


A GREATER THAN SOLOMON IS HERE

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The following thoughts that I attach to the commentary are the gist of an address that I gave to the public at the Leicester clock-tower where I stand on occasional Wednesdays expounding a book of the bible and speaking of Christ from all the scriptures.

In this book on “love” and “friendship” there are prophetic passages and numerous lessons on how to live a life that pleases our Messiah and King. There is also benefit to be derived chapter by chapter by comparing Solomon and Christ.

In *Matthew 12.42* and *Luke 11.41* we read that our LORD stressed that as judge of all men He exceeds Solomon in significance and in *Luke 11.41* in comparing Himself with Solomon to whom the Queen of Sheba came from the “wings” of the earth He says quite simply “A greater than Solomon is here”.

In Canticles chapter 1 Solomon’s name is referred to as “ointment poured forth”. His name meant “peace”. But the name of Christ is greater far. His name means “Yahweh saves” and in Him was the title of Godhead as for Him was the task of man’s redemption. His was a greater name and greater work.

In the second chapter of the Canticle we read that the banner slung over the Shulamite was “friendship” or “love”. When you complete the story of the commentary you will realise only too well that the banner represented a very self regarding and sensuous love. The “agape” love of Jesus which is mirrored in *John 3.16* and in *1 Corinthians 13* and in the cross is greater far. He is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

In the third chapter of the Canticle we read of the Shulamite’s defection from the harem. She was as we might say “fed up to the teeth” with the wine-laced allurements of Solomon and his banqueting house. Who is there that tastes the love of Jesus and feels the ransom that His blood affords who would leave the shelter of His everlasting arms? His table is better than Solomon’s table

In the fourth chapter of the Canticle Solomon goes for a walk in the mountains and among the resin forests where the air is laden with myrrh and frankincense. He is downcast. He feels the need of forgiveness. Not so the Christ. He is the sinless One who stands ready to pardon the believing sinner.

In the fifth chapter of the Canticle the shepherd who has her heart visits the Shulamite with blood stains on his body and tears in his eyes and balm in his arms to present to her. Such compassion and sheer detail of care was not Solomon’s style. By contrast

our LORD Jesus was filled with compassion and fell to tears over the waywardness of Jerusalem. In compassion He was unfailing – the man of sorrows.

In the sixth chapter of the Canticle Solomon says “O my soul I did not even know or understand the Shulamite!” He looked at her lovely body but overlooked her soul. Not so Jesus. He knows his sheep. He nourishes the character and souls of his own.

In the seventh chapter of the Canticle we have the “Palm tree Parable” where Solomon dreams of how it might have been. He thinks how he might have conquered a heart with quince and wine. His soiled thoughts plumb the depths. Christ came to conquer our hearts by providing redemption.

In the final chapter of the Canticle Solomon rises to the highest apex of theology as he speaks of “love stronger than death” and introduces a new word to scripture “the jealousy love of God”. He declares that he loves the Shulamite still and well aware of her tryst to the shepherd he allows her to go her way but cannot forget the woman who is pure as the moon –radiant as the sun and invincible as an army encampment with banner flying ready to repulse any assault. In this Solomon comes to understand the love that reaches to the lowest hell and yet his own affection falls far short of that which bore a cross and went to lonely Golgotha for the sin sick soul!

PREFACE

In commending the commentary to the reader I have to say that the author of “The Song” is in my estimate the laureate of Israel par excellence. You will find depths of thought and delights of language in Solomon that cannot be glanced elsewhere in the Torah. This epic on “love” is at once a Song-a Poem-a story – a dramatic presentation-a spiritual allegory; five things in one- “*multus in parvo*” – that in itself renders it unique. You should stand to gain considerably from reading the commentary though I have to warn the reader that unless the Jewish perspective is preserved the application of this book to the Christian Church and its progress is falsetto. Held together with the Jewish background both hermetics interlace perfectly as one.

Rabbi Akiba went on record as saying “the whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; all the writings are holy and the Song of Songs is the holy of holies.”

It has been said that rabbinic and Christian allegorical interpretations neutralised the sensual and erotic in the Song. It is equally arguable that Solomon himself set in train such understandings because like *Bunyan* he set out to write a classic of devotion using the unique Shulamite story as his base.

Solomon, who sought to spiritualise the very language of Israel through sowing hundreds of proverbs in the traffic lanes of common speech and who turned preacher

as he grew older can surely be credited with bringing this linguistic trophy out of the plethora of relationships he had with gorgeous women.

Delitzsch held to the view that the characterisation in the Canticle involved Solomon and the Shulamite only. Ewald by contrast found three main characters and understood there to be a romantic tug-of-war between the overtures and the tantalising world of Solomon and his harem on the one hand and the faithful covenant of a rustic romance with the Shepherd who had the heart of the Shulamite.

In defence of thoroughgoing allegorical interpretation based on the intent of the writer to inculcate a higher theme there can be little doubt that the first reference of the Shulamite is to **Israel**. The application of the very same text to **the bride of Christ** is I believe legitimate. There are distinct occasions when the original intent of contrasting Israel's choices of God or this world with its very physical satisfactions is the more delectable whereas there are times when the allegory reads readily on the "catching away of the church." Such matters as the double appearance of the Shepherd and his absence refer suitably to Israel and the Church.

The writer in referring to "paradise" in 4.13 uses a Persian word. He does this on several occasions. He also uses a Greek loan word in 3.9. [*transliterating φερειον with myrpa*] My conviction is that Solomon had vast learning and knowledge both of the Persian and Greek languages. The stamp of Solomon's authorship is everywhere. The Gardens and the extensive knowledge of the landscape and its flora and fauna show a comprehensive mind. The immense skill of delineating a story which virtually writes himself out and yet deftly contrives a means by which he can express his appreciation of the beauty of the girl he never successfully wooed.

I commend the commentary and associate notes to the reader after some months of quite engrossing work on the text to which I returned after the space of several years since writing on the initial chapters.

As always my commentary is interspersed with translation. The translation diverges at several junctures from NIV and AV text but abides faithful to the original. The commentary is at all times respectful of the original primary Jewish perspective.

Bob Coffey

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The book tells how a country girl makes choice of her lover before King Solomon himself. It is an epic of love and reflects the many-sided jewel of the mutual

affection between Christ as the heavenly bridegroom and his believing people. It is entitled "Song of songs" and was like "congratulations" in the repertoire of "Cliff". The "words of personal affection" that pass between the lovers are associated with the development of the life of faith – which works by love. We shall love at both sides of these expressions of affection.

The great skill of the writer is seen in his presentation of a short allegory of love the narrative of which switches between Shepherd and Shulamite with very few intrusions and even less exposure of the person of narrator. This is the case despite the fact that every word is Solomon's and the whole conception is based on a real life story.

1 THE LEGEND OF THE TEXT-READING AT TWO LEVELS

The canticle works on two levels-the level of the struggle between two affections and the level of spiritual life with its parallel struggle between the world and loving submission to the Shepherd of our souls. The story has features from the "house of concubines" with its 300 beautiful ladies (*1 Kings 11.3*) and relates a special affection that developed between a swarthy beauty and the shepherd of her dreams-who has been co-opted into the harem.

The song belonged to "the peaceable" as *Josephus* called Solomon! (*cf. 2 Samuel 20.19*) The word SHALOM is in itself a spectrum and has a rainbow of meanings. It can mean "complete" "restore" "pay or recompense" "to be friendly" or "to make peace" (*Joshua 11.19*) to which significance the cognate Arab root Salam "submit" easily attaches itself.

The first letter of the word *m/v* is used in the text of the book and attached to a host of words in an *apparently* willy-nilly fashion. It is a mark of the chosen writing style of Solomon sprinkles **V** as a prefix more than liberally through his canticle. Standing alone **V** is (a) a prefix meaning "which" or "because" and (b) the sign for 300 and (c)

the ancient sign for El **Sh**addai and finally (d) it was used by Aramean speakers in place of **t** (*the sign for the cross*) – this connection strengthens its meaning of "final or complete" since **t** is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. All of these hints of why the writer employs the prefix so generally are of interest but the simple reason is grammatical and for the associated reason of stressing "beauty" and "glory." I refer the reader to my comments on 4.2.

2 HIS LOVE

Let him kiss me with **the arsenal** of kisses *twqvm* of his mouth for your love is better to me than wine which cheers the heart of man. *Declared affection conquered her soul. The Hebrew for intimate "love" Jydd is always plural-as if it is a basket of delights. Wine is just as sweet every time it is tasted, so precious times of fellowship with Jesus are special.*

Who can cheer the heart like Jesus
By His presence all divine,
True and tender pure and precious
O how blest to call Him mine.
All that thrills my soul is Jesus

He is more than life to me
And the fairest of ten thousand
In my blessed Lord I see.

Thoro Harris(Nazarene Publishing)

3 HIS NAME

To be in the presence of the fragrance of your good ointments; your name is ointment that has been poured out – for that reason the virgins sigh after you in love. *Solomon's name is used many times. Why does the name mean so much? It is because it is the name of an "anointed one!" Even so the name of Jesus has significance because He is Messiah – the Son of God.*

Amongst us our beloved stands
And bids us view His pierced hands
Points to his wounded hands and side
Blest emblems of the crucified!

4 HIS SIMPLEST WISH IS OUR COMMAND

Hold out your hand and we will run after you. The king caused me to come into his "house of women" or "curtains". *This is the sign of pleasure of a monarch enter – the "sceptre" was stretched out to the Shulamite. We will dance and be radiant with you. We will cause your love to be remembered more than wine. The righteous love you. The sense we are to take is that of desire (literally "breathing after"). The testimony of this girl is very luminous. She says "Those approved in your sight love you". Our king does not see as man sees-and approve by a standard of outward beauty.* Both lessons this concubine carries from the Curtains of Solomon-**He is our "peace". His approval is "righteousness"**. Now the scene changes

5 THE SENSITIVITY OF THE SHULAMITE ON HOW SHE IS

The quest of her shepherd lover together deeply felt need vv5-8 A "shesh" v introduces God's presence I am V black [hrj—v] like the tents of Kedar (goat hair tents)-like the curtains of Solomon". The Ismaelite Arabs whose tents David would not enter – and the trembling curtains enter – reflecting the fear of the presence of the sovereign too. The fear of this woman whose heart belonged to another than Solomon becomes evident. The question of enduring acceptance is uppermost in her heart. The Hebrew letter "Shesh" carries the effect "I who am signally black" This swarthy is a very real factor in the attractiveness and beauty of the Shulamite.

6 THE CULTURE OF THE SOUL

Do not look upon me prophetically – for I am swarthy – *SHAHARHAR means "dusty black"-since the word describes the dawn the expression might well read "I became dark-skinned very early". The word is in the diminutive form meaning "I am only a little swarthy girl." She is really confessing a deeper hue than her skin-colour-and admitting a deeply felt handicap-she is no delicate beauty-but an out-of-doors type.*

Because **V** the sun has scorched me – the sons of my mother have "snorted in anger" at me – they made me the guardian of the vineyards. Because "shesh" **V** I have not kept myself. The text suggests that as a little girl she had no care for her appearance – which in a woman was something of an error-because to cover against the sun would preserve the skin and beauty. *She was put to a task usually reserved for youths. The tell-tale "Shesh" has the effect of drawing attention to some carelessness – but the oils and treatments of the court were not available to her and though she felt so different from the soft ladies of the harem her duskiness was her glory.*

7 THE HIGH NOON OF REVELATION AND THE APPEARANCE OF THE GREAT SHEPHERD

Reveal to me the enigma (HAGADAH) "O Thou **V** whom my soul loves" of where you will feed? Again the "shesh" prefix of Solomon lays stress on the supreme beauty of the shepherd in the thought of the Shulamite. Reveal to me where you cause your flock to recline with their feet underneath in the double light of noon (i.e. great light)

V Why (*Shesh before the interrogative particle*) should I be as a covered harlot among the flocks of **your companions**? *The Shulamite unused to being covered up will not stoop to enticement –she hates seducing as much as being smothered in clothes. She is characteristically inclined to "seeking" or understood spiritually "prayer" and "revelation". The beauty of the Shulamite was in her glorious hair and eyes-her swarthy looks – her lovely body-scantily clad and open to the Shepherd's admiring eyes. The shepherd was one of many companion shepherds as the Shulamite had many companions in the gardens – cf. Chapter 8*

8 INTIMACY BY DISCIPLESHIP-HIGHER GROUND AND JACOB'S PENIEL

If you do not know me intimately – the one who belongs to you, O fair one among women – go in the footsteps of the flock! (*Literally the "Jacobs"*) – and feed your kids above the tents of the shepherds. There is high-ground even above these tabernacles – in the divine presence itself. The reference to Jacob speaks about the believer claiming his birthright in the shepherd care of the Lord and His people

9 LOVE OF THE SHEPHERD MEANS DENIAL OF THE WORLD

I have constantly thought of you as my companion mare in the chariots of Pharaoh." *One of the uses of the Hebrew Piel is to pose a parable. There is a sense of support and working together and companionship here, a discipline and a unity of purpose that made this Shulamite the natural queen – but that was not in her heart. The world she entered by connection with Solomon had scanty attraction for her.*

*Take this world but give me Jesus
All its joys are but a name.
He will strength and comfort give you
Through eternity the same*

10 SOLOMON'S GIFTS

Your cheeks are beautiful or fresh with cut jewels; your narrow or little neck in gold. *As the prodigal received the clothes of the firstborn so the Shulamite received gifts. Among these were jewels and cut gold. The Shulamite does not have a powerful neck as was sought in a strong wife-but the weakness was counter veiled by glory*

11 A POTENTIAL QUEEN

We will make you tiaras of splendid gold with earrings of silver. *The piercing of the ear has a biblical connotation. It conveys the notion of "faithfulness through life".*

12 THAT OTHER SPIKENARD STORY FOR THE WORLD

As long as he who is the king **V** is around his table! – *The prefixed "shesh" by tends to highlight the king's glory and appearance. Solomon can speak of his own glory without ostentation as he uses the "shesh" device. As long as the King is around [rbsmb] his triclinium (table of dainties) my nard (Indian spikenard) sends out a beautiful fragrance. The gift of fragrance is in the anointing of perfume applied in this case to the woman herself but for the king's pleasure. What is being said is that the Shulamite is in the close presence of the king. The book is a "song of loves "(plural). It is in marriage that a Jewish couple is King and Queen but the shulamite is not and never will be Solomon's Queen. We cannot rule out the possibility that she is Abishag and so was earlier David's virgin intimate. If so she was in Solomon's harem by transfer at the Kings death but may never have consented to be David's either. In the NT a lady anoints the Saviour with "spikenard." Like Jesus Solomon on his couch was so moved by the "nard" and attentions of the Shulamite that he determined her story would be told despite her dusky and swarthy appearance. The woman of the NT by contrast was so devoted to Jesus that she sacrificed her own expensive spikenard on His body and anointed Him her King.*

13 MYRRH THE SHEPHERD AND HIS DEATH

A pressed bundle of myrrh (in a purse) is my Beloved to me – between my breasts. *Such was often hung on a string around the neck – a secret reminder of a lover. The "myrrh" was a constant secret reminder of the Shepherd. The choice of myrrh also heightens the association with the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep.*

14 THE ATONEMENT ANALOGY

My beloved is a "bunch of cypress." *[From such red nail varnish or "nail covering" could be made. This is a gift of the Shepherd. The cognate Hebrew is rpk "covering" where "Kippur" speaks of atonement] in the house of the vineyards of Engedi. The true love has a great big heart and overlooks the actions demanded by the harem of the king. The contrast between the gifts of the King and the simple fragrances of the beloved is stark as is the contrast of Solomon's canopy and that of the Shepherd.*

15 THE FLIGHT OF THE SHULAMITE

Look at you **my companion** O beauty, look at you beautiful one! *The jnh "behold" is in this case a term of inquiry. The query is "Why are you eyes fearful?" Those tearful mourning eyes are so dove-like! Your eyes are mourning doves. There is much*

weeping over this enforced relationship at the palace. Like the dove and Jonah who was named “dove” the Shulamite is restive. It would seem she flees from the harem to her Shepherd lover.

16 NAOMI THE SHULAMITE

Behold my beloved you are fair – all sweetness [“Naomi”]. All we have for our canopy is the overhanging curtain of a flourishing green tree. *The place where the Shulamite and the Shepherd might marry under God was beneath the forest green perhaps of a spreading cypress or cedar.*

17 THE TRYST UNDER THE CEDAR TREE

The rafters of our house – that are united and meet so fast & sure are cedar, our carved work is in “cypress” *mytrb* (from which we get “Beirut”). The play on “fretwork” suggests their names are carved together in a tree. So under great trees in the country the true relationship of this couple is for real. This place of meeting is significant – for from the timbers of the cedar Solomon’s house and God’s temple were constructed. The Shulamite looked not at the mighty palace beams but the arching bows of the spreading cedar in the wood. Here union with her beloved Shepherd was cemented at “the tree”.

CHAPTER 2

This second chapter is perhaps the best known section of the canticle. It features the “rose of Sharon” and the “apple tree” and it tells of the “banner of love” and the “little foxes”. What is less well known is that as part of the spiritual and prophetic glimpses of the Saviour Bridegroom it signals Israel as the “fig tree” and catches sight of the coming King or messiah. It also recalls Israel to Bethel where the glory of Christ was revealed to Jacob and brings us to the fount of faith – holding on to Christ and seeking His face in prayer.

1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF “THE ROSE OF SHARON”

I am the “rose of Sharon” – the lily of the long valleys that broaden out before the eye. This flower grew profusely far from the Plain of Sharon and the humble title does not constitute an address. [*myqm*] The “rose” of Isaiah 35.1 and The Song is thought to be the autumn crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*). It is not of isolated habit but spreads throughout the pastureland of the plains as flowers in the Swiss valleys. There are two things I observe about the word rose *lxb* first it means “acrid” like an onion and second it is a cognate of “shade” so it lives both in the sunshine and in the protective shade of great mountains. It is an autumn flower. *Gesenius* calls the “rose of Sharon” the “meadow saffron.” As a description of the bride of Christ the description fits. While there is inevitably acrid hidden sin in every Christian life that is unseen – Christ sees His “beauty” in us and in the autumn of His dealings with us we shall display a humble loveliness-indeed His church shall spread in all the deep places of the earth.

2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LILY AND THORNS

As the lily [v̄v̄] among the thorn bushes [j̄h̄] so is my companion and friend among the daughters. *The lily is most likely to be the “Aram lily” abundant in Antioch and Syria though the original white lily was native to Persia and gave Shushan the city and seat of the Persian monarchs its name. Spiritual reading readily recognises the purity of the bride of Christ among the crackling thorns of envy and jealousy. As our Saviour’s brow was crowned with thorns so our lives are surrounded with friend-enemies whose words are as arrows.*

3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE APPLE TREE

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood so is my beloved among the sons. *Ready interpretation leads us to understand the implication is the “fruitfulness” associated with the ministry of Christ. I caused myself to rest or interrupt my work or spent Sabbath in His shadow. I was delighted over and over. The quality time spent with the beloved is readily understood as worship. The word delight [dm̄j] is identical with “the desire of all nations” Haggai 2.7. The delight of the Shulamite is her anointed one. And his fruit was pleasant to my taste [k̄j] – “the hook” of perception or palate] or pleasant for my “training” and “dedication” The Shulamite quite unlike Eve in the Garden of Eden is not enamoured with the serpent but with her beloved. He will not lead her into sin but rather to a life of instruction and consecration. She relishes the presence of the beloved-it is sweet as honey.*

*There is a name I love to hear, I love to speak its worth
It sounds like music to my ear the sweetest name on earth.*

O how I love the Saviour’s name

O how I love the Saviour’s name

The sweetest name on earth

F Whitfield 1829-1904

4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BANNER

He caused me to come to his house of wine and his flag or banner of conquest [l̄gd̄] over me was “**friendship.**” [hb̄ha “the delight and desire of love”] *As wine bonds friends so the blood of Christ plainly acts as a mighty weld between the redeemer and the redeemed. The love based friendship of one whose household of faith is founded on the redemption of the cross cements for ever that spiritual union of believer and Saviour. The large flag that is unfurled to declare victory is linked to the house of wine as the Love of Christ is linked to the Church of God purchased by the blood of the Lamb.*

*He brought me into his banqueting house
And his banner over me is love.*

5 WHY CAKES?

Sustain me or bestow liberally on me with cakes or dainties. Give me a spread couch with apples and citrus fruit for I am writhing or going round and round out of love. *The experience of the exhilaration of the enamoured is mixed with the rest of sharing and refreshment. There are these other aspects of “friendship”-those special cakes those*

celebratory times and those lovely sweet fruits which represent sharing in the good fruits of the work of the beloved. At the level of abandonment the intimacy of lovers is enhanced and cemented by savouring the loveliest of dainties.

6 THE EMBRACE OF ASSURANCE

His left hand underneath belongs to my head and his right enfolds me in his embrace. *The lovers are committed in intimate embrace. For the Shulamite the experience of the arms of her beloved is enthralling, assuring, affirming.*

*I'm safe and secure from all alarms
I'm resting- resting- resting in the everlasting arms*

7 WHY SWEAR BY DEER?

I make you swear O daughters of Jerusalem by the female gazelles or if you like by the hinds of field that you will not or may not give cause to alert awake or raise up my beloved and you do not keep on stirring him from rest until he sets his wish to rise or appoints his pleasure. *The gazelles and hinds may easily be disturbed and take to flight. Just as there is a time in the life of the fleet footed deer called the "rut" so there are seasons in the purposes of God. The "beloved" is pictured coming in the latter days to claim His bride – the portraiture is not so much that of redemption as the redemption of our bodies-the catching away – the time of the marriage feast of the lamb. For us the spiritual impact of this image lies in the objects associated with the oath. The chosen animals speak of a special season when the bridegroom shall come and the very swiftness of his catching away of the redeemed*

8 WHY MOUNTAINS?

The voice of my lover-look this beloved comes skipping or leaping over the mountains and **shutting his mouth in death** [xpq] upon the hills. *I have taken the rendering of Schultens (cf. Job24.24 where "they perish" and "shut their mouths" registers death) and this rendering records the "death of Jesus Christ" on the hillside of Calvary. The Shepherd of the canticle would speed across the Judean hills to seek his Shulamite friend in the city. The further relevance of "mountains" attaches clearly to Christ's coming again above the mountains as He seeks and draws His bride into the air and indeed His final return when He stands on the Mount of Olives. The call for the reader's attention-the call is given by the Shulamite – the bride in whose name is "peace". The spiritual significance for these latter days is that Christ has died in redemptive love and is coming again to claim His own. These seasons are of God's choosing not mans.*

9 THE FAWN AT THE WINDOW

My lover is comparable to a glorious gazelle or to a young fawn of the stags. Just look as this one stands behind our wall of compacted clay [l tk] looking in at the windows – his bright eye looking by stealth [xix] through our window netting. *The curiosity of the young fawn which noses up to the window and its big eye can be seen peering in-is a graphic portrayal of the attention the LORD is paying to his bride in*

the latter days as he awaits the day when he takes her home. The “clay walls” speak of the earthly church.

10 THE MUST OF THE “CATCHING AWAY”

My beloved answered and spoke to me. Arise, come, my friend and companion, my beautiful one – you must come – he must go. *The double imperative singular – feminine and masculine declare the double necessity of the bride leaving and the bridegroom going away with her by Hebrew custom reflected in Pre-millennialism and ancient Christian theology.. This in terms of latter day truth speaks of the catching away of the church which is not to suffer wrath and of the essential occasion of joy and recognition in glory.*

11 ISRAEL’S WINTER

For behold the long winter is passed over – the heavy December January rains are passed and that which goes with it. *Sowing and harvest were over – the winter of waiting and suffering. The latter rains and the spring of new times are just ahead. The significance for the Sovereign bridegroom whose story fits like marquetry into the romance is that Christ is coming again.*

*Coming again coming again
It may be morning, it may be noon,
It will be soon –
Jesus is coming again.*

12 ISRAEL’S SPRING

The flowers make themselves seen on earth. The time of the singing has arrived and the voice of the turtle makes itself heard in our land. *In Psalm 74.19 we read “O deliver not the soul of thy turtle dove over to the multitude of the wicked”. Israel may begin to prosper but the call of the turtle is the call of love and the call of the afflicted also. In Jeremiah 8.7 the turtle is one of 4 birds which signal a new season.*

13 ISRAEL THE FIG TREE

The fig tree extends her unripe figs [*which normally hang on to the branches over the winter*] and the vines in blossom give a pleasant fragrance on the wind-arise and come my companion, my fair one – you must go I must go. *The “fig tree” putting forth leaves is the sign of the coming of Christ in the latter day. This our LORD bade us attend to. (Matthew 24.32) The beginning of Israel’s turning to God in expectation through the work of the Spirit of God combines with the other portrayal to ratchet up the immanence of the return of the LORD for us today. All this spiritually we can see readily from the text of Solomon.*

14 ISRAEL PETRA AND CHRIST’S DESIRE

O my dove in the quarried places of Petra – in the secret places of the steeps let me see what you look like or let me see you look towards me. Let me hear your voice – your reply – for your voice is agreeable or a pledge and your looking towards me is desirable. *There can be little doubt but that the lesson about the “dove” is that Israel –*

the “Jonah” people who like the famous prophet fled from Christ is turning to God in jeopardy like the prophet in the latter times.

15 THE FOXES-RIVAL INTERESTS DESTROY FRUITFULNESS

The new section beginning with v15 and continuing to the end of Chapter 3 is spoken by the Shulamite

Catch the burrowing foxes [1 [iv] – the little fox cubs that damage the vines and our cultivated vineyards at the time of blossom. The phrase seems gratuitous in the context but it warns that the good fruit of faith can be destroyed by “foxes” The term for fox is also a description of locations in the district of Benjamin. Solomon slew many of the adversaries of David and was vigilant against any re-assertion of trouble from that quarter. The lesson is that no rivalry to the rule of Christ can be tolerated in our lives – He must be sovereign ruling supreme and alone. No other lordship should be countenanced or undermine the fruitfulness of His will in our lives.

16 SPIRITUAL FOOD AND HOLINESS OR JOY COMBINED

My loved one belongs to me and I belong to Him. He feeds his flock among the lilies (beauty of purity) of the field. The text might also read – He feeds his flock with pipes of song (joy). David may well have piped as he shepherded – and the music of scriptural song feeds souls – indeed the apostle Paul says “Speak to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”. The principle stress must be on the mutuality of the relationship with the LORD which is the spiritual lesson set out plainly. The setting of pastoral care is the field of the world in which Christ Himself became incarnate and taught the principles of His kingdom.

17 BETHER: THE PENIEL EXPERIENCE COGENT TO TRUE HEBREW RELIGION: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE “GOD OF JACOB”

*Until the day grows cool in the evening breeze and the shadows flee away-you must turn – you must think concerning yourself – **meditate on your life my beloved comparing yourself to the splendid gazelle or young roe of the leading stags upon the hills that divide (Bether).** According to 2Samuel2.29 the area of Bether is close to where Jacob met with God – south of Mahanaim where the great old shepherd divided his family and flocks and where the Yarmuk gorge divides the hills. **The meditation yields a fundamental truth-that the very likeness of Christ should become settled in our life and character.** To take the lesson for the latter days and the church yielded by the verse is to recognise the Saviour’s glory and beauty and concern for us in v.9 as drawn with deft idiomatic strokes of literary artistry. We are to have the very same Christ likeness – which can be best gained as it was obtained by Jacob at Bether-Peniel by wrestling with God – by prayer – by that intimacy that makes of the supplanter a veritable “prince with God”.*

A somewhat more involved but equally feasible understanding of the fascinating statement about “seasons and love” is that after the autumn apples of love and walks amid the autumn saffron have consolidated the relationship of Shulamite and Solomon built on the “friendship” built in the banqueting house that conquered her heart (for us the cross and the Saviour’s blood) there comes winter and testing and the spring of

assurance and His renewed voice. The relationship goes on till the evening breeze of life's little day and the shadows of death flee before eternal daybreak. The "glory" ("gazelles") and the "intimacy" morning roe all occupy the high ground of the "hills of Bethel" (cf. Genesis 15.10) where the covenant offering or the "man of division" of the covenant offering brings Abraham nigh to God through the luminous one walking through the pieces or "division". Our "life of faith" and "hope of glory" are built on that covenant which our beloved keeps. For us who believe this focuses our meditation on Christ and Calvary and the meditation enables us to rise to the spiritual uplands of life.

So to a higher plain than this
And to my soul I know 'tis bliss
Though how or why I cannot tell
He should have lifted me.
From sinking sands He lifted me
With tender hand He lifted me
From shades of night to plains of light
O praise His name He lifted me.
Charles Gabriel

CHAPTER 3

This beautifully conceived section of the allegory features the manner in which the Shulamite gives her minders the slip and hastily scours the streets of the metropolis for her Shepherd lover whom she feels sure will have come in search of her. The love of the good Shepherd is alike evident – Jesus said, "How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing – but you would not!" Solomon is understandably demurring as he refers to the wedding that overshadows the story of the sweet burgeoning romance with the Shulamite. The story of "foreign wives" is inescapably part of his life and the allegory stands true autobiographically to his life.

1 FEELING AFTER THE SHEPHERD IS INCONCLUSIVE

On my bed in the night I was "feeling for" or asking for **V** the lover of my soul. The "shesh" of emphasis shows us to the exquisite loveliness of the Shepherd whose presence she dreams about. With continual seeking I did not find him. The Hebrew *vqb* has the root meaning "to feel for." Scripture assures us that "in seeking we shall find" but equally Paul tells us in Acts 17.27 that good enough as "feeling after" God may be revelation is essential.

2 THE NIGHT SEARCH

I will rise or "please may I rise". The house of the women was most strictly governed. The Shulamite appears to have asked to rise in the night-time and for obvious reasons gained ready permission. I will or would circle again and again through the city running to and fro and in the broad squares I will seek "the one" **V** whom my soul

loves. Again we are to read “the beautiful one” in the context. I did not find him through seeking him.

3 THE WATCHMEN PROMPTED TO THE SEARCH

O watchmen who circuit the city apart from finding me you look out for him whom my soul loves. *It seems curious that the Shepherd should come to Jerusalem from his rural haunt and home. Should the Shulamite truly hail from Issachar the shepherd might well come from nearby plains and valleys which form the time of Joseph were clad with sheep – though of this we know nothing affirmatively. Yet did not Christ enter the city and there do many mighty works. The Shepherd sought his Shulamite lover-the Saviour the people of the city over which He wept. Taking this lesson to heart should we not encourage all to be alert for the coming of the LORD?*

4 TIME WITH JESUS IS PRECIOUS

It was a brief **time when** **V** I passed from them until “**that**” **V** when I found the lover of my soul. I took hold of him and I would not or will not relax or give up [hpr]

Until that **time when** **V** I had caused him to come to the home of my mother and into the inner apartment of the one who conceived me. *Three glorious things are shared in this statement. For the Shulamite there was the glory of speaking about her Shepherd, the glory of re-discovering him and the glorious experience of having him to her home. The Shulamite was irked by delay. She was overjoyed to come upon the one who loved her as she was and she brought him to her mother. Delay in spiritual things is unwelcome. Meeting with the one who loves the souls of His own in prayer is joy and to see Jesus purest joy. Total commitment to Him means He enters every part of our lives.*

5 A SECOND OATH

I cause you to swear **O daughters of Jerusalem** by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field (*quiet shy animals*) that you do not cause my beloved to awake or keep trying to wake him till the time when **V** he pleases. *The stress is on the beauty and glory of the “awaking shepherd”. The application to Christ is the glory of His resurrection and the glory of His coming as King. The setting is the morning afterwards – for the Shepherd had gone to rest in the city and needed sleep after a long trek to attempt to meet his Shulamite friend. She recognised the need for a long period of rest. For a second time in the canticle the “daughters of the city” are under oath. The time of Christ’s coming to save and to rule are in God’s authority. Israel is to patiently await her king and the “daughters of Zion” might well incorporate believers who answer to Jerusalem as the city where Pentecostal blessing raised the testimony of the worldwide church. The church is committed to evangelise or herald the good news world-wide but the decisive moment of the LORD’S appearance is the Father’s prerogative.*

6 SOLOMON’S CONQUEST: WHO IS WHISKED TO THE CITY?

Who is this that is coming up out of the desert like columns of smoke? Who is this anointed with myrrh and frankincense – all the aromatic powders of the trafficking

merchant? *The question is “Who is he?” and the query must also be “What was he doing?” Did he pursue and regain the Shulamite? The oils and powders suggest a hugely prepared wife or concubine. **Could this not be the princess of Egypt?** The Huge posse of guards suggests something more grandiose than a short trip to Engedi. The caravan creates a huge dust cloud. This question raises interest. The diffidence of the writer to give the answer suggests strongly that a bride of neither popular nor godly choice may be hinted and if so this is the only biblical reference to Solomon’s marriage with the princess of Egypt.*

7 THE UNIQUE LITTER OF SOLOMON

Behold his expansive bed – that of **V** Solomon. *Solomon draws attention to the glory of the bed. Sixty robust warriors are around about it from the mighty men of Israel. The immediate transition from the desert scene to the bed is unusual. What is the connection? Though the thoughts in the narrative are those of the Shulamite the writer is Solomon. The story of how the Shulamite avoided Solomon’s bed and gained her Shepherd lover is related first. Had she not escaped her way would for ever have been barred. The emergence of the nameless occupant of the litter powdered and heavy with unguents follows. The reference to the “special” crown gifted by Bathsheba seals the answer to the query about the woman in the litter. The lesson for us is that the tantalising future this world holds out before us can capture us so that getting back to Christ is a battle.*

8 SOLOMON RETAINED DAVID’S MIGHTIES

They are all grasping a sword as experienced fighters out of battle every man from fear of the night with his hand on his sword that is strapped to his thigh. *The short sentence tells us that Solomon’s palace guard were men from David’s trusty soldiers who were battle hardened. Solomon so far as we know fought no campaigns.*

9 SOLOMON’S SIGNATURE-ONLY THE BEST

King Solomon made him a litter [*myrpa*] from the wood of Lebanon. *This sentence introduces a yet more complex twist to the theme. Why refer to the litter? The first obvious answer is that Solomon rejoiced in creating the best things – he was immensely inventive. But Solomon is still telling the story of one he loved. What is being described is the nearest thing in scripture to a mobile home. It is a mobile bedroom where the King who pursued an amorous life-style could drive with his wife or concubine. Was he pursuing the Shulamite to have her share this bed-chamber?*

10 SOLOMON DIRECTS US TO THE LOGO IN THE FLOOR

He made its pillars of silver, its sides and back [*dpr*] of gold, its seat purple. Its centre was inlaid with stones [*pxr*] **“A friend or love from or outside the daughters of Jerusalem”** *The tell-tale inscription in tiles tended to make the one hosted feel very special. It also had about it space for interpretation. It could be as easily used for a foreign wife as for a bride from Jerusalem. [*mlvry tmbll hbha*] This chariot would have been the coveted setting for the Solomon’s amorous trip with the Shulamite.*

11 SOLOMON REMINDS US OF HIS BELOVED BATHSHEBA

Go out and look O daughters of Zion at King Solomon with the crown **with which his mother crowned V** (again “shesh” concentrates attention to the glory of the diadem Bathsheba presented-it may well have been one which David minted for her or one of her own designing. Some idea of her immense capability can be derived from my commentary on “Proverbs”) him in the day of his marriage and in the day of his radiant joy of heart. The “Chariot” the “Litter” “the crown” – trappings of glory surrounded the king – of which many women might have been jealous-and the daughters of Zion who perhaps seldom saw the great litter are told about it by the Shulamite – and Solomon the writer reveals it as perhaps something of a secret little known to the general public – much less its acrostic inscription. Jewish marriage made the bridegroom and bride regal during their marriage celebrations. That was the crown given him and his bride as King and Queen when he married the princess of Egypt-an event absent from scriptural annals. (cf 1Kings 9.24 and 11.1)

CHAPTER 4

Further lessons are to be drawn from the “compliments” to the bride and from the “glories” of the Shepherd in Chapter 5.

In this entire chapter where the concentration is on “the beauty” of the Shulamite the disclosure of how “shesh” is employed in respect of the teeth discovers to the reader the subtle emphasis this sign enables the writer (Solomon) to lay throughout the canticle on the glory of the Shepherd and the Shulamite and at times the writer obtrudes more conspicuously to refer to himself or something which gives him joy without the embarrassment of embellishment. The narrative of rustic friendship and romance continues apace as the royal wedding fades into the background. Solomon’s appreciation of the Shulamite is to be read from the lips of the shepherd lover. The later section of the chapter speaks of engagement to the Shepherd and the joy and provisions of that noble union of Christ and His church. The sub-set of “Garden” epics in chapters 4 5 & 6 are set in the garden of the Lover. The literary sub-set is Solomon’s concept framed on his well-known garden interest. The garden for all intents and purposes is imaginary because it is actually the life and work of the Shulamite. Thus whilst the owner of the actual gardens from which the imagery is all drawn is undoubtedly Solomon the garden in which the Shulamite works and where her Lover resorts belongs to the Shepherd. Solomon would have had splendid gardens both at Jerusalem and in Lebanon and as we shall later see more significantly in Galilee. The Shulamite originally watched a vineyard so her apprenticeship in matters of grace began through acquaintance with the atonement and her further work involved prayer and fruitful living.

1 BEAUTIFUL EYES AND HAIR

Behold you are fair my love – behold you are fair. Your eyes are mournful doves from behind your locks. Your hair is as a herd of goats which **V** hangs from Mount Gilead.

This compliment is lost on us. It seems banal. The “glory” of the manner and sheen and length of the hair of the Shulamite requires a very special simile and Solomon is not wanting when a special idiom has to be rustled up. After all Solomon’s proverbs were constructed to seed the Hebrew language with a new spirituality. Solomon is the Shakespearean genius of Hebrew who left the language richer by far than he received it.

Jerome in the vulgate has “ascend from Mount Gilead”. The word $\nu\lambda g$ also means “shine.” The compliment is rich in meaning – the hair is profuse and dark –and splendid in sheen. The Shulamite is retiring and diffident before the King

2 THE ENIGMA OF “SHESH” DECIPHERED

Your teeth are as a flock of shorn sheep each \mathbf{V} matching the other as sheep from the wash. Of which \mathbf{V} each is doubled or twinned and not one \mathbf{V} of them all is childless or aborted. *The copious use of “shesh” in this verse is clearly because the letter taken alone means “tooth” and as the teeth greatly enhance **loveliness** in a smile the sign used by Hebrews for “tooth” in its multiple use is employed as a device to stress beauty and glory. Added to the grammatical use of “shesh” (meaning “which”) is its widespread use as a “sign” of beauty and glory. It is in this verse that the enigma of Solomon’s use of “shesh” becomes patent.*

3 BEAUTIFUL LIPS SPEECH AND FOREHEAD

Your \mathbf{V} lips are as a cord of scarlet and your words are apt and beautiful. *Solomon is pleased to stress that in the Shulamite he found a person as intriguing as the Queen of Sheba in the use of words. He was the nation’s mentor in language and this commendation cannot go without notice. The Church of Christ ought to be outstanding too for “speech that is with grace”. Your temple or cheeks [qqr] are like slices of pomegranate beneath your locks. The beautiful pink slices of the pomegranate provide a suited simile*

4 THE STRENGTH OF THE SHULAMITE

Your neck is as the tower David built for the hanging of sharp edged weapons [$tnp\ l\ t$] A thousand shields [nym -small shields unlike hnx – “whole body shield”] hung upon it- all shields [$f\ l\ v$ literally “shields that gained power” for David] of his warriors. *The small round shields might be compared to pots and burdens which the Shulamite carried on her head – a thousand loads not being an exaggeration.*

5 THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF HER WALK.

Your two breasts are as two young twin deer swelling or prominent as they delight among the lilies. *The comment is intimate and sensuous. The reference to the prominent and beautiful bosom linked with feeding roes yields the sense of gentle breast movement. This comment which presents the Shulamite walking with a burden on her head brings the grandiloquence to a conclusion and if the reader should dare to employ the metaphor of the strong neck and swaying breasts in the teaching of scripture the depiction is to be understood as that of the walk of the bride or the*

church which occupies a leading part of Paul's teaching in Ephesians and elsewhere in his teaching.

6 A LONELY WALK TO FRAGRANT PLACES

But the shadows have fled and I will go by myself to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense until the glorious time of day when **V** the evening or exciting breezes blow. ***This lonely expedition to a place associated with death and with priestly work is more than a country walk. It is visit to the most fragrant places. For the Christian it speaks of the singular and individual encounter with suffering death and atoning work of Christ. It reminds us of Christ's trials and His death by the lonely hill of Golgotha. As to the allegory we are not told who goes there. It would appear to be Solomon himself. In company with everyman and woman he needs to be alone with that which atones for his sin and supports his soul beyond the highest sensual dreams of the mind.***

7 THE SOURCE OF ASSURANCE

You are entirely fair my love or my friend. There is no blemish in you. *The natural comparison is with Ephesians 5.27 and the bride whom Christ will one day present to Himself spotless and perfect. The Shepherd brings this assurance to the Shulamite who is so conscious of her failure and dusky appearance. Christ by His glorious atoning work brings like certitude to the believer. It is not our self-conscious awareness of failure or conscience of sin that must gain predominance but the power of His blood to wash the vilest clean.*

8 THE SHULAMITE GAINS VITAL VISIONS

Come with men from Lebanon my betrothed crowned with a caplet, come with me from Lebanon. You will watch as one who lies in wait from the summit of Amana the summit of Shenir and Hermon from the dens of the lions and the mountains of the leopards. *The high point of "truth" or faithfulness and the high point of "a coat of mail," The spouse is to be wary to hold to the truth and to be a-warring. The Shepherd will have her protected by vision and by truth and the whole armour of God. The most vital vista of Hermon is a reminder to the Christian of that dazzling whiteness which was experienced on the "very high mountain" where Jesus was transfigured. His garments shone whiter than a fuller could white them. So the Shulamite needs to know her Shepherd is faithful; he will safeguard her and let her glimpse the realm beyond death whilst warning of the dangers below. Christ gives vision to his church.*

He will show you his unfailing truth and faithfulness

He will provide for you the whole armour of God which you must take to you with prayer

He will open eternal life to your view whilst warning you of the strategies of Satan and the multiform trials and temptations of this world.

9 LOVE IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

O my sister my betrothed you belong close to my heart – you belong to my heart through one single glance of your eyes – by one single chain of your neck. *It takes so*

little to cement love. As one glance of a beautiful Shulamite moves the heart of the Shepherd and for that matter the heart of Solomon so one look at the crucified Saviour binds us to Christ. Equally one gift that confirms that engagement of the heart seals the union – a chain about her fair neck as a ring on the modern bride's 3rd finger.

10 THE LOVE OF CHRIST

How beautiful is your love my sister and betrothed? How much better is your love than wine and the fragrance of your anointing than all the balsams? *The apostle Paul spoke of the lasting quality of love in 1 Corinthians 13. The love of Christ for His bride is very great. Through death He purchased us. Through trials He never leaves us. Through eternity He will show us the extent of His great love.*

*The love of Christ is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell
It stretches to the furthest star
It reaches to the deepest hell.*

F H Leyman Nazarene Publishing

11 PURE DOCTRINE-SIMPLE NURTURE

Your lips will distil **drops**. [pfi] Such “distillation” is described in Amos 9.13 as “prophetic declaration” and edifying discourse. The application of this detail of the allegory is the truth of scripture and doctrine committed to the bride of Christ. Honey and milk abide or are marks [tj t] of your tongue and the fragrance of your garments is as the smell of the (cedar wood of) Lebanon. *The doctrinal purity and nurturing provided in the teaching of the church or bride of Christ and the witness of the enduement of peace are the lessons to be taken from this compliment.*

12 THE CROWN RIGHTS OF CHRIST

A garden secured by bolt or bar is my sister and betrothed-a fountain barred-a spring sealed with a signet. *This tribute recognises that whilst marriage awaits the bride to be is fully dedicated to her fiancé. She has kept her virginity. She is sealed as the one with whom her Shepherd has a tryst. So the Church which awaits the LORD is dedicated to produce fruit for Christ; dedicated to minister to His thirst for a holy relationship; dedicated to the one who seals with the Holy Spirit.*

13 A TABLE OF PRODUCTS DEMONSTRATE COMMITMENT

Your table or produce is a paradise of pomegranates with the choicest fruits – camphor with spikenards. *The pomegranate is the type of immense fruitfulness and was attached to the robe of the high priest. This robe was worn in the holy place where fruitfulness sources. Campfire was used to dye the nails – which is the usage in the proper translation of Deuteronomy 21.12. Oil from its seed was used anciently to make soap-so campfire cleanses and beautifies. Spikenard is of course a powerful perfume. Fruitfulness of life and cleanliness or purity of living and fragrance of witness are gathered from the garden.*

14 WHOLENESS AND HOLINESS

There is spikenard and saffron sweet cane and cinnamon with all the trees of frankincense myrrh and aloes with all the chief balsams. *Powerful frankincense perfume, medicinal saffron (this flower – the common crocus was made into a type of spray which the Romans used to scent their theatres) Sweet cane is spoken of by Jeremiah (6.20) as “sweet or good”-an obvious ingredient of incense. Cinnamon also was an ingredient of the “holy oil”. The trees that excreted resins which had holy use were in the garden too. The aloe was originally an Indian tree called the “aghal” which yielded astringent or bitter tasting wood. This wood-aloe was used herbally. This entire variety of flowers herbs resins and woods is associated with “health and holy oil. The Christian reads this list of further produce and recognises aspects of refreshment repair and holiness of soul as products of the engagement of the Shulamite. The immense variety of specialist plants demands of course Solomon’s knowledge of gardens as a background.*

15 GARDENS NEED WATER. CHURCHES NEED THE WORD

These are products from the fountains of gardens the well of living waters and streams from Lebanon.

None of these lovely plants could grow without water. The water sources were fountains and a well of “living water” and some water “drawn” from streams that originated in far away Lebanon. Solomon had all these water features in his own gardens. The living water from deep artesian supplies together with fountains that watered the area much as our garden sprays would do was supplanted by water drawn from streams. Without water there are not fruits or growth – without the word of God there is no spiritual fruit.

16 WIND AND FRAGRANCE

Awake O north wind and come O south wind blow on my garden-it’s spices will distil [/ ʒ] Let my beloved come to his garden and eat the precious fruit. *The wind combines with the fruit. In the N.T. we speak of the “fruit of the Spirit”. The cold north wind and the balmy south wind both operate to produce fruit. The Holy Spirit leads us through hardships and pleasant places to develop the best fruit – that which Christ approves-in our lives. There is no fragrance to life without the work of the Holy Spirit of God. The “coming of Christ” is to be connected with the harvest of fruit in the garden of this world.*

CHAPTER 5

It is to be observed that because “The Song of Solomon” was attached to the psalms in the writings or Kethubim of the Jews the LORD himself would have declared “the things that must be fulfilled” from this book in Luke 24.44. In this fifth chapter we have the Approach, Affection, Alert and Affirmation of the Shulamite. The lesson for the church in the latter days is to cultivate increased “emphasis” on the “love of His atonement”, increased “awareness” of His desire for daily intimacy with His

own, increased “preparedness” for His return and increased concentration on Him—His person and work in our thinking communication and living.

APPROACH OF THE LORD 1

I have come, my sister, my betrothed, even to my garden or on behalf of my garden or on account of my garden! *The emphasis lends a new constitutive element to the Christian understanding and use of “time”. In the account of the gospel by Peter transcribed by Mark the “kairos” (Greek) moment of Christ’s entry into time is emphatic (Mark1.14). Using the term “immediately” (Greek euthus in 36 contexts Peter stresses the revolution in life that Jesus brought with Him. His ministry changed families, townships, and the whole future of the Jews and the history of the world. Henceforth men would leave occupations to forward the overturning of the world that Jesus put in motion. So the Lord comes as a hero as a lion with an insatiable affection for his people—despite their darker side. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. The Hebrew reads “I have plucked off or torn away as a lion would tear off jytra—a word of single use in the O.T.] my myrrh with my spice”. This rude action at the trees is mightily suggestive of the action of a mighty lion in action in the strangest setting—amid the resin yielding trees. The lion is seeking honey and the “sweetness” that Christ seeks is that of his queen—bride and all those who work to fulfil His desire that the earth shall be his footstool. Myrrh is associated with burial and sweet smelling balsam which is associated with healing flow freely from their respective resin bearing trees.*

I have eaten my free flowing honey (*not strictly the comb*) with the bees honey which is the honey currently filled. *The picture is of one who is heroically and with the promptitude of love intervening in His garden. There is the image of the lion which speaks of the King mixed with the metaphor of resins whose free flow speaks to us upon whom the ends of the world are come of the voluntary yielding of Christ’s life unto death on the cross.*

I have drunk to satiety – like Belshazzar-drunk my seasoned wine with my fresh milk. Eat my friends till you are full, drink and do so till you become hilarious, my family friends. *This invitation parallels that of the table “Take eat – this is my body” and “drink ye all of it.” For His part our LORD drank the cup of suffering to its dregs and His ministry gave us the milk of the word. This intense series of metaphors is a compact yet comprehensive declaration of the inception of the ministry of Jesus Christ beginning in the gardens of Gennesaret and destined for the ends of the earth*

AFFECTION OF THE LORD 2

I am a sleepy one but my heart was watching. There is a call—a voice—a cry of my beloved – the zealous one. I have been knocking urgently The Poel participle of the verb indicates “continually knocking”. *This links to NT parable of the man knocking in search of loaves. It is also closely associated for Christian readers with the Rev.3.20 image of Christ knocking at the door of the believer.*

Open to me

My sister!

My love!

My dove!

My weary one!

We are to understand that the LORD'S affection is strikingly conveyed in these four terms.

- (1) Friend-this speaks of a family relationship-a closeness to be resumed or retrieved
- (2) Darling- a person with whom one has eaten and shared much time
- (3) Dove-a term of gentleness applied to the betrothed
- (4) My exhausted or unblemished one [*mmt*] *Our LORD observes our commitment and in him we are complete-without blame-perfect-forgiven.*

My head has filled itself with dew or light rain. *The King is pictured as patiently waiting through the night watches till the early morning-such love.*

My locks [*xmq* – the term is used here and in v.11 only – it means “that which is cut off”] full of the raindrops of the night”.

ALERT AFTER APATHY 3-9

I have taken off my cotton garment – how can I put it off and on? I have washed my feet, how can I keep soiling them? *The suggestion is that Israel like the world today is very comfortable very kosher! Applied to our era the church too is quite immured in comfort and established ways. We can almost leave Christ out in the cold. The poem goes “When Jesus came to Birmingham they just passed Him by.”*

My friend withdrew his hand from the latch (literally “latch hole” or window “aperture”) and my inmost soul was in tumult or turmoil on account of Him. I rose to open it for my friend and my hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers as passed over the handles of the door-bolt. *Matthew Henry has the lovely comment “The lovers hand oiled the lock with myrrh (of His death) and made it easy to open.”* I opened for my lover but he had withdrawn (or gone on circuit).

My soul was overwhelmed as it was spreading abroad his word. *The Hebrew might read “My soul gushed forth” as if ransomed and free like Israel redeemed from Egypt. The expeditious “spreading of the news” that the beloved came is the lesson for the latter day.* In constant seeking I did not find Him. I called Him and he did not answer me.

- (1)The watchmen found me – the ones who go around the city – they beat me bruised me-those watchmen of the walls took my veil from me. *The wording may be read “they directed arrows at me” The threat to life is there.*
- (2) O daughters of Jerusalem if you find my lover tell him I am wearied or sick with love. *They reply “Can you satisfy us as to why or how your beloved is more than any loved one O beauty among women?” The curious are apathetic.*

AFFIRMATION – FROM HEAD TO FOOT AND BACK AGAIN 10-16

In this 9th of 24 glorious statements about the Shepherd Lover in the Canticle I have taken the trouble to give the reader access to the original Hebrew. You will need Hebraica 2 script added to your fonts to enable the script to be read.

The standard bearer over an over is associated with blood and suffering

- (1) *jz mda* My beloved is bright radiant and of sunny disposition; my beloved is ruddy or **stained with blood**
- (2) *hbbm lmd* the standard bearer of the host.

- (3) **zp mtk** His head is precious or hidden as precious gold *The phrase sums up the “hiddenness” of Christ in heaven and the refinement of His suffering in the context of today’s understanding. He is sovereign – thought some see it not.*
- (4) **myl tlt nytxq** His locks hang like palm branches – dark as a raven. Endless in supplies of grace-victorious and glorious
- (5) **ycyp l[mynyk** His eyes as doves on the **streams or gentle water flows**. *The idea is a compassionate one who sympathises genuinely*
- (6) **bljb xjr** lubricated most excellently – they miss nothing. They remain solid in their setting as gems. *Christ does not demur from his bride-His eyes rest on her.*
- (7) **mmbh hgr[m** His cheeks are as a trellis of pure sweet-smelling Balsam. *Balsam was one of the gifts of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. It was originally grown in Gilead (Jeremiah 8.22) from where the Ishmaelites carried it to Egypt It still grew in Israel in the time of our LORD and was brought by Titus as an exhibit to Rome in AD70.*
- (8) **myqrm tldgm** As beds of cleansing or remedies *The balsam tree was cut to release its precious resin so **Christ died on the tree to shed His precious blood** for the spiritual healing of the believer*
- (9) **rb[rmm tufn mynvv nytptv** His lips as lilies **producing drops of myrrh**. *We think of the words of Jesus-especially the sayings from the cross.*
- (10) **vyvrb myalmm bhz ylylg ydy** His hands rolling in gold with settings of Spanish Topaz or amber. *The power of Christ’s movement to take as His possession of the west-even the peoples of industrial nations*
- (11) **nv tv[y[m** His belly (*seat of compassions*) **shining skin associated with sharp pain** or ivory with languishing sapphires **myryps tpl [m** *The sapphire is the heavenly gem that Job said is turned up from the bowels of earth Job28.6 So Christ is true man and the God of heaven – the heavenly man – covered in painful marks.*
- (12) **zp ynd[l[mydsym vv ydm[** His legs are white marble or **fine linen** with foundations established on foundations of **gold** or His ministry *His ministry and standing is doubly secure. Again the imagery stresses the human and divine in the bridegroom*
- (13) **myzrak rjrb mmbk tharm** The sight of Him is as Lebanon – as cedars examined (*for the temple*) *The Bridegroom-Messiah is the choice building block of the house of God*
- (14) **mydmjm ulk myqtmw ukj** His palate for truth is sweet to take sweet counsel or his dedication is pleasant-*the verb means “to suck”* and he is altogether handsome-desirable- This is my friend and this is my companion **O daughters of Jerusalem** *The Shulamite gave a glorious description of Solomon though it actually comes from Solomon’s pen and is a description of a better counsellor who is dedicated to his bride to the point of being willing to die for her.*

CHAPTER 6

This chapter gives strong evidence that another persona was originally included in the script of the dramatic allegory than Solomon and the Shulamite. If the “man” in this chapter is the Shepherd Lover or simply Solomon re-minding the Shulamite of his previous compliments then there is a total break-down of relationship which makes no literary sense when set alongside the immediate sequel. This chapter is the

clearest evidence that Solomon writes as a romantic sage with three characters and a chorus made up of the “daughters of Jerusalem” who are included for instance in the phrase at the end of the English chapter “Come back, come back O Shulamite that we may gaze upon you”

1 THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE BELOVED

Peterson puts this statement in the mouth of what he terms “the chorus”. It belongs to the women of Jerusalem who interact several times with the Shulamite

Where is your lover gone O you who are the beauty among women? Where has your lover turned? We ourselves (daughters of Jerusalem) will also seek him along with you. This “going away” of the Shepherd lover is of the essence of the continuing allegory. The coming of Christ to redeem his bride is of course spaced by an era of evangelism from the return of the Messiah to rule. During the time following Christ’s ascension many seek the LORD and the bride directs them as to where He is to be found. The great relevance of this early preaching for the first Jewish church and the Gentile proselytes is emphasised by the mention of the chorus of the “daughters of Jerusalem”

2 THE LORD STILL DELIGHTS IN THE WORK OF HIS GARDEN

*My lover has gone down to his garden to the raised or trellised beds of balsam to rule in the gardens and to gather lilies. Was it not Mary Magdalene who thought Christ was the gardener? The word **h[r]** in Hebrew whilst it can mean “to feed” also means “to rule” and this better fits the allegory. Christ who is ascended is ruling over his people. He is rejoicing in the holiness of His people.*

3 THE RULE OF CHRIST

I belong to my lover and my lover belongs to me – the one who rules His flock among the lilies.

4 THE SHULAMITE CAPTIVATED EVERY HEART

In “The Message” Eugene Peterson developed a helpful technique of indicating where the man and women enter the narrative. Up until this point that has been fairly plain but in the sub-set of epic garden scenes it is less clear. At this point Peterson ushers in the “man”. We have good reason to see this “man” as Solomon himself.

*The cue concerning male and female lovers in the Hebrew text is the female gender of the “lovely one” **hpy** who contrasts with **ydrd** (Dodi the male lover of verse 3. For modern readers the term Dodi is recognisable as the masculine name of the son of the former owner of Harrods.*

*You are fair my **lady companion** as **Tirzah**. [Centuries after Solomon it became a royal city in Israel. It is named “delightful” and was a place of great charm before it was adopted by king Jereboam] **Père de Vaux** excavated Tirzah which lies 7 miles NE of Nablus. The area interestingly lies close to where Abishag originated. The reference to Tirzah is typically Solomon who would have a personal interest in the build up and development of Tirzah. Doubtless like Tirzah the Shulamite was still developing.*

*You are comely or **sit beautifully** like Jerusalem. [Foundation of “peace”]*

*You are **fearful** or **idolised** [As unfurled military banners of an encampment [**twl gdn**]*

The Shulamite is described as captivating the hearts of all.

The church like the bride is to be deeply attractive conquering the hearts of those who oppose by her love. These words are not the intimate words of an accepted lover-they describe a friendship that had to face austere non-compliance in the attitude of the Shulamite.

5 IS CHRIST DEEPLY MOVED BY THE LOVE OF HIS BRIDE?

Let your eyes look around – turn away their direct gaze. Those eyes have overcome me- your hair is as a herd of goats ascending from Gilead. *The power of the eyes of the Shulamite tantalise Solomon. Again no true accepted shepherd lover would want to turn his love away. In the rarest of requests the man (Solomon) seems not to be able to bear the gaze of the Shulamite. It is steely, determined. The idiom is rustic but the speaker is sophisticated – employing metaphors that the Shepherd could better use.*

6 THE TEETH PROVE CONTINUALLY ATTRACTIVE

Your teeth are as a flock of sheep which **V** are beautifully clean as they go up from the washing – every lovely one **V** has twins – none of all these beautiful sheep **V** is barren. *We have here the repetition of the solution to the enigma of the use of “shesh.” (cf 4.2) The connective is grammatical and as a sign it is used of the beauty depicted by a lady’s perfect teeth. The Shulamite’s teeth or beauty remains undiminished. The same words from Solomon as from the Shepherd (4.2) leave the Shulamite cold. This tactic just did not turn her on.*

7 THE CHEEKS –THE KING’S BORROWED COMMENT

Your temple is as a cut segment of pomegranate from beneath your locks. *For us this equates to “your head is cut” but the reference is regularly poetic for “cheeks” so that it better reads “your cheeks are beautiful. The lady love is commended again for her lovely countenance. So often the face changes and the looks fade – but the loveliness of the Shulamite gets no less. The Shepherd might speak as a country boy about the cheeks as slices of pomegranate – not Solomon’s style – but in a vain attempt to win affection the King would turn on the magic.*

8 THE POINT IN TIME OF THE SHULAMITE FRIENDSHIP

There are sixty queens and eighty and three hundred soft paramour concubines and virgins beyond count. ***Solomon reckons 440 immediate unions were established at the time of the friendship with the Shulamite.*** Solomon’s rule lasted for 40 years. In 1st Kings 11.3 we read that Solomon ultimately had 700 wives. The harem of concubines seemed not to increase but the number of wives would appear to rise appreciably. However the increase occurred the Shulamite was not about to make up the numbers!

9 THE SHULAMITE IS MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN ALL

She is single and alone my dove my undefiled, she is the **only daughter** of her mother. She is the choice possession of the one who gave birth to her. The daughters (possibly

of the King) saw her and pronounced her happy. The queens and concubines also praised her.

10 ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH ARE WELL DESCRIBED

Who is this who looks out the window or hangs out of the window like the morning? She is fair as the silvery white moon choice as the glowing noon day sun – overwhelming as an army camp with banners unfurled? *The beauty of the Shulamite is as the dawn for surprise as the moon for loveliness and the sun for warmth and glory and as regularly attractive as all of these.*

11 SOLOMON'S GALILEE GARDEN

I went down to the garden of the walnut (*Gennesaret*)/[*נַגַּל*] to see the green unripened fruit of the torrent valley, to see the growth of the vine to see the pomegranates blossomed. *The “royal” nut Josephus tells us grew by Galilee. The statement takes us to a special place to see one of the unique products of ancient Israel. The two fascinating and curious statements now made sit best in the mouth of the writer himself. The vine and royal walnut were grown in this instance precisely where our LORD ministered. Did Solomon have a garden by Gennesaret – and was the “Lake-Garden” first developed by Solomon?*

12 THE ROMANCE THAT CAME TO NOTHING

O my soul I had no intimate knowledge. Set me in array the chariots of my willing nation. *At the deeper level of the soul the romance made no connection. Love is essentially a spiritual matter in its true context. Again the strange word sits best in Solomon's mouth. He is confessing he never really knew the lovely Shulamite. He knew so much about her. He commended her time and again. He never won her heart. She was mighty to resist his strongest overtures and though Solomon mustered his nation he could not conquer her invincible heart which was pledged to another.*

CHAPTER 7

I have set out the chapters in obedience to the Hebrew text. The first verse of this chapter belongs to the end of Chapter 6 in the English Bible.

This chapter is a re-run of the compliments. There are further thoughts to relish about what the Shulamite was like. This vision of what might have been is totally imaginary – reverie! Yet the vision puts into words the infatuation of the king. The exploration of intimacy is salacious and erotic but it has a purpose

7.1 or 6.13 (English)

Return, return the Shulamite – come back come back and we will have a vision of you. The verb *hvj* may also intimate “be in league with or “covenant” with you. This is one thought. Then upon its heels comes the reverse thought – “What would we covenant for?” This Shulamite was awesome as an army about to conquer! Such reactions can easily be contemplated in the absence of the church at the “catching away”! What you would see prophetically or contemplate in a Shulamite is similar to bustling army hosts of the encampments. *Where is the Shulamite gone? Has she been taken away to her*

bridegroom's home? Could that be a picture of the day when Christ shall come for His bride?

1 THE CHRISTIAN'S WALK SHOULD IMPRESS

How beautiful are your steps in your sandals **O daughter of willing heart or nobility.** [bydh] The joints [qmj] of your thighs are like shining golden neck chains. *Popular beauties as ever are judged on the lovely features of their legs-indeed the seductively revealed upper leg. The eye of the beholder is remembering the unforgettable walk of the Shulamite. How good should the world around and all the citizens recall the walk of the Christian who is no longer present. This recollection holds a genuine lesson. How much better if they remember our "gospel shoes" – the preparation of the gospel of peace!*

2 A LESSON IN SEXUAL DIGNITY

Your **navel** [rrv] is the **round bowl** [nqa] not needing **mixed wine**. [gzm] Your inmost part or **womb** [nfb] is naked or prudent [tmr/] as to the marrow or **seed of man** [myfj] fenced round with lilies. *The Shulamite was not willing to imbibe wine to enable her to be manipulated-she was not willing to "explore" sexual intimacy or put her body at the disposal of king or commoner outside of her covenant with the Shepherd of her heart. The Shulamite was indeed "pure as the moon and bright as the sun and awesome as an army ready to war." Her defensive shield was impenetrable.*

3 PRESSED TO EXHIBIT HERSELF SHE REMAINS CIRCUMSPECT

Your two breasts are as two beautiful prominent shining [hbx] young deer. *The breasts of ladies of the harem may well have been open and the Shulamite's breasts were brown and even shining. She was a rare beauty in the court of Solomon because she had taken more sun than any other Jewess. But the important stress is laid on "two roes"-the Shulamite was fast to withdraw from sickly intimacy – as shy of that as the young deer. However she had to appear she was circumspect.*

4 SOLOMON PUTS HIS FAILURES IN THE MOUTH OF THE SHULAMITE

Your neck is as an ivory tower. Your eyes in pools of water because of understanding or "devices" and "evil inventions" (Heshbon) [mbvj] cf. Ecclesiastes 7.29] *The strength of the Shulamite is stressed by reference to her sinewy neck and yet the sorrow of heart she showed when she realised the sin of the court and the evil inventions that even Solomon has lent himself to – though God made him an upright king in the beginning. ... "evil inventions" by the gate of Beth Rabbim. The gate of the princes of the land was so soiled with evil it drove the Shulamite to tears.*

Your nose is as the tower of that side of Lebanon (Pure whiteness) that keeps watch for the approaches of hasty ones (Damascus – where "Rimmon" the god of war was worshipped) *In a series of puns on the mapped locations mentioned Solomon signals the Shulamite's sorrow over Solomon's household and the rich ruined nobles of the land. He also signals her natural talent for sniffing out those who are alert to attack the people of God. This device is another sign of the acute mind of the king and the diversity of Solomon's literary approach.*

5 THE SHULAMITE HOLDS THE KING IN HER HAND AS SHE SPEAKS

Your head is like a cultivated garden (*Carmel*). The A.V. margin suggests “crimson” which is an entirely different word. [*l ymrk*] Clearly the translators of the A.V. absolutely wrong footed because they did not understand the technique Solomon adopted in verses 4-5. **The modern translations fare little better because they fail to open the place-name enigmas.** In dealing with Solomon’s writings biblical interpreters and translators are well to be aware of the delight Solomon takes in enigma and simple codification. In this instance the first purpose of it is to be honest but not candid or critical about the failure of the princes and nobles of the land. This state of his thinking leads me to observe that the book must fall somewhere in region of the 20th year of the King when his sons were grown – especially Rehoboam. Solomon is not so much concerned about the “red head” if the Shulamite was ever such but rather about her acute intelligence which had made even this wise king uneasy.

And the “two-leafed” door of your head is as purple cloth. The royal manner in which the Shulamite spoke though she was a simple vine-yard keeper was singularly impressive. God kept the door of her lips just as David’s had been kept in an earlier generation. She was circumspect. Her conversation was a model of excellence—a study of chapters 1-3 should relieve any doubt that this is the case.

The King is a prisoner in the flowing ringlets or a prisoner to the flow of words – both were true. [*fhr*] The binding nature of the love of this woman – who had such a power of speech as to make the king listen and obey her moral demands and whose welling tears as she spoke of his son and the nobles is testimony enough to the power of this spiritual woman. This was the woman of Solomon’s dreams – but she belonged to another.

6 CHRISTIANS TO BE “A DELIGHT”

How beautiful – how sweet O friend you are because of your **delight** *mygn* [*is the word Solomon used to sum up the Shulamite. She was alluring – hers was a delightful life. She knew “delight” in God much in the way Isaiah described in Isaiah 58.13 and for that reason was doubly attractive. The term allows of “criticism” too—she was willing to speak clear and straight – but again compellingly. Solomon at all times could call her a “friend.”*

7 SENSUOUS DELUSION INDULGED – FAILURE IN THOUGHT-LIFE

This standing erect of yours or enduring bears **likeness** to a palm tree and your breasts to date clusters. The straight tree and the brown clusters in form resembling a woman’s breasts are chosen as the next compliment. The word “likeness” [*htmd*] may signify “parable” I call this the “funniest parable in the bible” but it demonstrates how the wise can be deluded. The following verse expands this mini-parable of sensuous delusion

8 THE PARABLE OF THE DATE PALM

I said “I will ascend the date palm. I will grasp its waving exalted pendulous fronds and **please** may your breasts become like clusters of the noble vine.” Solomon the King, I think you would agree, would have been about the most unlikely man

imaginable to scale the palm tree and taking hold on to the palm branches or fronds supposedly to signify his victory over the Shulamite would in all probability result in an expeditious descent. As to finding that the firm clusters of the palm become soft and pendant like the clusters of the noble vine as he clings on for his life to the fronds leaves very little to imagine on how the episode ends. The strange little parable does not end quite yet. Solomon adds ...And may the smell of your nose be as of apples. Apples as we know them were not successfully grown in the heat of Israel. Quince according to Celsius did grow. The hope of the King was that a little light wine would play its part in the victory. The story of the liaison with the Shulamite ends up in a fashion that makes us breath a sigh of relief that the Shulamite made a midnight flit from the harem and escaped from the king.

9 THE NADIR –THE VERY GUTTER OF SOLOMON’S THINKING

Finally Solomon adds ...and may your palate smell of the best fast acting wine reserved for my friend that smoothly creeps or glides over the lips of the sleepers. This old trick of those who indulge in wine and combine their passion for women with their wine has been used from time immemorial to reduce the resistance of a woman to the unwelcome advances of an erotic lover. When one comes to this nadir of ethics one cannot but agree with the scriptures that Solomon who took many foreign wives was himself seriously at fault amid his reign of forty years – and his mini-parable is a wholesale revelation of the nature of his sins. Later in his life Solomon gives crystal clear warnings against wine that bubbles and ironically against loose women.

10 THE SHULAMITE IS UNDER NO ILLUSION-SHE IS THE SHEPHERD’S

The Shulamite (now with her Shepherd lover) declares I am my beloved’s [dvd] and his longing is for me.

11 THE SHULAMITE SPURNS THE PALACE -SHE LOVES THE COUNTRY

Come my love [male dvd] let us take ourselves into the country. Let us get lodging in the villages.

12 SHEPHERD AND SHULAMITE – TOGETHER AT LAST

We will be sure to get up early for the sake of the vineyards. We will look if the noble vine is fruitful-the vine blossom opening – the pomegranates blossoming. There may I yield my breast to you. The contrasted joy of tryst and intimacy is based on true love.

13 THINGS OLD AND NEW – MATTHEW 13.52

The love apples give a smell in the wind and at our open gates O my love[ydvd] are all precious choice or noble things – the new things also the old – that I have hidden away or treasured up and destined for you! The garden was not simply a place of vines or citrus fruit – there were balsams and mandrakes and much innovation alongside the staple fruits of any garden. The garden was planted with much that encouraged true love and the wind which gives a sense of the Holy Spirit blows the lovely fragrances about. Likewise the “things old and new” of the N.T. encourage the believer as the scripture is taught under the Holy Spirit’s anointing. There is much in the word hidden for us to find to encourage us in the love of our Shepherd.

CHAPTER 8

1 THE SHULAMITE WILL GIVE 100% FOR REAL LOVE

Who will you provide like my brother who suckled at the breasts of my mother? May I find you around me or out there? I will refresh you like irrigated land or attend to you as one who waters cattle or be at your beck and call as a butler. Also they will not despise me or trample me under their feet [**zb** “despise” from the root **srb** “trample”] *The Shulamite stands committed to “the one” who will care about her and not make her a plaything but rather see her true value*

2 THE SHULAMITE DESIRES A TRUE CIRCLE OF RELATIONSHIPS

I would lead you or “guide” [**ghn**] you to the house of my mother. She would cause me to learn. I would cause you to drink from the spiced wine – from treadings of my pomegranate tree. *The Jews not only spiced wine with fragrances but also with water. The drinks offered were of a cordial sort. The Shulamite who fought shy of the falsetto unions of concubines with Solomon is desirous of true family ties.*

3 THE SHULAMITE VALUES STEADY FAITHFUL FRIENDSHIP

His left hand is under my head and his right hand will or may continually embrace me. *The word “embrace” is only used 3 times in the entire OT in the present or past tense. (Ecc3.5, 4.5, and 2Kings 4.16) It is elsewhere as here used in the Piel or continuous. So the embrace of the beloved is not a “one off” – it is a continued relationship of deep commitment.*

4 ONE OF SEVERAL “SECOND COMING” PROPHETIC ASIDES

I am causing you to swear for me, **daughters of Jerusalem**, lest you cause my love and friend to awake and lest you keep him awake until that lovely one **V** desires or is willing. *The solemn oath for the “chorus” in the light of the bridegroom-bride relationship and the coming to the mother’s house in the marriage context and in the progress of the allegory as understood within the church context is a theological statement. The Jews must await the advent of Messiah subsequent to the marriage feast and then the unadulterated joy of Jerusalem will break out in earnest.*

5 THE SHEPHERD’S PLEDGE IN A ONE-TO-ONE UNION

Who is this that comes from the wilderness with the man of her support – leaning on her lover’s arm? I kept waking you up under the apple tree. **There you** (masculine gender) **pledged her** (feminine gender) **time and again**. There your mother who brought you forth pledged again and again that you would be mine. *I use the “pledge” significance of **lbj** not the “birth pangs” meaning. The wider use would suggest that mother “gave guidance” again and again”-and this is in line with the second verse where the Shulamite in taking her Shepherd lover home to her mother in Jerusalem is gaining instruction as to her relationship and marriage. The allusion is to the prophetic scriptures and what they have to say about the coming of the earthly rule and kingdom of Christ. The line in bold print is indicative of the shepherd or future bridegroom’s action of arousing the bride to new commitment. The line is a rare*

comment of the writer Solomon himself. The Palace and the mother's house were not too distant the one from the other. The couple were often and often under the apple tree in the garden. The King (Solomon) might easily have passed that way or heard report from his informants of what was taking place with the woman whose heart he never conquered. We do know that Solomon keep his eyes and ears open. In his other writings he watches whilst youths are seduced into the nearby house of the prostitute.

6 SOLOMON DEMONSTRATES IN THE HUMILITY OF CONFESSING HIS WEAKNESS THE VERY GREATEST THINKING OF THE BIBLE

Place me as a seal-ring upon your heart – upon your arm for love and friendship grows strong and prevails as death. *For the writer Solomon this phrase might have read “love is as impudent or harsh as death”. Solomon had finally and irretrievably lost his Shulamite friend. By the same token her love was pledged until death to the Shepherd. That pledge she gave her rustic lover prevailed over all other amorous approaches by the king. Continuing angry rivalry or jealousy is cruel as Sheol. Its bright sparks become burning flames of fire – a beautiful flame of the LORD. The word *hy tbnlv* is a rare term. Solomon is saying that he came through this experience to feel like God feels when one he loves is lost. He came to the experience of God about the lost. God does not give up-His heart just burns with love. He may forget our sin out of love for us but he never forgets the sinner because of the same love-however Satan might hold that one in his grasp. So we come to the zenith of Solomon's understanding of God. His love is not spent when His judgment falls. God is love. Even in hell as Solomon's father said “Thou art there”. We can now better understand the creedal statement “He descended into hell”. The Song of Solomon which seemed to plumb the depths of sin in the human soul through bringing to light Solomon's thoughts on plying his paramours with wine now reaches the heights of theology and the very zenith of our biblical understanding of God. Our faith in the work of God in the heart of Solomon is restored. He knows what is happening to the Shulamite. He is fearfully jealous but his love at length like that of the *Darrel-Carter* story *Dickens* contrives in the *Tale of Two Cities* is willing to give away its best and suffer for the welfare of the beloved. Solomon better understands the heart of God.*

8 LOVE ABIDES – 1 CORINTHIANS 13

Great waters of the sea are not able to **keep quenching** [*hbk*] love or friendship and flooding streams or rivers of water will not sweep it away or **overwhelm** it. [*pfv*] If a man were to give all the wealth of his house for love or friendship it would be absolutely despised. *Solomon could not buy the affection of the Shulamite. On the other hand the high seas might distance love but not erase its memory. The floods might wash away all else-even the family one brought up-but love of them lives on.*

9 A FURTHER PROPHETIC ASIDE ABOUT JEWISH DESTINY

A little sister belongs to our family – she has no breasts. What action shall we take on behalf of our little sister in the glorious **V** day when she shall have to be legally betrothed? *The curious question of another marriage now begs an answer. Who is this as yet undeveloped bride? Yes she is from the Jewish people-so much we know!*

Scripture says here that she will have been betrothed-her marriage is also in view in the providence of God. From the point of view of ancient scripture she is Jewry awaiting Messiah. A priori the little sister represents the future of the Jewish people as to their relationship to Messiah. From the standpoint of the church that relationship incorporates God's design for the gentiles so that the Pentecostal church developed from a Jewish corpus to a gentile core – and we must recognise the mother church of Christianity is the apostolic ecclesia in Jerusalem directed by the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost. Thus enters the allegory a substantial reason for interpreting its truth in the light of the marriage of Christ to his bride the Church. **It is when the great allegory is read prophetically that it takes on its full glory.** Solomon adds a “shesh” to the glorious day of the sisterly betrothal. All history looks to that glorious time when Israel shall be gathered to Christ. That development is foreseen here 3000 years before.

10 THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

If she is a wall we will build over that a range of palace buildings [רמ] of silver and if she is a door we will fortify her [רמ] with bright boards of cedar. *The Jewish people were first covenanted to the law and then at the time of Christ many made covenant with **Christ the door** – the way to the inner presence and the way to God through the cross. Thus Israel is to be seen in both roles. Even in the time of Solomon she had the law that illumined sin and the priesthood and sacrifices that illumined forgiveness. The prophetic future required both a palace for Israel and her King and a temple for His worship. These need not be separate – for when Christ comes there will be no such principle permitted as “the separation of Church and state.” The **silver palace** is a step beyond any of Solomon's structures and the cedar temple reflects His attachment to lasting structures. A refining work had to be effected among God's ancient people ere those days could finally emerge. Those days cannot be far distant.*

11 FUTURE JEWISH DESTINY-PEACE THROUGH MESSIAH

I am a wall and my breasts are as towers. After that I was living a life in his sight as one that found peace. *The allegory is breaking up in face of a flood of prophetic truth. The original Shulamite former sign of the Jewish righteous can describe itself as a wall. Israel treasured the law – the Torah. Israel in a sense was the Torah. Israel in the person of the **Shulamite** looks to the future time when she will live out day by day her lovely name and be at Peace” and in the totality of her relationship and the found of her commitment in fullest union not with a rustic shepherd but with the “Shepherd of Israel” as Christ is described in Psalm 80.1.*

12 WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD – cf. MATTHEW 20

There was a vineyard that belonged to Solomon in Baal Hamon. *Beth-Hamon is known also as Beth Hammath – one of the fenced cities of Naphtali (Joshua 19.35) I have visited the hot springs at that very place – on the present southern fringe of Tiberias. The Sea of Galilee (Chinnereth) was known as the sea of the “Harp” and the area was very populous. [The place of humming harp music wealth – throngs of men or the place that stirred with deep emotion] He gave the vineyard to keepers. Each man was*

to bring him 1000 pieces of silver from the value of its fruit to him. *We too as believers are responsible to bring fruit to the Saviour as labourers in His harvest.*

13 THE SHULAMITE'S VINEYARD –AN ABIDING ROYAL CONNECTION?

My vineyard my glorious **V** vineyard is before my face (now). The thousand pieces of silver are for you Solomon and keepers of its fruit earn two hundred pieces. *It may be that the Shulamite's brothers were part of the vineyard hire plan of Solomon. It is of interest that she may have lived within a few miles of where Jesus lived. Should the Shulamite have been Abishag as some scholars believe she would have originated from Issachar just 25 miles south of the region Beth-Hamon region. The conjecture is difficult to establish though Abishag was extremely beautiful and never consummated any union with David and was refused to Adonijah subsequently coming into Solomon's harem. From this base she has a claim to be the chosen character of the wise king's allegory. There is no record to show that this Abishag had another lover prior to her promotion to queen under David – but it is not impossible. Abishag's strong principles established in caring for David certainly would have stood her in good stead in warding off the amorous gestures of Solomon. Her position would have gained her unique respect in the harem. The vineyard where we first met the Shulamite was worked or farmed as the king's rental by her brothers. The vineyard where she finally stands joyously is her own by virtue of belonging the monarch of her heart. The matter symbolised is Israel God's joyously His own.*

14 THE GOSPEL THEN AND NOW

O lady that makes you home in the gardens – your companions after they have pricked up their ears to your voice **must be caused to listen to me.** *This penultimate verse of the allegory directs that the “garden companions” (an idiom for “the gentiles”) must listen to me. This is an imperative related to the Kingdom of God established in the latter days. It is a caution well suited to re-directing the Church from its worldly base of detachment from the prophetic purposes of God for Israel. Fly along as a fugitive my beloved (Shepherd) and let the likeness of the roe or the hart from the strong stags upon **the mountains of spices** be a likeness suited to your expedition.(cf. 2.8 & 2.17) The image of the “spice mountains” whose most likely location is in Gilead the land of Balm-links with Peniel and the enlightenment of Jacob in that very area. The time of Christ's return will bring Israel again to be what its name implies – a Prince with God. Those “fragrant mountains” are especially noted when Solomon feels his grief and sets out alone to find peace and recover his soul among the trees heavy with resin of myrrh and frankincense. (4.6) The message to which the Shulamite's companions are to listen is all about the spice mountains-the mountains of myrrh and frankincense which speak of the death and high priestly ministry of Christ. This in its prophetic context is the message we know as the gospel of forgiveness by the blood and intercession of the atoning Redeemer-Messiah. In the time of the Shulamite recourse to the “offering” and the “priest” was the message. In later time the world would listen to one who came later to the same area-Jesus of Nazareth – whose ministry circled the populous area around Gennesaret-the “Garden” lake.*

THE COMINGS AND GOINGS OF THE BRIDEGROOM

Some years ago *Maurice Roberts* wrote an article whose greatest value was its insightful title “The Comings and goings of the spiritual bridegroom”. I was somewhat familiar with *Maurice* during our time in the vicinity of Ayr at the time of writing and found his theme engrossing.

Since then with thorough study of the Hebrew text and being affianced to a somewhat different viewpoint I have found that the three basic appearances of the bridegroom taken with the biddings to the “daughters of Jerusalem” chorus in the text of the canticle read **prophetically**. I do not mean that they are to be interpreted as referring to Christ and the Church but rather that they were written in a Hebrew context and bear most intimately and primarily on the future history of the Hebrew people. The application of the Christian hermeneutic is perfectly plausible when the import of the “little sister” concept of chapter 8 is understood. The “back to Jerusalem” orientation of Chinese believers is relevant and somehow the “replacement theological pose” has gone awfully wrong and carried the church into a head-on collision with biblical prophecy. It is part of my vision in delivering a biblical commentary to make those who pose as inheritors of the apostolic message to take thought on how far they have drifted from anchorage.

In the third chapter of the Canticle **we first meet the Shepherd-bridegroom in the streets of Jerusalem** as the Jewish Shulamite engages with him and brings him to her mother’s house. “I found Him whom my soul loveth”. His subsequent sleep and the caution that He cannot be awakened to return to the streets of Jerusalem until He pleases refer to His major second distant advent appearance as the Shepherd-bridegroom. But meantime He puts in another type of appearance recorded in Chapter 5 in the setting of the Galilee gardens.

The Galilee visit intimates the inception of the **gentile** aspect of the ministry of the Messiah. It is immediately followed by the **mysterious Jerusalem visit** to the Shulamite who after initial apathy enthusiastically opened the lattice and ran everywhere gossiping the good news. The myrrh which represents the death of Messiah was everywhere on the door or window and associated with his mysterious or “risen” appearance it promoted an exposition of the glories of Christ on the part of the first Jewish church. This is all true to form and the Shulamite is almost transformed into Peter and John in her public proclamation of love for the Shepherd.

The beloved never truly is “gone forever” as in the song of “Clementine” – His work **in the garden** continues (6.2) among Jew and Gentile.

Next in Chapter 7.10 the beloved is back-**He is lodging like a stranger to the inhabitants with the Jewish Shulamite in the villages**-His work among the Jewish

people is begun low-key. He is working with the Shulamite in the vineyards. There is a new renewed intimacy.

In Chapter 8 the Shulamite expresses the desire for marriage. The long-expected **union of Israel with her Shepherd-Lover is imminent**. She wishes to bring Him to her mother's house-but still the "daughters of Jerusalem are cautioned like the wise virgins to wait. All things are not quite ready. The N.T. "catching away" fits into this setting perfectly. The long history of surrounding the throne of mercy with the spice incense of prayer is over – the fellowship in the gardens moves to paradise – the lilies are gathered home (6.2). It is now that the Shulamite comes up from the wilderness on the arm of her beloved. The Bozrah connection and the gathering of the embattled Jews from their southern hideaway during the perilous time of Jacob's trouble again fit perfectly with this arm-in-arm progress of Christ and His faithful ones to the heart of His Empire of the latter days. The "apple tree" is back as a predominant feature-the one fruitful tree among the trees of the wood of which we heard in 2.3. **The king reigns among the kingdoms of the earth and among His sons within those subservient rejoicing realms.**

The whole development in concertina fashion is presented in the "**Annals of the Little Sister**" which in the compass of two verses kaleidoscopes the development of the church from its ancient Jerusalem base and the context of the law through its emphatic prophetic proclamation as "The people of the Way" ever pointing to Christ the Door until in the fullness of time through evangelism and witness by the grace of God the glory days return and the "silver palace" and age-long temple-home of Messiah is established in Jerusalem.

The mighty allegory ends with this caution "O lady that makes you home in the gardens – **your companions** after they have pricked up their ears to your voice **must be caused to listen to me**". *This verse the A.V. has turned right around until it says the opposite. That rendering has it "O you who swell in the gardens the companions hear your voice-cause me to hear (it)!" where "obedience" is rather demanded of the Jews. The intense complex thought of Solomon must be appreciated. The "lady" is the Shulamite or Jewish church who drew alongside her gentile companions who listened to the word of the apostles and finally must listen again acutely to the LORD in his return to rule from Jerusalem.*

Just like the Apocalypse the Canticle finishes with a call for the earliest possible return of the bridegroom. The reference to the "spice mountains" links with the ancient "wrestling of Jacob with the LORD". The "spice mountains" whose most likely location is in Gilead the land of balm – links with Peniel and the enlightenment of Jacob in that very area. The time of Christ's return will bring Israel again to be what its name implies – a Prince with God. It was in the spice mountains that Solomon walked when he had lost his Shulamite lover and it was there he breathed in the air that was laden with myrrh and frankincense. The myrrh of sacrifice linked to the Messiah who "shut His mouth" on Mount Calvary bespeaks atonement for his sin and the frankincense of high-priestly prayer the Lord's intercession for his soul. In the

latter day Israel is again to come over fully according to the apostle Paul to unequivocal faith in the Saviour. Thus the mightiest song in the most lyrical Hebrew explores the grandest theme of all time-the Bridegroom and his inter-action with His people Jew and gentile-and in a most fragrant "myrrh-filled" story leads us to the Christ whose death holds the key to the redemption of the soul, of His church and of Israel His people.

Even so come LORD Jesus.

STYLE AND CONTENT

From work on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes I have to observe that Solomon best compares to our Shakespeare. He seeds the Hebrew language deliberately with sayings and epigrams that were devised to enter common parlance. He thought to improve the spiritual content of the language. This intent and feature of Solomon's writing singularly escapes the notice of scholars.

Solomon's allegory makes a massive contribution to enabling religious thought to mount on the wings of the man-woman relationship to meditation on the companion relationship of man with God. Some Rabbis like *Akiba* go into ecstasy on that account while lesser critics are chewing the cud on whether the Canticle deserves its place in scripture.

The Canticle is not set out as Hebrew poetry. Solomon does not adopt his father's style. He writes sing able prose. The musicality of the Canticle is in its superb choice of syllable and letters and terminations of soft as well as rough sound. The execution extends over the entire 117 verses and is comparable to David's undertaking in the 119th psalm; indeed in my opinion the literary achievement is the greater by reason of the artistry required to embed a dramatic story line with personae and chorus in the poetry itself.

Let me now suggest to you some things which you should look out for in the Canticle.

(a) Look out for the switch of narrator in the text – very often only the Hebrew feminine or masculine will define that change-and that of course is clear to anyone singing the song in Hebrew. Here an English prompt like "The Message" translation helps.

(b) Take note of my references to the Hebrew connective "Shesh" which is a rare stylistic feature. It means "which" or "because" but in the canticle is like a word dressed in two coats or having two layers of meaning. Its other meaning is "beautiful" or "glorious" so it means "which beautiful....."

(c) On account of the baring of Solomon's very soul in the Canticle we dare not take it simply as a sensuous poem. This would be to do a severe injustice to the spiritual conclusion too. Solomon during his "**walk in the mountain woodlands**" smells the myrrh and frankincense of offering and prayer which his scarred heart and conscience need. These mountains prophetically spell out the "death of Christ" and the offering

theron. Solomon's base thoughts in the **"palm tree parable"** is a self portrait of *Solomon the sinner* whilst his newly coined word translating **"the jealous love of God"** brings the spiritual insight of the author to a theological tableland of glory. If you read thoughtfully you too will travel with him to emerge in awe as you look back at the scene behind you from the vantage point of the mighty love of God. Forget those critics who would drop this masterpiece into the thrash – they haven't travelled.

FINIS

Bob Coffey
A Bible Companion