

A Summary of the Song of Solomon

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The story begins with the account of the marriage of Solomon and Shulamith. Throughout the narrative Solomon and Shulamith reminisce over previous events of their courtship. A summary of the events of the story, as pieced together from these references is given below.

Solomon, disguised as a shepherd, on a trip through Lebanon with some of his companions, first sighted Shulamith as she tended her vineyard (6:11-12), which duty she had been given by her unkind brothers (1:6). He inquired about her (6:10), but as soon as she saw the men she fled away (6:11-12), not fully aware that she had instantly fallen in love with Solomon the shepherd. They tried to call her back (6:13) but she gave a quick reply and hurried home (6:13b).

Later Solomon, still disguised as a shepherd, met her again and he began to court her when she was away from home: evidently she would go to where he was keeping his sheep to meet him (1:7-8). Their courtship was sometimes conducted under a favorite apple tree (8:5) for which they later had sweet thoughts of reminiscence (2:3, 5, 7, 8). During the frustrating days of their courtship she secretly wanted him to be her brother so she could be with him at home without interference (8:1-2).

Eventually Solomon decided to go to her home to propose marriage, still not having revealed his true identity. She recounted the visit in which she saw him coming and described him to her family. (2:8-10). Solomon asked her to come away with him (2:11-14) but her brothers angrily interfered and reminded her of her vineyard duties (2:15). She protested, but had to reluctantly send him away (2:16-17). Evidently Solomon went away, never to return as a shepherd. That night she had a troubled dream in which she sought her beloved in the city and brought him home with her (3:1-5).

Some time later, Solomon returned to Shulamith's home in his royal robes with a litter (palanquin) specially made for her. From a distance she thought it was the procession of some royal lady (3:6, gender), but as it drew near, it was identified as that of King Solomon himself (3:7-11). The king addressed her (4:1-5) whereupon she recognized him as her lover, and responded favorably (4:6). The king proceeded to formally propose marriage to her (4:7-15) and Shulamith accepted his proposal (4:16). Then Solomon, responding with joy, proclaimed a celebration feast (5:1).

Solomon took Shulamith to Jerusalem for the royal wedding (the book begins here, 1:2-2:7), followed by a banquet and a procession to the bridal chamber. During this time the bride was accompanied by bridal attendants (the daughters of Jerusalem), to whom she made apology for her ruddy complexion, acquired in Lebanon while keeping her vineyard (1:6). During the banquet the bride and groom whispered reminiscences of their courtship (1:7) and make veiled references to their favorite meeting place-- the apple tree (2:3).

Some time after the marriage Shulamith had another troubled dream (5:2-6:3) in which Solomon comes to her chamber to be with her. He called to her for admission (5:2), but she replied with indifference (5:3). She saw him attempt to enter and her indifference was turned to delight (5:4). However, when she finally got to the door to let him in, she found he had gone away in discouragement (5:5-6). So she frantically sought him in the streets, and not being recognized as queen, she was mistreated by the city watchmen (5:6-7). In her dream she solicited her attendants to help her find him (5:8). They asked what he was like (5:9), and as she related his beauties as "altogether lovely" (5:10-16) she realized that she could find him at the place of their first courtship (6:1-2). Evidently, still in her dream, she returned to the place of first love, and there reunited with her lover, she listened as Solomon mused over the beauty of his bride (6:4-9). As he spoke to her, he reminisced over their first encounter in Lebanon (6:10-13). He then continued to praise her beauty (7:1-9), to which praise Shulamith responded favorably (7:10).

Because of the dream, Shulamith realized the need to renew their early love, and, being homesick, she requested Solomon to take her home to Lebanon for a second honeymoon, to a place which she had specially prepared (7:11-13). Evidently Solomon consented to her request, and she revealed the secret desire of her heart toward him during the frustrating days of their courtship (8:1-2).

They returned to Lebanon and were greeted by her father (?) under their favorite courtship apple tree (8:5). There they renewed their vows of love (8:6-7, 11-12). There she revealed her brothers protective attitude toward her as a girl (8:8-9) and her current attitude toward their behavior (8:10). Shulamith's old companions awaited her visit (8:13) but she and Solomon slipped privately away to their secret place of love (8:13-14).

Song of Songs

A translation with editorial comments. Liberal use of F. Delitzsch's translation is made, plus the ASV and KJV with reference to the original Hebrew.

1:1 Solomon's best song [Title]

Idyl 1--The Royal Wedding Reviewed (1:1-2:7)

Scene: Outside the palace. The bridal procession approaches: the royal bridegroom leading the bride, followed by an attending chorus of the daughters of Jerusalem.

(Bride to Chorus)

1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.

(Chorus to Bridegroom)

For thy love is better than wine.

1:3 Thine oils have a goodly fragrance;
Thy name is as oil poured forth;
Therefore do the virgins love thee.

(A pause is made at the threshold of the palace.)

(Bride to Bridegroom)

1:4 Draw me!

(Chorus to Bridegroom)

We will run after thee.

(The bridegroom lifts the bride across the threshold.)

(Bride to Chorus)

The king has brought me into his chamber.

(Chorus to Bride)

We will be glad and rejoice in thee*;

(Chorus to Bridegroom)

We will remember thy love more than wine.

(Bride to Bridegroom)

Rightly do they love thee.

(Inside the palace)

*Marks significant feminine pronouns and nouns throughout the text.

Idyl 1--Continued

(Bride to Chorus)

- 1:5 I am black, but comely,
O ye daughters of Jerusalem,
As the tents of Kedar,
As the curtains of Solomon.
- 1:6 Look ye not upon me because I am dark,
Because the sun has scorched me.
My brothers were angry with me,
They made me keeper* of the vineyards,
But my own vineyard I have not kept.

(The bride and bridegroom whisper reminiscences of their courtship, how she sought to penetrate his disguise.)

(Bride to Bridegroom)

- 1:7 Tell me, thou whom my soul loveth,
Where you feed (your flock).
Where you make it to rest at noon;
For why should I appear as one veiled
Among the flocks of your companions?

(Bridegroom to Bride)

- 1:8 If you* do not know, thou* fairest of women,
Go after the footprints of the flock,
And feed your* kids beside the shepherds' tents.

(The procession from the banqueting house to the bridal chamber)

(Bridegroom to Bride)

- 1:9 I have compared you*, my love*,
To my own mare among Pharaoh's chariots.
- 1:10 Beautiful are your* cheeks in the chains,
Your* neck in the necklaces.

(Chorus to Bride)

- 1:11 We will make golden chains for you*
With points of silver.

(Bride to Bridegroom)

- 1:12 While the king sat at his table
My spikenard sent forth its fragrance.
- 1:13 My beloved is as a bundle of myrrh to me,
Which lies upon my bosom.
- 1:14 My beloved is as a cluster of henna-flowers to me
In the vineyards of En-gedi.

(Bridegroom to Bride)

- 1:15 Behold, you* are beautiful, my love*,
Behold, you* are beautiful;
Your* eyes are as doves.

Idyl 1--Continued

(Bride to Bridegroom)

- 1:16 Behold, you are fair, my beloved, yea pleasant:
Also our couch is green,
1:17 The beams of our houses are cedars,
And our rafters are of fir.
2:1 I am a rose of Sharon,
A Lily of the valleys.

(Bridegroom to Bride)

- 2:2 As a lily among thorns,
So is my love* among the daughters.

(Bride to Bridegroom)

- 2:3 As an apple-tree among the trees of the forest,
So is my beloved among the sons.

(Bride to Chorus)

- I sat down under his shadow with great delight,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.
2:4 He brought me to the banqueting house,
And his banner over me was love.

(Bride dismisses the chorus with the words:)

- 2:5 Support ye me with grape cakes,
Refresh ye me with apples,
For I am love-sick.
His left hand is under my head,
And his right hand embraces me.

(The poet)

- 2:7 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the roes and by the hinds of the fields,
That he stir not up, nor awaken love,
Until it pleases.

(End of Idyl 1)

N.T. antitype = the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-10)

See also the parable of the marriage supper (Matthew 22:1-14), and the parable of the ten virgins.

Spiritual applications:

- 1:3 The name of Jesus
1:5f. "black"--the stains of sin and the world.
1:9 The value of the bride to Christ
1:10, 15--the beauty of the bride to Christ
2:1 The humility of the bride
2:3 The bride's delight in Christ.

Idyl 2--The Bride Reminisces Their Courtship (2:8-3:5)

Audience: Probably the Daughters of Jerusalem.

Setting: Bride's home in Lebanon. Solomon, disguised as a shepherd has been courting Shulamith. As scene opens she is eagerly awaiting his visit.

(Shulamith relates her words to her family)

2:8 The voice of my beloved! There he comes,
Leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping upon the hills.

2:9 My beloved is like a gazelle
Or a young one of the harts.
Lo, there he stands behind our wall!
He looks through the lattice.

2:10 My beloved spake, and said to me.

(Solomon to Shulamith: a marriage proposal)

Arise*, my love*, my fair one*, and come away*.

2:11 For, lo, the winter is past;
The rain is over and gone;

2:12 The flowers appear in the land;
The time of song has come,
And the turtledove's voice is heard in our land;

2:13 The fig-tree spices her green figs,
And the vines are in blossom;
They give forth their fragrance.
Arise*, my love*, my fair one*, and come away*.

2:14 My dove* in the clefts of the rock,
In the hiding-place of the cliff,
Let me see thy* countenance,
Let me hear thy* voice!
For thy* voice is sweet, and thy* countenance comely.

(Perhaps the brothers angrily remind Shulamith of her duty to the vineyard)

2:15 Catch** for us the fixes, the little foxes,
The spoilers of the vineyard;
For our vineyards are in blossom!

(Shulamith to brothers)

2:16 My beloved is mine, and I am his;
He feeds (his flocks) among the lilies.

** The verb is common plural.

Idyl 2--Continued

(Shulamith to Shepherd-Solomon, reluctantly sending him away)

2:17 Till the day cools and the shadows flee away
Turn; make haste, my beloved,
Like a gazelle or a young one of the hinds
On the craggy mountains.

(Evidently he did not return.)

(Shulamith relates her troubled dreams after that night)

3:1 On my bed in the nights
I sought him whom my soul loveth:
I sought him and found him not.
3:2 (I said,) "I will arise and go about the city,
In the markets and the streets;
I will seek him whom my soul loveth!"
I sought him and found him not.
3:3 The watchmen that go about the city found me:
(I said,) "Saw he him whom my soul loveth?"

(Evidently there was no reply.)

3:4 Scarcely had I passed from them,
When I found him whom my soul loveth.
I held him and would not let him go
Until I brought him into my mother's house,
And into the chamber of her that conceived me.

(Shulamith to the daughters of Jerusalem)

3:5 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or the hinds of the field,
That you awake not nor disturb love
Until it pleases.

(End of Idyl 2)

Spiritual considerations:

- (1) The disguised shepherd-king
- (2) The wooing of the savior, not recognized as sovereign king.
- (3) The response of first impressions
- (4) The interference of family, and cares of this world.
- (5) The troubled heart of one under conviction.

Idyl 3--The Betrothal Recalled (3:6-5:1)

Scene: Lebanon: Solomon approaches in his royal coach.

(Shulamith speaks)

- 3:6 Who is this coming up from the wilderness
Like pillars of smoke,
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
With all aromatics of the merchants?
- 3:7 Behold! It is Solomon's litter.
Surrounding it are sixty heroes
Of Israel's mighty men.
- 3:8 They are all Swordsmen trained in war.
Each with his sword on his thigh,
Because of fear in the nights.
- 3:9 King Solomon made himself a royal litter
Of the wood of Lebanon.
- 3:10 Its pillars he made of silver,
Its support of gold, its cushion of purple;
Its interior is adorned from love
By the daughters of Jerusalem.
- 3:11 Come out, ye daughters of Zion, and see
King Solomon in the crown
With which his mother crowned him
On the day of his espousal,
And on the day of the gladness of his heart.

(King Solomon addresses Shulamith)

- 4:1 Behold, you are beautiful, my love,
Behold, you are beautiful;
Your eyes are as doves behind your veil.
Your hair is as a flock of goats
That lie along the side of Mount Gilead.
- 4:2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep
Which come up from the washing
All bearing twins,
And none of them is bereaved.
- 4:3 Your lips are like a scarlet thread,
And your speech is comely.
Your temples are like a piece of pomegranate
Behind your veil.
- 4:4 Your neck is like the tower of David,
Built in terraces;
Thereon hang a thousand shields,
Even all the heroes' armor.
- 4:5 Your two breasts are like two fawns
Twins of a gazelle,
Which feed among the lilies.

Idyl 3--Continued

(Shulamith answers Solomon)

4:6 Until the day cools and the shadows flee,
I will go forth to the mountain of myrrh
And to the hill of frankincense.

(King Solomon proposes marriage)

4:7 You are altogether beautiful, my love, [2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:27]
And there is no blemish in you.

4:8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride,
With me from Lebanon;
Look from the top of Amana,
From the top of Senir and Hermon,
From the lions' dens,
From the mountains of the leopards.

4:9 You have taken my heart my sister-bride;
You have taken my heart with one of your glances
With a little chain of your necklace.

4:10 How beautiful is your love, my sister-bride!
How much better your love than wine!
And the fragrance of your oils than all spices!

4:11 Your lips drop honey, my bride;
Honey and milk are under your tongue;
And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

4:12 A locked garden is my sister-bride,
A locked spring, a sealed fountain.

4:13 What sprouts forth for you is a park of pomegranates,
With most excellent fruits;

4:14 Nard and crocus; calamus and cinnamon,
With all kinds of incense trees;
Myrrh and aloes,
With all the chief aromatics.

4:15 A garden-fountain, a well of living water
And torrents from Lebanon.

(Shulamith accepts the proposal)

4:16 Awake, O north wind; and come, you south;
Blow through my garden, cause its spices to flow out.
Let my beloved come into his garden,
And eat his precious fruits.

(Solomon replies)

5:1 I am come into my garden, my sister-bride:
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;
I have drunk my wine with my milk.

(Solomon proclaims a celebration feast)

Eat, O friends,
Drink, drink abundantly, O beloved ones.

Idyl 4--The Bride Relates a Troubled Dream (5:2-6:3)

Scene: Jerusalem, after the marriage

(Shulamith speaks)

5:2 I sleep, but my heart awakens:
It is the voice of my beloved, knocking.

(Shulamith relates Solomon's words)

Open to me, my sister, my love,
My dove, my undefiled;
For my head is filled with dew,
My locks with the drops of the night.

(Shulamith's reply)

5:3 I have put off my garment,
How shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet,
How shall I defile them?

(She continues the story)

5:4 My beloved stretched his hand through the opening,
And my heart was moved for him.

5:5 I arose to open for my beloved
And my hands dropped with myrrh,
And my fingers with liquid myrrh,
Upon the handle of the bolt.

5:6 I opened to my beloved;
But my beloved had withdrawn, he was gone.
My soul had failed me when he spake--
I sought him, and found him not;
I called him, and he answered me not.

5:7 The watchmen that go about the city found me,
They beat me, they wounded me,
The watchmen of the walls,
Took my upper garment away from me.

5:8 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
If you find my beloved,--
What shall you say to him?
"That I am sick of love."

(The daughters of Jerusalem reply)

5:9 What is your beloved more than (another) beloved,
O Fairest of women?
What is your beloved more than (another) beloved,
That you do so adjure us?

Idyl 4--Continued

(Shulamith replies)

- 5:10 My beloved is dazzling white and ruddy,
More distinguished than ten thousand.
- 5:11 His head is precious fine gold,
His locks are curling, black as a raven.
- 5:12 His eyes are like doves beside the water-brooks,
Bathed in milk, fitly set.
- 5:13 His cheeks are as a bed of spices,
as banks of sweet herbs.
His lips are as lilies,
Dropping liquid myrrh.
- 5:14 His hands are golden cylinders,
Filled with (stones of) Tarshish.
His body is a work of ivory,
Overlaid with sapphires.
- 5:15 His legs are marble pillars,
Set on sockets of fine gold.
His appearance is as Lebanon,
Excellent as the cedars.
- 5:16 His mouth is most sweet,
He is altogether lovely.
This is my beloved and this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

(The Daughters of Jerusalem offer to help find the King)

- 6:1 Where has your beloved gone,
O Fairest among women?
Where has your beloved turned,
That we may seek him with you?

(Shulamith replies)

- 6:2 My beloved is gone down to his garden,
To the beds of spices,
To feed in the gardens, and gather lilies.
I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine,
He feeds (his flock) among the lilies.

Idyl 5--Solomon Meditates on His Bride (6:4-7:10)

(Solomon muses over his bride's beauty)

6:4 You are beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah,
Comely as Jerusalem,
Terrible as bannered hosts.

6:5 Turn your eyes away from me,
For they have overcome me

Your hair is as a flock of goats,
That repose along side of Gilead.

6:6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes.
Which come up from the washing,
All of them bearing twins,
Not a bereaved one among them.

6:7 Your temples are like a piece of pomegranate
Behind your veil.

6:8 There are sixty queens,
And eighty concubines,
And virgins without number.

6:9 One is my dove, my perfect one,
The only one of her mother,
The choice one of her that bare her.
The daughters saw her and called her blessed,
Queens and concubines, and praised her.

(Solomon reminisces first meeting Shulamith)

6:10 Who is this that looks forth as the dawn,
Beautiful as the moon,
Pure as the sun,
Terrible as bannered hosts?

(Shulamith relates her first reaction to Solomon)

6:11 I had gone down to the nut garden
To look at the shrubs of the valley,
To see whether the vine budded,

6:12 I knew not that my soul lifted me up
To the royal chariots of my noble people.

(When she saw Solomon and his companions, she fled, and they called after her)

6:13 Come back, come back O Shulamith!
Come back, come back, that we may look upon you.

(She replied)

What do you see in Shulamith?

(They respond)

As it were the dance of Mahanaim!

Idyl 5--Continued

(Solomon again muses over his bride's beauty)

- 7:1 How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
O Prince's daughter!
Your rounded thighs are like jewels,
The work of a skillful workman's hands.
- 7:2 Your navel is like a rounded goblet,
Wherein no mingled wine is wanting:
Your waist is like a heap of wheat,
Set about with lilies.
- 7:3 Your two breasts are like two fawns,
That are twins of a gazelle.
- 7:4 Your neck is as a tower of ivory;
Your eyes as the pools in Heshbon,
By the Gate of Bath-rabbim;
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon
Which looks toward Damascus.
- 7:5 Your head upon you is like Carmel,
And the hair of your head is like purple;
The king is held captive in its tresses.
- 7:6 How beautiful, and how charming you are,
O love, among delights!
- 7:7 This your stature is like a palm tree,
And your breasts are like clusters of grapes.
- 7:8 I said, "I will climb the palm,
Grasp its branches;
And your breasts shall be to me
As clusters of the vine,
And the smell of your breath like apples,
- 7:9 And your mouth like best wine,
Which goes down smoothly for my beloved,
Which makes sleeper's lips move."

(Shulamith responds favorably to Solomon)

- 7:10 I am my beloved's
And his desire is toward me.

(End of Idyl 5)

Idyl 6--The Bride Longs to See Her Old Home (7:11-8:4)

(Setting: Jerusalem. The bride becomes homesick and requests Solomon to return to Lebanon for a Second Honeymoon.)

(Shulamith speaks to Solomon)

- 7:11 Come, my beloved, let us go into the field;
Let us lodge in the villages.
- 7:12 Let us rise early for the vineyards;
Let us see whether the vine is in bloom,
Whether the vine-blossom is open,
And the pomegranates are in flower;
There will I give you my love.
- 7:13 The mandrakes give forth fragrance,
And over our door are all kinds of precious fruits,
New and Old,
Which I have laid up for you,
O, my beloved.

(Evidently Solomon consents to her request, and she now reveals the secret desire of her heart toward him during the frustrating days of their courtship.)

- 8:1 Oh that you were as my brother,
That sucked my mother's breast!
If I found you without, I would kiss you;
They also could not despise me.
- 8:2 I would lead you, bring you into my mother's house;
You would instruct me;
I would give you to drink of spiced wine,
Of the juice of my pomegranate.

(Shulamith to the Daughters of Jerusalem)

- 8:3 His left hand is under my head,
And his right hand embraces me:
- 8:4 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
That you wake not nor disturb love,
Until it please!

(End of Idyl 6)

Idyl 7--Renewal of Love at Lebanon (8:5-14)

(Setting: Lebanon. Shulamith and Solomon approach the old homestead. Her father(?) greets her.)

8:5 Who is this coming up from the wilderness,
Leaning upon her beloved?
Under the apple-tree I awakened you*
There your* mother was in travail with you*,
And she brought you* forth.

[*Pronouns are masculine. However, many commentators here follow the witness of the Syriac which has the feminine.]

(Shulamith to Solomon)

8:6 Set me as a signet upon your heart,
As a signet on your arm!
For love is strong as death,
Jealousy is cruel as Hell:
Its flames are flames of fire,
A flame of YAH.

(Solomon replies to Shulamith)

8:7 Many waters cannot quench (our) love
And rivers cannot overflow it.
If a man would give all the wealth of his hours for (our) love
He would surely be condemned.

(In her mother's house, Shulamith reports what her brothers said about her as a girl)

8:8 We have a little sister,
And she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister
In the day when she shall be spoken for?
8:9 If she be a wall,
We will build upon her a pinnacle of silver,
And if she be a door,
We will enclose her with boards of cedar.

(Shulamith gives her current reaction to this)

8:10 I was a wall,
And my breasts were like towers,
Then I was in his eyes
As one who found peace.

Idyl 7--Continued

(Shulamith figuratively renews her love-vow to Solomon)

8:11 Solomon has a vineyard in Baal-hamon;
He committed the vineyard to the keepers,
Every one for the fruit thereof
Brought in a thousand pieces of silver.

8:12 My vineyard, which is mine, is before me;
The thousand, O Solomon, is yours,
And those who keep its fruit, two hundred.

(As some of Shulamith's old companions are awaiting here visit, Solomon tactfully desires her presence.)

8:13 Thou that dwells in the gardens,
The companions listen for your voice:
Cause me to hear it.

(Shulamith suggests that they slip away privately to their secret place of love.)

8:14 Make haste, my beloved,
And be thou like a gazelle or a young hart,
Upon the mountains of spices.

(End of Idyl 7)