

SONG OF SOLOMON – A STUDY ON VIRTUE AND FIDELITY

Before commencing this study, let us read the book right through first. This will give those not familiar with Song of Solomon some sort of an insight into its content (CP Song Ch 1-8). The broad picture here is that Solomon was so captivated by the beauty of the Shulamite that he wanted to make her his queen of queens, and he spared no effort trying to woo her with extravagant allurements and seductive flatteries.

Song of Solomon is generally considered the hardest book in the Bible to understand, and as a result it has been the subject of a wide diversity of interpretations. For the purpose of this study though we will only look at two of the held views here – *typical* and *literal*. The typical view is that Song of Solomon is an old testament type of the love relationship between Christ and the Church: Solomon typifies Christ, and the Shulamite typifies Christ's bride, the Church. This is the most popular view held by Christians today. Yet there is absolutely no scripture support for this view whatever in the New Testament. In fact there is not one quotation in the whole of the New Testament at all from Song of Solomon. Also, the typical view assumes that Solomon is the Shulamite's "beloved" and he marries her. The literal view is that it is an historical story inspiring virtue and fidelity, which is the view this author holds to, as indicated by the sub-heading of this study.

In the typical view of Song of Solomon virtually only two speakers are given the pre-eminence – Solomon and the Shulamite – when in fact there are seven speakers all told. When they are properly distinguished between it is plainly evident that Solomon was never the Shulamite's beloved. Solomon and the Shulamite's beloved are two separate and distinct people, and when they are properly identified, the book clearly becomes a purely literal teaching. This author has outlined each speaker separately – underlined in capitals – and presents the case for a literal teaching in the comments that follow. Now let us proceed with the study.

TITLE (CP SONG 1:1).

Song of Songs means that it is the most excellent, highly treasured song of the thousand and five songs that Solomon wrote (CP 1Ki 4:32).

THE SHULAMITE SOLILOQUISES ABOUT HER TRUE BELOVED (CP SONG 1:2-4).

Here the Shulamite soliloquises – expresses herself aloud without addressing anyone – about her longing for the kisses of her beloved, "...for thy love is better than wine ... thy name is as ointment poured forth". The Shulamite is not referring to Solomon, and by extension, as the supposed Old Testament type, to Jesus, as so many Christians believe, because in V 4 she is crying out to her beloved to rescue her, after Solomon had taken her to his chambers, "... draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me to his chambers". We includes the virgins referred to in V 3. The Shulamite is the first of the seven speakers in Song of Solomon.

THE SHULAMITE ADDRESSES THE WOMEN IN SOLOMON'S HOUSE (CP SONG 1:5-6).

Here the Shulamite is addressing the women in Solomon's house, who she calls "*daughters of Jerusalem*". In V 6 she discusses her brothers who were angry with her and forced her to look after their vineyards (CP 2:15). Her statement in 1:6, "*but my own vineyard have I not kept*" is referring to her skin being black as a result of working in the sun in the vineyards.

THE SHULAMITE AGAIN SOLILOQUISES ABOUT HER BELOVED (CP SONG 1:7).

Here the Shulamite expresses her thoughts aloud about where would her beloved be feeding his flock? Where would he be resting them in the noonday sun? The clear teaching here is that the Shulamite's beloved is a shepherd – not Solomon. Why could she not visit him openly instead of one that is veiled appearing as though she were a prostitute (CP Gen 38:13-15)?

THE WOMEN IN SOLOMON'S HOUSE RESPOND TO THE SHULAMITE'S SOLILOQUY (CP SONG 1:8).

The women respond sarcastically that if the Shulamite did not know where her beloved was, she should take her flocks to where the shepherds' tents were. These women are the second of the seven speakers in Song of Solomon. It is not Solomon speaking, as so many Christians think it is (CP also 5:9 and 6:1).

SOLOMON USES BLANDISHMENTS TO WOO THE SHULAMITE (CP SONG 1:9-11).

Here Solomon speaks for the first time in Song of Solomon. Solomon expresses his admiration for the Shulamite and compares her to the beautifully decorated horses of Pharaoh's chariots. He sees her cheeks adorned with ornaments and her neck draped with gold chains. He offers to enrich her with ornaments of gold, with silver studs.

THE SHULAMITE AND HER BELOVED SPEAK TO EACH OTHER (CP SONG 1:12 – 2:6).

We learn in 1:12 here that while Solomon was at his table the Shulamite spoke to her beloved. She told him that her spikenard – fragrant oil – sends forth a sweet smell; that he was as a bundle of myrrh that lay between her breasts all night, symbolising his fragrance to her; he was as fragrant to her as a cluster of camphire – henna blooms – in the vineyard at Engedi – an oasis beside the Dead Sea (CP V12-14 with 4:13-14; 5:5). The Shulamite's beloved told her that she was beautiful, that she was his love and that she had the (soft) eyes of a dove (CP 1:15). The Shulamite's beloved is now the fourth speaker in Song of Solomon.

The Shulamite's response to her beloved was that he (too) was beautiful; that he was her beloved, sweet and delightful; that they bed down on grass in the open; that the beams of their house were cedar and the rafters of fir. Next, the Shulamite called herself the *Rose of Sharon* and the *Lily of the Valleys* (CP 1:16 – 2:1). Yet these are titles the Church has given to Jesus, which is totally unscriptural. When she called herself the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys, the Shulamite was in effect disclaiming her beloved's compliments in 1:15, for they were wild flowers that grew in the dense undergrowth, not cultivated roses

and lilies. In 2:2 the Shulamite's beloved speaks again. He responds to the comparison she made of herself and the wild flowers, telling her that as lilies are beautiful among thorns, her beauty stands out among the other women in Solomon's house (CP 2:2). In V 3-6 the Shulamite replies in similar fashion, that as an apple tree stands out among the wild trees in the woods, so her beloved stands out among his peers. She is delighted to be with him and loves his fellowship. Just to be with him was like being in a banqueting house. The love he displayed for her was like a banner over her head. Overcome with love for her beloved, the Shulamite then asked for cakes of raisins and figs, and apples, to sustain her. Her beloved embraced her (CP 2:3-5).

BACK AMONG THE WOMEN IN SOLOMON'S HOUSE, THE SHULAMITE CHARGES THEM NOT TO TRY TO "STIR UP" LOVE – IT HAS TO COME OF ITS OWN ACCORD. SHE TELLS THEM OF HER BELOVED AND HOW HE CAME TO HER (CP SONG 2:6 – 3:5).

In an aside to the daughters of Jerusalem in 2:6, the Shulamite sees herself in her beloved's arms. She then charges the women, in 2:7, not to "stir up" love – it has to come of its own accord. A great many Christians believe that the Shulamite is charging the women here not to stir up her love for Solomon; that it would come when it is ready, because the word *my* referring to her, is included in that verse. But that is not correct, for the word *my* was inserted by the translators, who obviously thought she was referring to her love for Solomon. But that also is not correct for she then went on to relate to the women how her beloved (shepherd) first called on her (CP 2:7-14).

THE SHULAMITE'S BROTHERS INTERRUPT HER TIME WITH HER BELOVED WHEN HE FIRST CALLED ON HER, AND ORDER HER TO WORK IN THE VINEYARD TO CATCH THE LITTLE FOXES THAT WERE RUINING THE VINES (CP SONG 2:15).

This ties in with what the Shulamite said in 1:6 that her brothers made her the keeper of the vineyard (CP 1:6). 2:15 has been interpreted as Solomon wanting the Shulamite to do by analogy in their relationship what she did literally in the vineyards: remove those things in their relationship that could spoil their blossoming love. Another interpretation is that it is probably a metaphor for the lovers' – Solomon and the Shulamite – physical beauty. Thus the desire is expressed that the lovers be kept safe from whatever might mar – the little foxes – their mutual attractiveness. Still another interpretation is that it is Christ speaking; He commands His pastors to catch false teachers whose erroneous doctrine and false teaching spoil the Church, like little foxes spoil the vines. The list goes on. The Shulamite's brothers comprise the fifth speaker in Song of Solomon.

THE SHULAMITE RESUMES SPEAKING WITH THE WOMEN IN SOLOMON'S HOUSE ABOUT HER BELOVED: HOW SHE WAITED IN VAIN FOR HIM TO COME BACK AGAIN IN THE EVENING AS SHE HAD ASKED HIM TO, SO SHE WENT SEARCHING, AND FOUND HIM (CP SONG 2:16 – 3:4).

The simple teaching here is that when she found her beloved (shepherd), the Shulamite took him home to her mother's house.

PEOPLE REMARK ON SOLOMON'S APPROACHING PROCESSION (CP SONG 3:6-11).

These people comprise the sixth speaker in Song of Solomon. It is not known precisely who they are other than that they are inhabitants of Jerusalem. Most interpreters see this procession as portraying Solomon and the Shulamite's wedding. They see the Shulamite to be the one speaking here. Yet there is absolutely no scripture supporting this view in Song of Solomon.

THE SHULAMITE'S BELOVED EXPRESSES HIS ADMIRATION OF HER (CP SONG 4:1-5).

Most interpretations see Solomon as the speaker here but when viewed from the perspective of what the shepherd said in 1:15 it is clear that he is the speaker. He uses the same terminology (CP 1:15 with 4:1). Contrast this modesty with Solomon's seductive flatteries (CP 1:9-11; 6:4-10; 7:1-9).

THE SHULAMITE SPEAKS – SHE PROPOSES TO RETURN TO HER OWN COUNTRY WITH HER BELOVED (CP 4:6).

The mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense is used metaphorically of the country where she and her beloved live – the country they both love.

THE SHULAMITE'S BELOVED RESPONDS TO HER OFFER TO RETURN TO HER OWN COUNTRY WITH HIM AND AGAIN PRAISES HER BEAUTY (CP SONG 4:7-15).

Here her beloved is expressing his overflowing love for the Shulamite. In comparing her to an enclosed garden, a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed, he was praising her chastity and faithfulness to him while in Solomon's house.

THE SHULAMITE DECLARES THAT ALL SHE HAS IS FOR HER BELOVED'S PLEASURE – HE RESPONDS THAT HE IS COMING (CP SONG 4:15 – 5:1).

It is not known who the *friends* are the Shulamite's beloved encourages to eat and drink, in 5:1. They were probably the women of Solomon's house, for the Shulamite spoke to them again in V 2-8.

THE SHULAMITE TELLS THE WOMEN OF SOLOMON'S HOUSE OF A DREAM SHE ONCE HAD ABOUT HER BELOVED (CP SONG 5:2-8).

After telling the women of Solomon's house the dream she once had about her beloved in V 2-7, the Shulamite then charged them in V 8 that if they saw her beloved to tell him she was lovesick for him.

THE WOMEN OF SOLOMON'S HOUSE QUESTION THE SHULAMITE AS TO HOW HER BELOVED IS SO DIFFERENT – SHE THEN GOES ON TO DESCRIBE HIM (CP SONG 5:9-16).

The Shulamite's description of her beloved was so vivid it stirred up the imagination of the women of Solomon's house. They desired to know where he was that they too might look for him with her (CP 6:1). The Shulamite would not answer the women directly because of their piqued interest in her beloved (CP 6:2-3).

SOLOMON RENEWS HIS BLANDISHMENTS AND TRIES TO PERSUADE THE SHULAMITE TO BECOME HIS QUEEN (CP SONG 6:4-10).

This is only the second time in Song of Solomon that Solomon has actually spoken to the Shulamite – the first time was in 1:9-11 – yet most Bible commentators have named him as the speaker on every occasion the Shulamite’s beloved spoke. They confused Solomon with the shepherd, who was the Shulamite’s true beloved. We learn in V 8-9 here that Solomon’s experience with the Shulamite was when he only had sixty of his seven hundred wives and eighty of his three hundred concubines (CP V 8 with 1Ki 11:3). Solomon’s sixty wives and eighty concubines – probably the ones addressed as the “daughters of Jerusalem” by the Shulamite in 1:5; 2:2, 7; 3:5, 10-11; 5:8, 16; 6:9 and 8:4 – all saw her and acknowledged that she was indeed the most beautiful among women (CP Song 6:9 with 1:8; 5:9; 6:1).

THE SHULAMITE EXPLAINS TO SOLOMON THAT THEIR MEETING WAS BY CHANCE AND NOT INTENTIONAL (CP SONG 6:11-12).

The Shulamite was not overcome by Solomon’s blandishments. She told him that they had merely met by chance because she had gone to the orchard to check if any buds had come out yet on the nut trees, the grapevines and the pomegranates, and came upon his chariots unexpectedly. Otherwise they would never have met. It is quite obvious here that the Shulamite does not intend to be a willing participant in Solomon’s flatteries and she told him so.

NOT PUT OUT BY WHAT THE SHULAMITE TOLD HIM SOLOMON CONTINUES WITH HIS BLANDISHMENTS TRYING TO WOO HER (CP SONG 6:13 – 7:9).

Regardless of what she had just told him in 6:11-12, Solomon still continued with his flatteries trying to woo the Shulamite. As she sought to leave, she asked, “*what is there to see in me?*” Solomon begged her to return to him in 6:13. He then resumed his flatteries, which became even more seductive until she interrupted him in 7:10 and declared that she belonged to another, who loved her dearly – her beloved shepherd (CP V 10).

AFTER REJECTING SOLOMON’S ADVANCES THE SHULAMITE ASKED HER BELOVED SHEPHERD TO TAKE HER HOME (CP SONG 7:11 – 8:4).

The Shulamite tells her beloved that all her affections had been reserved for him. As they leave, she tells Solomon in 8:1-2, that if he were her brother she would embrace and kiss him and not be reproached. She would take him to her mother’s house and serve him spiced wine made from pomegranates. She was in effect telling him that her love for him was on a purely brother/sister level. Again, in 8:3-4, as in 2:6-7, in an aside to the daughters of Jerusalem, she sees herself in her beloved’s arms, and charges them for the last time not to try to stir up love by carnal means – it will come when it is ready (CP 2:6-7).

THE SHULAMITE AND HER BELOVED RETURN HOME (CP SONG 8:5).

There are two speakers here. Opinions are divided among Christians as to the identity of the first, who

asks, “*who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?*” Some think it was a relative speaking. Others that it was friends of the shepherd. Still others, that it was the local people. The most extreme view is that they are the angels with admiration beholding the Gentiles converted to the faith. Suffice it to say that it is not anyone previously recorded in this study, which makes whoever it is, the seventh speaker in all, in Song of Solomon. The second speaker in 8:5, is the Shulamite’s beloved shepherd who awakened her love for him under the apple tree where she was actually born. There they pledge their love for each other again (CP 8:6-7).

THE SHULAMITE’S BROTHERS DISCUSS HER DOWRY: WHAT SHE WILL RECEIVE DEPENDS UPON WHETHER SHE REMAINED VIRTUOUS OR NOT IN SOLOMON’S HOUSE. THE SHULAMITE RESPONDS (CP SONG 8:8-12).

V 8-9 Look back in time to when the Shulamite was a young girl. The brothers decided her dowry back then: if she remained virtuous, pure and faithful – as a wall – they would give her a silver dowry. If she was promiscuous and accessible – as a door – they would kill her, as required under Old Covenant law. To *enclose her with boards of cedar* is a reference to her being killed and put in a coffin made of cedar. The Shulamite declared that she had been a wall and not a door. She had withstood every advance by Solomon and not succumbed to his seductive flatteries, and consequently had found favour in the eyes of her beloved. In V 11-12, the Shulamite contrasts her vineyard with Solomon’s many, which he lets out to keepers who pay him rent. She said that her vineyard, which is hers, was before her. This is a reference to her body; that she had not let it out to any man to make use of. She had kept her virtue and saved herself for her beloved.

HER BELOVED ASKS THE SHULAMITE TO TELL THE STORY OF HER STAY WITH SOLOMON TO HER BROTHERS AND THEIR COMPANIONS IN DETAIL SO HE COULD HEAR IT (CP SONG 8:13).

The Shulamite’s beloved was so proud of the outcome of her stay with Solomon, that he asks her to tell the complete story of her adventure to her brothers and their companions, so he could hear it all.

IN CONCLUSION THE SHULAMITE URGES HER BELOVED TO MAKE HASTE AND COME TO HER (CP SONG 8:14).

In figurative language here the Shulamite urges her beloved to hasten and come to her – no longer over the mountains that separated them (in 2:8, 16), but to the mountains of delight – the glorious consummation of their relationship.

That completes our study on Song of Solomon. This author’s view, as is plainly evident in the study is that it is a purely literal teaching. In summary, it concerns Solomon wanting to make the Shulamite his queen of queens, but she was already pledged to the shepherd and remained faithful to his love throughout her stay with Solomon. She eventually returned home with the shepherd as 7:10 – 8:14 clearly teaches. The purpose of Song of Solomon is not to show us the love relationship between Christ and the Church, by a writing of mystical meanings, but to teach us lessons

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which inspire virtue and fidelity. To even suggest that Solomon typified Christ is to reduce our Lord and Saviour to the level of a seducer, and put words of coarse, unrefined flattery on his lips. Shame on those

interpreters. It is certain that not everyone will agree entirely with what the author has expressed here, and he respects their right to disagree, but let us do so, in love.