

Song Of Solomon

WRITER

The first verse of this book ascribes its writing to Solomon, king of Israel (See intro. to Ec). Though some have assumed that the book was written after the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity in 536 B.C., there is no strong evidence within the book that would suggest this late date of writing. We thus assume the traditional view that Solomon was not only the writer, but the one who sought to woo the Shulamite woman to become one of his wives. The book would thus be one of Solomon's 1005 songs (1 Kg 4:32). The theme of the book would support this conclusion, for the writer wanted to teach the devotion of one's true commitment in love, though tempted by wealth and royalty to forsake one's commitment.

DATE

If Solomon composed the book, then the composition would have taken place during his reign. At the time of writing, Solomon had many wives and maidens in Jerusalem, and thus the setting would have been toward the latter part of his 40-year reign. The date of writing would have been sometime before his death in 931 B.C.

BOOK

Some interpreters have considered the book to be an allegory of the history of Israel in her relationship with God. Others have used the book as an analogy of the love between the church and Christ. But these interpretations are forced since there is no contextual reason to consider them to be correct. The best interpretation is often the most obvious. And thus, when viewed in the historical context of the love poetry of Egypt during the times of Solomon, it is best to consider the book in the context of a love relationship between two people who had committed themselves to one another. Though Solomon, the Shulamite woman, and her beloved may set the immediate context for the love triangle, we would

assume that the Holy Spirit placed this book of love in the Scriptures for the purpose of revealing the committed relationship that two people should maintain toward one another. By focusing on this relationship, the book teaches against the practice of polygamy, for no relationship as is defined in the book could exist between a man and several wives. In fact, in the triangle of characters in the book, one theme would be directed specifically against polygamy. Solomon's appeals to the Shulamite were questionable, for the Shulamite saw that his devotion to her could never be as the devotion of her true beloved who would become her only husband. Solomon had many wives. But the Shulamite was the only love of her beloved. In this sense, therefore, the king's proposals were shallow of commitment to take her as his only affectionate wife for life.

God wanted us to understand the sanctity between one man and one woman that must exist in a marriage relationship. This commitment must begin before marriage in order that both parties in the relationship understand and feel confident in the commitment to one another. The Shulamite's resistance to the appeals of wealth and royalty clearly manifested her commitment to her beloved. She turned away from the greatest the world had to offer in order to remain true to her commitment to her beloved. This book, therefore, is a definition of Paul's exhortation in Ep 5:25-33, that husbands and wives commit themselves to one another until death.

In the Hebrew text the book is written in poetry, not prose. Since the poetry is in the style of the orient, the figures are descriptive. Characteristic with most ancient poetical literature, there is no indication of a change in scenes or characters in the narrative. The interpreter, therefore, must be cautious in defining the change in speeches from one character to another, as well as the setting or events when the speeches took place. The speeches of the characters are not dialogues, but monologues that express dramatic action or feeling. The lack of identification of who is speaking was intentional in the sense that the writer wanted us to focus on the content of what everyone was saying in reference to one an-

other in the love triangle. Who was speaking at any time was not as important as the themes that are revealed through the encounter of personalities and their motives and commitments.

The leading characters of the story are Solomon (the king of Israel), a young Shulamite maiden from the country of northern Israel, and her beloved to whom she had made a commitment to marriage. The daughters of Jerusalem would be the court attendants of the palace in Jerusalem, or possibly the concubines of Solomon. Mention also is made of the Shulamite's brothers who were of her family in the farming country of northern Israel. All these characters are brought together into a poetical song of love that glorifies monogamous love relationships. There is no other book in the Bible that so uniquely portrays the love relationship that should exist between a man and a woman in the bond of marriage (See comments Ep 5:22-33).

Introduction

(1:1-4a)

Outline: (1) The authorship (1:1), (2) The setting (1:2-4a)

Chapter 1

THE AUTHORSHIP

1:1 *Song of songs:* This was a superlative in Hebrew poetry. This phrase identifies the book as one of Solomon's 1005 songs (See 1 Kg 4:32), and thus signifying to us that this book is written in poetry and not prose. **Solomon:** Since the word "which" in Hebrew can be translated "by," "for," or "about," it is not conclusive that the authorship of the book can be attributed to Solomon (see introduction). However, in reference to the theme of committed love, Solomon fits the character who would represent the temptation to the Shulamite to forsake her commitment to her beloved.

THE SETTING

1:2-4a The Shulamite woman (6:13) was possibly abducted from her home in order to be brought first to the king's summer home in the mountains of Lebanon. She

was taken to the king's chambers of the summer home and the king's maidens devoted themselves to minister to her. **The maidens love you:** Upon her arrival at the summer palace, the maidens (daughters) of Jerusalem, who were of the king's harem at the summer home, gave her moral support. The maidens reassured the Shulamite that all would be well, for she would be the center of their affection. They would be devoted to her because she was the focus of the king's love. Though the Shulamite asked that the charioteer take her away, he departed, leaving her to the fate of being tempted by the wealth and royalty of the king. The setting of the story, therefore, begins first in the Shulamite's homeland in northern Palestine, and then is intensified when the king brings her in a royal caravan to the capital city of Jerusalem. In the royal palace of Jerusalem, the appeal of the king would intensify when the Shulamite was offered the love of a king, and a life-style of royalty. It was a situation where her morals could be tested.

The First Encounter

(1:4b - 2:7)

Outline: (1) The Shulamite and maidens (1:4b-6), (2) Solomon and the Shulamite (1:7 - 2:7)

THE SHULAMITE & MAIDENS

1:4b-6 This first encounter with the king was planned in the summer residence of the king in northern Palestine, the homeland of the Shulamite. It seems that she is in shock concerning her fate. However, the maidens are comforting with exhortation. From 4b it seems that the dialogue begins between the king and the Shulamite maiden, though some Bible students have affirmed that the beloved of the Shulamite is at first in the scenes of the drama. **Dark:** The maidens are amused at the darkness of her skin that had been parched by the sun. Fair skin was prized and a sign of royal care in the palaces. But the Shulamite's skin was deeply tanned. Because her brothers were for some reason angry with her, they consigned her to work in the vineyards in the heat of the sun. **Own vineyard:** She had neglected her own skin while working

in the vineyards. She had the skin of a farm laborer, not the skin of one who had dwelt in the luxury of palaces.

SOLOMON AND THE SHULAMITE

1:7 Homesick, she yearned for her home and the company of her country sweetheart. She cried out, wondering why she should be as a veiled harlot wandering among the flocks of the king's friends.

1:8 One of the maidens responded with a rebuke that the Shulamite should not remind the king of the shepherds of his kingdom. The sarcastic rebuttal of the maiden was meant to scorn the Shulamite for her lack of appreciation for the opportunity of her predicament. The king's maidens would later wonder why one would not want to dwell with the king in the luxury of the nation's palace. Their questioning of her rejection of the king's luxury underscores a primary theme of the book. Committed love is not dependent on one's physical environment. True love is identified by the continuation of one's commitment regardless of the environment in which one lives.

1:9-11 The king interrupted the quarrel between the Shulamite and the maiden. He interrupted with compliments concerning the Shulamite's beauty. **Horse:** In oriental literature this was a compliment, for horses were prizes of beauty. One also took great pride in his possession of great horses. It is possible that the king here expressed his desire to possess the Shulamite as he had the other women of his harem. By the end of the drama, however, the Shulamite would not allow herself to be possessed.

1:12-14 The Shulamite reminded the king that she had given her love to another, and thus could not accept his proposal of love. **His table:** The king's first appeal to the Shulamite was to bring her into the dining environment of royalty. But while everyone was seated at the banquet feast of a royal party, she reminded herself that she was in a relationship with her beloved at his table in the humble vineyards of the farmlands. In that environment, her perfumes appealed to her beloved. But now in the king's chambers her fragrance could go forth to

her betrothed. She thus carried the remembrance of her former beloved on her bosom as a bag of myrrh. Even during the royal occasion of a kingly banquet she could not forget her beloved.

1:15 The king was persistent. Noticing that her mind was far away with her lover in the vineyards, he did not accept her reluctance to respond to the occasion of the banquet.

1:16,17 Our bed is green: She reminded the king during his advances that she was comfortable with her betrothed in a country setting. She preferred that environment more than the king's palaces.

Chapter 2

2:1 Verse 1 was assigned to the words of the last speech in reference to the Shulamite's beloved. The application of these statements in reference to who is speaking in the context is left to the discretion of the interpreter.

2:2 The king possibly sensed that the Shulamite questioned his devotion to one person in marriage, since he had so many wives and maidens. Her integrity was manifested in poetical drama by her refusal to become one of many in a polygamous relationship.

2:3-7 *My beloved:* In order to dissuade the king's advances, in her mind the Shulamite things about her love relationship with her true beloved. *His fruit:* As the apple is pleasing to the sight and tastes, so was the presence of her first true love. Her love for him was still in his heart, and thus she yearned to stand under the protection of his shade and enjoy the sweet fruit of conversation with him. *Sustain me:* It could be that at this time in the scene, the king withdrew from the presence of the Shulamite. Verses 5-7 could thus be directed to the maidens. Regardless of her audience, the Shulamite maiden spoke with passion concerning her love for her beloved farmer. *Left hand ... right:* At this time during her ordeal, she reassured herself that it would only be her former beloved's arms that would embrace her with true love. *Do not arouse:* The passion of sexual intercourse must never be aroused outside the limits of God's intended relationship between a man and a woman. And

that intended relationship is in the bond of marriage. Young people should never place themselves in a situation where their sexual passions are aroused to the point of being out of control.

The Second Encounter

(2:8 – 3:5)

Outline: (1) The beloved's visit (2:8-17), (2) The first dream (3:1-5)

THE BELOVED'S VISIT

2:8-10a Verses 8-17 describe the visit of the Shulamite's beloved shepherd who comes from her former country environment. He comes to visit her while she remains confined in the summer house of the king. This may be an actual visit by the beloved, however, it may simply be an imaginary visit that took place only in the mind of the Shulamite. If it was imaginary, then we assume that she was reciprocating her love toward him.

2:10b-15 What is stated by the beloved is a love song. It is a love song that is based on the beauties of nature, which beauties would appeal to a young woman who was the social product of a country environment. All that is stated in the song appeals to the natural instincts of the Shulamite in order to express the yearning of the beloved that she return to him. If the scene is imaginary, then the Shulamite is revealing that she longs for the natural setting where she experienced her first true love with her beloved. **Foxes:** Reference in this song may figuratively be that the beloved take captive the foxes, a reference to the king's proposals. As mischievous foxes, the proposals were threatening their first and true commitment to one another. The little foxes were spoiling the relationship between the Shulamite and her first beloved. Little things have a tendency to break down a love relationship between two people.

2:16,17 In response to the plea of the beloved, the Shulamite responded with two brief statements in song. **My beloved is mine:** There was certainly some stress in their relationship with one another because the king had taken her from her beloved. But the differences between the Shulamite and her beloved subsided. This is

thus a song of reconciliation. **Feeds among the lilies:** The beloved was nourished by her affections. Though he lingered with her, it is her desire that he return again to her presence. **Turn my beloved:** The Shulamite consigns herself to wait for her beloved. She is content at this time to wait for the day of marriage. Her emotions, therefore, are still joined with her former love, and thus she had not resigned herself to the king's harem. In her mind, she reaffirmed her commitment to her beloved. If the visit was real, then she wanted to reassure him that she was not wavering from her commitment to him. If the visit was imaginary, then we would suppose that she was becoming defensive. She wanted to reassure herself that she would not forsake her commitment to her beloved.

Chapter 3

THE FIRST DREAMS

3:1-5 The young Shulamite is now with her maidens. She tells them of her dream. **In the nights:** She had several dreams night after night. She would then rise to seek her beloved in the city squares. Once she found him, she would then bring him to her mother's dwelling in order to reaffirm her commitment to him. Since she is in Jerusalem, time and distance will not weaken her love for her beloved who was in northern Palestine. **Do not stir up:** The sexual passions of love should not be aroused and fulfilled unless in the context of marriage (2:7; 8:4). Thus the Shulamite appealed to the maidens that they not seek to stir her passions toward the king. She revealed her dreams to the maidens concerning her beloved in order that they not dissuade her from forgetting her feelings toward her first love. If the passion of sexual intercourse were to be aroused, it was going to be in the consummation of her marriage with her beloved, and not with the king.

The Third Encounter

(3:6 - 5:1)

Outline: (1) The royal procession (3:6-11), (2) The king's proposal (4:1 - 5:1)

THE ROYAL PROCESSION

3:6-8 A royal procession brings the king and the Shulamite together. It is not revealed whether the king comes to her at the summer house, or she is taken to him in Jerusalem. It seems that Solomon built a special royal carriage for her in order that she be brought to him at the palace in Jerusalem. **Traveling couch:** Ancient kings would travel in a room on a mobile platform. It was a means by which royalty traveled from one place to another, being carried in this case by sixty armed men who also protected the king. The couch and the entourage were probably sent to the Shulamite in order to bring her to Jerusalem. The king had tempted her with the royalty of the summer palace and a great banquet, but now his proposals to her would intensify. They would intensify in the setting of the capital of the nation, surrounded with all the luxury of a king's life and the admiration of the people.

3:9-11 *He made:* In order to woo the Shulamite, it may have been that Solomon specifically made this traveling couch and sent it to her in order to bring her to Jerusalem. The couch was made of the wood from the home country of the Shulamite. The scent of her homeland, therefore, would accompany her to Jerusalem. **Lovingly fitted out:** Reference would be to a work of love done by the maidens in order to appeal to the Shulamite. As other women who were approached by the king, she too should respond to the king's advances as all other maidens had done. The integrity of the Shulamite was manifested in the fact that she was not overwhelmed by the wooing of a king, but remained faithful to her country sweetheart. She did not sacrifice her commitment in order to respond to the politics of a king.

Chapter 4

THE KING'S PROPOSAL

4:1-5 The scene of the triangle of love has now changed from the summer house of the king in northern Palestine to the king's palace in Jerusalem. In this context the words of the king are written as a song that is worded as a typical Syrian song of marriage. **Hair ...**

teeth ... lips ... neck ... breasts: As the typical man upon his first encounter with a woman, the king wooed her with compliments concerning her physical appearance. He admired her illustrious eyes behind her veil. The whiteness of her teeth and the beauty of her lips sparked admiration in the mind of the king. All those features wherein a woman would be self-conscious concerning her own beauty, the king complimented her. His words, therefore, reassured her that though she was in the presence of the king, she had no reason to be shy, or to feel insecure. The king knew that she was a humble country girl, and thus through his praise of her beauty he sought to set her at ease in his royal presence. She should be reassured in his presence because of the command of her beauty.

4:6 Regardless of the compliments of the king, the Shulamite looked away, yearning for her home in the northern farm country. Without responding to the king, she still longed for the mountain country of Lebanon. Her farming culture had more appeal than the elegance of the king's palace. Herein is revealed the integrity of a great woman. Such reveals why Solomon was so driven to have her as one of his wives. But her integrity also reveals the reason why she could never become one of his harem. Great women save themselves for the commitment of one man for life.

4:7-15 In these words, the king again reassures the Shulamite with compliments concerning her presence. His first praises in verses 1-5 were compliments in reference to her first appearance. He now moves into praise of her character and demeanor. **No spot:** In contrast to her country dwelling, she was one fit to be a king's wife. Her integrity made her eligible, but at the same time, it also disqualified her from being in a polygamous relationship with a king who had many wives. **From Lebanon:** He sought to take her mind off the mountains of Lebanon, and bring her to the reality of the king's palace in Jerusalem. He would fail in this feat. He abducted the farmer out of the country, but could never take the country out of the farmer. Those who dwell in cities have a difficult time understanding this characteristic of the

culture of rural people. **A garden enclosed:** This would probably reveal the faithfulness of the Shulamite to her former love. One walked in a garden in order to enjoy the fragrance of the environment. But her garden was closed to the king, and she would not allow Solomon in to the fragrance of her love. She was still true to her beloved country sweetheart. Her monogamous devotion to one man manifested the integrity of her heart. Such integrity was a challenge to the king to woo her earnestly into his own heart. **Plants:** Solomon resorted to the beauty of his garden (See 1 Kg 4:33). The metaphors are taken from the natural beauty and fragrance of a garden. As one would seek to be in the presence of such natural beauty, so would one want to be in the presence of the Shulamite. Her demeanor invited people into her presence as a garden invited people in to behold beauty and sweet-smelling fragrances. But she was not inviting him in. There was a wall around her garden (8:10). The king was not allowed in.

4:16 The Shulamite was faithful to her beloved country sweetheart. She continued to reject the king's persistence, and thus turned her attention from the palace of the king to the refreshing winds that would carry the fragrance of her love far to the north to her beloved. She was his garden, and it was only him whom she sought to enjoy the fragrance of her presence.

Chapter 5

5:1 It was at this point that the king may have become impatient. He now claimed the Shulamite to be his garden, and thus presumed to claim her as his bride. His advances had been rebuffed, and thus he turned away in order to come later with another appeal. There was impatience in the tone of his appeals.

The Fourth Encounter

(5:2 - 6:3)

Outline: (1) The Shulamite's second dream (5:2-8), (2) The Shulamite's song (5:9 - 6:3)

THE SHULAMITE'S SECOND DREAM

5:2-8 Her longing for her country sweetheart was revealed again in her dreams. This was a dream that he had come to her. She dreamed of him speaking to her. **My undefiled:** In her dream she revealed that she had kept herself free from any sexual relationship with the king. Her integrity was manifested in the fact that she had kept herself pure. **I have put off my robe:** We could assume that verse 3 was not a part of the dream, but the thinking of the Shulamite after she had awakened. However, the words may be a continuation of the visiting beloved in her dream. She had prepared herself for bed, but now she dreamed that he was at the door. At this time in her ordeal with the king, she may be questioning her devotion to her beloved. She dreamed that her beloved was reasoning that she was turning from him, and thus her heart was changing. In her dream her beloved had come a great distance to find her, but how could he now return since she had hesitated in opening the door to him. In her dream, she may have been questioning her own devotion, and thus pictured herself as hesitating to receive him. **My heart yearned for him:** She did not open the door quickly to allow him to come in. Though he sought reconciliation (see 2:15), he felt that her love for him might be fading. She may have been frustrated with her predicament, and the distance from her beloved began to weigh down on her. **Open to my beloved:** This revealed her true feelings. She had hesitated, but then responded to the feelings of her former commitment to him. She quickly put away her hesitation, and responded to his coming. His love was as the fragrance of perfumes that invited the beloved into her presence. **My beloved had withdrawn:** Her welcome came too late. The beloved had left. So in desperation she went in search for him. She searched to the extent that the guards of the city thought she was a prowling woman of the streets. She was thus beaten and wounded. Her dream concluded with an appeal to the maidens that if they come across her beloved, that they tell him that she remains lovesick for him.

THE SHULAMITE'S SONG

5:9 Upon telling her dream to the maidens, they still

could not understand why the Shulamite would yearn for the country life over the palaces of Jerusalem (See 1:8). They could not understand why she would not exchange a country beloved for a beloved king. They had accepted the fact that they were a part of Solomon's harem. They could not understand why she would not relent to the fact that she should become another wife of the king.

5:10-16 The Shulamite rebuffed the criticism of the maidens by describing the appeal of her country beloved. In her description of him, she sought to remind herself of the one from whom she was withheld. In her mind, his physical appearance, demeanor and speech were that for which she yearned (See 7:1-5). This is a description of a lovesick woman for a man to whom she had committed herself.

Chapter 6

6:1 This question comes from representatives of the maidens of Jerusalem. The question is in reference to 5:6 where the Shulamite asked concerning the location of her beloved about whom she had dreamed. It is also related to 5:8 where she had asked that they tell her if they found him. Their desire now was to seek her beloved with her. Evidently, by this time in the drama, they too were motivated by her true love for her beloved. As the polygamous maidens of a harem, it would be easy for them to be inspired by being the object of the love of only one man. Their former criticisms, therefore, may have been motivated by their envy of the Shulamite who was loved so much by her beloved. As a part of the harem of Solomon, they enjoyed no such attention.

6:2,3 Garden: See 4:12-15 & 5:1 where the Shulamite was metaphorically described in reference to a garden scene. The picture here is of her beloved coming to her in order to consummate their marriage. She thus looked forward to a reunion where the consummation of her marriage to him might take place. She may have wavered from her commitment in the presence of the king and the environment of the royal palace in Jerusalem, but she reaffirmed to the maidens that she was still committed to her beloved.

The Fifth Encounter

(6:4 – 8:4)

Outline: (1) Reconciliation and refusal (6:4-12), (2) Appeal and passion for love (6:13 – 8:4)

RECONCILIATION & REFUSAL

6:4-7 The king now revisited the Shulamite in order to contend for her affection. He again complimented the beauty of her physical appearance. He compared her to the beauty of Tirzah (meaning, “beautiful” or “delightful”) in her own country, and to Jerusalem (“perfection of beauty”) where she now resided. He wooed her with the beauty of a city from her homeland, as well as with the beauty of a city where he desired that in her heart she would take up residence. **Turn away your eyes:** It would seem that the integrity and beauty of the Shulamite somewhat intimidated even Solomon, the one who had many wives and concubines. Such would explain the challenge he felt in wooing her to respond to his wealth and royalty, both of which had little appeal to the country girl from the vineyards of Lebanon.

6:8-10 My perfect one: Solomon had many wives (1 Kg 11:1-3). At this time in his reign he had the number of wives that is stated here, with maidens that were without number. His appeal here to the Shulamite was that she would be special among so many. He stated that she was the most beautiful. Since she had been a special child, so she would be special in his harem. The other queens and maidens (concubines) who normally should be jealous of her, even gave her praise. In verse 10, the king repeated what the others were saying about the Shulamite. But such a woman as the Shulamite could never be one of many wives, regardless of the promises made by the king. The behavior of his life made a statement that was contrary to the words of his appeal. She would never be just another woman that he had conquered through his courting.

6:11,12 In her continued refusal of the king's proposals, she reminded him of her abduction by him. From the time of her abduction, she became the captive of his obsession and a challenge to be conquered by his woo-

ing. She had been unwillingly detained, and thus rebuffed her suitor. In order for her to be loved sincerely, she must live as a free person. True love does not confine, but sets free in order to draw willingly the loved into one's bosom.

APPEAL & PASSION FOR LOVE

6:13 It may have been that Solomon said that she could go, and she went. If these are the words of the maidens, then they sought to make an appeal to the Shulamite that she return to the presence of the king. She may have simply left the room, and they pleaded that in her rebuff of his advances, that she return to him. **Two companies:** Reference here may be to the noun from which the translation is made, that is, Mahanaim (See Gn 32:1,2). If the Shulamite returned to the king, it would be like the angelic dancing between Jacob and the angels who met him at Mahanaim. This introduces the song of admiration that follows in chapter 7.

Chapter 7

7:1-5 This is another description of the Shulamite that is similar to the one given by the king in 5:10-15. The appeal of the song here is that the Shulamite relinquish to the beauty of her body, and thus give in to the proposals of the king. The natural beauty of God's created woman is here magnified in the context of a pure relationship between a man and a woman. God created the beauty of a woman in a manner that would appeal to the created instincts of men who would be attracted by the beauty of a woman. Though in this context emphasis was on the appeal of the outward appearance of the woman to the God-created instincts of man, what is of greater glory in the Shulamite was the appeal of her character. Neither wealth nor fame tempted her to indulge in a sexual relationship with the king of the empire. She maintained her purity though ravished in comments concerning the beauty of her physique. She never allowed her beauty to be used to manipulate the thinking of the king.

7:6-9a We would assign the statements in these verses to the response of the king to the previous song

of the maidens. He thus made a final advance to woo her to conform to his desires. He was captivated, both the beauty of her body, as well as the beauty of her integrity. ***I will go up:*** There now seems to be some frustration on the part of the king. His advances had been rebuffed, and thus there may be in his mind at this time the urge to embrace the Shulamite against her will. But forced love only brings the aggressor into the bondage of his own passions. The king knew this, and thus he restrained himself from submitting to his passions.

7:9b-13 Feeling that the king may be at the point of frustration, and thus force her, the Shulamite takes her mind to a far away setting with memories of her beloved. She desired that he escape with her into the vineyards of her homeland, away from the pressure of the proposals of the king. Her response to the king was as intense as his proposals were to her. Though he advanced with intentions that were generated by the appeal of her beauty and character, the Shulamite responded with a portrait of a pure relationship with her country sweetheart. The theme of this love story must not be missed at this point. The theme was that a woman maintain her honor and integrity by guarding her purity. Though approached by wealth and royalty, she must not succumb to the advances of those who would be overcome by her sexual appeal. The Shulamite did not present herself in dress or conduct in any manner that would arouse the sexual urges of the king. On the contrary, she did everything to rebuff his advances. In doing so, she maintained her integrity. And though he was rebuffed, and frustrated, the king maintained his integrity by not forcing himself on her. Thus the king maintained his dignity in the presence of a woman of great integrity.

Chapter 8

8:1-4 These verses probably continue the statements of 7:10-13. It seems that the more intense the king wooed her, the more intense her feelings were generated toward her beloved. ***Would not be despised:*** It was the custom of the time that no affection between a man and a woman should be manifested in public. If such were

done, it would bring shame upon both. But at this time in the drama between the king and the Shulamite, the Shulamite sought for the affection of her beloved regardless of where it was manifested. In this context, the Shulamite desired that her beloved come into her mother's house in order that the mother might instruct her as to how she should please him. **Not stir up:** See comments 2:6,7.

Romantic Climax

(8:5-14)

Outline: (1) Eulogy of love (8:5-7), (2) Remembrance (8:8-12), (3) Reward of love (8:13,14)

EULOGY OF LOVE

From this point on it seems that the king had resigned himself to the fact that he had no chance of gaining the love of the Shulamite. The Shulamite's loyalty to her beloved was more powerful than his appeal with complimentary words, wealth and royalty. Since he could not succeed in his advances, the scenes of this poetical drama close with a eulogy of love by the Shulamite.

8:5-7 The book closes in the country setting of northern Palestine from where the Shulamite was taken. The question of the friends in 5a brings us to another turning point in the song. The scene appears to be that the Shulamite was sent away from her royal captivity and allowed to return to her country sweetheart in their homelands of the north. **Apple tree:** The two lovers passed the place where they first encountered their love for one another. Under the apple tree her beloved had first awakened her love for him. **Seal:** This would be a sign of their commitment to one another. It would be a promise that would eventually lead to matrimony and the consummation of their marriage. **Jealousy:** Since her commitment to her beloved would have given rise to jealousy if he were approached by another woman, then she knew that his jealousy had certainly been aroused by her presence with the king. **The Lord:** This is the only time the word Yahweh is used in the book. The Shulamite affirmed that God was on her side. She had been

taken from her beloved. Justice would be that she return to the one whom she had made lifetime commitments. **All the substance of his house:** Solomon sought to gain the Shulamite's love with wealth and royalty. But true love cannot be purchased with the wealth of a king. True love is neither purchased nor relished by things of this world.

REMEMBRANCES

8:8,9 The brothers may have assumed that there would be an imminent marriage of the Shulamite with her beloved. They also had a younger sister who was young and immature. **If she is a wall:** That is, if she too, as her sister, resists the advances of unworthy suitors, then the brothers would arrange a wedding for her. But when she grew into womanhood, and became too eager for intimate relationships, or weak in resisting the advances of men, then they as her brothers, would protect her. If she did not build a wall of resistance for herself, they would build it for her.

8:10-12 The Shulamite was a wall of resistance to all the advances that could be offered by this world. She was treated with dignity, offered wealth and fame by a king, and yet she maintained her purity and integrity. Her maturity was manifested in the fact that she did not succumb to anything that would rob her of her purity, or cause her to forsake her commitments to her beloved. **Solomon has a vineyard:** If we understand this metaphorically, then the Shulamite was saying that Solomon had many wives (vineyards). He had many keepers (maidens, or concubines) of these vineyards. The Shulamite would not be added to his collection of women. She thought more of herself than to be a conquered prize of royalty and wealth. **My own vineyard:** The Shulamite resisted being one of the vineyards of Solomon, and thus she was her own woman as a vineyard for her beloved.

REWARD OF LOVE

8:13 The beloved continued the thoughts of the preceding words of the Shulamite. She was his vineyard.

8:14 The response to the voice of the beloved was that

the Shulamite sought to consummate their marriage. This is the conclusion to true love that had faced strong trials. The song thus closes with a theme that true love may pass through many struggles, but it is discovered to be true and faithful when its outcome is in the marriage for life of those who have committed themselves to one another. Once two are married, however, there will continue to be struggles and possible outside attacks against their union. Two people must realize that the love they had for one another when they were first married will grow stronger. However, in order for it to grow stronger the two must work to develop their marriage in the Lord. If both are in the Lord, then they have a reason for which to live in harmony with one another, as well as a common ground on which to stand united in marriage.

Commentary by Roger E. Dickson

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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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