



## The Courtship Of The Bride

**Song of Solomon 1:1-4** *1 The song of songs, which is Solomon's. 2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. 3 Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee. 4 Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.*

· The Song of Solomon is regarded today as probably one of the most obscure and difficult books in the Bible. However, it may surprise you to know that throughout Christian history – especially in times of persecution in the dark ages under the Catholic church – it has been one of the most read and loved books of the Bible.

· It is the last of the five books of wisdom (or poetical books) in the Old Testament. Each of these books reveals one of the basic elements of man's nature:

· **JOB** is the voice of the spirit, the deepest part of man's nature. Here is the voice of man crying out through pain and struggle for God ("Oh that I knew where I might find him!" – Job 23:3).

· **PSALMS, PROVERBS AND ECCLESIASTES** form a trilogy which sets forth the voice of the soul. The soul of man is made up of three parts; emotion, mind and will.

· **PSALMS** is the book of the heart or the emotions, and in it you will find reflected every emotion known to man. This is the book to turn to whenever emotion is strong in your life to find an answering psalm that will reflect and meet your mood. That is why the Psalms have always been such well-loved portions of Scripture.

· **ECCLESIASTES** is the voice or expression of the mind of man. All the philosophies that man has ever discovered find their expression here. It is a penetrating inquiry into life, searching after answers. The answer it comes up with, because it approaches life only on an intellectual level, is that all is vanity, emptiness and futility. That is what the mind discovers without Christ.

· **PROVERBS** is the expression of the will of man, summed up in the most quoted of the Proverbs ("Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." – Proverbs 3:5-6). The mind and the heart must apply knowledge to the direction of the will to choose the right way. All through Proverbs you will find an appeal to the will of man.

· **SONG OF SOLOMON** is preeminently the cry of the body in its essential yearning. What is the essential yearning of the body? For love! So first and foremost, this is a love song describing with frankness and yet with purity the physical attraction of a man and his espoused bride to each other. It shows human sexual desire as God intended it to be expressed – not pornographically or prudishly (both harmful extremes), but in purity.

· The ancient Hebrew mind (because of its foundation in the Word of God) could not isolate and alienate the sexuality of man from God. The modern capacity of man to think of himself as a purely biological creature in a purely physical world is not evidence of his sophistication but of his spiritual poverty. God is the originator of man's sexuality.

· Of course, we have not heard the deepest message of this song until we pass behind the description of human love to read it as an expression of communion between man and God. The Jews took it to be an allegory of the love between Jehovah and Israel; we understand it on a deeper level as a type of the love between Christ and His Church. The condescension of God to dwell among men as the Shekinah in the tabernacle pales in comparison to the incredible condescension we see in the New Testament, when God took on a body of flesh to walk among men as a man.

· Ecclesiastes is the search of man throughout the world for something to satisfy his heart, but when he gains the

whole world his heart is still empty because THE HEART IS GREATER THAN THE OBJECT OF LOVE. But in the Song of Solomon, Christ is so magnificent that the heart which falls in love with Him will never be able to fully discover the depths of His love, because THE OBJECT OF LOVE IS GREATER THAN THE HEART.

- This book is called the “Song of Songs” – a Hebrew idiom like “Holy of Holies” (King of Kings, Lord of Lords, etc.) meaning “chiefest, greatest, most superlative” of Solomon’s songs. (“And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.” - 1 Kings 4:32).
- It is the first of the five scrolls in the third part of the Hebrew canon, and was sung at Passover in the spring.
- It was written by Solomon, the wisest and richest man in the ancient world (1 Kings 1-11 and 2 Chronicles 1-9).
- Solomon is from the Hebrew “shalom” meaning “peace.” In this love song, he is courting an unknown maiden called the “Shulamite” which is the feminine counterpart of “Solomon” in the Hebrew language. Their eastern courtship differs in many ways from what we are familiar with, especially in the imagery of their expressions of love.
- It is not always clear from the English who is speaking, but in most cases this can be determined by looking at the Hebrew pronouns (i.e. masculine, feminine, singular, plural). Most modern translations of Scripture attempt in some way to indicate who is speaking, but they cannot be definite in every case. The KJV translators did not attempt this.
- There are basically three interpretations set forth as to the characters who are speaking in this book:
  1. KING SOLOMON AND THE SHULAMITE. This interpretation has the weight of traditional Bible scholarship.
  2. THE SHULAMITE, A SHEPHERD WHO IS HER TRUE LOVE, AND KING SOLOMON WHO ATTEMPTS UNSUCCESSFULLY TO WOO HER AWAY. This interpretation has the weight of modern Bible scholarship.
  3. THE SHULAMITE AND KING SOLOMON, WHO FIRST DISGUISES HIMSELF AS A SHEPHERD TO WOO THE HUMBLE MAIDEN, AND THEN RETURNS LATER IN KINGLY SPLendor TO WED HER. I believe that this interpretation has the weight of Biblical typology behind it, as we will discover. Bible scholars like Harry Ironside and Ray Stedman subscribe to this viewpoint. It is the only one that “fits” New Testament revelation.
- THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM are also present as a kind of “chorus” which observes the unfolding events.
- No matter which interpretation is chosen, the love of Christ for His Church remains the strongest theme of the book.

## **OUTLINE OF SONG OF SOLOMON**

- 1 1:1-4 The Bride’s Introduction to Her Recollections of Courtship
- 2 1:5- 2:7 The Shulamite Meets a Shepherd – Love at First Sight! (*section ends with “do not awake love”*)
- 3 2:8-17 The Shepherd Proposes to Her (*“come away” – v. 10*)
- 4 3:1-5 The Shulamite Expresses Her Loneliness at Their Separation (*section ends with “do not awake love”*)
- 5 3:6-11 PARENTHESIS: King Solomon Visits to Check on His Vineyard (*“who is this? – v. 6*)
- 6 4:1 – 5:1 The Courtship Continues
- 7 5:2 – 6:3 The Shulamite Searches For Her Beloved
- 8 6:4 – 8:4 The Courtship Continues (*section ends with “do not awake love”*)
- 9 8:5-14 The Engagement – The Shulamite Finally Discovers the Identity of Her Beloved! (*“who is this? – v. 5*)

## **SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION**

**1:2** *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.*

· Note the desire for intimacy which is the hallmark of those who love the Lord (cry of OT for the incarnation – Job 23:3). The bride finds the groom’s love “better than wine” (represents “earthly pleasures” in Scripture).

*1:3 Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.*

· The Bride is marked by “anointing oil” (Baptism of the Holy Ghost) and by the “name” (Baptism in Jesus’ Name) of the Groom. A name (“shem”) implies the authority of the person who bears it; oil poured over the head signified empowerment from God for a position. You can’t be in the Bride of Christ without both!

· Note that all the virgins love the majesty of King Solomon – but not all the virgins are married to Him! Many “Christian” people have a fascination with the POWER of Jesus, but the Bride identifies with His PERSON.

*1:4 Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.*

· The Bride is distinguished by her “running after” the Groom; she pursues a “deeper walk” with God in the inner chamber (“cheder”). This love relationship is only possible if we separate from the lusts of the world.

· It is the “upright” – those distinguished by righteousness – who have this kind of relationship with the King. This pursuit of the King is found in the story of the unfolding courtship which follows.

## **SECTION TWO – LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT**

*1:6 Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.*

· King Solomon owned a vineyard in the hill country of Ephraim, about 50 miles north of Jerusalem. It was here the Shulamite and her family worked as keepers. She was the “Cinderella” of the family, with a natural beauty that went unnoticed. Her step-brothers (and sisters) treated her harshly and made her work outside so much that she became dark from the sun, and had no time to care for her personal appearance.

· In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us that he undertook expeditions to discover what life was like in various levels of society. One day he disguised himself as a shepherd and went to check on this vineyard; he met the Shulamite and they fell in love, but she still did not know His true identity.

· The beauty of the story is that the majestic King Solomon makes a long journey from the beautiful city of Jerusalem to the rough and dangerous mountain country CLOTHED LIKE A PEASANT, falls in love with a poor peasant girl who has absolutely nothing to offer him in return, and promises to take her away with him!

· Note that it is the “mother’s children” (descendants of the traditional church) who persecute the Shulamite (true church), BECAUSE THEY DO NOT KNOW THE TRUE IDENTITY OF HER BELOVED!

*2:1-2 I I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. 2 As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*

· We often attribute v. 1 to the Lord, but it is the bride (Church) who is speaking. He replies to her in v. 2.

· The bride is humble in the presence of her beloved. She sees herself as only one of many flowers.

· Yet he sees her as a single beautiful lily in a patch of thorns! In the eyes of the world, God’s intimates are obscure and unimportant; but to God they are exquisite flowers in the midst of the briar patch of the world.

*2:7 I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*

· This charge is found at the end of three sections of this love song, and is best translated “do not stir up or awaken love before its time.” This is the secret to natural courtship, since love which is expressed inappropriately (i.e. premarital sex) before its time is damaged like the bud of a flower which is forced open. When awakened, these strong

feelings push us further than God intends us to go at that time.

· However, this is also the secret to spiritual courtship, which is a progressive walk with God. There are two extremes in spiritual life: one is the extreme of deadness and tradition, while the other is the extreme of seeking after religious experiences as an end in itself. Its not the blessing we seek but the Bridegroom!

## **SECTION THREE – THE PROPOSAL**

*2:10 My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.*

· The invitation is to a place that the Shulamite has never seen; she must accept the proposal by faith!

*2:15 Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.*

· Little foxes represent the “small sins” in our lives, the “insignificant lusts” and “trivial pleasures” that grieve the Holy Spirit and threaten to ruin the whole vineyard. To many these things would not be important, but to the one who courts the affection of the King of Kings they become crucial issues in a maturing relationship.

## **SECTION FOUR – LONELINESS**

*3:1 By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.*

· The Hebrew indicates “many nights” when the Beloved is absent. All Christians have “night seasons” when they feel abandoned by God. We often make the same mistake as the Shulamite, who acted on her fear and loneliness and rose from her “rest in Christ” to go get help from the watchmen of the city.

· She found her Beloved nearby (v. 4), so there was never any cause for anxiety (he was on his way!).

## **SECTION FIVE – PARENTHESIS: KING SOLOMON VISITS**

*3:6 Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?*

· King Solomon in royal splendour pays a visit to his vineyard, surrounding by clouds of incense. God “inhabits the praises” of His people, represented in Scripture by incense.

· However, the Shulamite does not yet realize that her beloved Shepherd is really the great King Solomon.

## **SECTION SIX – COURTSHIP**

*4:9 Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.*

· The phrases “one of thine eyes” and “one chain” represent single-minded devotion to the Beloved. The word “ravish” means “greatly stir up.” It is one thing to profess love for the King, but another thing entirely to have the King profess His love for you! That only happens through absolute devotion to Him!

· The neck in Scripture always symbolizes the will (as in “stiff-necked”). God honors right choices!

· Isn't it amazing that an Almighty God desires and enjoys our companionship?

## **SECTION SEVEN – THE SEARCH**

*5:2-3 2 I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my*

*love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. 3 I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?*

**5:6** *I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.*

· New Christians seem to experience lots of “feedback” from the Lord; He holds their hand while they learn to walk. Later He provides us with less immediate feedback; we now learn to walk by faith.

· The arrival of the Beloved is sudden and unannounced. Jesus wants us to arise and let Him enter upon a moment’s notice. The Shulamite delays to open the door because she is comfortable – and by the time she arises her Shepherd is gone! She then must go out and search for Him.

· WHY IS GOD SILENT? We often cry for help, but God knows that what we are crying for is merely relief, to be taken out of the harmful effects of our selfish ways, and then be allowed to revert right back to being selfish. If our appeal is merely to escape the penalty of our actions, that is good reason for God to be silent.

**5:9-10** *9 What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us? 10 My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.*

· The world has never seen Jesus in His royal splendour; He appears to them as a “humble shepherd.” The church has never seen Him in His ultimate splendour either, but we love Him above all others anyway!

## **SECTION EIGHT – COURTSHIP**

**7:10** *I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.*

· The Shulamite knows that her Beloved wants to spend time with her – because she loves him so much.

· Our generation is preoccupied with what God can do for us, our health, happiness and well-being. Few seem to ask the question, “What can we do for God?” The Shulamite returns love to her Beloved!

## **SECTION NINE – ENGAGEMENT**

**8:5** *Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth that bare thee.*

· Another procession in the wilderness – but this time King Solomon has arrived in all his kingly splendour to take the Shulamite out of the wilderness to his royal palace in Jerusalem. She will be his Queen!

· The rest of the verse refers probably to one of their earlier courtship encounters in her home town.

**8:6-7** *6 Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. 7 Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.*

· The climax of the song is found here, as the Shulamite declares the power of her unending love.

· Seals were precious to their owners, almost as personal as their names. As the grave will not give up the dead, so love will not surrender the loved one. The words “vehement flame” indicate a flame which has been kindled by the Lord. The waters of an ocean cannot quench love, and it is worth more than anything.

**8:11-12** *11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver. 12 My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.*

· The identity of Solomon is confirmed here. Basically, the Shulamite is saying that Solomon has many vineyards which bring him wealth, but the only vineyard she has to give is herself. That’s okay with him!

## **CONCLUSION – JEWISH WEDDING CEREMONY (STONEKING)**

Before her wedding, an orthodox Jewish girl must repent of all her sins before God. Then, she goes to a mikvah (bath) to be totally immersed in ritual cleansing; this is where she takes on the name of her bridegroom. She is clothed in wedding garments and walks down a pathway. The groom appears at an unknown point and takes her to the marriage supper!