

Song of Songs

Chapter 6

Others

Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?

6:1-3 Song 6:1-3 requires the supposition that Solomon in one sense departs from his wife when he descends to his garden. Yet in another sense, in light of the imagery in 4:10-5:1, his descent to his garden with its spices and his activity in it (browsing, gathering) in 6:2 represents the continuance of his intimacy with her and even the intensification of intimacy as the marriage bond matures and strengthens. We believe that such intensification is what explains the remarkable portrait of her that follows (6:4-10), particularly in 6:10, where she is described with theophanic, Christ-like imagery. (CC)

6:1 The question asked by the friends forms a transition from the beloved's description of the lover to her delighted acknowledgment of his intimacy with her and the exclusiveness of their relationship. (CSB)

Together in the Garden of Love

She

2 My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. 3 I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies.

6:2 *his garden.* The beloved. (CSB)

Christ dwells in His garden amid the fruits of holiness; and they who seek Him there shall find Him. (CB)

Every human marriage experiences the rhythm of absence and reunion, even on a daily basis, as when a spouse departs for work and returns at the end of the day. Over the years, a marriage goes through longer cycles of trying times and relative bliss. So too the Christian may perceive periods of time when the Lord seems far away and others when His presence is almost palpable – even though God promises His own constancy despite and throughout all human vacillations (2 Tim. 2:11-13). (CC)

beds of spices. Her sensuous attractions (cf. 5:13). (CSB)

Terraces on which spices were grown. The Shulammitte reflects on the absence of her beloved, who is called away by other duties. (TLSB)

gather lilies. The lover, enjoying intimacies with the beloved, is compared to a graceful gazelle (see notes on 2:7, 9) nibbling from lily to lily in undisturbed enjoyment of exotic delicacies. (CSB)

6:3 *I ... mine.* Notice the reversal; here her yielding to her lover is emphasized. (CSB)

No longer is she worried and desperate. As she depicts Solomon in the garden, she confidently asserts that they belong to each other. We might picture this scene in one of two ways. Perhaps she recalls how they frequently spent time with each other in the royal garden. She is confident that he has gone there and that she will find him there. When we recall how the word garden was used in the wedding scene, we might picture this episode in another way. *She is the garden* (4:12-5:1). He has gone to “his” garden – in her renewed confidence she knows that he will be waiting for her. In either case she is sure she has not lost her husband. (PBC)

Christ’s love for His people remains even in their departure from Him; and they return to Him with all their heart, He will graciously receive them, and restore them to their former union and communion with Himself. (CB)

Christ’s sacrificial giving of His entire self for the sake of His beloved calls for exclusive devotion to God through Him and is the pattern for how husbands are to love their wives (Eph. 5:25-33). The power of that relationship is not available to those who seek God casually, as one among many attractive options. This relates to the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3), and also the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14). The undivided and all-encompassing love that fulfills those commandments is expressed positively by way of affirmation in this verse. (CC)

Solomon and His Bride Delight in Each Other

He

4 You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners. 5 Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me—Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. 6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins; not one among them has lost its young. 7 Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. 8 There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. 9 My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her. 10 “Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?”

6:4 Tirzah. An old Canaanite city in the middle of the land (see Jos 12:24). It was chosen by Jeroboam I (930–909 B.C.) as the first royal city of the northern kingdom (see 1Ki 14:17; see also 1Ki 15:21; 16:23–24). The meaning of its name (“pleasure, beauty”) suggests that it was a beautiful site, perhaps explaining why the author here sets it alongside Jerusalem (though what constituted the beauty of Tirzah is not known). Comparison of the beloved’s beauty to that of cities was perhaps not so unusual in the ancient Near East, since cities were regularly depicted as women (see note on 2Ki 19:21). (CSB)

Following Jeroboam’s apostasy (c 922 BC), the capital city of northern Israel for over 100 years. (TLSB)

lovely as Jerusalem – Jerusalem, of course, was the royal city. Scripture often extols the beauty of Jerusalem, beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth” (Psalm 48:2) and “perfect in beauty” (Psalm 50:2). The greatest joy that would come from this city would be that here the world’s Savior was to culminate His work of salvation with His death and resurrection. Revelation 21:2 pictures Christ’s bride, the church, as the “new Jerusalem”: “I saw the Holy City,

the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” (PBC)

as an army with banners. The beloved’s noble beauty evoked in the lover emotions like those aroused by a troop marching under its banners. (CSB)

This is hardly a gentle description of the woman! Yet it emphasizes the hold she had on him. She came, she saw, she conquered. (PBC)

Most of the ancient versions and most commentators recognize the military connotations of the 6:4, 10. This military view is consistent with a number of other Song passages about the Shulammitte. Solomon had compared her to a mare among the war chariots of Pharaoh (1:9). Luther expositors have related this imagery to the church militant. Luther considered this phrase to refer to the spiritual warfare of OT Israel and the church against Satan and human persecutors. (CC)

6:5 *your eyes ... overwhelm me.* The beloved’s eyes awaken in the lover such intensity of love that he is held captive (see 4:9). (CSB)

He wants her to look away so he can continue speaking and reassure her of his love. (PBC)

6:8 *queens ... concubines ... virgins.* The reference is either to Solomon’s harem or to all the beautiful women of the realm. (CSB)

The Shulammitte is a queen among queens, receiving the loftiest position among Solomon’s many wives. The number 60 here indicates an earlier period in his reign; he eventually had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1Ki 11:3). See pp 54–55. The virgins are likely among those who admired Solomon (1:3), but are not yet married to him. (TLSB)

If these refer to King Solomon’s harem, we have here an indication that the Song comes from a time early in his reign. Eventually he has seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines who turned his heart from the Lord (1 Kings 11:3,4). On the other hand, the poet does not specifically say he is speaking of Solomon’s wives and concubines. The reference, then, is to women in general. No queen, concubine or virgin anywhere can compare with his beloved. (PBC)

In either case, we come face to face with the fact that Solomon did not remain married to one woman throughout his life. Perhaps early in his reign he left his harem as he found a pure relationship with the woman described in the Song. For whatever reasons, this love was not to last. It is in his ungodly polygamy that Solomon falls far short as a type of Christ. What made Solomon’s marital foolishness all the worse is that was done against the clear warning of Scripture. Deuteronomy 17:17 had declared that the king “must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.” (PBC)

6:9 *perfect one.* Cf. “flawless one” in 5:2. (CSB)

only daughter. Not literally, but the one uniquely loved (cf. Ge 22:2; Jdg 11:34; Pr 4:3). (CSB)

The Shulammitte had brothers (1:6), but she may have been the only daughter. However, as Solomon considers her his “only one” among 60 queens, 80 concubines, and countless virgins, “the only one of her mother” may indicate a favored position among these other women.

(Medieval interpreters used allegory to make this one of the chief proof texts for the unity of the Church.) (TLSB)

maidens ... praised her. All the other women praised her beauty (see 1:8; 5:9; 6:1). (CSB)

queens and concubines. Solomon's self-indulgence led to idolatry and casts a shadow over his serving as a type of Christ. (TLSB)

G. Lloyd Carr comments on two of these various classes of women in the ancient world, "Concubines in ancient Israel were not mere bed partners. They were actual wives' ...albeit of secondary rank, with certain protections and privileges that set them apart from those outside the wife/concubine categories. Maidens were unmarried women." It is noteworthy that all the women are eager to join Solomon in praising his wife rather than jealously resenting her. This says much for the beloved's gentle, likable personality. (PBC)

6:10 *dawn...moon...sun* – The friends carry the king's praises even further. Notice the progression from the lesser to the greater light. Her brightness increases. (PBC)
In NT language, she is portrayed in light of the indwelling of Christ in all baptized believers, who comprise His body, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, by whom believers comprise a new temple. Hence the Shulammitte is a type of the corporate church. (CC)

The Shulammitte – a historical person still living in the OT era – reflects and even radiates Christ's glory, but she herself is not the embodiment of that glory. She is adorned with divine glory, but she herself is not divine; she is human and is clothed with Christ (Gal. 3:27). Jesus Himself is the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). The Shulammitte, as a member of God's redeemed people, represents the corporate bride of Christ – the church of both testaments, as does the woman in Revelation 12 – and her appearance anticipates the fulfillment of the eschatological promise of eternal glory: "then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt. 13:44; see also Rev 2:28; 21:11, 23). (CSB_

She

11 I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. 12 Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince.

6:11 *I went down* – This is probably the beginning of a new representation. The bridegroom has gone down into his garden, as in 6:2. There he is seized with longing affection for his absent spouse, and calls upon her to return, that he may behold her beauty. (CB)

Solomon made many royal gardens (Ec 2:5), and the Shulammitte visits one of them. (TLSB)

nut. Perhaps walnut. (CSB)

look ... in the valley. For the first signs of spring. (CSB)

6:12 The most obscure verse in the Song. (CSB)

The Shulammitte's desire has led her to a garden, seeking her beloved. Suddenly, she finds herself among the chariots and entourage of her kingly husband, beckoning her to return with him (v 13). (TLSB)

my desire set me – We might picture their meeting something like this: It was springtime in the country. She had gone into the valley to look at the budding trees and vines. It just happened at that time the king was passing by on his chariot. Perhaps he stopped beside her vineyard to rest. It was then that the great king and the country maiden were drawn to each other. (PBC)

The apostle John expressed it this way: “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The opening verses of the Song indicate that the Shulammitte and the daughters of Jerusalem love Solomon because of the sacrificial quality of his prior love, and he is the one who draws them after himself. (CC)

chariots. Solomon was famous for his chariots (1Ki 10:26). (CSB)

Others

13 Return, return, O Shulammitte, return, return, that we may look upon you.

6:13 Shulammitte. The beloved. It is either a variant of “Shunammite” (see 1Ki 1:3), i.e., a girl from Shunem (see Jos 19:18), or a feminine form of the word “Solomon,” meaning “Solomon’s girl.” In ancient Semitic languages the letters *l* and *n* were sometimes interchanged. (CSB)

First place the text calls the bride “the Shulammitte.” She may be Abishag the Shunammite, the beautiful woman chosen to care for David in his old age (1Ki 1:1–4, 15; 2:17, 21–22). Or it may also be a feminine noun formed from the name Solomon, indicating their relation as husband and wife. (TLSB)

The name Shulammitte means “one who receives peace,” while the name means “the peaceful one.” Here we see an obvious parallel with Christ and His people. He is “the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6) who through His sacrificial death brings us peace with God. (PBC)

The form of the name Shulammitte indicates that it is not strictly a personal name, but more of a designation. She is the Shulammitte. It is possible that the word Shulammitte is a variation of Shunammite. This has whetted the appetite of Bible students as a suggestion concerning the identity of the beloved. If Shulammitte and Shunammite are synonymous (and one ancient historian does link the two), then Solomon’s beloved could have been Abishag, who took care of aged King David. 1 Kings 1:1-4 records this history:

When King David was old and well advanced in years, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him. So his servants said to him, “Let us look for a young virgin to attend the King and take care of him. She can lie beside him so that our lord the king may keep warm.” Then they searched throughout Israel for a beautiful girl and found Abishag, a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The girl was very beautiful; she took care of the king and waited on him, but the king had no intimate relations with her.

He

Why should you look upon the Shulammitte, as upon a dance before two armies?

Why should you look upon me – When the believer has the deepest sense of his unworthiness, he is most excellent and honorable in the sight of God. (CB)