

Song of Songs

Chapter 3

All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him.² I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him.³ The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. “Have you seen the one my heart loves?”⁴ Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go till I had brought him to my mother’s house, to the room of the one who conceived me.⁵ Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. until it so desires.⁶ Who is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant?⁷ Look! It is Solomon’s carriage, escorted by sixty warriors, the noblest of Israel,⁸ all of them wearing the sword, all experienced in battle, each with his sword at his side, prepared for the terrors of the night.⁹ King Solomon made for himself the carriage; he made it of wood from Lebanon.¹⁰ Its posts he made of silver, its base of gold. Its seat was upholstered with purple, its interior lovingly inlaid by the daughters of Jerusalem.¹¹ Come out, you daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon wearing the crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced.

3:1 This verse begins a new moment in love’s experience. (CSB)

With its overwhelming power love dominates her thoughts day and night. While the events do have a dreamlike quality, there is no sign that the girl is asleep. (CC)

All night long. Night, with its freedom from the distractions of the day, allows the heart to be filled with its own preoccupations. (CSB)

The Bible often pictures night as a time of trouble. In his suffering Job describes the sorrow of the night: “Nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn” (Job 7:3). Only in heaven will we be entirely free from the darkness and sorrows of the night (Revelation 22:5). (PBC)

On my bed by night I sought him. The Song cycles back to the time of courtship, when the Shulammitte searches for her bridegroom, longing for their wedding and its consummation. The Church father Bede compared the searching of the Shulammitte with Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb while it was still dark, searching for the Christ (Jn 20:1, 11–18). (TLSB)

The dominant motif of this text is the search. Intertwined with the search motif is the tension between the now and the not yet: the couple is courting and may be betrothed, but is not yet married. These OT themes of nuptial yearning and searching find their NT counterparts and fulfillments in Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as His betrothed bride, awaiting the future day of nuptial union. (CC)

THE ONE MY HEART LOVES – Literally “the one my soul loves” indicating her deep attachment to him. (PBC)

Expression of deep communion. (TLSB)

Throughout the centuries of interpretation, the love of the Shulammitte’s “soul” for Solomon has spawned a wide variety of theological and devotional meditations on the love of the church and of the Christian soul for Jesus Christ. The best Christian expositions direct the seeker to find Christ where He has promised to be found: in His Word and Sacraments. (CC)

3:2 GO ABOUT THE CITY – Whether she is dreaming this or actually walking in the streets it immaterial. Women were not to out alone at night. This, therefore, is a picture of her agitated state of mind. (PBC)

squares. Broad city plazas used for gatherings. Various gates of Jerusalem had adjacent plazas or squares. (TLSB)

3:3–4 No reason is given for Solomon’s wandering at night. (TLSB)

3:3 *watchmen*. Were stationed at the city gates (see Ne 3:29; 11:19; 13:22) and on the walls (see 5:7; 2Sa 13:34; 18:24–27; 2Ki 9:17–20; Ps 127:1; Isa 52:8; 62:6). Apparently they also patrolled the streets at night (see 5:7). (CSB)

City guards who patrol at night. (TLSB)

Later (5:7) she will have another, more tragic encounter with some evil watchmen. At times the prophets described preachers and spiritual leaders as watchmen. For example, God said to Ezekiel, “I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me” (Ezekiel 3:17). Spiritual watchmen are to point out danger as well as direct people to Christ. (PBC)

The watchmen are the servants of the Word who watch over the souls of men (Heb. 13:17). The fact that the watchmen did not answer the Shulammitte signifies that during the era of papal darkness the office of preaching provided no consolation or evangelical teaching. But (3:4) after much prayer and meditation, the church found Christ – at the time of the blessed Reformation. She takes hold of Him and will not let Him go, since He has accepted her soul (Is.38:17). She will continue in fervent prayer, praise of God, contemplation of His Word, and exercise of godliness, and so retain His grace and friendship always. The time when she will bring Him to her mother’s house (3:4) is when she comes with Him

into the heavenly Jerusalem, which is our mother (Gal 4:26), and receives therein eternal life (Rev. 21:10) (CC)

3:4 FOUND THE ONE MY HEART LOVES – It seems they gave her good directions. (PBC)

Christ will be found of all who earnestly seek Him in ways of His appointment. (CB)

WOULD NOT LET HIM GO – She clings to him and brings him to her house. Soon she will be able to stay with him forever. Their wedding is fast approaching. It brings a reassuring conclusion to the beloved's frantic search for her lover. Though she feared she had lost him, he was never far from her. It is only a matter of time and she would see him again. (PBC)

mother's. Mothers are referred to frequently in the Song; fathers are never mentioned. (CSB)

mother's house. Mothers of both the Shulammitte and Solomon play a supportive role in their marriage (cf 3:6–11; 8:1–2, 5). (TLSB)

ONE WHO CONCEIVED ME – Spiritually interpreted, the bride's mother is not essentially different from the bride herself. The one is the church viewed spiritually, in her power to produce and perpetuate a holy seed, and the other, the church viewed as that seed. (CB)

chamber. The Shulammitte brings Solomon to the bedchamber of her mother, as she would later arouse Solomon beneath the apple tree where his mother conceived and gave birth to him (8:5). (TLSB)

3:5 Once again the charge occurs at the moment of intimacy. (CSB)

3:1–5 The Shulammitte earnestly sought her bridegroom. What occupies our dreams and aspirations, our hopes and desires? The Lord commends to us the excellent and praiseworthy. His Word sets our hearts upon our Savior. • Lord, teach us a proper and timely desire for all good earthly gifts. Above all, teach us to find our joy in You, who sought us when we sought You not. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. (TLSB)

3:6–11 Perhaps spoken by the friends (see 8:5). If so, this section probably portrays the wedding procession of Solomon and his bride approaching the city. (CSB)

Loose description of the marriage rite. Groom and friends would travel to the bride's home, where she was veiled and adorned with jewelry. The groom and a singing and dancing crowd would escort her to his home. When she entered his home, they were married. (Cf Ps 45:13–15; Is 49:18; 61:10; Jer 2:32; 7:34; Ezk 16:12–13.). (TLSB)

In his book “Manners and Customs of Bible Lands, Fred Wight gives some insight into this custom:

Sometimes the bride’s relations would conduct her from her father’s house to the house of her fiancé, where her new home was to be. But more often, as was the case of the ten virgins in Christ’s parable, the bridegroom himself went in person to bring her to his house for the wedding festivities to take place there.

The bridegroom set out with the bride from the house of her parents, and there followed a grand procession all the way to his house. The streets of Asiatic cities were dark, and it was necessary that anybody venturing forth at night should carry a lamp or torch. Those invited guest who did not go to the bride’s home were allowed to join the procession along the way, and go with the whole group to the marriage feast. Without a torch or lamp they couldn’t join the procession, or enter the bridegroom’s house.

In going from the bride’s house to the groom’s house, the bride allowed her hair to be loose and flowing [to be arranged by women at the groom’s house], and she had her face veiled. Some of her own relations preceded her in the procession, and scattered ears of parched grain to the children all along the road to the destination. Part of the procession included men who played on drums or other musical instruments. And there was dancing along the way...” (PBC)

3:6 This verse begins a new moment in the relationship. (CSB)

Who ... desert. See 8:5, where the reference is to the beloved. (CSB)

desert. Uncultivated seasonal grasslands. (CSB)

Desert between the land of Israel and Egypt. The wedding procession of Solomon and the Shulammitte is here described in terms reminiscent of Israel, as God’s bride, coming up out of her wilderness wandering and entering the Promised Land. (TLSB)

Since the time of the Exodus the desert or wilderness came to symbolize the transition from bondage to freedom, from humiliation to glory. Here it symbolizes the king’s transition from his former state to the joys of marriage. (PBC)

The church never appears so glorious as in her return to God by hearty repentance and faith, after the night of affliction and chastisement. (CB)

smoke. Incense (see note on Ex 30:34). (CSB)

myrrh and frankincense. Perfumes worn by and associated with the Shulammitte (cf 4:6, 14; 5:5), but also associated with both Solomon and Christ (1:13; 5:13; Mt 2:11). Luth: “Myrrh is a symbol of the Word, but frankincense is a symbol of prayer” (AE 15:231). (TLSB)

fragrant powders. Spice finely ground into a powder, associated with international trade, indicating the richness that adorns this wedding procession. (TLSB)

She is surrounded with clouds of fragrant incense. Her graces are a sweet savor to God. (CB)

of the merchant. Imported. (CSB)

3:7 *carriage.* A richly adorned royal conveyance, a palanquin (see vv. 9–10). (CSB)

litter. Bier or portable couch, carried by porters. *mighty men.* Bodyguards. (TLSB)

This was probably a couch carried by servants. (PBC)

ESCORTED BY SIXTY WARRIORS – According to 1 Samuel 27:2 and 30:9, King David had 600 personal troops. The sixty warriors accompanying Solomon might then be the elite, the tenth part of the royal bodyguard. This elite group consisted of experienced warriors, the cream of the crop. (PBC)

At a spiritual level these armed warriors represent the angels who will accompany Christ as He returns in glory at the end of the world (Matthew 25:31). Indeed, Jesus depicts His glorious return as that of a bridegroom coming to take His bride home. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3). (PBC)

3:8 *terrors of the night.* See Ps 91:5. (CSB)

Most likely thieves. (TLSB)

3:9 THE CARRIAGE – This is for his bride and her companions, daughters of Jerusalem. Its precious materials represent the dignity and excellence of those who ride in it. (CB)

Hbr word occurs only here; probably a chair, litter, or palanquin. (TLSB)

The church’s worship practice includes analogous processions. A processional at the start of the Divine Service signals that Jesus Christ is coming to His people through Word and Sacrament, preached and administered by the servants of the Word who process after the cross. For a Gospel processional, the pastor(s) and acolytes (followers) move from the chancel into the midst of the congregation in the nave. Through the reading of the Holy Gospel, Christ the King is present with those He has betrothed to Himself. (CC)

3:10 *posts.* Supporting the canopy. (CSB)

silver ... gold. Probably metals that overlay the Lebanon wood. (CSB)

Purple was the color of royalty; it was extracted from Mediterranean shellfish. The NT relates how the soldiers put a purple robe on Jesus as a way of mocking “the kings of the Jews” (John 19:2,3). Little did they realize the color truly befit the King of kings. (PBC)

inlaid with love. Solomon’s carriage is described in terms reminiscent of the tabernacle, temple, and palace. (TLSB)

3:11 *daughters of Zion.* Elsewhere “daughters of Jerusalem.” (CSB)

crown. A wedding wreath (see Isa 61:10). (CSB)

This crowning was different from the royal coronation in which the high priest crowned the king (cf 1 Kings 1:32-48; 2 Kings 11:11-20). According to the ancient custom, not only the king but every bridegroom wore crown. Fred Wight offers a description of the ancient groom:

When the night arrived for the wedding festivities to begin, and it was time to go for the bride, the groom was dressed as much like a king as possible. If he were rich enough to afford it, he wore a gold crown. Otherwise it would be a garland of fresh flowers. His garments would be scented with frankincense and myrrh, his girdle would be a silken one brilliantly colored, his sandal would be figure and carefully laced, and all of this would give effect to the flowing drapery of the loose robes and to the graceful bearing peculiar to the lands of the East. For the time, the peasant seemed a prince among his fellows, and all paid him the deference due to exalted rank. (PBC)

In His espousals to the church, Christ appears in heavenly glory, the object of unbounded love and admiration to all who belong to the household of faith. (CB)

mother. Here the reference is to Bathsheba. (CSB)

mother crowned him. This wedding is described as a coronation, inaugurating the king’s reign in a new way as he consummates his union with his bride. Cf Eph 5:21–33; Rv 19:7–9. (TLSB)

3:6–11 Like Solomon, our Lord spares no expense preparing for the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom. In fact, with something more precious than gold and silver, with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, He has readied the feast! • Lord God, our heavenly Bridegroom, we seek Your face and rejoice in Your presence. Sanctify us and keep us steadfast in the foretaste of the feast to come, that we may be gathered with all the faithful on that glorious day in the heavenly banquet that is yet to come. Amen. (TLSB)