 8:6-7 gives the basis of the commitment the woman desires of the man; clearly implied to be the basis of her own feelings. The first two lines about the seal are connected by the word “for” to the next two lines about love being as strong as death (in not letting go of those in its grasp) and, likewise, jealousy (i.e., proper jealousy in the sense of guarding the exclusivity of the committed relationship) being as “unyielding as the grave” (NIV)?the word “cruel” in the KJV and NKJV probably being a wrong nuance in this case of the Hebrew word here that literally means “hard.” Glickman notes a short chiasmic or symmetrical pattern: a: heart; b: arm; b’: strong; a’: jealousy unyielding (p. 228). This abstract statement about the nature of love, continuing through to the end of verse 7, is quite remarkable here? there being nothing else like it in the Song. Having tied the whole of the Song together in the description of the renewal of the relationship in verse 5, the segment that follows forms the secondary high point of the Song (the climax being the central passage, 4:16-5:1). Here in 8:67, in what is likely aimed at the audience in an instructive sense, we are told not only about the unbreakable grip of love and accompanying jealousy, but that love is a flame of God, as the words in the last line of verse 6 can translated “a flame of YAH.” If this translation is correct, this is the only direct mention of God in the Song. The translation issues here, and the import of this segment, are considered in detail in our introduction, and you may wish to review that here. Though this translation is disputed, it reasonably fits here; and the wording may be intentionally ambiguous so that the mention of God is very subtle. In any case, it is clear that God is the very author of human love and sexuality.

The last two lines of verse 6 go with the first two lines of verse 7. So intensely does true love burn that “great waters” (mayyim rabbim) cannot put it out; these being representative in other passages of Scripture of destructive forces and applying most naturally here, since water would typically extinguish a flame. This is not to say that love can never die; for it clearly can and does die out through neglect and wrong choices of the lovers themselves. But when true love is burning, it cannot be quenched.

At the end of verse 7 we are further told that love cannot be bought. If a man gave everything he had for love, “it [or ‘he,’ this could be translated] would be utterly scorned” (NIV). Shepherd hypothesis advocates take this as a summary of what has happened throughout the Song. The

New Bible Commentary: Revised contends here: "True love is not only unquenchable, it is also unpurchaseable. Solomon had made every effort to buy her love with all the luxuries of the court, but to no avail. The Shulammitte speaks from experience" (note on verses 8:6-7). Yet there are ways to understand this passage that do not require a three-character interpretation. If Solomon is the lover in the Song, the woman could simply be making a point that it was not his wealth that drew her to him in love as some might assume; that he, rather, won her over naturally because no one can be induced to true love through bribery. On the other hand, if a poor shepherd and vineyard caretaker girl are being extolled in the Song as if they are king and queen, the girl may be contrasting her man with the real Solomon, commenting that true love is not really about wealth and splendor. Murphy makes another suggestion here, pointing out that this pronouncement of disdain on one seeking to buy love "may seem somewhat anticlimactic after the preceding lines, but in the biblical world, where the mohar, or bride-price, played a significant role, the reference was appropriate. Moreover, the practices associated with the bride price seem to figure in the background of vv 8-12" (p. 198, note on verses 6-7).

We will consider this shortly.

The next segment here, 8:8-10, seems to spring out of nowhere. While these verses go together based on the same matter under discussion carrying through them, it is not clear who is speaking and who is being discussed. Let's first consider what is being talked about, as this is fairly easy to discern. In verse 8, a group or an individual speaking on behalf of a group mentions having a little sister with no breasts; probably indicating that she is very young. Concern is expressed as to what to do for this sister in (or perhaps in consideration of) "the day when she is spoken for"; which seems to indicate the day that commitment is made to her in betrothal or marriage (or at least the time when such is possible). Some note a similar expression in 1 Samuel 25:39 regarding David and Abigail. In fact, this meaning would follow well in the context of the commitment sought in Song 8:6.

Verse 9 is either a response by another part of the group here or a continuation by the same speaker or speakers if the question at the end of verse 8 was posed rhetorically. If she is a "wall," verse 9 says, the group will build a silver battlement on her; and if a "door," the group will enclose her with cedar boards. Some assume that the "wall" imagery here corresponds to the girl having no breasts and believe that the intention is to enhance her flat-chested appearance. But this is clearly not the case. The "if" here clearly indicates a condition not presently apparent. Of course some then assume that the concern is whether the girl will remain undeveloped. But this is not the point either. In verse 10 a girl who does have breasts (which are reckoned as towers) is presented as a "wall" (so no flatness is intimated here). Moreover, the imagery of building of battlements on this wall shows what kind of wall is meant, making the meaning plain. "The wall (the Hebrew word [and the battlements imagery] signifies a fortified city wall, not the wall of a house)...suggests defence, impregnability, repulsion of intruders. Metaphorically it represents chastity, unavailability, self-protection and preservation"

(Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs*, p. 236). Indeed, in the context of preserving a young girl for marriage, the wall imagery could reasonably apply only to the guarding of her

virginity. The battlements, normally meaning further stone courses (though some picture turrets here), could entail extra support in maintaining virginity. Yet their being silver would seem to refer more to adornment as a reward or gift (perhaps a bridal gift)?the courses atop the wall being the place in this metaphoric picture to place such adornment.

There is a bit of confusion about the “door” (or “gate”) imagery. Some regard this in the same sense as the wall, that it also implies a barrier to entrance. The enclosure with cedars is then reckoned to be, as before, extra security and/or, as a reward, adornment consisting of cedar paneling. Others, however, regard the door or gateway as promoting access; an image of being open, or sometimes open, to seduction and unchastity. The need, it is deemed in this case, is to board her up; to sequester her from that potential. This seems more probable. For consider: In presenting the image of a door beside that of a wall, are both really intended in the same light? It seems hard to get around the idea that you can get through one of these. There certainly is not the same degree of impregnability. Furthermore, the woman in verse 10 selects only one of these to describe herself; the wall. The implication seems to be that she has not been a door. And boarding over a door makes more sense than decorating it with paneling. The word “enclose” here means “confine” (Strong’s No. 6696).

Who is saying all this, and who is the little sister? Most understand, as in the NKJV speaker annotations, that the Shulamite’s brothers (mentioned in 1:6) are speaking in 8:8-9 (or that she is quoting them; with her continuing to speak after verse 7) and that verse 10 is her comment in reply. Many holding this opinion see verses 8-9 as a flashback to the brothers discussing the Shulamite when she was young. Others, however, see them presently discussing another sister. On the other hand, some consider that the woman is speaking (to or on behalf of her brothers) of a younger sister in the present; verse 10 referring to her being a personal example to the sister. Still others see the female chorus singing here as the daughters of Jerusalem regarding a young girl among them, a “sister,” figuratively speaking, among them (they all being “daughters”); perhaps representative of young girls generally. Again, verse 10 would be the Shulamite pointing to herself as an example. Others have proposed a group of men, suitors (being supposedly the companions of verse 13), discussing the Shulamite in verses 8-9 as a young “sister” in a figurative sense; each aiming to sequester her until marriage. This view is the most unlikely, as there has been no hint of such suitors at any point prior (and verse 13 does not support the idea, as we will see). What, then, of the other views here?

Regarding the Shulamite and her brothers having a younger sister, we should consider the earlier words of the man in 6:9: “My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite [or ‘pure one,’ this probably ought to be] of her mother.” At face value, it would appear that the Shulamite is an only daughter (not an only child, as we know she had brothers). Some argue for the supposed interpretation of “favorite” here as being parallel to the concept of one and only unique or being essentially the only one the mother sees. Of course, this would be rather sad for a second daughter. (And the idea that a second daughter would be too young to be prized or noticed by her mother is absurd.) Furthermore, “favorite” does not seem a reasonable meaning of the

Hebrew word here, since the same word is translated in the next verse as “clear” (you would never say “favorite as the sun”). A second sister would be necessary only if the Shulamite were clearly shown to be speaking her own words in 8:8. Yet since there are easily other alternatives, there is really no basis for a second sister.

While it is possible that the daughters of Jerusalem are speaking of a young one among them, why would one be singled out? Would there not be many such young girls? Perhaps the idea is that one represents many, each to be considered individually. Older sisters could and did, of course, influence younger ones. But did older sisters have the authority that seems to be indicated here? “Responsibility of brothers for a sister is well established in the Bible, especially in matters pertaining to sexuality and marriage, as in the case of Rebecca, Gen. 24:29-60; Dinah, Gen. 34:6-17; and the daughters of Shiloh, Judg. 21:22. Song 1:6 clearly reflects the fraternal authority of the brothers over the Shulamite” (Ariel and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, pp. 214-215, note on Song 8:8). Such authority is magnified in the absence of a father. Even if older sisters had similar authority over younger sisters, we should consider that this is attested to nowhere else in Scripture and that such an image has no correspondence to earlier imagery in the Song; whereas the common opinion that the brothers are speaking does.

In encountering verse 8, we properly recognize a change of speakers since the Shulamite, who was previously speaking, had no other sister. Then, in considering who the little sister is, we consider that the Shulamite herself is earlier referred to figuratively as “sister” by her beloved. And, more importantly, we recall that she earlier referred to herself as being under the authority of her brothers (1:6)?making her their younger sister. Thus, without inventing new information, it is most natural to assume (barring some conflict) that they are in 8:8-9 speaking of her. A potential conflict immediately emerges with respect to the chronology. We consider that the Shulamite is no longer a young girl under their care, but is evidently married to her beloved. However, we also note that we have already met with reflection on past events a few verses prior, as the lovers returned to the theme of the apple tree (from 2:3) in 8:5?getting back, as we earlier noted, to the love they once knew. This, we should recognize, is a facet of the overall symmetrical arrangement of the Song; particularly correspondence between the last major section (8:5-14) and the opening section (1:1?2:7). And now we have further correspondence in what is evidently additional reflection. In 1:6, the earlier mention of the Shulamite’s brother’s authority over her, she said that they were angry with her and made her

a vineyard keeper so that she was not able to attend to her own vineyard (her own person, particularly her appearance in context). Putting this together with 8:8-9 gives us a better picture here. It seems that part of their motivation was to safeguard her purity.

Some believe the Shulamite’s brothers were angry with her in Song 1:6 because she had failed to protect her virginity; and that her work in the vineyard, where they could see her, was her sequestering. Yet the Shulamite declares herself a wall in 8:10, so this seems unlikely. Perhaps the brothers were mistaken (not necessarily thinking she committed immorality but imagining

based on something that happened, perhaps some perceived flirtation, that she might). Or perhaps she earlier mistook their assignment of her to vineyard work as their anger when it was merely a way to help her maintain her chastity (through having duties that took up her time and energy and kept her in public view). She seems to appreciate their past efforts in verse 12, as we will see in a moment.

Those who regard verses 8-9 as the words of the brothers but see only a female chorus in the Song typically imagine that the woman is here quoting the brothers. Yet there is no indication of a quote here, such as we find in 2:10. Indeed, this would be extremely confusing to listeners since the woman sings the previous verse (8:7). How could an audience reasonably comprehend a new speaker here without a new singer? The man singing would not make quick sense of it. These factors make a good case for a male chorus singing here (and probably earlier in parts of 3:6-11). This does not mean that the brothers, in the storyline of the Song, are actually present in 8:8-9. Those who consider 8:5 as picturing the arrival of the lovers at the Shulamite's country home often imagine her family gathered together with them in 8:8-10 and the group reminiscing here. Likewise, some who see the lovers returning to Jerusalem in 8:5 imagine a family visit. Those who comprehend a wedding feast setting still ongoing; or having just ended; think that the family is still gathered together in verses 8-10. Yet we ought to realize that the brothers' words in verses 8-9, constituting a memory or reflection, do not require any such gathering or visit.

Verse 10, as already noted, is typically taken to be the words of the Shulamite. Where her words are typically translated "I am a wall," some render this "I was a wall" (NRSV), which is possible, as the verb is only implied. Indeed, this seems to fit better in context. In reply to her brothers having in the past wondered if she would be a wall or a door, she says she was a wall, with her breasts as towers (meaning that they were unreachable and guarded atop her fortress wall). Yet this was until she became in "his" eyes (which can logically only mean the eyes of her lover; perhaps referring to the one who spoke for her, as verse 8 anticipated) as one finding "peace." That is, the lover (the husband) was, through terms of peace, allowed entrance into her fortress. His advances were not repelled but embraced. Some take "peace" (shalom) here in the sense of wholeness and contentment, and this may be implied in a secondary sense. Yet the primary meaning in the metaphor seems to be that of opposing forces coming together, there being no further need of defensive fortifications guarding chastity (at least within marriage; there still of course being a need to defend against threats from outside). The peace and unity here may also tie in to the ongoing reconciliation of the past few chapters; the idea being one of having recaptured that earlier peace that came through marital union (physical and otherwise).

It is interesting to note the phrase "one who found peace [shalom]" at the end of verse 10 as a designation for the woman. This may specifically relate to the reference to her in 6:13 as haShulamit (the Shulamite), possibly; especially if a feminine form of Shelomoh (Solomon)? derived from shalom. Indeed, the last word in 8:10 is shalom, "peace," and in the next verse, verse 11, is Shelomoh (Solomon). Indeed, "his eyes" in verse 10 is thought by some to refer to Solomon

since his name immediately follows. So we may have some implied wordplay here: ha-Shulamit finding shalom in Shelomoh. This, it would appear, happened with initial union in marriage; and it has now happened again, in a parallel sense, through the renewal of love and intimacy. Shepherd-hypothesis proponents view the woman's statement in an entirely different light of course, usually taking it to mean that Solomon finally ceased his attempted seduction of her and allowed her to be with her beloved shepherd.

Continuing in Song 8:11-12, we note that these two verses clearly go together (each mentioning Solomon, vineyard, thousand and fruit), though there is dispute as to who is speaking and what is truly being portrayed. Solomon, we are told in verse 11, had a vineyard in Baal Hamon, a name otherwise unknown. In verse 12, Solomon is addressed and mention is made of "my own vineyard." How are we to take these verses; literally or figuratively? And why are they here? As with verses 8-10, this segment that follows seems at first glance to come out of the blue. Yet considering the reflection we have already noted; and the symmetry between this closing section of the Song (8:5-14) and the opening section (1:1?2:7), it is natural and appropriate to look for more of the same.

Solomon, we should note, is mentioned twice here (8:11-12) and also twice in the opening section (1:1, 5); both these positions being exactly opposite to three mentions of his name in the central section of the Song concerning the apparent wedding procession (3:7, 9, 11). The word translated "keepers" or "those who tend" (8:11-12), thus appearing twice here in this segment, occurs elsewhere in the Song only in the opening section; in that case also appearing two times together as "keeper" and "kept" (1:6). This former instance is part of the segment that also mentions Solomon (1:5-6). Furthermore, it should be recognized that the word "vineyards" and then "my own vineyard" at the end of 1:6 parallels the two mentions of "vineyard" in 8:11 and "my own vineyard" in 8:12. On top of this, we should observe that 1:6 is also the verse that mentioned the Shulamite's brothers assigning her work; parallel to their authority over her we have already noted in 8:8-9. All of this very strongly indicates that 8:8-12 should all be taken together; as parallel to 1:5-6.

This can help us to understand what is going on in 8:11-12. In 1:6, the girl was sent by her brothers to work in the sun in literal vineyards; and this prevented her from devoting as much energies as she would have liked to her own personal vineyard, a figurative reference to her own person (her appearance being at issue here). This gives us good reason to see the vineyard of 8:11 literally and the personal vineyard of verse 12 as a figurative reference to the speaker's person. Indeed the vineyard of verse 11, in this parallel, would seem to be one that the girl was sent to work in; followed by reference to her own person in the vineyard of verse 12. However, the related wording between verses 11 and 12 indicate that the vineyard in verse 11 is to be understood figuratively on some level, as we will see. Thus it may be that a literal situation in verse 11 is being used in a symbolic manner.

A literal interpretation of the vineyard in verse 11 most naturally implies a literal interpretation of Solomon here as well. It does not follow that a poor shepherd or even an average citizen would have a great vineyard leased to keepers who were to bring a return of 1,000 silver coins for the

fruit sold. The lord of this vineyard would be a wealthy individual, and King Solomon makes a great deal of sense in that light. Solomon is the likely author of Ecclesiastes, and the writer of that book lists among his great works the planting of vineyards and the making of gardens and orchards with pools and all kinds of fruit trees (2:4-7). That Israelite kings had a penchant for possessing vineyards is also evident in the story of Ahab's desire for Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. We may also note David's appointment of officials to oversee vineyards and wine production, evidently to supply state needs (1 Chronicles 27:27). Solomon's administration was surely no different in this. So it may well be (putting the whole story together in Song 1:5-6 and 8:8-12) that the king placed one of his vineyards into the care of the Shulamite's brothers and that they delegated some responsibilities to her.

In this scenario, Baal Hamon in verse 11 would be a literal place; though it is probably also a figurative reference. On the literal side, we should note that even though "Baal-hamon" is not specifically attested to elsewhere, there are other geographic names in Scripture beginning with Baal; for example, Baal-hermon, Baal-meon, Baal-peor, Baal-perazim, Baal-hazor. Some see a resemblance to a place mentioned in the Apocrypha, which is written in Greek: "As pointed out by a number of commentators, Judith 8:3 mentions a place called Balamon, possibly a Greek equivalent to Baal-hamon, which is near Dothan. In this regard, it is interesting that the Septuagint translates the Song of Songs' reference as Beelamon" (New International Commentary on the Old Testament, p. 219, note on Song 8:11). This is the same as "Khirbet Balama, modern Ibleam...about a mile south-west of Janin [in the northern West Bank].... This site was occupied as early as the pre-conquest Canaanite period" (Lloyd Carr, The Song of Solomon, Tyndale Commentaries, p. 174, note on verse 11). This being taken as the location of the vineyard in which the Shulamite worked is thought by some to buttress the view of the word Shulamite being equivalent to Shunammite, since Shunem was about 15 miles away. But that's quite a distance for people without modern cars. It certainly doesn't make sense as a daily commute.

Alternatively, some take Baal-hamon as an altered form of Baal-hermon in the far northern territory of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan River (Judges 3:3; 1 Chronicles 5:23). This location is understood to be parallel with "Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon" (Joshua 11:17; compare 13:5) and typically equated with modern Banyas, a beautiful, lush place of springs and waterfalls in the Golan Heights. Mention of Baal-hermon here is thought to parallel the several uses of the word Lebanon in the Song, particularly in 4:8 as possibly signifying the woman's homeland: "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse...from the top of Senir and Hermon." Of course, it may be wondered in that case why the Song would not simply say "Baal-hermon" in 8:11 and not "Baal-hamon" when the spelling "Hermon" is used in 4:8. It may be that the songwriter, perhaps Solomon himself, intentionally changed the spelling here to, in a clever wordplay, inject a figurative meaning.

In any case, it seems highly likely that there is a figurative meaning in this name; exclusively if no physical location is intended. For commentators point out that the term Baal-hamon means "lord (or possessor) of a tumult (or crowd or multitude)" or, alternatively, "lord of abundance (or

wealth)”?these definitions fitting Solomon. He was the lord of a multitude and of abundant wealth. Moreover, the term baal or “lord” could designate “husband,” and the abundance could well apply to the wife as the fruitful vineyard so that the name could apply to the actual Solomon or a nameless groom represented by him. A figurative meaning here would give us a very strong parallel with the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7. The actual word order at the beginning of Song 8:11 is “A vineyard was to Solomon in Baal-hamon (possessor of abundance).” Isaiah 5:1b, written well after the Song of Solomon and perhaps alluding to it, reads: “A vineyard was to my Beloved in a horn of fatness” (J.P. Green, The Interlinear Bible)?

or on a fruitful hill, as it is often interpreted. This correspondence may also imply other parallels; such as Solomon (or one referred to as Solomon) being the beloved in the Song. And since in the Song of the Vineyard God is the Beloved (Husband) in relation to His people Israel as His vineyard, it may be that we have here a scriptural basis for understanding the marriage in the Song of Songs as typifying, on some level, divine marriage.

If the actual King Solomon is the lover in the Song, neither of verses 11-12 can be attributed to the male lead. It might in this case be possible that a chorus sings verse 11 and the woman sings verse 12, but it is generally reckoned in this view that the woman is singing both verses. Support for this comes from verse 10?where “his eyes” is understood to anticipate the mention of Solomon in verse 11. That she would refer to Solomon now by name without having done so previously (all the other times using “my lover”) does perhaps seem odd. Yet it may be that it is appropriate for the businesslike discussion here of ownership, profits and payment.

Those who believe the actual Solomon is the lover here comprehend a figurative comparison being made to a literal financial arrangement. The idea is that the brothers, as caretakers, were to bring a return of 1,000 silver coins for selling the fruit of the vineyard. (Interestingly, Isaiah 7:23 mentions a thousand vines being worth a thousand silver coins yet that is the sale value of the vineyard itself, as opposed to the expected return from produce in Song 8:11.) In verse 12, the woman mentions her own vineyard (probably indicating her own person, as in 1:6) but then says that “the thousand”; i.e., the same thousand previously referred to (not “a thousand” as in the KJV and NKJV)?goes to Solomon and 200 to the keepers, the woman’s brothers. The wording here is sometimes taken to mean that each caretaker was to bring a return of 1,000 coins and then keep 200. Yet it is clear from verse 12 that the thousand was the total value of the vineyard’s produce. What, then, of the 200? If each keeper received 200, as some believe, this would be a problem if there were five brothers, as the profit would be eaten up. In fact, though, we don’t know how many there were. Others suggest that 200 (a fifth of the 1,000) was the total payment to the keepers. Of course we can’t know, and it’s not important. The point is that the caretakers receive fair payment for their efforts; and the 200 does seem to indicate that an actual sum is in view (whereas the thousand by itself might be viewed in purely figurative terms).

Of course, a figurative parallel is understood here. As Solomon’s literal vineyard gave him profits in part through the efforts of its caretakers, so would his figurative vineyard, his wife, yield up her profits to him (willingly, she seems to be saying); again, thanks in part to the work of the

caretakers, her brothers, who should properly be compensated. This seems to indicate a change in attitude on her part regarding their having made her work in the literal vineyard. (Indeed, some deem her grateful in thinking that if they had not made her work there, she would never have met her future husband; though this is an assumed embellishment.) Some even regard that the money to the caretakers here is an allusion to the bride price or gift a man would give to his bride's family (compare Genesis 24:22; 24:53; 29:18; 34:12; Exodus 22:17; 1 Samuel 18:23-25). This was of course a small price to pay next to the great reward reaped from receiving a wife! (as represented by the thousand coins). Of course, in no way is this to be taken as having bought love; which cannot be done, the point stressed in Song 8:7. That may be why there is emphasis in verse 12 showing that the woman's vineyard is her own; to give freely.

Shepherd-hypothesis advocates see the actual King Solomon referred to in 8:11-12?yet they of course do not reckon him as the woman's beloved. They typically see the vineyard of verse 11 in both a literal and figurative sense. Literally, they deem it the place where the Shulamite was working in 1:6 ;and the place she was noticed by the king (since she was working in his vineyard). Figuratively, they conceive of the vineyard and the name Baal-hamon as representing either Solomon's wealth and kingdom or his vast harem. In the first view, verses 11-12 are taken to be the words of the woman, telling Solomon in verse 12 that he can keep his wealth and power with which he tried to seduce her; that he cannot buy her person, her own vineyard, which belongs to her (this seen as parallel to the end of verse 7, which transitioned into the segment now in question). The 200 for the caretakers in this conception allow for, nonetheless, honest earning in working for the king, such as by her brothers. In the second conception, of the vineyard as the harem, the idea is that Solomon put it into the care of eunuchs, whom the Shulamite has had to deal with (though there has been no prior mention of them). The thousand coins are seen to be the physical enjoyment the king derives from all his women (often thought to symbolize his 1,000 women yet the 60 and 80 of 6:8 makes that problematic as seeming to represent a much smaller number at this point). In this view, either the Shulamite or her beloved shepherd is thought to be speaking. If the woman, she is in verse 12 telling the king that he may have his "profit" from his harem but he will not derive any profit from her personal vineyard; or, in a slight variant, "You've got all those others so just let me be." If the shepherd is seen as speaking, he is saying the same thing but referring in verse 12 to the woman as his own vineyard. The keepers receiving 200 here, whether the Shulamite or the shepherd is speaking, are deemed to be the eunuchs getting their personal compensation out of the deal; yet it seems rather odd that these new characters would be introduced here at the end in a summary conclusion.

Those who understand an alternative two-character progression in the Song wherein a nameless groom is portrayed as Solomon sometimes interpret verses 11-12 in much the same fashion as those who see the literal Solomon as the lover (considering the woman to be singing in both)?except that the verses are taken either in a wholly figurative sense (the vineyard entrusted to caretakers here seen as applying only to the wife and not to a real vineyard) or in an analogous sense, with an actual vineyard arrangement of the real Solomon overlaid onto the characters here (the family in reality having no connection to actual Solomon). On the other hand, there are some

who take some earlier references to “king” and “Solomon,” such as those connected with the wedding in 3:6-11, as applying to a nameless groom but who nonetheless consider Solomon in 8:11-12 not as the groom but as the real Solomon; in the sense of a foil or contrast. In this light, verses 11-12 are thought to portray Solomon negatively; as in the shepherd-hypothesis view as one who did try to buy love many times over (counter to the point in verse 7) or one who maintained a harem for personal profit. In this conception the groom is thought to be commenting that Solomon can have his big vineyard, the harem (so large it must be entrusted to others) while he will be happy with his own; this being the woman. The 200 are then taken as a knock at Solomon; to say that others who are taking care of his women are getting some of their fruit (this being not the eunuchs but other lovers). Yet such an interpretation does not seem consistent with the other imagery here.

All things considered, it is probably best to take verses 11-12 as sung by the woman and referring either to the real Solomon as her lover (prior to his polygamous corruption) or to a nameless groom as her lover here portrayed positively as Solomon. The 200 here seems best explained by the bridal gifts typically presented to a woman’s relatives. This goes well in line with the reflection of this section regarding the relationship of the couple in the Song; here highlighting the arrangement of the marriage as the natural outcome of the preparatory work of the woman’s family in rearing her and helping her to maintain her chastity. All are ultimately blessed through this noble effort.

Finally we come to 8:13-14, the last two verses of the Song. There is no ambiguity here as to who is speaking. The grammatical gender of a number of the words make it clear that the man is speaking in verse 13 and that the woman is speaking in verse 14. Yet still there is dispute as to what is intended.

In verse 13, the woman is said to “dwell in the gardens.” Some debate is made regarding the word rendered “dwell.” That could be a correct sense, but others argue for “stay,” “linger” or “sit”; seeing the implied permanence of “dwell” to go beyond what is intended, particularly as some infer from this verse that the man is cut off from the woman while she is in the gardens (which is reckoned to be a condition that does not last). This perspective, however, may be wrong. The garden motif appeared earlier in 4:12?5:1 as symbolizing the woman as a source of every kind of sensual pleasure. The imagery reappeared in 6:2, with the lover returning to the garden, probably again in a sensual context; and then once more in verse 11, where the visit to the garden, whether this is by the woman or the man, is to examine the blossoming of the relationship in terms of love and intimacy (see also 7:12). The plural “gardens” in 8:13 may imply something different from these earlier singular references; yet it may be simply a way to ensure that we do not envision her in a fixed place or static situation in her cultivation of her sexuality and relationship with her husband (and perhaps other aspects of life as well).

The “companions” here are masculine plural; which can denote an all-male group yet also a mixed group of men and women. The particular Hebrew term used for the friends here occurs elsewhere in the Song only in 1:7, where it refers to the man’s companions, portrayed as fellow shepherds.

The companions in 8:13 are listening for the woman's voice. The man then asks to hear her voice. It should be recalled that he made the same request in 2:14, following his invitation to her to join him in the newness of spring (verses 10-13), symbolizing the budding of their love. In 2:14, her being as a dove in the rocky clefts indicated some apparent inaccessibility; perhaps indicating that she had not yet fully given herself to him yet. Thus, his desire to see and hear her on that occasion may have symbolized his request that she join completely in a life together with him. It is based on that imagery that some see in 8:13 an indication again of inaccessibility. Moreover, the mention of the companions listening for the woman's voice has led some to believe that they have the same intention as the man. Some imagine here a group of rival suitors vying for the woman's affections. But there is no other hint of that elsewhere in the Song; and such an interpretation is not at all necessary. In fact if the companions be linked to those in 1:7, we might ask why the man's friends would be trying to court his bride? Of course, it might be argued that 8:13 is flashback to early in courtship, but that does not tie in well to verse 14?which appears a response to verse 13.

It could well be that the companions of verse 13 are a mixed group of men and women. Indeed, the specific word used would appear to link the meaning with the man's friends in 1:7. Yet in the symmetrical arrangement of the Song, we might expect that since 8:8-12 corresponds to 1:5-6, something following 8:8-12 would correspond to something preceding 1:5-6. Indeed, commentator Robert Alden noted this in his chart on the chiasmic arrangement of the Song's lyrics, which is reproduced in our introduction. The companions of 8:13 are there shown to correspond to the female friends in 1:4b. Yet perhaps both the woman's friends of 1:4b and the man's friends of 1:7 are intended in 8:13. Some picture all the wedding guests as being in mind here if the wedding feast setting is still intended. Even if an all-male group of the man's friends is meant, this would not imply rival suitors. The New American Commentary suggests: "This may imply that she has moved out of her old world; the world of her brothers and of the Jerusalem girls; and has entered his" (p. 430, note on verse 13). Furthermore, "'Friends pay heed to your voice'...simply means that all attention is fixed on her" (same note).

If there is any sense of the man being cut off from the woman here, it seems only to do with the fact that they are together with others in public and therefore cannot share the secret togetherness of their relationship. So in asking to hear the woman's voice, the man may be seeking to hear something that the others who are listening never could; her expressed desire for intimacy, which is exactly what she answers with in verse 14. Recall that the man's request to hear her voice in 2:14 was followed by her call (whether coy or serious) for catching the little foxes (2:15), her refrain of mutual possession (2:16) and then her concluding request that he be like a gazelle or young stag on the mountains (2:17). In chapter 8, the man's request to hear the woman's voice (verse 13) is followed immediately with her concluding request that he be like a gazelle or young stag on the mountains (verse 14)?without intervening dialogue or remarks as before.

In this last verse of the Song of Songs, we end as we began in 1:1-4a with the woman seeking escape and intimacy with the man. As noted above, the wording of 8:14 is very close to the woman's words in the latter part of 2:17. In full the earlier verse stated, "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 [separation or perhaps cleavage].” There she seemed to be looking forward to the consummation of marriage yet to come. Then, on what appears to be the wedding day, we see further mountain imagery from the man: “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” (4:6). As was pointed out in earlier comments on these verses, the mountains here are taken by some as an erotic symbol. Some see them as representing the woman’s breasts, lower parts or body generally. But others reckon them to imply some sensual wonderland, such as being in the land of Punt in the Egyptian love songs; or what people often mean today when they say, “I’m in heaven.” The imagery of a gazelle or stag on mountains (2:17) and then mountains of spices (4:6; compare 4:13?5:1; 6:2) combine in 8:14 at the Song’s conclusion.

It should be pointed out that the word translated “Make haste” here actually means “Flee.” Some imagine that the woman might be telling the man here to go away from her; with similar ambiguity to that found in the word “turn” in 2:17. Yet it seems obvious that if she is telling him to go in 8:14, she means that she will be right behind him. More likely, since the place she tells him to go is one that elsewhere obviously symbolizes intimacy with her, she is more likely telling him to leave from wherever he is, from whatever he is doing, to be with her to romp and play in the enjoyment of physical relations.

The impression here is one of ongoing physical relations within the marriage bond. Some interpreters, we have previously noted, believe the couple has never as yet been married; and take all the singing of intimacy to be anticipation of the future wedded bliss. Yet it is hard to believe that all of the erotic language and innuendo in the Song would be shared between an unmarried couple; particularly given the social setting of the Song’s composition. We certainly have anticipation here at the end; yet it appears to be of more to come within the blessings of a marriage relationship that already exists. And with that, the Song is over. “The lack of closure at the end of the poem has the effect of prolonging indefinitely the moment of youth and love, keeping it, in Keats’s phrase, ‘forever warm’” (Ariel and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, p. 19).

So much to say, then, for so short a book as the Song of Solomon! And still we are no doubt left wondering if we truly comprehend it. Of course, it is probably not vital that we do in all respects; or God would have made the meaning plainer for us. It seems far more important that it make an impression on us, that we get the gist of it and that our lives are appropriately impacted by it.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes well: “The Song of Songs is a beautiful picture of God’s ‘endorsement’ of physical love between husband and wife. Marriage is to be a monogamous, permanent, self-giving unit, in which the spouses are intensely devoted and committed to each other, and take delight in each other. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh’ (Gen. 2:24). The Song of Songs shows that sex in marriage is not ‘dirty.’ The physical attractiveness of a man and woman for each other and the fulfillment of those longings in marriage are natural and honorable. But the book does more than extol physical attraction between the sexes. It also honors pleasing qualities

in the lovers' personalities. Also moral purity before marriage is praised (e.g., Song 4:12). Premarital sex has no place in God's plans (2:7; 3:5). Faithfulness before and after marriage is expected and is honored (6:3; 7:10; 8:12). Such faithfulness in marital love beautifully pictures God's love for and commitment to His people."

## **Romans 12**

Reasonable worship is setting yourself apart as a living sacrifice to Yehovah. As the mind is transformed by the matters of Elohim, so the body also should follow and no longer appear to be like the rest of the world.

Everyone in the faith has been bestowed a measure of gifts as a result of the favor of Elohim. Be careful not to be boastful about your gift or belittle others who are given different gifts from you. There is a purpose why each are given different gifts, just as there is a purpose to each part of a human body. All the parts perform different functions to allow the body life. So it should be in the assembly of believers. All parts working together for the One Body which is Messiah.

Then Paul goes on to list many favorable and unfavorable traits, stay away from some, but pursue others and he lists them in verses 9-17. Do not take revenge and feed the hungry. In summary, treat even your enemies as your brothers who are beloved.