

The Redemption of Eroticism – Commentary on the Song of Solomon

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Introduction

The Bible is Christianity's source book for all of the issues of life. Some subjects are treated in much more detail than others, and many topics require elaboration and further study. Its content was written between 2,000 and 3,500 years ago, so we must consider how these ancient writing apply to our current culture, which is obviously very different from that era. But human nature has not changed, and the underlying principles stated in the Bible are timeless, applying to all people everywhere.

One of the most basic aspects in human existence is male/female relationships and the associated issues—marriage, parenting, family life, and so on—and at the core of these is our sexual nature. God is the designer of the human mind and body, and He is the one who created sexuality. We should therefore expect that the Bible would address this essential issue.

Sexuality and male/female relationship issues are indeed addressed in many Biblical passages. However, tucked away in the middle of the Old Testament is a small book called the “Song of Solomon,” which not only teaches, but also truly celebrates romance and eroticism. This book has long been a classic, but throughout history, its content has been spiritualized and allegorized, and therefore its romantic and erotic nature has largely been hidden. This was done for a variety of reasons, but all of them boil down to a discomfort with sexual expression. See the following internet resource for a full treatment of the reasons for this discomfort:

www.unholygrailbook.com/DocReligionAndEroticism.asp

Many have attempted to explain and comment on the Song of Solomon, but most of these commentaries are from an allegorical perspective, and have eliminated the romantic and erotic aspects, which I believe to be the book's primary meaning.

The book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible, tells the story of the creation of the world. After creating each element, God paused and proclaimed that it was “good.” It is my contention that the Song of Solomon is essentially an extension of the Genesis concepts of the intrinsic goodness of sexuality, along with advice to guide us in its proper expression, so that we may fully realize our potential as men and women and have satisfying and lifelong relationships with the opposite sex.

If God designed human beings to be sexual, and to be capable of eroticism and orgasmic delight in the appropriate context, who are we, and who any religious or government authority, to call these things bad or evil? Let us instead attempt to wash

away all of the negative accretions that have tarnished and debased this important part of our essence, and return to the Garden of Eden. That is what The Song of Solomon is all about.

Principles of Biblical Interpretation

One of the most basic principles of Biblical interpretation is that the main meaning and significance of any Biblical text is found in the plain sense of what it says, and in particular, what it was intended to say to the people to whom it was written. It is fairly certain that The Song was written by King Solomon himself (see the Question of Authorship paragraph below), the greatest king in Israel's history (ca. 1000-928 BC). We do not know exactly when this work was written or who its original audience was, although it was likely addressed to the Israelite nation at large.

If the Song is read without seeking any deeper meaning, it is obvious that this story/poem was written to celebrate romance and sex in the context of an appropriate relationship. The book is essentially a poetic continuation of the type of relational advice that Solomon wrote in his other books—Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The Song, however, was written in poetry and figures of speech, because of the subject of this advice is romance, marriage, sexuality, and eroticism. In other words, Solomon wished to give very specific and graphic sexual advice, but to do it in a tactful and elevating manner, where it would be hidden from the young but understood and appreciated by adults.

Question of Authorship

In regard to the authorship of this book, it is fairly certain that Solomon himself wrote it. Following are evidences for this:

- The book opens with a statement of authorship—"the Song of Songs which is Solomon's" meaning that he wrote it and that it was his best song.
- Solomon also wrote Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which are classed as "wisdom literature." The book of Proverbs also contains the writings of others authors: King Hezekiah (ca. 715-687 BC), a descendent of Solomon, commissioned a man to collect Solomonic proverbs for chapters 25-29; a man named Agur was the author of chapter 30; and a man named Lemuel authored chapter 31. Solomon may also have used other sources in addition to writing proverbs of his own, but there is no reason to doubt Solomon's authorship of chapters 1-24. A careful reading of the Song would conclude that it is of the same genre as Proverbs, albeit in poetic form, as some of the same euphemisms used in the other Solomonic writings are also used here. For example, Proverbs 5:15-23 contains advice to young men, telling them to avoid prostitutes and other men's wives, and have sex with their own wife instead:

My son, give attention to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding that you may observe discretion and your lips may reserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and smoother than

oil is her speech. But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house, or you will give your vigor to others and your years to the cruel one. Strangers will be filled with your strength and your hard-earned goods will go to the house of an alien; and you groan at your final end, when your flesh and your body are consumed, and you say, “How I have hated instruction, and my heart spurned reproof! I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to my instructors! I was almost in utter ruin in the midst of the assembly and congregation.”

Drink water from your own cistern, and fresh water from your own well. Should your springs be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love. For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress, and embrace the bosom of a foreigner?

The terms “water,” “cistern,” “well,” “spring,” “fountain,” “hind,” and “doe,” all of which refer to a woman and to her body in the Proverbs text above, are also used in The Song.

- The Song generally comes from the Solomonic period in history and was included in all versions of the Torah, in the section known as “the writings.” Some scholars have disputed Solomonic authorship for the wisdom writings, especially Ecclesiastes, citing linguistic anomalies. However, the dispute is not convincing enough to cause any serious doubt. All other factors, including evidence of authorship in the text itself, as well as long-standing Jewish tradition, points to Solomon being the main author/compiler of all three works.
- The rabbinical opposition to a literal interpretation for the book, as described above, would also argue for its authorship by Solomon himself, who along with King David, his father and the author of most of the Psalms, were the two most highly respected kings in the history of Israel. If the book were written by a lesser figure or by an anonymous scribe, its acceptance into the canon of the Torah would then have been much less certain.

Meaning and Interpretation

Most of the Song consists of dialog between a man and a woman, and issues relating to their relationship. At first reading, the story seems strange and disjointed, rather like stream of consciousness writing. Another difficulty is that it is not always clear who the speaker is. This role switches back and forth between various individuals and groups, and it is not always possible to determine exactly who is speaking and who is being spoken to. But in most places this can be inferred from the context and content. For example, the line from chapter one, “may he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,” is obviously the woman speaking about or to the man. After the figures of speech are understood, and the text is considered, the story flows and makes much more sense.

Many others have attempted to comment on the Song of Solomon and develop a structure for it. Some have seen it as a drama or a musical play, others as an extended allegory, but virtually all of the older commentaries treated the book in spiritual and metaphorical terms, in which the male in the story (“the beloved”) represents God or Christ, and the female represents either the nation of Israel or the church.

In contrast to these, the basis of my interpretation and commentary below is that the story is an extended love and sex poem intended to provide guidance and advice for couples (a “romantic and sexual book of Proverbs” if you will), and it covers various stages and issues in a courtship and marriage relationship. It may well have secondary meanings with more theological overtones, but the primary meaning

In addition to the differing interpretations of this book, there is also disagreement about the identity of the central male figure. The shepherd boy/man who is the “beloved” in the story is not identified. Many believe that that the male is Solomon himself, perhaps in an earlier and more innocent period of his life.

Solomon was the king of Israel at the apex of the nations’ power. He had total supremacy; his reign encompassed long periods of peace and prosperity lasting for 40 years; he was reputedly the wisest man in history, as well as being one of the wealthiest; he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines; and he had a huge ego.

In my opinion, however, Solomon is not the lover of the woman in the story. He makes several appearances and perhaps tries to woo her in Song 1:4-2:7, Song 3:6-11, and Song 8:11. He flaunts his wealth and power, but she is in love with her “beloved” and remains true to him. Immediately after each mention of Solomon, the woman returns to contemplating her true lover and extolling his virtues. Therefore in this commentary, Solomon is not the male of the story and instead represents a competitor of the man who is the beloved.

The identity of the girl/woman is equally veiled. There is only one reference that further identifies her—she is designated as a “Shulammite maiden” in Song 5:13. This word is the feminine form of “Solomon,” which comes from the Hebrew word “shalom,” meaning “peace.” Therefore, the woman may have been one of Solomon’s maidens from his court, but not necessarily one of his wives or concubines.

Some have suggested that the woman in the story was Abishag, who was a beautiful Shunammite maiden. Perhaps the use of “Shulammite” to describe the woman was a play on words with “Shunammite.” Abishag became King David’s nurse and servant in the king’s old age, but not his sexual partner. She became further involved in royal politics after the death of King David, and it is possible that the background for the Song was Abishag’s subsequent love for a man other than Solomon.

Near the end of David’s life, Solomon’s brother Adonijah had attempted to be crowned as king, but he had not received his father David’s blessing. Adonijah organized a coronation party for himself, but his party was rudely interrupted by the shouts of another gathering hosted by King David to crown Solomon as king. All of Adonijah’s guests slunk away in fear and embarrassment. Adonijah later stupidly compounded his error by asking Solomon for permission to marry Abishag, the former royal nurse. A marriage to Abishag, who was a royal “concubine,” would have allowed Adonijah to claim the throne.

Solomon forgave Adonijah for his first indiscretion in attempting a premature coronation, but not the second one of asking to marry Abishag. Solomon had seen his

half-brother Absalom almost overthrow their father David's kingdom, and he was not about to allow such a thing to happen again. Therefore, he ordered that Adonijah be killed.

There is no further mention of Abishag after the incident with Adonijah, but she may well have married another man. In his later years, Solomon was perhaps fascinated with Abishag's love for this man and her rejection of the wealth and influence that could have accrued to her if she had been Solomon's wife/concubine and stayed in his court. Perhaps he was feeling jaded with all of his women—Song 5:8 indicates that he had sixty wives and eighty concubines at the time. In any case, if Abishag had married a man other than Solomon and was happy with him, Solomon could have been inspired by and used that relationship as the foundation for the story when he wrote it.

Some may ask, why would Solomon, the great king and expert on romance and sex, write a song/poem in which he was not “the beloved” and the central figure? The answer lays, or may lay, in considering his life and his other writings, especially the book of Ecclesiastes, which he probably wrote near the end of his life. Ecclesiastes has an overall tone of despair and regret—Solomon was a man who had seen it all and done it all, and the book explores his reaction, as well as providing clues to understanding the Song:

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” What advantage does man have in all his work that he does under the sun?

A generation comes and a generation goes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets; and hastening to its place it rises there again. Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns. All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again. All things are wearisome; man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.

I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.

I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves and I had home-born slaves. I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.

Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I

did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.

Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-8, 2:1-11

As he considered his life, Solomon seems to have regretted some of the decisions he had made, particularly concerning women, marriage, children and parenting. He had a huge harem, which, no doubt, had all of the problems of other harems of history—vicious cattiness, competition, lack of love, and a high level of jealousy and political maneuvering. Often this led to civil wars and other forms of conflict between the progeny of the women, with the Biblical story of Absalom and Amnon discussed below serving as a powerful example. Many of Solomon's wives were political marriages from surrounding areas and came as part of treaties and peace agreements. Thus, they had little or no loyalty to Solomon, and many of them probably were never able to sleep with him or even see him, causing further resentment.

Solomon debased the worship of Jehovah in order to allow all of his foreign women to retain their religious customs, for which he was strongly criticized. This also had the practical implication of requiring extensive taxation to support the royal court and the lavish lifestyle demanded by all of his women and their children—like many absentee husbands, Solomon felt compelled to spend large amounts of money in order to buy peace in his house.

There is a cloak of silence over the end of Solomon's reign, and the number of his children is not recorded, but with his many wives and concubines, the total certainly must have been huge. Each of his women would have attempted to protect and promote her own children, causing potentially intense and deadly conflict, as was the case in his father David's succession.

The Bible extensively details such problems in the lives of David's children. Prior to the story of Adonijah discussed above, Amnon, David's firstborn (the son of David's wife Ahinoam) fell in lust with and eventually raped his half-sister Tamar, (daughter of David's wife Maacah). When David failed to punish Amnon for the rape, Tamar's brother Absalom took matters into his own hands and murdered his half-brother. Becoming estranged from his father David and encouraged by others with their own agendas, Absalom eventually led a revolt, almost destroying his own father in a power grab, but wound up hanging from a tree by his hair, and being run through with a sword.

If the last days of Solomon were anything like those of his father David, who had only eight wives in contrast to Solomon's hundreds, the royal palace must have been a place of jealousy, power struggles, treachery, fear, greed, and hatred. Considering the following words that Solomon wrote provides a hint of the relational problems that the king had to deal with:

And I discovered *more bitter than death, the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are chains*. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

Ecclesiastes 7:26

In contrast to the many wives of David and Solomon, Saul, the first king of Israel, had only one, although he had concubines as well. Despite his other problems, Saul was apparently a good father, and all of his children were loyal to him. His son Jonathan, the heir to his throne, had a deep friendship with David, Saul's rival. But in spite of Saul's hatred toward David and his severe criticism of his heir, Jonathan was faithful to his father unto death—all of Saul's sons died with their father in battle.

David did not follow Saul's marital example, and despite David's political popularity, his family life was a shambles. Likewise, Solomon saw what had happened to his father, but no doubt felt that he was wise and smart enough to handle the situation. He let lust and desire for power rule him.

Solomon discovered, however, as have many others before and after him, that marital and family problems are some of the hardest and most intractable of all. Toward the end of his life, issues with his wives and other problems in the realm began to fester. The great king was then beset by both internal and external rebellions at a time when his age had weakened him. He died in a climate of political doubt and unrest, where the people were weary of his heavy-handed rule and eager for change.

After Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam came to the throne, and ironically, Rehoboam's mother was Naamah, an Ammonite woman, and therefore not a Jewess. Solomon had apparently selected and declared Rehoboam to be his successor, hoping to avoid the sticky succession problems that had occurred at the start of his reign. There is no indication as to why Rehoboam was selected or how the other royal offspring were treated, but all the people came together to make Rehoboam king, indicating that Solomon had given the royal mantle explicitly to him. However, it seems that the father failed to give his son any advice on how to handle the politics of the transition.

Prodded by Jeroboam, a man who had long been an enemy of Solomon, the people immediately appealed to the new king for relief from their heavy tax burdens. Being politically immature and not sensing the depth of the unrest, Rehoboam haughtily rejected the people's request, which led to a disastrous revolt in which the nation was permanently split into two parts. Solomon, reputedly the wisest man in history, thus failed to properly instruct and prepare even his own sons, and educate them on the realities of ruling.

One of the most significant verses in Ecclesiastes is in the last chapter, where Solomon says, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth before the evil days come; when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them,' and when the clouds return after the rain." Solomon undoubtedly wrote these words from a deep sense of personal crisis and failure. The crises are not identified, but they were probably a combination of the intractable political, familial, and marital problems that took place at the end of his life, when he had the least amount of energy to deal with them—when the clouds returned after the rain.

For all of his sexual variety, Solomon apparently did not have a woman who truly loved and cared about him, and therefore sex may have been purely copulation, where the relational elements—love, affection, and devotion—were entirely missing. Thus, he may well have written the Song as a catharsis, as the realization dawned on him after he had already married a number of women, that this was not the best way to live.

In my opinion, the unidentified male in The Song is “every man” and the female is “every woman.” Looking at the book from this perspective, Solomon was trying to help people avoid the problems that he had experienced, and to provide wisdom and counsel as to how best to carry on a marital and sexual relationship for both male and female.

Sex has always been a subject of intense interest, but in contemporary society where it is used to sell many things, it is often thought of as being cheap, crass, shameful, trashy and mercenary. But the intent here is for a romantic and sexual relationship that is high and holy in addition to being intensely erotic. Is such a thing possible? It is my contention that this was God’s intention from the beginning, and that the Song of Solomon was written to tell us how to achieve it.

Please see the section following the text of the Song for additional thoughts on interpretation and application.

Individuals involved in the story

The Woman—the Shulammite maiden/girl/woman.

The Man—the shepherd boy/man.

King Solomon.

The Daughters of Jerusalem or Zion—a group of other maidens/women, perhaps maids of the king, or his wives and concubines.

Other groups (soldiers, citizens, queens, concubines, villagers, and guests).

Meaning of various terms used in the story

Beloved—the man in the story.

Come in to—sexual intercourse.

Embrace—the man caressing and hugging the woman, and possibly penetrating her.

Fountain, Spring, Well, and Water—the woman and her body, referring to her capability to refresh and renew a man.

Fruit—yield, benefits, and food; “choice fruits” means satisfaction, including sexual satisfaction.

Garden—the woman’s body, referring to the fact that she is beautiful, pleasant, and possessed by the man.

Gazelle or Young Stag—A virile male buck who chases down and ruts with a doe, and a symbol for the male.

Hind or Doe—A female deer, and symbol for the female.

Little Foxes—problems, issues, and temptations that over time destroy a relationship.

Love—in the context of this story this may mean sex, but probably refers to the total romantic and sexual relationship of the couple.

Mountains and Hill—the high points on a woman’s body when she is lying on her back, i.e., her breasts and mons.

Vineyard—the woman and her body, referring to her capability to satisfy a man in various ways.

Wine—the actual drink as well as a symbol of total romantic/sexual satisfaction and fulfillment.

The above terms have obvious meanings when the text is considered. But other terms are less definitive and may not necessarily apply in the exactly the same way every time they are used. Furthermore, some terms may be meant in a literal rather than a figurative sense, and we have no definite way of knowing which one the author intended. For example, the woman says at one point, “Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick.” The “raisin cakes” and “apples” could refer to the literal foods, to a specific romantic or sexual activity, or both. The following list consists of speculative terms in the story, and possible meanings for them.

Aloes—a spice, meaning unclear.

Apples—possibly a reference to the male or the male member.

Balsam—an ingredient in anointing oil, or possibly semen.

Calamus—a spice, meaning unclear.

Cinnamon—a spice, meaning unclear.

Doves—a reference to the woman’s eyes, perhaps fluttering eyelashes like the wings of a dove.

Figs and Fig Tree—meaning unclear.

Frankincense—a spice, meaning unclear.

Henna Blossoms—unclear, although women often used henna to decorate themselves both for beauty as well as for erotic enticement.

Hill of Frankincense—probably the woman’s mons.

Honeycomb and Honey—sweetness, meaning unclear.

Lebanon—possibly fertility.

Lily of the Valley—a common flower of the field, and may also refer to a crocus, meaning unclear.

Lovesick—possibly aflame with sexual passion.

Mountains of Myrrh—probably the woman’s breasts.

Myrrh—a spice; this word is used fairly often without a clear-cut meaning that can be applied to all instances. In some places it may refer to semen.

Nard and nard plants—a spice, meaning unclear.

Oils and Purified Oil—meaning unclear, although it may refer to the man or woman anointing the other in a romantic/sexual way.

Pomegranate—possibly a symbol of female fertility and/or male virility.

Raisin Cakes—meaning unclear.

Rose of Sharon—a flower from the coastal regions of Israel, meaning unclear.

Saffron—a spice, meaning unclear.

The Song of Solomon

Chapter One

1:1 The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

The best Song of all the ones that Solomon wrote or collected (he supposedly wrote 1,005 songs and perhaps selected this as the best one to include with his other wisdom writings of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes).

1:2 "May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!

The woman expresses her desire to her beloved to kiss her passionately. She may at this point be in the tents or the camp of Solomon, who has taken an interest in her, and she is dreaming of her man.

For your love is better than wine."

She tells him or says of him, "Having a love relationship with you (probably also romance and sex) is better than anything else."

1:3 "Your oils have a pleasing fragrance,
Your name is like purified oil;
Therefore the maidens love you."

The woman compliments her beloved's appearance and heritage, and tells him that other women are attracted to him also.

1:4 "Draw me after you and let us run together!
The king has brought me into his chambers."

Solomon is also attracted to the woman and has brought her into his tent to consider adding her to his harem. But the woman is more interested in her true love, and expresses a desire for him to lead her and run away together.

"We will rejoice in you and be glad;
We will extol your love more than wine.
Rightly do they love you."

The chorus (the daughters of Jerusalem) praises the beloved and his love for the woman (perhaps as opposed to Solomon's lust for the woman).

1:5 "I am black but lovely,

The woman reflects on her own appearance. It doesn't make any difference what her skin color is. As a girl, she could be black, white, or any other color, but she is still beautiful and desirable.

O daughters of Jerusalem,
Like the tents of Kedar,

She could be dark-colored (the "tents of Kedar" were made from the hair of black goats).

Like the curtains of Solomon."

Or she could be a variety of other colors and shades.

1:6 "Do not stare at me because I am swarthy,

White or light-colored women were usually valued more highly than dark-colored ones.

For the sun has burned me.

I have been outside too much without any covering (perhaps meaning that I have been working in the fields or have been too careless with my appearance and femininity).

My mother's sons were angry with me;

Her brothers were angry that she didn't take better care of her appearance. Family members would try to protect their daughters and sisters, and look out for them.

They made me caretaker of the vineyards,

So her brothers disciplined her and gave her other responsibilities. Perhaps the responsibilities are caring for or serving other women (vineyard=woman), so that she would learn beauty and femininity from them.

But I have not taken care of my own vineyard.”

And therefore she has not been able to take care of her own body and beauty as well as she should have.

1:7 “Tell me, O you whom my soul loves,
Where do you pasture your flock,
Where do you make it lie down at noon?
For why should I be like one who veils herself
Beside the flocks of your companions?”

The man is a shepherd, and the woman wants to know where he is during the middle of the day (during the rest period) when no one else is around him. Then she can take her veil off and show him her face, and they can be more intimate with each other (women at that time would veil themselves in the presence of male strangers). She wants to spend time with him, rather than just watch him from a distance and from a crowd of others.

1:8 “If you yourself do not know,
Most beautiful among women,
Go forth on the trail of the flock
And pasture your young goats
By the tents of the shepherds.”

The man (or possibly the chorus) compliments the woman and tells her that she can easily find him – just follow the trail. If the woman doesn't find him, then he will be able to find her.

1:9 “To me, my darling, you are like
My mare among the chariots of Pharaoh.”

Solomon or the man tells her, “you are my woman and you belong to me, even in the midst of all of the other women.” Another possibility is that he tells her that she is like a mare running loose in a group of stallions and being chased by them, and he is attracted by the thought of chasing and capturing her in the same way.

1:10 “Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments,
Your neck with strings of beads.”

The man (or Solomon) compliments the woman's jewelry.

1:11 “We will make for you ornaments of gold
With beads of silver.”

The chorus tells her that they can make more jewelry for her. Perhaps the woman will wear erotic jewelry to please her beloved.

1:12 “While the king was at his table,
My perfume gave forth its fragrance.”

The woman is sitting at the table with Solomon and was sexually attractive to him because of her scent and her manner.

1:13 “My beloved is to me a pouch of myrrh
Which lies all night between my breasts.”

The woman thinks of her man or tells him or that she would enjoy embracing and possibly making love to him all night. Perhaps she is thinking this when she is in Solomon’s tent, and this is what causes her to appear seductive and attractive to Solomon as well.

1:14 “My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms
In the vineyards of Engedi.”

The woman indicated that that her beloved is like refreshment in the desert (like flowers in an oasis). Engedi was a remote oasis, so perhaps this is alluding to getting away to a private place for romance. The reference to “henna blossoms” may also refer to the custom of women decorating their hands and feet with henna for her man’s pleasure as the women (the vineyards) do in Engedi.

1:15 “How beautiful you are, my darling,
How beautiful you are!
Your eyes are like doves.”

The man tells the woman that she is extraordinarily beautiful. Both the man and woman repeatedly compliment each other throughout The Song, emphasizing the important of frequently verbal blessings—telling your partner how beautiful and special they are, and using words to build your partner up. The one receiving the compliment is thus encouraged to become beautiful and special.

1:16 “How handsome you are, my beloved,
And so pleasant!

The woman compliments her man’s appearance and his manner with her.

Indeed, our couch is luxuriant!”

The woman tells her man how lovely their bed is and how ideal it is for love and romance; she could also be referring to how wonderful their relationship is.

1:17 “The beams of our houses are cedars,
Our rafters, cypresses.”

The woman expresses appreciation for the house that her man has built or will build for her and the materials used to make it. She may be contemplating their life together in the future. Alternatively, this may represent the wealth of Solomon that the man will one day inherit or become one with.

Chapter Two

2:1 “I am the rose of Sharon,
The lily of the valleys.”

The woman indicates that she considers herself to be so beautiful and attractive that she herself is a flower. She expresses self-confidence in her own attractiveness, in her femininity, and in her worth as a feminine woman.

2:2 “Like a lily among the thorns,
So is my darling among the maidens.”

The man (or Solomon) tells the woman that she is much more beautiful and attractive to him than other women.

2:3 “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest,

The woman indicates that her man (in contrast to other men) “bears fruit,” i.e., is lovely, attractive, and profitable in contrast to other men (other trees) who are not fruit bearing. A fruit tree in a forest would be rare and would stand out and be obvious.

So is my beloved among the young men

In his shade I took great delight and sat down,

The woman feels protected and sheltered by his love and possibly enjoys being under him in a relational and sexual sense.

And his fruit was sweet to my taste.”

She enjoys the benefits of what her man produces for her.

2:4 “He has brought me to his banquet hall,

The man prepares a banquet for the woman (i.e., an entire life or relationship and not just one simple piece of fruit), or perhaps the man builds a house for the woman where they will feast together. Alternatively, she may be in Solomon’s banquet hall, but thinking instead of her true lover, or perhaps that the true lover will one day become Solomon, and have Solomon’s wealth and power.

And his banner over me is love.”

She enjoys belonging to the man; taking his name and his identity and surrendering her own. This is a powerful phrase, because in seven words it summarizes the concepts of male possession of the woman tempered by love and care, as well as her desire to be possessed in love.

2:5 “Sustain me with raisin cakes,

Refresh me with apples,

Because I am lovesick.”

The woman indicates that she is longing for the man in either a romantic or a sexual way. The “raisin cakes” and “apples” may have a specific romantic or sexual meaning, or may simply refer to the woman’s desire for food to sustain her and her excitement as she contemplates his love for her.

2:6 “Let his left hand be under my head

And his right hand embrace me.”

The woman indicates that she wants to be lying down with her man’s left hand under her head and his right hand caressing and fondling her.

2:7 “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,

By the gazelles or by the hinds of the field,

That you do not arouse or awaken my love

Until she pleases.”

Physical union should be entered into only when the pair is ready to be responsible for their union. When a gazelle (male) takes a hind (female) they will produce offspring, and so a couple must not have intercourse until they are ready for the associated responsibilities of relationship and parenting.

2:8 “Listen! My beloved!

Behold, he is coming,

Climbing on the mountains,

Leaping on the hills!”

The woman hears her man coming and anticipates him searching for her until he finds her. Perhaps he is pursuing/chasing her, or she may simply be anticipating his homecoming.

2:9 “My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag

The woman indicates that her man is virile and strong, and that he desires to have her.

Behold, he is standing behind our wall,
He is looking through the windows,
He is peering through the lattice.”

The man is interested in her, comes to see her, and is wants to see what she is doing. This may refer to his desire to understand her mind and know what she is interested in, and/or him wanting her to follow him and to be caught up with his desires – to be inside her.

2:10 “My beloved responded and said to me,
‘Arise, my darling, my beautiful one,
And come along.’”

The man leads the woman and makes plans to be together and do things with her. This may include plans for their wedding.

2:11 “For behold, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone.”

The man indicates that it is time to get out, build, do things.

2:12 “The flowers have already appeared in the land;
The time has arrived for pruning the vines,
And the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land.”

The man indicates that the flowers are blooming, and it’s time to get out and see them. “Pruning the vines” may be a reference to caring for their current financial needs, making sure that they are prepared for the future, or perhaps an in-depth consideration of their relationship (in preparation for marriage?). The “voice of the turtledove” is the singing of birds, and may be a reference to their wedding.

2:13 “The fig tree has ripened its figs,
And the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance.
Arise, my darling, my beautiful one,
And come along!”

The man indicates that they should go out and enjoy themselves, and he desires to lead her in an exciting romantic and sexual relationship. The “vines in blossom” may be a reference to her body and its loveliness, and a call to marriage. However, the marriage ceremony itself is not described.

2:14 “O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret place of the steep pathway,
Let me see your form,
Let me hear your voice;
For your voice is sweet,
And your form is lovely.”

The man indicates that when they are alone in a “secret place” that he wants the woman to undress for him and show him her body and perhaps for her to tell him that she belongs to him. This may be a reference to their honeymoon.

2:15 “Catch the foxes for us,
The little foxes that are ruining the vineyards,
While our vineyards are in blossom.”

The man indicates they need to eliminate and/or deal with the little irritations and problems that over time can destroy a relationship, so that the vineyards – plural (i.e., possibly the lives of both the man and the woman) will continue to bloom and be attractive.

2:16 “My beloved is mine, and I am his;

The woman indicates that he belongs to her and she belongs to him. This probably means that they are now married.

He pastures his flock among the lilies.”

The woman indicates that the man kisses and intimately caresses her on an ongoing basis and maintains the love relationship through the normal daily events. “Pasturing his flock among the lilies” could refer to some form of sexual caress. On the other hand, this could mean that after the honeymoon, the man now returns to his occupation, and their life flows back into normal channels.

2:17 “Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away,

Turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle

The woman indicates that she wants her man to take her like a stag would take a doe. She wants him to make love to her all night, until it starts getting light outside. Thus she may be stating a desire for their romantic and sexual activities to continue and grow stronger after the initial excitement of the marriage is over, and married life has begun (perhaps by making love all night rather than just for a brief time).

Or a young stag on the mountains of Bether.”

The “mountains of Bether” are rolling hills southwest of Jerusalem and refer to the woman’s breasts and/or body, and the stag (the man) mounting it.

Chapter Three

3:1 “On my bed night after night I sought him

Whom my soul loves;

I sought him but did not find him.”

The woman wanted her man for both companionship and sex. Perhaps he is spending a lot of time away from her and she wants him back again.

3:2 “I must arise now and go about the city;

In the streets and in the squares

I must seek him whom my soul loves.

I sought him but did not find him.”

The woman looks everywhere for him.

3:3 “The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me,

And I said, “Have you seen him whom my soul loves?”

The woman asks other people if they have seen her man.

3:4 “Scarcely had I left them

When I found him whom my soul loves;

I held on to him and would not let him go

The woman is desperately in love with her man.

Until I had brought him to my mother's house,

She brings him home to meet her mother because she is so proud of him.

And into the room of her who conceived me.”

The woman wants her mother’s blessing on their relationship, perhaps so that she also will conceive children by her man, and so that she herself will become a mother.

3:5 “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or by the hinds of the field,
That you will not arouse or awaken my love
Until she pleases.”

Physical union and marriage should be entered into only when the pair is ready to be responsible for their union. When a gazelle (male) takes a hind (female) they will produce offspring, and so a couple must not have intercourse until they are ready for parenthood.

3:6 “What is this coming up from the wilderness
Like columns of smoke,
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
With all scented powders of the merchant?”

Contrast is made here and later with the wealth of Solomon vis-à-vis the simpler lifestyle of the man and his woman, but that the latter are wealthy in a way that Solomon is not and perhaps never can be, because of the depth of their relationship.

3:7 “Behold, it is the traveling couch of Solomon;
Sixty mighty men around it,
Of the mighty men of Israel.”

3:8 “All of them are wielders of the sword,
Expert in war;
Each man has his sword at his side,
Guarding against the terrors of the night.”

Solomon’s guard is necessary because he has so much treasure and so much to lose. In contrast, the man and woman don’t need that kind of expensive protection because the most valuable thing they have is their love and relationship, and no one can take that away from them.

3:9 “King Solomon has made for himself a sedan chair
From the timber of Lebanon.”

3:10 “He made its posts of silver,
Its back of gold
And its seat of purple fabric,
With its interior lovingly fitted out
By the daughters of Jerusalem.”

More details on all of the expensive accoutrements that Solomon has. The reference to his fancy couch may be in contrast to the simpler couch that the woman mentions in 1:16 above. Solomon’s couches where he would make love to his women were much fancier than the man and woman could ever afford. Alternatively, this could be seen as what the man (the beloved) will eventually become or inherit.

3:11 “Go forth, O daughters of Zion,
And gaze on King Solomon with the crown
With which his mother has crowned him

On the day of his wedding,
And on the day of his gladness of heart.”

Solomon had many weddings. He eventually collected seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Perhaps the idea here is to tell people (i.e., “the daughters of Zion”) to carefully compare Solomon’s happiness and “gladness of heart” with that of the man and woman in the story, and then choose for themselves that which is better.

Chapter Four

4:1 “How beautiful you are, my darling,
How beautiful you are!

The man again admires the woman’s beauty, encouraging her to be beautiful for him.

Your eyes are like doves behind your veil;

The man enjoys seeing his woman veiled – the veil causes him to focus on her eyes and to imagine what the rest of her looks like.

Your hair is like a flock of goats
That have descended from Mount Gilead.”

The woman’s hair is very long – all the way down her back. Also, the woman has her hair down, which would be a reference to her sexual availability and desire to make love to him.

4:2 “Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes
Which have come up from their washing,
All of which bear twins,
And not one among them has lost her young.”

The man compliments the woman on her beautiful, white, and healthy teeth – none of them are missing. He even includes a sexual reference when complimenting her teeth.

4:3 “Your lips are like a scarlet thread,
And your mouth is lovely

The man compliments the woman on her lips which are reddened with some form of ancient lipstick, as well as her lovely mouth for kissing and caressing.

Your temples are like a slice of a pomegranate

The woman is, perhaps, blushing behind her veil at this frank and erotic description of her body.

Behind your veil.”

The man compliments the woman’s face behind her veil which he can’t see and is therefore hidden and mysteriously attractive.

4:4 “Your neck is like the tower of David,
Built with rows of stones
On which are hung a thousand shields,
All the round shields of the mighty men.”

The shields indicate coins and jewelry that the woman is wearing representing her dowry, and that she belongs to the man. She may be nude and wearing only a veil and jewelry for his pleasure, because in the following verses he compliments her breasts, and then indicates that he will make love to her.

4:5 “Your two breasts are like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle
Which feed among the lilies.”

The woman is probably nude at this point and the man indicates that the woman's breasts are for his pleasure (he is the gazelle) as well as possibly for nursing the children (fawns) that they will have.

4:6 “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.”

The man indicates that he will “go his way” on the woman, on her breasts (the mountain of myrrh), and her mons (the hill of frankincense). He indicates that he will make love to her all night until the morning comes.

4:7 “You are altogether beautiful, my darling,
And there is no blemish in you.”

The man indicates that the woman's body is totally beautiful and lovely.

4:8 “Come with me from Lebanon, my bride,
May you come with me from Lebanon
Lebanon may be a metaphor for fertility.
Journey down from the summit of Amana,
From the summit of Senir and Hermon,
From the dens of lions,
From the mountains of leopards.”

The meaning of this is unclear, but may mean that the man wants the woman to travel with him and to have some type of together, which could be romantic/sexual adventures or games that they play. The four references to “mountains” may also refer to sexual exploration of her body.

4:9 “You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride;
You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes,
With a single strand of your necklace.”

The man indicates that he is aroused by the woman, by the way she looks at him and wears her jewelry. He appreciates how she makes herself sexually attractive and available to him. The “sister” and “bride” refers to the fact that the woman is both his companion as well as his wife and sex partner (perhaps sex object).

4:10 “How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride!

The man is smitten with the woman's beauty, and perhaps with the depth of her sexual surrender to him. He compliments her on their wonderful romantic and sexual relationship and what a lovely companion she is. See 4:9 for a description of the “sister and bride” references.

How much better is your love than wine,

The man indicates that love, romance, and physical union with her is better than anything else.

And the fragrance of your oils
Than all kinds of spices!”

The man indicates that the charms of his woman are better than all other women and their attractions.

4:11 “Your lips, my bride, drip honey;

The man indicates that he loves kissing the woman and sucking her lips.

Honey and milk are under your tongue,

The man indicates that he enjoys deep kisses and exploring her mouth with his tongue.

And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.”

Perhaps this means that her garments are perfumed and smell fresh like the cedars of Lebanon. However, if Lebanon is a reference to fertility, perhaps he is saying that the perfumes on her garments remind him of their sexual encounters.

4:12 “A garden locked is my sister, my bride,

The man indicates that the woman’s sexual favors are only available to him, that he is her sole partner. See 4:9 for a description of the “sister and bride” references.

A rock garden locked, a spring sealed up.”

The man indicates that he is the only one who can enjoy the garden of the woman’s body and be sexually refreshed from her spring. She is reserved for him.

4:13 “Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates

With choice fruits, henna with nard plants,”

The man indicates that the woman’s body is sweet to possess and partake of and that she is a source of great sensual pleasure. The reference to pomegranates could indicate that the woman is fertile, and the reference to henna could mean that she had decorated her hands and/or feet for him.

4:14 “Nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,

With all the trees of frankincense,

Myrrh and aloes, along with all the finest spices.”

The man celebrates the woman’s sexually intoxicating appearance and aroma.

4:15 “You are a garden spring,

A well of fresh water,

And streams flowing from Lebanon.”

The man indicates that the woman is his “water of life” and the source of sexual refreshment. The water is both flowing (a stream), and still (a well) possibly meaning that the woman is both sexually active and passive in this experience. The “streams from Lebanon” may refer to the fact that the source of sexual refreshment is also related to fertility and the conception of children.

4:16 “Awake, O north wind,

And come, wind of the south;

Make my garden breathe out fragrance,

The woman wants to employ everything she can to make herself and her body attractive to the man. In other words, she uses her creativity to make herself sexually appealing and desirable, so that her body “breathes out fragrance” for him.

Let its spices be wafted abroad

She wants to make sure that he senses her efforts.

May my beloved come into his garden

The woman identifies her body as belonging to the man (she is the garden, and the garden belongs to him), so that her beauty and body are for his benefit.

And eat its choice fruits!”

The woman wants the man to take her fully and enjoy every aspect of her body and sexuality, and their relationship.

Chapter Five

5:1 “I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride;

The man has penetrated the woman and taken possession of her. But here again the man balances his taking of her body and her belonging to him (his garden), with the relational and partnership aspects of the marriage (his sister and bride).

I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam

Myrrh and balsam were ingredients used in preparing anointing oil. This may mean that the man has “anointed” the woman’s womb.

I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;

I have drunk my wine and my milk.”

The man states that he has been fully satisfied with the sexual experiences and has enjoyed her body to the fullest. The references to honeycomb, honey, wine and milk are unclear, but may represent the totality of her sweetness and his satisfaction, and may possibly indicate that he has impregnated her.

“Eat, friends;

Drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers.”

God encourages both the man and the woman to enjoy each other and make full use of the sexual aspects of their relationship. This verse is at the central point—the high point of the story.

^{5:2} “I was asleep but my heart was awake.

A voice! My beloved was knocking:

The woman is asleep, but her man is awake and trying to get her attention.

‘Open to me, my sister, my darling,

My dove, my perfect one!

He may be outside the house, knocking on the door and wanting to be let in, and/or this may be a metaphor for him wanting to enter the woman and asking her to sexually surrender to him.

For my head is drenched with dew,

My locks with the damp of the night.’

The man is outside the house and has been drenched with dew, but alternatively this may mean that he is sexually aroused.

^{5:3} “I have taken off my dress,

How can I put it on again?

I have washed my feet,

How can I dirty them again?”

The woman is already in bed and asleep and doesn’t want to get up to let him in. This is a metaphor for her not wanting to surrender to the man, making excuses, and pushing him away. It may well be a reference to an ongoing and persistent problem with the couple which threatens to drive them apart, as later verses would seem to indicate. The following section alludes to a common problem in marriage where the man wants sex more than the woman does.

^{5:4} “My beloved extended his hand through the opening,

And my feelings were aroused for him.”

The man is outside the door trying to open the lock – a metaphor for caressing the woman and penetrating her with his fingers; eventually the woman is aroused by his actions.

^{5:5} “I arose to open to my beloved;

The woman finally gets up and lets her husband in the house – she prepares to surrender.

And my hands dripped with myrrh,

And my fingers with liquid myrrh,

On the handles of the bolt.”

She works the lock of the door to try to open it. She may have perfume on her hands, or the liquid myrrh may be a metaphor for caressing his member.

5:6 “I opened to my beloved,

The woman opens the door to him, i.e., she sexually surrenders herself.

But my beloved had turned away and had gone!

The woman had initially rejected the man, and had taken so long to come around that the man had interpreted her lack of interest as rejection of him and had left her (or at least had left the bed).

My heart went out to him as he spoke

The woman did not mean to reject the man.

I searched for him but I did not find him;

But the man has gone.

I called him but he did not answer me.”

The man feels that the woman has rejected him and has left her (physically and/or psychologically). The woman calls the man to return and possess her again, but he doesn't respond.

5:7 “The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me,

They struck me and wounded me;

Others (or perhaps the woman's own conscience) discipline the woman and instruct her that she should have made herself available to her man.

The guardsmen of the walls took away my shawl from me.”

Perhaps a reference to the woman's feeling that she should have removed her clothes for the man rather than pushing him away.

5:8 “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,

If you find my beloved,

As to what you will tell him:

For I am lovesick.”

The woman wants to let the man know that she still loves him and wants him to have her. She involves other people in finding her man and helping to restore their relationship.

5:9 “What kind of beloved is your beloved,

O most beautiful among women?

What kind of beloved is your beloved,

That thus you adjure us?”

The other people that she talks to (perhaps her girlfriends) are concerned about the woman and want to know if the man really loves her, or is just using her.

5:10 “My beloved is dazzling and ruddy,

Outstanding among ten thousand.”

The woman tells the others that her man is both handsome and wonderful.

5:11 “His head is like gold, pure gold;

This may be a reference to his facial appearance, or the woman may be indicating that the man has a good head on his shoulders; that he thinks and plans for them and has created a lovely environment for them to live in.

His locks are like clusters of dates

And black as a raven.”

The woman indicates that the man has nice looking hair.

5:12 “His eyes are like doves

Beside streams of water,
Bathed in milk,
And reposed in their setting.”

The woman indicates that her man’s eyes are calm and that he is not violent or abusive.

5:13 “His cheeks are like a bed of balsam,
Banks of sweet-scented herbs;
His lips are lilies
Dripping with liquid myrrh.”

She indicates that her man is a good lover and kisser, and may indicate that he doesn’t have bad breath (myrrh was an ancient remedy for breath problems).

5:14 “His hands are rods of gold
Set with beryl;
His abdomen is carved ivory
Inlaid with sapphires.”

She indicates that her man is valuable, and possibly indicates that he is strong and in shape.

5:15 “His legs are pillars of alabaster
Set on pedestals of pure gold;
His appearance is like Lebanon
Choice as the cedars.”

She indicates that her man has a noble and attractive appearance and demeanor.

5:16 “His mouth is full of sweetness

She indicates that her man says nice things to her.

And he is wholly desirable.

She indicates that she loves all of his aspects.

This is my beloved and this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.”

The woman indicates that she wants her man both as a husband, lover, and as a companion. That is the kind of man he is (i.e., he wants her for a relationship and not just for sex). This extended series of flattering descriptions of the man that the woman makes to her girlfriends are another indication of the value of positive communication.

Chapter Six

6:1 “Where has your beloved gone,
O most beautiful among women?
Where has your beloved turned,
That we may seek him with you?”

The others ask the woman where her man could be found, how they could be restored, and where he wants the relationship to go.

6:2 “My beloved has gone down to his garden,
To the beds of balsam,
To pasture his flock in the gardens
And gather lilies.”

The woman indicates that her beloved has returned to her (to his garden).

6:3 “I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine,
He who pastures his flock among the lilies.”

The woman indicates that they still belong to each other and will restore all aspects of their relationship. The meaning of the phrase “pasture his flock among the lilies” is unclear, but may mean that the man has resumed sexual activities with the woman.

6:4 “You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my darling,
As lovely as Jerusalem,
As awesome as an army with banners.”

The man returns to the woman and again begins to reflect on her beauty and her character. The references to the cities of Tirzah (meaning “delight”) and Jerusalem may mean that the man considers the woman as his “city” and his “territory.”

6:5 “Turn your eyes away from me,
For they have confused me;

The man indicates that the woman is bewitching him with her loveliness by making eyes at him.

Your hair is like a flock of goats
That have descended from Gilead.”

The man indicates that he loves the woman’s long hair that runs all the way down her back. Many of the following comments and compliments by the man are repeated from before, and the implication is that he is rededicating himself to pursuing and possessing her as his original wife, and to renewing their romance and sexual relationship.

6:6 “Your teeth are like a flock of ewes
Which have come up from their washing,
All of which bear twins,
And not one among them has lost her young.”

The man again compliments the woman on her beautiful, white, and healthy teeth – none of them are missing.

6:7 “Your temples are like a slice of a pomegranate
Behind your veil.”

The man again compliments the woman’s face behind her veil which he can’t see and is therefore hidden and attractive.

6:8 “There are sixty queens and eighty concubines,
And maidens without number;”

This may be the number of wives and concubines that Solomon had when the story was written.

6:9 “But my dove, my perfect one, is unique:
She is her mother's only daughter;
She is the pure child of the one who bore her
The maidens saw her and called her blessed,
The queens and the concubines also, and they praised her, saying,”

The man indicates that there are many other attractive women that he could have had. But he has chosen his woman, and that she is the one who will truly belong to him.

6:10 “Who is this that grows like the dawn,

As beautiful as the full moon,
As pure as the sun,
As awesome as an army with banners?”

It is unclear who is speaking here. It may be man who is impressed with how the woman has grown throughout their relationship, in beauty, sexual attractiveness, wisdom, and strength. Alternatively, this could be the woman admiring her man, and amazed at how he has matured into her lover and leader. The fact that it is unclear may mean that it applies to both man and woman.

6:11 “I went down to the orchard of nut trees
To see the blossoms of the valley,
To see whether the vine had budded
Or the pomegranates had bloomed.”

These three sets of verses are obscure, but may indicate the following: the man indicates that he had gone to check out other women (the orchard of nut trees, and the blossoms of the valley) because he has been disappointed in his wife. This is the common problem and complaint of women that men are not faithful, or as faithful as they should be.

6:12 “Before I was aware, my soul set me
Over the chariots of my noble people.”

The man indicates that during this process of evaluating other women that he had imagined himself as possessing a number of them. “Before he was aware” indicates how quickly his mind had gone off in pursuit of other women, and how easy it would be for him to fall into that trap if he does not exercise self-control.

6:13 “Come back, come back, O Shulammitte;
Come back, come back, that we may gaze at you!”
“Why should you gaze at the Shulammitte,
As at the dance of the two companies?”

The others encourage the woman to return to her man, and man decides that what he really wants is his original woman. The question about “gazing at the Shulammitte as at the dance of the two companies” may be a rhetorical question and be restated as “why should you look at your own woman when there are so many others who will dance and present themselves to you?” The answer is that the man’s original woman will be better for him not only from the standpoint of doing the right thing, but also because she will be a better partner because they have already established trust.

Chapter Seven

7:1 “How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
O prince's daughter!

The man reappraises his wife and begins to compliment her body again. He likes her feet and enjoys seeing them bare. The woman is probably nude (dressed only in sandals?) or wearing diaphanous/transparent clothing here, as shown below.

The curves of your hips are like jewels,
The work of the hands of an artist.”

The man compliments the woman’s hips and feminine shape.

7:2 “Your navel is like a round goblet
Which never lacks mixed wine;

This may be a reference to her navel or to her vulva/vagina, and the sweetness of caressing and entering it.

Your belly is like a heap of wheat

The meaning here is unclear, but it may mean that the man admires the woman's pubic hair.

Fenced about with lilies.”

A reference to her legs or hips.

7:3 “Your two breasts are like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle.”

The man repeats his earlier compliment about the woman's breasts, and indicates that they are for his pleasure (he is the gazelle) as well as possibly for nursing the children (fawns) that they will have.

7:4 “Your neck is like a tower of ivory,
Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon
By the gate of Bath-rabbim;
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon,
Which faces toward Damascus.”

The man compliments the woman's white neck, her deep eyes, and her lovely nose.

7:5 “Your head crowns you like Carmel,
And the flowing locks of your head are like purple threads;
The king is captivated by your tresses.”

The man indicates that the woman's hair is so long and beautiful that she would captivate any man.

7:6 “How beautiful and how delightful you are,
My love, with all your charms!”

The man indicates that he is totally delighted with the woman's body.

7:7 “Your stature is like a palm tree,

The man indicates that the woman's body was made to be climbed and mounted by him.

And your breasts are like its clusters.”

He will grab and hold her breasts like a cluster of dates.

7:8 “I said, 'I will climb the palm tree,

The man states that he will climb on top of his woman.

I will take hold of its fruit stalks.'

He will take hold of the woman, possibly by her breasts.

Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,

The man wants the woman's nipples to be enlarged like ripe juicy grapes.

And the fragrance of your breath like apples,”

7:9 “And your mouth like the best wine!”

The man wants to kiss her repeatedly and deeply.

“It goes down smoothly for my beloved,

Flowing gently through the lips of those who fall asleep.”

The woman indicates that she is ready for the man to take her in whatever way is pleasing to him, and that they will make love and fall asleep together.

7:10 “I am my beloved’s,
And his desire is for me.

The woman indicates that she now truly belongs to the man, and that his desire to possess and love her has been renewed. In Song 2:16 she states “My beloved is mine and I am his,” placing her desire before his. In Song 6:3 she states “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine,” placing his desire before hers. Here she states “I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me,” indicating that she has fully surrendered. In other words, there is a progression in her thinking throughout the story. She begins with putting her own desires first (he is mine and I am his); then she moves to putting his desires first (I am his and he is mine); finally as they have come through rocky times and survived together and she has come to trust him more deeply, she can focus totally on him and his desire for her (I am his and his desire is for me).

7:11 “Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country,
Let us spend the night in the villages.”

The man indicates that he wants to renew the adventures that he and the woman had experienced when they were first married.

7:12 “Let us rise early and go to the vineyards;
Let us see whether the vine has budded
And its blossoms have opened,
And whether the pomegranates have bloomed.
There I will give you my love.”

The man indicates that he wants to explore the woman’s body (his vineyard) and have intercourse with her in the morning as well as in the evening. This may be more than sexual activity and may refer to exploring new ways of maintaining romance and companionship together.

7:13 “The mandrakes have given forth fragrance;
And over our doors are all choice fruits,

The woman indicates that she has been exploring new things as well, and has obtained various kinds and type of aphrodisiacs (mandrakes) to enhance their enjoyment of each other. The mandrakes may also refer to her desire for pregnancy and children.

Both new and old,

The woman indicates that she will apply her creativity to their relationship and lovemaking, and they now have many ways and techniques available to them, both old and new.

Which I have saved up for you, my beloved.

The woman indicates that she has dedicated herself to exploring, preserving, and refreshing him in the manifold ways that a woman can give herself to a man. The reference to the “choice fruits over their doors” may indicate a number of lovely elements of their relationship which they are already making use of and have been for some time.

Chapter Eight

8:1 “Oh that you were like a brother to me
Who nursed at my mother’s breasts.

The woman wants the man for an intimate companionship, i.e., not just sex or romance.

If I found you outdoors, I would kiss you;
No one would despise me, either.”

The woman wishes that she could kiss her man in public (like a sister and brother, as married couples in that society were not permitted to display affection in public).

8:2 “I would lead you and bring you
Into the house of my mother, who used to instruct me;

The woman would bring her man back home again to her mother, who taught her how to be a wife and lover. Perhaps the woman desires to see if her mother has any additional advice for her in becoming a great wife.

I would give you spiced wine to drink from the juice of my pomegranates.

The woman wants the man to have her and enjoy her in her parent’s home. Perhaps the thought here is that her parents have accepted him. The meaning of the “spiced wine to drink from the juice of my pomegranates” is unclear but possibly refers to a special treat the woman has for the man.

8:3 “Let his left hand be under my head
And his right hand embrace me.”

The woman indicates that she wants to be lying down with her man’s left hand under her head and his right hand holding and caressing her.

8:4 “I want you to swear, O daughters of Jerusalem,
Do not arouse or awaken my love
Until she pleases.”

This may be a reference to the man to take the woman’s sexual desires into account as well as his own, and not force her.

8:5 “Who is this coming up from the wilderness
Leaning on her beloved?”

The woman depends on the man for a variety of things in life. “Coming up from the wilderness” may refer to growing up from childhood into maturity.

“Beneath the apple tree I awakened you;
There your mother was in labor with you,
There she was in labor and gave you birth.”

“Being awakened beneath the apple tree” is probably a reference to their initial lovemaking. The man and woman may be reflecting on their life together beginning at birth and continuing down through the start of their relationship to the present.

8:6 “Put me like a seal over your heart,

The woman wants the man to dedicate himself and his heart totally to her.

Like a seal on your arm

The woman wants the man to dedicate his strength and/or commitment to her, possibly in a public and visible way.

For love is as strong as death,
Jealousy is as severe as Sheol;

The woman indicates the consequences of infidelity, that once it occurs and trust is broken, it is impossible to reverse (i.e., it is like death and the grave).

Its flashes are flashes of fire,

The woman indicates that once jealousy starts, the fire starts to burn and it will eventually consume everything in their relationship.

The very flame of the Lord.”

The woman warns the man that he has made a vow and a commitment to her, and that God will judge him if he betrays her.

8:7 “Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor will rivers overflow it;

The woman indicates, however, that trials and problems cannot terminate love.

If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love,
It would be utterly despised.”

The woman indicates that her love can never be bought, and that any attempt to do so would be scorned.

8:8 “We have a little sister,
And she has no breasts;

The woman now becomes concerned for other members of her family, to make sure that they are aware of the lessons that she and her man have learned. A sister “with no breasts” is a girl who is not yet ready for marriage. This may be because she is too young, but in the context, it is more likely that the girl “has no breasts” because she is psychologically immature and doesn’t understand and/or appreciate the dynamics of male/female relationships.

What shall we do for our sister
On the day when she is spoken for?”

The woman wonders how the family will handle things when a man comes to ask for her hand in marriage. In that day families were concerned with protecting the virtue and future of their daughters and sisters.

8:9 “If she is a wall,
We will build on her a battlement of silver;

If the sister is righteous (a wall) and waits for marriage before she gives her body to her husband, then the family will honor and adorn her (build battlements of silver on top of what she already has).

But if she is a door,
We will barricade her with planks of cedar.”

If the sister is a loose woman and opens herself to many men (a door), then the family will restrict her and keep her at home and under control (barricade her with planks of cedar), until she learns.

8:10 “I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers;
Then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.”

The woman indicates that she was virtuous and married her man, and therefore her breasts (representing her sexuality) were employed in the right way. Therefore she and her husband together found peace in their relationship.

8:11 “Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon;
He entrusted the vineyard to caretakers
Each one was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit.

The vineyard at Baal-hamon is probably a reference to all of the women that Solomon had (he literally had extensive vineyards at Baal-hamon, which means “place of a multitude”), as well as to the impersonal nature of his relationship with his women. In a large harem the women are rarely seen by the man, and kept under the care of others (the caretakers). The women were there not because of love, but because of money and power, and because of strategic alliances that Solomon had entered into, such as he did with the daughter of Pharaoh; hence the reference of silver (money) for fruit (relationship and sexuality).

8:12 “My very own vineyard is at my disposal;

The woman indicates that she wants to keep her body and present it to her real lover and king – her own husband.

The thousand shekels are for you, Solomon,
And two hundred are for those who take care of its fruit.”

The woman indicates that Solomon can keep his money, and that she has something better.

8:13 “O you who sit in the gardens,
My companions are listening for your voice--
Let me hear it!”

The woman asks that others couples (men who possess their women – their gardens), to speak up and let people know how male/female relationships should be conducted, so that she is not alone in giving this advice.

8:14 “Hurry, my beloved,
And be like a gazelle or a young stag
On the mountains of spices.”

The woman ends this love poem with a plea to the man to hurry and sexually take her. Note that the reference here is to all of the spices, not just one or two. The idea may be that the woman is using all of the romantic, sexual, and wifely techniques that she has learned through the years to attract and please her husband.

Secondary and Hidden Meanings in the Song of Solomon

Biblical texts, especially from the Old Testament, may very well contain secondary meanings. However, these typically emerge from the primary meaning and plain sense of the text, and are not in conflict with it. Therefore, attempts to totally spiritualize and allegorize this story should be questioned. For example, consider the following verse from Song 6:7-9:

Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I said, “I will climb the palm tree, and I will take hold of its fruit stalks. Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine!”

It is hard to seriously consider another interpretation for the above text, as it obviously refers to a sexual act that the man performs on the woman. However, there are a number of secondary interpretations that are generally valid and appropriate to some parts of the story, as follows:

- Marriage is used throughout the Bible as the main paradigm for the relationship between God and his people. In the Old Testament, God is the husband and the nation of Israel is his bride, but in the fuller and more complete revelation provided by the New Testament, Christ is the husband, and the church (i.e., the people of God from all over the world) are the bride. In the book of Revelation part of the imagery used to describe entering heaven is a wedding feast—the marriage supper of the Lamb and the consummation of the relationships between Christ and the church.

The intense admiration and love exhibited in the story represents the love of God and Christ for us, and the love that we, as the bride, should return to him. The erotic aspects of the story may also be symbolic of the delights of heaven, which are as yet future and unknown, “Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him.” (I Corinthians 2:9). “For now we see as in a glass dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also am now fully known.” (I Corinthians 13:12). From the Book of Revelation we are told that at the end of the world there will be something akin to a wedding feast, and from our human perspective, this involves three of the things that we desire most—intimate relationships, good food, and sex.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”

Revelation 19:7-9

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:1-2

- Some of the verses have been applied to Christ directly, for example Song 2:1, “I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley,” and Song 6:10, “Who is this, that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun, as awesome as an army with banners?” Alternatively, they could be seen as applying to God’s people (Israel and/or the church), as these are attributes of the woman.
- Solomon represents the seductive allure of what the world has to offer—wealth, power, and unrestrained sexuality, and he may very well be a metaphor for Satan, who is the false Christ, and who attempts to use the things of the world to twist and pervert people, and lure them away from God. Christ is the shepherd lover—“the good shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep.” He does not offer all of the glitz and glitter that Solomon (Satan) does, but he offers something better—an everlasting love relationship with the Lord of the universe.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul; he guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalms 23

Therefore, the question is whether the Shulammitte maiden (the people of God), will resist the attraction of Solomon (the world and Satan), and save herself for her true lover (Christ), who will satisfy her in ways that Solomon with all of his riches never could. This interpretation flows out of the ideas expressed above in which the Song was written by Solomon as a personal catharsis.

- A variation on the prior paragraph would see Solomon in this story not so much as figure of temptation, but rather as the fulfillment of Christ, either in heaven or at his second coming. In other words, the appearances of Solomon throughout the Song may represent the beloved (the man in the story) as he ultimately will be and become at the end of time; transformed from the poor shepherd boy into the king and ruler of all. But in my opinion, this interpretation does not square with the text of the Song in which the woman turns away from the king and back to her beloved.

I am not at all diminishing secondary interpretations of the story—they make it more powerful and meaningful. But prior to considering any secondary interpretation, the

primary meaning of the text must be stated and explored, which, in my opinion, has been neglected. Furthermore, secondary meanings lose their power and cogency if the primary meaning is ignored or repressed.

Application of the Song of Solomon

In contrast to the distortions of relationships and sexuality, the Song of Solomon calls man and woman back into a loving partnership where the differing strengths and capabilities of each gender are used and enjoyed to the full.

The story details the initial delights, trials, separation and finally the recommitment of a man and a woman and makes a number of points about the general nature of male/female relationships, as follows:

1. Monogamy and long-term commitment is the best and highest form of male/female relationship. It does not, of course, guarantee happiness or satisfaction, but if the partners understand and are committed to each other, it provides the framework for the development of an optimal relationship.
2. Polygamous or serial relationships are typically unsatisfying, and the partners won't experience the depth of intimacy and sexual/relational satisfaction that is possible in a monogamous union.
3. Sexual fulfillment is a very important part of the relationship.
4. God designed sex, and fully approves of eroticism in the context of a monogamous relationship. God is not mentioned directly in The Song, but there is a very interesting verse at the exact midpoint of the original text where the most important theme would be stated, and where God seemingly speaks to the couple. Immediately after the man has sexually taken and possessed the woman, Song 5:1 says, "Eat, friends; drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers."
5. Fulfilling romance and sex will not come automatically—they must be cultivated by both partners. Sex can be ecstatic at the beginning of a relationship, but the excitement quickly wears thin unless the relational elements are also present—understanding, trust, care, affection, concern for the partner, etc.
6. Men and women are different, and have different perspectives and desires. In order to have the best relationship, each gender must understand what the other wants and needs, and must endeavor to meet those desires. The man wants to enter and possess the woman, and he desires that she respect and honor him as the leader. The woman wants the man's long-term commitment, as well as his love, care, devotion, and respect.
7. Problems can and will upset the balance and destroy the union, even in the case of the most attractive and well-adjusted couples.
8. Forgiveness will restore the union, but if the partners are unfaithful to each other, the resulting jealousy and feelings of betrayal may not be redressable.
9. Families should be especially concerned with how their children marry, and with protecting their daughters.
10. Sexual activities must be delayed until the couple is ready to assume the associated relational and parental responsibilities.

The character of the relationship between the man and woman in The Song is very different from today's feministic paradigms of pure equality and interchangeability of the sexes. It presents a view of male/female relationships more along the lines of traditional sex roles. In this paradigm, the male role is primarily that of leader and lover, and the

female role is primarily follower and nurturer. This lifestyle recognizes and celebrates the propensity of males to be dominant (i.e., masculine) and females to be submissive (i.e., feminine) in varying degrees.

In a number of places the Bible instructs wives to submit to husbands (e.g., Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, and I Peter 5:5). The Greek word used in the Bible for “submission” is “hupatasso,” from “hupa,” meaning “under,” and “tasso,” meaning “to arrange” or “to place.” The word was originally a Greek military term for someone who was placed under the authority of a commander, or one who placed him or herself under such authority. Some Bible scholars have attempted to do away with female submission and indicate that it was never meant to be that way. Their arguments are as follows:

1. In Ephesians 5:21, Paul indicates that we should submit to each other, and therefore the specific directives on wives submitting to husbands should be ignored and/or downplayed.
2. The Greek word “hupatasso” should be interpreted as “support” rather than “submit.”
3. The submission of wives to husbands is purely cultural and done in earlier times, but now we have supposedly become more enlightened female submission should be abandoned.
4. All submissive women are supposedly weak, co-dependent children, in need of psychological counseling.
5. The Apostles Peter and Paul were misogynist pigs who feared women and wanted to hold them down in whatever way they could. While other parts of their epistles and teachings may be acceptable, we should ignore whatever they say about male/female relationships.

However, all of these arguments fall apart on closer examination:

1. The Bible does indeed teach mutual submission and humility, but that does not void or negate the specific directive that a wife should submit to her husband. The directive given to a husband is to love his wife, not submit to her. Furthermore, there are no exceptions given
2. Interpreting the word “hupatasso” as “support” is a deceptive attempt to redefine the clear meaning of a word.
3. Human nature has not changed—men are still men and women are still women. Like all Biblical teaching, the practical aspects need to be adapted from one culture and era to the next, but the underlying principles are timeless.
4. Submissive women have a strength of character and purpose that feminists do not understand or appreciate. That a wife could be in submission to a man and love it, which many do, is deeply threatening to feminists, because it destroys the basis of their argument. This is why housewives were so bitterly attacked and condemned. Any psychological counseling that demands a feministic approach is warped.
5. The Apostles were certainly men of their times, which are different than ours, but what they said was for the benefit of women, not to keep them down. It is ironic that Paul is called a misogynist even though he is the one who called for mutual

submission. Furthermore, female submission is taught in many places in the Bible, not just in the New Testament epistles. It is only the twisted nature of today's feminism that sees all types of female submission as evil.

The issue of dominance and submission is, of course, one of the most incendiary topics in our culture; everyone who reads this will, no doubt, have strongly preconceived ideas about it. Some will rejoice and say, "Finally someone is speaking for what I have felt all along!" whereas others will roll their eyes and say, "One more male chauvinist trying to put women back in the kitchen!"

But before passing judgment, it is essential to understand that there is no universal or "one-size-fits-all" Biblical pattern about how leadership should be carried out in marriage. The above texts do not indicate the exact manner or the extent of the submission. Therefore, there is a wideness in what the term "hupatasso" can mean and how it should be interpreted in the case of a given marriage, and it is left up to individual couples to determine what will work for them. In cases with a strong-willed wife and a retiring husband, leadership and power could be in the woman's hands (as a way of acknowledging the husband's lack of leadership abilities) or shared in a more-or-less equal way, whereas in the case of a more submissive wife and dominant husband, more of the leadership aspects of the marriage would naturally devolve on the man. In other words, it is wrong for someone to claim Biblical authority when indicating how a wife should specifically submit to her husband, regardless of whether their view is liberal or conservative.

Therefore, the mental images that we have from the past associated with traditional sex roles do not need to bind us to any specific way of relating to each other, and even less so should the feminist roles of the present. We are thus free within the confines of the general paradigm to construct a relationship that is mutually satisfying, and in which the specifics vary from couple to couple. If God is the creator of all peoples, then His counsel on a topic as fundamental as marriage must surely take in account the normal variations in human reality.

No two couples are exactly alike, but all of us, both liberal and conservative, tend to think that our own viewpoint is normative, and that everyone else should do just as we do. We try though various means to foist our view upon others. But a more reasoned look at the Bible demonstrates that the principles stated allow for latitude and interpretation. It does **not** supply any basis for a conservative to thunder that "all wives belong in the kitchen," nor does it give a liberal any basis for claiming that "absolute equality is essential, and submission is tantamount to wife abuse."

Conservatives may state that "most of our societal problems are due to the failure of wives to submit to their husbands," and liberals may ridicule that statement. The problem with the statement is not that it is false, but that it is only half true. We must include the responsibility of men, and the statement has left out the "failure of husbands to love their wives." When the latter portion is included, then we do indeed have the major cause of social pathology.

Male/female relationships are complex and nuanced. It is like dancing the waltz in which the man normally leads, but at times he exchanges roles with the woman and she leads, and both of them are needed in order for the dance to proceed. Following are some of the "masculine vs. feminine" elements of the Song:

- Leadership. Throughout the story the man leads the woman, and the woman expresses a desire for him to take the lead (e.g., Song 1:4, Song 2:3-4), but the woman leads as well (e.g., Song 8:2), and she is not at all shy about expressing her desires. In other words, she submits to him eagerly, but still retains a strong sense of her own identity and personal worth. She also takes the lead at times, and he enjoys having her do so. There is no need for suspicion or resentment because the leadership is bathed in love, and is not a selfish power grab, or a means to get even with each other. There is nothing wrong with female leadership, but there is also nothing wrong with leadership being mostly male.
- Roles. The woman belongs to the man throughout the story, and many of the terms used for the woman depict her as such. She is his “garden,” his “vineyard,” and his “spring.” All of these terms imply that he owns her in a deep and intimate way. Furthermore, she doesn’t resent this or see it as an imposition, rather she views it as being the natural order of things, and the fulfillment of her nature as a woman. She rejoices in belonging to him, and understands that being his spring, garden, and vineyard is a role that she must freely choose for herself. The man sexually takes her, but also regards her as his partner and responsible companion (expressed in the story as being his “sister”), and she clearly relishes both the roles of partner and possession. In the paradox of femininity, the woman conquers the man by surrendering to him. She harnesses his energies to serve both her and their children by freely and eagerly giving herself to him.

One of the major problems of all human societies is channeling male aggression in positive directions, so that its young men build the society up rather than tear it down. The only known and reliable way for this to take place is for each man to have a woman, and to dedicate himself to taking care of her and their children. The man is thus infused with a quintessentially masculine desire of protecting, caring for, and leading his family, so that he becomes the “chief of his tribe.”

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord. The fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How
blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.
Psalm 127:3-5

These roles resonate in the deep yearnings and the romance of our heart—the male desire to be a knight who rescues and leads the fair maiden, and the female desire to be the fair maiden who is rescued and led. These passions are celebrated in thousands of poems, stories, movies and songs, in untold permutations and variations, and are the most common and basic theme in all of art. The trashing of these roles by contemporary culture is a sacrilege and a deep desecration.

- Positive Communication. The man compliments the woman and her body in very frank sexual terms, and it is clear that he loves seeing and caressing her. She frequently expresses desires to be caressed (e.g., Song 2:6, Song 4:16), and she enjoys his compliments and praise. But the man always expresses this in a noble

and poetic way—he is never gross or tasteless, and he always builds her up and makes her feel good about herself. He never belittles her. Likewise the woman compliments the man and makes him feel good about his appearance and his efforts to lead and provide for her. She builds his ego, treats him as her leader, and indicates that she wants to follow him, which is a powerful medicine for a man’s ego and his sense of self-esteem. With such a woman, a man has no need to seek other females.

- Trust. In contrast to the throwaway relationships of our culture, here the woman gives herself to the man in exchange for his commitment to stay true to her. In Song 8:6 she says, “Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, and jealousy is as severe as the grave.” The woman’s surrender is directly related to her level of trust in the man—how can anyone truly surrender to another person that he or she does not trust? Therefore it is incumbent on the man to be worthy of the woman’s trust.
- Mutual Surrender and Humility. This type of relationship requires surrender, humility, and maturity from both man and woman, but in different ways. The woman surrenders, allowing the man to lead her. The man must also surrender, but what he must give up is his desire for non-commitment and independence. He must humble himself so that he can truly lead the woman in a way that affirms her and makes her feel loved and cared for. True leadership demands the sacrifice of the leader and the abandonment of self for the benefit of those he leads. In other words, love is a call for both male and female to give up selfish ways, and truly serve and satisfy their partner. It directs them more fully into their own masculine and feminine nature, and thus it is satisfying and fulfilling to both. Mutual surrender creates a self-reinforcing relationship of potentially fantastic trust and deep intimacy.

Regardless of the above statements about traditional sex roles, this is not an attempt to keep women in the kitchen, and it does not presuppose any particular division of labor between men and women. There are several points to be made here:

1. The type of relationship described in The Song does not dictate any given household work arrangement—this is entirely up to the couple. Assuming that they have children, both man and woman could be employed outside the home with a mixture of full and part-time work according to their financial needs and child care requirements. However, most couples will probably find that the traditional model or a modified form of it works best because, a) it provides the most income and satisfaction for both (the man primarily on the job and the woman primarily at home with the children); and b) it prevents super-mom burnout, where the woman works full-time, and then has to come home, do all of the housework and care for the children as well.
2. In regard to housework, and women’s perennial complaint that men never do their fair share, it has been found that in homes where the wife is openly submissive, her husband will help her more, because when she adores him and satisfies his

- needs, he will want to serve her and will be motivated to do so.¹ Men tend to treat aggressive, dominant women as they do other men—as competitors—and typically have little interest in treasuring, cherishing, supporting, or helping such women.
3. This general form of relationship conforms more closely to the reality of masculinity and femininity, and therefore it will be the most satisfying to the majority of people. Most men are masculine and most women are feminine, to greater or lesser degrees, and approximately 98% of the population is heterosexual. But there are thousand of different forms and variations of these qualities in individuals, and the dynamic of the marriage relationship therefore needs to be adjusted accordingly, as stated above.
 4. The couple in the story enters into their relationship with desire, passion, and joy. There is no dread or fear involved until they start disappointing each other, but after they have been renewed, the joy and passion returns. In other words, whatever the exact form that a relationship takes, it is essential that it be done from joy and desire, and not from fear or coercion.

Marriage has long been scorned and attacked, but it has survived. It is an amazing institution that provides the possibility of companionship, trust, deep intimacy, and intense eroticism. It can also provide children and potentially an ideal environment in which to raise them. However, these benefits are only possibilities, and require the application of the principles described above in order for them to be fully realized.

All of the above is not meant to trivialize marital problems or to claim that they can be solved simply by reading an essay. In many cases couples have deep-seated problems caused by years of neglect and/or hurtful behavior which may require much time and possibly outside counseling help. The point is that the relationship dynamics typified in the Song of Solomon and discussed above are the direction in which couples should ultimately move.

Sexual Satisfaction

Orgasmic sexual ecstasy for the woman requires surrender to the man, which, in turn, is dependent on the dynamics of their relationship. Most of the sexual advice in women's magazines and current sex books urges women to "take control of their sexuality." But heterosexual women who wish to experience truly great sex and mind-blowing orgasms would be better served by giving themselves to their men and letting him take control. Consider the following quote from Dr. Marie Robinson, a woman doctor who specialized in treating problems of female frigidity:

There is a tremendous surging physical ecstasy in the yielding of itself, in the feeling of being a passive instrument in the hands of a man. Your body is stretched out supinely beneath him, delighting in his dominance and responding in further surrender. You give your body and will over to him and are taken up by his passion as leaves are swept up before a wind. One woman described it as "a sensation of such beauty and intensity that I can hardly think of it without weeping." Another said, "it's like a mounting symphony, rising in tremendous

and irresistible rhythms till your whole being feels as though it has been swept away.”

Orgasm in the woman requires an absolute trust in one’s partner. In sexual intercourse, as in life, man is the actor, woman is the acted upon. Giving oneself up in this passive manner to another human being, making yourself his willing partner to such seismic physical experiences and allowing yourself to be sexually conquered, means one must have complete faith in him. There can be no crossed fingers about such yielding and no reservations in such a submission. *There must be a sensual eagerness to surrender, because in the woman’s orgasm, the excitement comes from the act of surrender.*

The untrusting woman is frightened of the totality of such an experience, mistrusts her husband’s love, and has to feel that she is “in control” all the time. The trouble with that position is that in a real orgasm, a woman must be out of control, and must willingly, delightedly desire to be so. With his pleasure in mind, she now seeks out more and more those things that please him, *and her exploration leads inevitably to the discovery that what pleases him most, outside of his own sensations, is her pleasure and the giving of herself to him.* In other words, he is most pleased when she is most fully surrendered and given over to him and actually desires to be so. This mutual spiraling of feeling ultimately climaxes in her decision to give him the greatest psychological pleasure of all, *the total surrender of her body to him and the delights that it can bring.* [italics, mine]

Marie Robinson, MD, *The Power of Sexual Surrender*

In other words, there is a complete congruence between the Biblical directive of female submission, and the quality of orgasm that women who practice it will experience. Having sex like this on a regular basis, binds a couple together with bonds of desire and love in a way that nothing else can—the woman’s surrender generates devotion in the man, and in turn, his devotion provides an environment of trust and acceptance that allows her sexuality to flower. In regard to the erotic possibilities of marriage, consider the following:

To put my cards on the table, I am rather stick-in-the-muddish, and am sold on the institution of marriage, as it might be, if not as it is. This does not mean that I am opposed to having affairs. I am highly in favor of it. I am particularly in favor of having them with one’s wife.

A remarkable fact about marriage, seldom explicitly noted, is that it consists of one man and one woman. That is very sexy, to say the least. What a fantastic opportunity for intricate and delightful sexual experiences. The man and woman have each other all to themselves and their pleasure. They are free in a socially accepted institution to contrive the most exquisite enjoyments for each other. The heights of their pleasure are limited only by their own imagination.

Marriage is an extremely sexy institution. There is no reason one should fail to take advantage of it...Marriage is filled with diamonds and glories. It is literally fantastic in what it could offer, and in terms of what it could be. Before you read

further, agree tentatively, to put from your mind the familiar platitudes of what marriage is supposed to be. It is up to you, not another, to define what it shall be.

To be sure, the grim outside world, the society, will try to reach even into their home...with its instructions for suitable, standard, repetitive, routine relations between men and women. To a large extent the contagion of their loathing, centuries later, still infects and emotionally disfigures millions of human beings, depriving them of precious ecstasies.

Very few screen actors (beyond Valentino) convey anything of the simple appreciation of how fantastic women are. To be sure, Valentino could portray the looming dark male menace, dangerous, and intent upon her sexual subjugation, but too, he could exhibit a thrill and delight in holding a woman in his arms. Women were not, to those of his generation, chicks, foxes, and broads. His was a more romantic generation. Women in his day, pale, proud, and beautiful were thought to be worthy prizes, worth capturing and carrying off. Today it is not clear that there is that much point in bothering...It was not known at the time of publication of the book (*The Sheik*) upon which the movie was based that the author was a woman, and it caused something of a stir when it leaked out. Furthermore this makes clear that the fantasies of men and women tend to be similar, save for the difference in perspective. Men often fantasize adventure and sexual capture, and women do as well. The men think of themselves as doing the capturing, and the women, by some coincidence, are the ones who are captured. There is a set of congruent fantasies! All a husband and a wife have to do is put together their fantasies and get ready for a corking good time!

One of the most beautiful sights in the world to a man is a woman you love in the throes of an orgasm which you have induced in her. There are few things in the world that can so fill a man with a sense of power and joy as seeing his beloved female yielding herself helplessly to him.

When two human beings can give each other such exquisite and mind-expanding excitements, it is natural for them to grow very close. They realize that such a partner is not simply another interchangeable unit of which most of our marriages seem to be composed. He or she is a jewel.

John Norman, *Imaginative Sex*

Christianity and Sexual D/s

What is being presented here is a “D/s” (male dominant, female submissive) relationship dynamic. D/s is the reestablishment of the “feminine mystique” that feminism has tried to tear down. Rather than eliminating the distinctions between the sexes, D/s is a celebration of the differences, in a way that ennobles both men and women and calls both to a higher standard. It is a renewing of the vision of females as princesses and queens, and males as princes and kings with all of the glories and responsibilities that those positions entail. In essence, it is the flowering of our gender and the fulfillment of our sexuality. It is the reestablishment of the true basis for male-female intimacy—the mutual satisfaction of desires in the context of a committed relationship.

To put this in picture form, it is the attempt to enter into and live out in your own way the most powerful and enduring of all human fantasies, that have been celebrated in story and song since the dawn of time, in thousands of variations and permutations—the lord and the lady, the white knight and the fair maiden, the sheik and the dancing girl, Cinderella and Prince Charming, the cheerleader and the football star, Dudley DoRight and the damsel in distress, Beauty and the Beast, the rajah and his concubine, the Princess Bride and the Dread Pirate Roberts, etc., etc., etc.

The goal is transformation. It is redirecting a man away from being a selfish boor into a white knight, who can fire the romantic imagination and sexual surrender of his woman, and continue to inspire her for a lifetime. It is redirecting a woman from being an inhibited mom into a passionate, surrendered lover that her man will want to be with, and who has a richness of feminine character that will delight him. D/s is therefore psychological dynamite.

The D/s lifestyle may or may not include a number of sexual practices (e.g., bondage, spanking, forcefulness, oral sex, etc.) and it is entirely up to each individual couple as to what activities they will engage in. There is abundant evidence that engaging in practices such as the husband spanking his wife can dramatically increase the pleasure of both, along with their level of intimacy and commitment to the relationship.²

Some people will read the above and take offence because they feel that the women are being presented as too submissive and the man too dominant. Others will read it and feel that it is too tame, and will want something deeper and more extensive.³ The point is to find your own level, not be constrained by cultural dictates, and avoid criticizing others who are at a different level.

In recent years various BDSM groups and web sites have become very popular. The term “BDSM” is a clever contraction of three different but overlapping lifestyles and expressions of sexuality, as follows:

- “BD” – Bondage and Discipline. The incorporation of physical bondage (tying with rope, scarves, chains, etc.) and various aspects of discipline (spanking, being under authority, etc.) into the sexual and in some cases the relational aspects of a relationship.
- “DS” – Dominant/submissive. The recognition of one partner in a relationship as being dominant (leading, making decisions, directing sexual expression, etc), and the other as submissive (following, providing feedback, nurturing, and surrendering, etc.)
- “SM” – Sadomasochism or Sex Magick. The use of pain to give pleasure, where one partner enjoys administering the pain/pleasure (the sadist), and the other partner enjoys receiving it (the masochist).

The BDSM community, while still generally thought of as being “extreme,” has gained some degree of acceptance in contemporary culture. There are at least three reasons for this: 1) it is pan-sexual—it treats hetero-, homo-, and bisexuality as equivalent and equally valid and acceptable; 2) BDSM relationships are often transient and non-monogamous—monogamy and non-monogamy are therefore equivalent and

equally valid and acceptable; 3) the movement has lobbied for acceptance on the grounds that it tolerates all forms of sexual expression, and is just one more lifestyle choice among many.

Those in the Christian community have wondered if BDSM is compatible with Christianity and the Bible. Following is a Christian critique of BDSM:

- The Bible does not concur with the pan-sexual approach of BDSM, and indicates that a heterosexual relationship is God’s ideal for humanity. For the vast majority of people this is true—approximately 98% of the population is heterosexual. A key question here is whether homosexuality/bisexuality is inborn and unchangeable, or learned and transient. Gay advocates demand that we see gayness as being exclusively genetic and unalterable. However, the current scientific answer is that some are born with gay inclinations, but for many it is a learned behavior. There are organizations who work with gay individuals seeking to go straight, and depending on the degree of personal motivation, they have demonstrated many cases of successful transformation from homo to hetero.

The practice of homosexuality is presented as being sinful in a number of Biblical passages. But even so, in the eyes of God, homosexuality is not inherently worse than any other sin problem, and there are Biblical indications that provisions should be made for it. For example, divorce is also condemned in Scripture, but there is a recognition that it will occur, and that it will be necessary in some cases. Similar provisions should be, and have already been made for homosexuality. Divorce should not be encouraged or held up as a “equally valid lifestyle,” but at the same time we must not persecute divorced people. Homosexuality should be treated in a similar manner.

- The Bible does not concur with the non-monogamous nature of some BDSM relationships, and marriage is presented throughout as the ideal. There is a plethora of scientific evidence upholding monogamy as being the best and highest form of male/female relationship from many perspectives—trust, affection, personal security, sexuality, and parenting.

The thrust of Biblical teaching on marriage is maledom/femsub, and this is offensive to some who insist on the equal validity and acceptability of all forms of sexual expression. But the Bible’s position is that not all forms of expression are equally valid and beneficial—monogamous heterosexuality is the best and highest form of sexual expression. We must not condemn those who engage in other lifestyles, but at the same time we must not encourage people to enter them. Monogamy does not, of course, guarantee any of these positive results. It merely provides the best framework for a couple to achieve them.

- Aside from the issues of pan-sexuality and monogamy, the Bible encourages couples to engage in whatever sexual practices bring them mutual pleasure and fulfillment. In other words, “anything goes” as long as both partners enjoy what they are doing. The “DS” portion of BDSM is probably closest to Biblical

teaching, but as discussed above, each couple is unique. Some will have a passion for bondage, submission, and other DS activities, while others will consider them extreme and out-of-bounds. Find your own level and avoid the condemning others who see things differently.

Conclusion

The idea here is for the wife to be her husband's pornography and sex object, as well as his partner and companion. She does this in return for his commitment to dedicate himself to her, and to take delight in their relationship. Is this idea scandalizing? Perhaps so, but it is important to remember that our bodies, minds, gender, and sexuality were given to us by God, who declared them to be good. After all, God was the one who created sex, designed gender, and invented orgasm. Consider the following Biblical passages:

Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalms 37:3-4

You will make known to me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy, and at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

Psalms 16:11

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love.

Proverbs 5:18-19

My beloved is to me a pouch of myrrh, which lies all night between my breasts.

Song of Solomon 1:13

Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies. Until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense... You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride. You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes, with a single strand of your necklace.

Song of Solomon 4:5-6, 9

Awake, O north wind, and come, wind of the south. Make my garden breathe out fragrance. Let its spices be wafted abroad. May my beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruits!

Song of Solomon 4:16

How beautiful and how delightful you are, my love, with all your charms! Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I said, "I will climb the palm tree, and will take hold of its fruit stalks." Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine!

Song of Solomon 6:6-9

Eat, friends; drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers.
Song of Solomon 5:1

¹ Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged*, New York: Basic Books, 1977, p. 220

² For examples of satisfied D/s couples, see the web site www.takeninhand.com

³ Many are attracted to the “D/s” (Dominant/submissive) lifestyle and to using various BDSM-related practices in marriage. There are a large number of internet resources on this—a popular one is www.castlerealms.com.