



Sunday School Lesson for February 12, 2004.
Released on February 12, 2004.

Study Song of Solomon 2:8-13; 7:10-12; 8:6,7. A Time For Love
Questions and answers below.

TIME: about 970-960 B.C.
PLACE: Jerusalem

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

8 The voice of my beloved! Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

9 My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice.

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

11 For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;

12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

13 The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Song of Solomon 7:10-12

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

11 Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.

12 Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves.

Song of Solomon 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.

Lesson Background

Here is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful books in the Bible. How sad that it is so often neglected. Many pass by the Song of Solomon confused or embarrassed by

the simple beauty of its words. This ought not to be, for all Scripture is authored by the blessed Holy Spirit; and this song is no exception.

Characteristics. The Song of Solomon exhibits all the characteristics of the best Hebrew poetry. The Song abounds in imagery drawn from both country and urban life, and its language is full of vitality.

The scenes are not always chronological. Some paragraphs are obviously retrospective, and others clearly look ahead in anticipation. Whether Solomon himself understood the import of his writing we do not know. It is clear to all who read the book that the Holy Spirit intends it as a testimony to the true nature of love.

Synopsis. The Song is told primarily from the standpoint of a Shulamite maiden. She is a member of a family in Shunem; her father is apparently deceased; and her brothers have become responsible for the maintenance of the family. Their livelihood is obtained from shepherding flocks and caring for vineyards.

In the course of her shepherding duties the maiden meets and falls in love with a young shepherd. The brothers do not approve and attempt to hinder any further development of their relationship.

One day the maiden sets out to visit the countryside. On her way she meets King Solomon with his entourage returning from an excursion to his northern territories. Solomon is struck by her great beauty and remands her to the care of the ladies of his court. She cannot escape and is eventually taken to Solomon's splendid palace at Jerusalem.

Solomon attempts every conceivable ploy to win her affection. She refuses him consistently because her thoughts are filled with the memory of her absent shepherd-lover. She cannot forget her vow of love to him. Solomon eventually realizes that she is not to be his and, impressed by her devotion to her shepherd, he grants her permission to return home.

The Shulamite maiden is overjoyed. She immediately sends word to the beloved to come and take her back to her family and the land of their betrothal. The Song ends with a beautiful description of their homeward journey.

Purpose. The Song furnishes the saints of all ages with the language of holy love and challenges the saints of every dispensation to an ardent devotion and fidelity in the presence of God's love. Such loyalty and devotion to God and mate are aptly illustrated by the conduct of the Shulamite maiden in the "Song of songs" (1:1).

Authorship. The Solomonic authorship has at times been denied. However, there are many interesting internal arguments for the authorship of Solomon. There is the reference to the horses in Pharaoh's chariots at 1:9, which compares to a similar reference in I Kings 10:28, 29. Also, the towns mentioned in the Song of Songs point to a time when there was a single kingdom in Israel, which would have been the case prior to the death of Solomon. Solomonic authorship was universally accepted in ancient times, and no convincing reasons have been advanced to warrant its rejection.

Interpretation. Approaches to the interpretation of the book have varied. Historically, four approaches have held prominence:

1. **Allegorical.** This method of interpretation treats biblical narratives in a nonliteral manner. One looks beyond the literal meaning of the words and constructs new and more spiritual meanings. Jewish scholars who followed this approach saw in the Song a message relating the special union between Jehovah and Israel. Many of the early church fathers employed this approach and found in the Song a message of God's love for the church.

2. **Typical.** This view sees in the Song a portrayal of the love between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the church, His bride.

3. Literal. This view sees the book as a collection of love songs or poems that is designed to extol human love.

4. Dramatic. This approach suggests that the Song is a drama. Solomon has fallen in love with the Shulamite who has already given her heart to her shepherd. This view is advocated by Franz Delitzsch and is essentially the view espoused in this commentary.

The Beginnings of Love Described.
The Beloved's Approach
(Song of Solomon 2:8-13)

1. Who is conversing in the following verses?

The speakers in these verses are the Shulamite and the court ladies. In 1:6 the maiden had spoken of the ill treatment she received from her brothers. She now informs the court ladies of the reason for that treatment. She describes the coming of the shepherd as the surefooted stag or gazelle, covering difficult mountain terrain. No obstacle could keep him from his love. Soon he is behind the wall; he looketh forth at the windows. He approaches the wall of the village, and from there he moves to the windows where she beholds him peering through the lattice. In Eastern lands windows are unglazed and of latticework so closely set together that a person outside cannot see what is taking place within, yet anyone inside can see all that goes on outside.

2. How did the Shulamite describe her shepherd-lover's invitation to get her to come out to him (v. 10)?

The Shulamite here records the words of the shepherd. He urges her to come with him to enjoy the charm of the fields, for winter and the rains have ceased. He addressed her as "my love" and "my fair one." These were terms of endearment used to reveal his feelings for her. The Hebrew word that has been translated "love" means a close female associate and probably could be translated "darling." The word for "fair one" means beautiful. He knew in his mind how deeply he loved her, and he communicated it clearly.

3. What was the reason did the shepherd give for wanting to go on a country walk (vs. 11-13)?

The reason the shepherd gave for wanting to go on a country walk with his lover was the coming of spring. After the long, hard winter it would be a refreshing time for them to enjoy the new beginnings taking place all around them. Winter in Israel is the rainy season. It is followed by the summer droughts. Spring sees new life budding everywhere as nature itself comes alive after the cold and rainy months. Everything appears to be new and fresh, giving the landscape a whole new appearance. It is a time to be enjoyed.

Falling in love is much like the beginning of spring. When God brings into our life that very special person, everything around us takes on a new look and feeling. In both situations our hearts should respond with praise to our loving Lord, who wants us to enjoy both the changing of seasons each year and the joy of finding the lifelong companion He brings our way.

The singing mentioned is the singing of birds (v. 12), which are not heard during the winter months. Mention of the "turtle" is a reference to the turtledove, which is indicative of all the migrating birds that return following the winter. Everyone who lives in northern areas understands the significance of the return of migrating birds and the encouragement they provide as we look forward to the summer months. The shepherd too wanted to enjoy that encouragement.

Fig trees are among the first to begin to produce in the spring. Mention of the good smell that comes from the newly budded grapevine (v.13) lets us know that along with the sights and sounds already mentioned, spring had brought about delightful smells. Once again the shepherd invited his lover to come away with him (v. 10), giving them an opportunity to privately enjoy the fresh air of spring together.

The Shulamite's Commitment (Song of Solomon 7:10-12)

4. How did the Shulamite verbalize her final rejection of Solomon's advances (Song of Solomon 7:10)?

The Shulamite here verbalizes her final rejection of Solomon's advances (vs. 1-9). "His desire is toward me." The king is only an intruder on a heart that has already been pledged to another. She loves the shepherd because she realizes his deep love for her (I John 4:19).

5. How did the Shulamite express her devotion to the shepherd (vs. 11,12)?

At this juncture in the Song the shepherd has once again moved on the scene. The maiden, overjoyed at his presence, urges a hasty withdrawal from the presence of Solomon and his retinue. "Let us." The open air of the fields would be deeply appreciated after the stifling moral atmosphere of the king's court. The villages are much to be preferred to the noise and business of Jerusalem.

"Let us." Togetherness is the theme of this verse. Let us together visit those places upon which my thoughts have centered much in these days of captivity. She longs for the vineyards and the blossoms. Once returned to the security and beauty of this natural sanctuary, she promises him suitable tokens of her love.

Another reason for hastening to that beautiful place is the *duda'im*, or love apples. Many luscious fruits (v. 13) that have delighted their tastebuds await them once again in that final place of memory. This may refer in poetic language to her longing for the day when they shall be united in marriage.

The Bond of Love (Song of Solomon 8:6,7)

6. Who asks "who is this" (Song of Solomon 8:5)?

"Who is this . . . ?" Convinced that the Shulamite's heart, indeed, belongs to another, Solomon dismisses her. In this verse we hear the response of the local villagers as the couple approaches their beloved home. I raised thee up under the apple tree (lit., I awakened your love here under this apple tree). Once again on familiar ground, their hearts are lifted to reminiscence. Here is the tree under which

the shepherd had won her heart. There, beneath that tree, her mother had consented to their betrothal.

Commitment Desired. 8:6-7.

7. What was she indicating in telling him to put her as a seal over his heart and arm (v. 6)?

The maiden, mindful of what passion can do to a man, urges a commitment to utter faithfulness from the shepherd. She admonishes him to set her as a seal, i.e., to indelibly imprint her upon his heart and his arm like the imprinting of a seal that forever ratifies a contract. She covets a settled assurance of his unwavering love. Her love for him is like a raging flame and is as strong as death. It is utterly irreversible. No earthly influence can destroy or drown her love for him. It cannot be bought, for it is a spontaneous gift; and all she asks is the love of his heart and the strength of his arm for abiding protection.

8. What was her final evaluation of love (v. 7)?

The Shulamite's final evaluation was that love is priceless. If a rich man would offer everything he had in exchange for love, it would not be close to enough. The word translated "contemned" (v. 7) means to disrespect. An offer of great wealth would be despised in light of how valuable true love really is.

The proof of unbending morality is offered in verses 11,12. Solomon had offered her a large vineyard in Baal-hamon if she would but compromise herself with him. The vineyard was so large that he let it out to a number of tenants, and each of them paid a thousand shekels annually and had two hundred shekels left for himself. She was truly a virtuous woman, and now she asks her brothers for the vineyard that she reasons ought to belong to her. Solomon is welcome to all the revenue and tenants he wants, but she is content with a small vineyard as a dowry and the companionship of her shepherd-lover.

Such expressions remind us again that the love of a spouse is beyond comprehension. All who are blessed with one should praise the Lord continually.

CONCLUSION

Thus the Song ends with an unparalleled testimony to the heights of joy that can be achieved by both male and female through the practice of absolute fidelity to the commands of Yahweh and the seal of marital love. Nowhere else in all the Scriptures is the character of faithful love so carefully described, a love that has its base in God's love for all of His children in every era of redemptive history, a love which is only possible for those who realize that both the ability to love and the objects to be loved are gifts from the Lord.

This is God's blueprint for married people. When two believers follow this blueprint and express their love for one another in such a deep and unshakable fashion, it can be a powerful testimony to others around them of the love of God and His commitment to His own.

PRAYER

Gracious Father, You have given us in the Scriptures very clear standards for sexual purity and for marriage. Give us the wisdom and the strength to live up to standards, and to teach them to our children and our friends. May we be bold in this, because eternity is at stake. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Our lesson next week deals with the need for courageous Christians in our secular world. Study background Scripture: Esther 3, 4.

I hope you enjoyed this week's lesson !

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