

Okay, what is Solomon doing here?

Last time we talked about how this is the *Song of Songs* –
 and we talked a little about how this fits into the three Solomonic books
 (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs) –
 but as some of you noted afterwards,
 Solomon is something of an odd character when it comes to marriage!

After all, according to 1 Kings 11:3 Solomon had seven hundred wives of royal birth,
 and three hundred concubines.

I’m willing to grant that there may be some hyperbole here!

In order to marry 700 wives of royal birth,
 he would have had to marry every princess on the planet!

But the point is obvious:

Solomon married a lot of foreign women –
 and so if you think of Song of Songs as Solomon’s love song to his wife,
 then it sounds really hollow!

And if the bride is a common Israelite,
 then she would be one of the concubines –
 in which case the Song of Songs would be rather painful!

But Solomon is probably *not* the poet.

If he is, then it would make the most sense to say that this is Solomon at the end of his life,
 using himself somewhat ironically – as a *bad* example.

But when it says the “Song of Songs which is *of* Solomon” –
 that does not mean “by” Solomon.

It could just as easily mean “to” Solomon or “for” Solomon – or even “about” Solomon.

The point is that when you sing this Song, you should be *thinking* about Solomon –
 but not thinking about his thousand wives –
 rather, thinking about his splendor and glory.

The poetess is using the image of Solomon because Solomon is Israel’s most glorious king
 And in every wedding – and in every marriage –
 the bridegroom becomes a king for a day –
 and at least for his bride, he becomes a glorious king for the rest of their life!

Notice what she calls him.

“My beloved” (2:8) – and used 26 times in the Song of Songs!

The only other use of this exact form is in Isaiah 5:1 –

“Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard...”

We saw last time that the Bride speaks of how she has not tended her own vineyard.

Her vineyard lies unkept.
Her fruitfulness resides in him.

And so:

1. The Bride Remembers the Voice of Her Beloved (2:8-17)

Verses 8-17 form a single poem,
framed by the reference to the beloved as a gazelle or young stag
leaping over the mountains –
though at the beginning of the poem he is *gazing* –
and at the end of the poem he is *gazing*.

Five times in this poem, she refers to him as “my beloved.”
Twice in her opening lines – verses 8-9,
twice in her closing lines – verses 16-17,
and once in her memory of his sweet words!

Likewise, in her memory of his words,
there is a doubled call:
“Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away” (v10, v13)

a. My Beloved – the Stag Leaping over the Mountains (v8-9)

⁸ *The voice of my beloved!*

*Behold, he comes,
leaping over the mountains,
bounding over the hills.*

⁹ *My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.*

*Behold, there he stands
behind our wall,
gazing through the windows,
looking through the lattice.*

First, she sings of the voice of her beloved!

“Behold, he comes...”

“leaping over the mountains” – used in Isaiah 52:7 –

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news.”

And the leaping is found in Psalm 18 – “by you I leap over a bull”

(bull-jumping being a well-known royal sport in the ancient world).

but since bull-jumping is a rather strange occupation,
many thought it meant “leaping over a wall.”

Well, the Davidic king leaps over walls (or bulls) by the power of God.

And the bride’s beloved leaps over mountains –

and finds himself “behind our wall” gazing through the windows –
looking through the lattice.

Her beloved has bounded over hills and leapt over mountains to reach his bride!
And the way that he gazes at her melts her heart!

Men (particularly married men!) – practice this!
Both the bounding and the gazing!!

What mountains will you leap to be with your bride?
And how do you gaze at her?
If you will not gaze, then you most likely will not graze!

After all, Christ looks upon us with love.
And his loving gaze is joined together with his loving words,
as he says to us:

b. My Beloved Sings Love Songs to Me! (v10-15)

¹⁰ *My beloved speaks and says to me:*

*“Arise, my love, my beautiful one,
and come away,*

¹¹ *for behold, the winter is past;
the rain is over and gone.*

¹² *The flowers appear on the earth,
the time of singing^[d] has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.*

¹³ *The fig tree ripens its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.*

In one sense, this is a song of spring –
rejoicing in the coming of flowers and fruit.
But it is more particularly a song of the New Creation –

You have been singing Andrew Deliyannides’ songs long enough
that you should be able to see this immediately!

What does it mean that the fig tree ripens!
The vines are in blossom! (Habakkuk 3)

The exile is over!

The voice of the LORD speaks tenderly to his people!
I was going to say that everything in this passage *screams* return from exile –
except this passage doesn’t scream!
It sings – it dances – it frolics with joy and delight –
that the winter is past – the rain is over and done –

the early rain and the latter rain (from Joel 2:23)
the rain that brings forth fruitfulness and life.

Verses 13-15 then play and dance together:

*Arise, my love, my beautiful one,
and come away.
14 O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the crannies of the cliff,
let me see your face,
let me hear your voice,
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.*

Remember that this is her memory – or her imagination –
of what he would say if he would come to her and call her to leave her hiding place,
and go with him.

*15 Catch the foxes^[e] for us,
the little foxes
that spoil the vineyards,
for our vineyards are in blossom.”*

Verse 15 is admittedly obscure –
but plainly the foxes (or jackals) are spoiling the vineyards –
and so the beloved and his bride call on someone to catch the foxes,
since the vineyards are in blossom!
And the time has come for lovemaking!

c. My Beloved Is Mine and I Am His (v16-17)

You may recall that in verse 2, the beloved called his bride “a lily among brambles.”
Well, now the bride rejoices that:

*16 My beloved is mine, and I am his;
he grazes [literally, ‘pastures his flock’] among the lilies.*

The mutual possession of the bride and the groom –
“My beloved is mine, and I am his”
echoes the language of “I will be their God and they shall be my people.”

Bernard of Clairvaux wisely points out that we should not try too hard to “understand” this:
“Affect has its own language.” (quoted in Jenson, 36).
And that language is found as she whispers in his ear:

*17 Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee,*

*turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle
or a young stag on cleft mountains.*

Do not worry about whether you “understand” this.
Do you understand the love that you feel for your beloved?
Then love God – and *be loved* by him!

And indeed, *pursue him!*
with the same relentless passion of the bride in chapter 3!

2. The Bride Pursues Her Beloved (3:1-5)

*On my bed by night
I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not.
² I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.
I sought him, but found him not.
³ The watchmen found me
as they went about in the city.
“Have you seen him whom my soul loves?”*

*⁴ Scarcely had I passed them
when I found him whom my soul loves.
I held him, and would not let him go
until I had brought him into my mother's house,
and into the chamber of her who conceived me.
⁵ I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the does of the field,
that you not stir up or awaken love
until it pleases.*

What’s going on here?

Some people say that the end of chapter 3 is obviously the wedding scene –
so everything before the end of chapter 3 is part of “courtship.”
But at the beginning of chapter 3 the woman chases the man down
and brings him into the chamber where she was conceived –
with very obvious intentions!

So some interpreters resort to the idea that this is a dream sequence –
in which her beloved metamorphoses into Solomon at the end of chapter 3.

Augustine once said that if you are interpreting a passage of scripture,
but your interpretation does not lead to love for God or neighbor –
then you have not understood the passage rightly!

I'm sorry, but it's not clear to me how a bizarre dream produces love for God or others.
"You should have bizarre dreams too!" (Huh?)

But the only reason to call this a dream is if you have first decided
that the pair is not yet married, and so therefore they shouldn't be this intimate yet!

But it seems abundantly clear that the pair has been making love since the start of the book!
in chapter 1 – where her beloved brings her into his chambers –
in chapter 2:6 – where his left hand is under her head, and his right arm is embracing her
at the end of chapter 2 – where he is "grazing among the lilies" –
and now here in 3:1-2 – where she expects to find him in her bed!

So let me say this clearly:
This is not a dream.

She wakes up, expecting to find beside her him whom my soul loves – her husband –
but he is gone.
So she rises and seeks him – but she cannot find him.

The watchmen found her wandering the city streets –
and she pleads with them,
"Have you seen him whom my soul loves" (a phrase repeated three times),
and "scarcely had I passed them
when I found him whom my soul loves."

Who is "he whom my soul loves"?
Again – you've been singing Andrew's work –
the great Shema – Deuteronomy 6,
"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, *with all your soul*,
and with all your strength."

Throughout the OT, the watchmen are the prophets.
How should God's people seek the LORD?
By listening to the prophets – the watchmen who point her to her God!
But then as she passes them,
she finds him whom her soul loves –
and she held him and would not let him go

"until I had brought him into my mother's house,
and into the chambers of her who conceived me."

Some people have thought that there are no references to babies in the Song –
but this verse plainly connects what happens in the bedroom
with what happens nine months later!

Does that describe your passionate quest for the living God?

Because it's only when you pursue *God* like this
that it makes sense to pursue your husband like this!

I think too often we assume that it's the man's job to pursue.
The woman is to be passive.

What??!!

That's *not* what the Bible says!

Ruth wasn't passive in her pursuit of Boaz!

And certainly Song of Songs emphasizes the bride's pursuit of her husband.

Yes, there is a way in which "we love because he first loved us."

In chapter 1, verse 4, the king "brought me into his chambers."

But from the moment that God first called us –

we are called to pursue him with all our heart, soul, and strength.

And therefore, wives, pursue your husband!

Grab on to him and drag him to your mother's bedroom...

But remember who we are talking to!

We are talking to the virgin daughters of Jerusalem!

In verse 5, we come back to our refrain (which we saw first in 2:7) –

⁵ *I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the does of the field,
that you not stir up or awaken love
until it pleases.*

The bride has described her beloved as a gazelle or young stag –

now she once again adjures the daughters of Jerusalem

by the *female* gazelles or does of the field

not to stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

It is probably not an accident that "female gazelle" is tsebaoth –

which is almost identical to "Sabaoth" – the name of God for "Lord of hosts"

and "does of the field" is *ayelot hassadeh* in Hebrew –

which both looks and sounds an awful lot like El-Shaddai (God Almighty)

The bride calls her friends – the virgin daughters of Jerusalem –

to swear an oath that they will wait until their wedding day.

Why wait?

If sex is so awesome – why wait?

While other parts of scripture give other reasons –

Song of Songs focuses on one reason:

because if you want the *awesomeness* – there’s only one way to get it!

It takes long, hard work to get this good at lovemaking!

It takes practice!

It takes diligence – persistently pursuing the same man for a lifetime.

(Remember, this is the *bride* saying this to her friends!)

[It’s a good thing for a husband to pursue his wife, too –

we did see him bounding over mountains to get over the wall...

but here it’s just the bride talking to her girlfriends!]

And finally tonight, we see the Glory of Solomon.

3. The Glory of Solomon (3:6-11)

⁶ *What is that coming up from the wilderness*

like columns of smoke,

perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,

with all the fragrant powders of a merchant?

⁷ *Behold, it is the litter^[a] of Solomon!*

Around it are sixty mighty men,

some of the mighty men of Israel,

⁸ *all of them wearing swords*

and expert in war,

each with his sword at his thigh,

against terror by night.

Verse 6 says, literally, “Who is she coming up from the wilderness.”

The pronoun and the verb are very obviously feminine.

Now, the reason for the ESV’s translation

is because the noun translated “litter” is also a feminine noun.

But the fact that this is the “litter of Solomon”

does not mean that Solomon is *in it*.

In fact, it is the *bride* who is “she” who comes up from the wilderness,

“like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
with all the fragrant powders of a merchant.”

I like Douglas O’Donnell’s description of this:

“The Rolls-Royce Limited meets the ark of the covenant!

It’s a spectacular (almost theophanic) sight!” (69)

Where do you find this language of “columns of smoke”?

Joel 2:30 – “and I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth,
blood and fire and columns of smoke”

as Joel speaks of the great and terrible Day of the LORD!

And think of the smoke that wreathed Mt. Sinai in the Exodus (Ex 19),

or the smoke that filled the temple in the call of Isaiah (Is 6) –

and of course when you add the myrrh and frankincense,
you realize that you have a picture of the kingdom of priests –
God’s people, Israel, coming through the wilderness –

accompanied by sixty mighty men (doubled the number of David’s 30).

God is bringing his people back from exile!

Isaiah had spoken of kings carrying Israel back from Exile on their shoulders,
but here they are returning in Solomon’s carriage.

⁹ *King Solomon made himself a carriage^[b]
from the wood of Lebanon.*

¹⁰ *He made its posts of silver,
its back of gold, its seat of purple;
its interior was inlaid with love
by the daughters of Jerusalem.*

¹¹ *Go out, O daughters of Zion,
and look upon King Solomon,
with the crown with which his mother crowned him
on the day of his wedding,
on the day of the gladness of his heart.*

The bride describes the wedding of Solomon in all its pageantry –

Solomon’s bride brought to him with all his mighty men protecting her!
But the bride of the *Song* sings about Solomon in order to compare her beloved
with the pomp and ceremony of the King.

Some would say that this is an ironic comparison –

“my beloved is better than Solomon” –
and I have some sympathy with this view.

After all, as we saw at the beginning, Solomon had a *thousand wives!*
He deserved some mockery!

But the bride does not seem to be mocking Solomon.

She *is* comparing her man to Solomon –
but she is saying that he is as Solomon *should have been*.

The glory of Solomon, after all, is the glory of the King of Kings and the Holy of Holies.

It is only fitting that the Song of Songs should display that glory!

Certainly this becomes most gloriously evident as

Jesus brings his people to himself for the glorious Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

But *therefore* it also speaks to us of how *our weddings* should have this glorious moment when the bride is brought to her King – fittingly escorted by her friends and relations.

It's okay that we do this all at the church building nowadays – but it was equally fitting when the bride got dressed at her parents' home, and then came in a festal procession to the church building.

The point is that the bride and the groom reflect the glory of Christ and his church!

But finally, what do you do with all this romantic pursuit and frivolity? It sounds like courtship and honeymoon – not the staid normalcy of married life! “Staid normalcy?” (there's a scary phrase!)

I will grant that some of the *silliness* that characterizes courtship should not continue after marriage – but marriage should include lots of romantic pursuit – and dare I say the *frivolity* of love!

But part of my reason for suggesting that this is talking about “ordinary” married love is because of the vocabulary of the Song:

“the beams of our house” (1:17)
“he stands behind our wall” (2:9)
“our vineyards are in blossom” (2:15)

All of this language of “our” house, our wall, our vineyard – suggests that they possess things together. And even if these are metaphors for their bodies – they possess one another!

Which is precisely the point in 2:16 –
“My beloved is mine, and I am his”

And yes, this is precisely the language of God's covenant with his people. I will be their God and they will be my people.

And so therefore *married lovemaking* is precisely what the Song of Songs is all about – and that is true regardless of whether you are married!

You are called to this passionate pursuit of Christ – your Beloved.