

## The Song of Solomon

Composed by King Solomon of ancient Israel, likely about 1020 B.C.E., during the early part of his 40-year reign, this song is a love story of a shepherd boy and a country girl of the village of Shunem. The drama unfolds near Shunem, or Shulem, where Solomon is camped with his court entourage.

It is challenging for a Bible reader to identify all the speakers in the Song of Solomon, but it is possible by considering what they say of themselves or by what is said to them. In the Hebrew text, grammatical forms often imply gender (masculine or feminine) as well as number (singular or plural), thereby facilitating identification of the characters.

Solomon's abrupt change of speakers and settings can make the dialogue and plot difficult to follow. For this reason the Biblical text is here supplemented with visual textual enhancements to identify the specific speakers.

Plain and indented = Comments

Underlined = Shulammite country girl

**Bold Underlined** = Shepherd boy

*Italics* = Court Ladies/Women of Jerusalem

**Bold** = King Solomon

***Bold Italics*** = Shulammite's Brothers

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## The Song of Solomon

1 The superlative song, which is Sol'o·mon's:

While on her way to the garden of nut trees, the Shulammite unintentionally came upon the encampment of King Solomon. Either seen there by the king himself or noticed by someone else and then recommended to him, she was brought to Solomon's camp, into the royal tent of Solomon.

King Solomon made known his admiration for her, but this humble country girl felt no attraction for him. She is anxious only to see her shepherd lover.

With longing for her loved one, the maiden speaks out as if he were present.

<sup>2</sup> "May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your expressions of endearment are better than wine. <sup>3</sup> For fragrance your oils are good. Like an oil that is poured out is your name. That is why maidens themselves have loved you. <sup>4</sup> Draw me with you; let us run. The king has brought me into his interior rooms! Do let us be joyful and rejoice in you. Do let us mention your expressions of endearment more than wine. Deservedly they have loved you.

The ladies of the court who wait on the king, the “daughters of Jerusalem,” look curiously at the Shulammitte because of her swarthy complexion. She explains that she is sunburned from caring for her brothers’ vineyards.

<sup>5</sup> “A black girl I am, but comely, O YOU daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Ke’dar, [yet] like the tent cloths of Sol’o·mon. <sup>6</sup> Do not YOU look at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has caught sight of me. The sons of my own mother grew angry with me; they appointed me the keeper of the vineyards, [although] my vineyard, one that was mine, I did not keep.

She then speaks to her lover as though she were free and asks where she might find him.

<sup>7</sup> “Do tell me, O you whom my soul has loved, where you do shepherding, where you make the flock lie down at midday. Just why should I become like a woman wrapped in mourning among the droves of your partners?”

As the maiden expresses her longing for her beloved shepherd, the court ladies recommended that she leave the camp, pasture her flock by the tents of the shepherds, and look for her lover.

<sup>8</sup> *“If you do not know for yourself, O you most beautiful one among women, go out yourself in the footprints of the flock and pasture your kids of the goats alongside the tabernacles of the shepherds.”*

But Solomon comes forward and is unwilling to let her go. He begins praising her beauty, promising to fashion circlets of gold and studs of silver for her.

<sup>9</sup> **“To a mare of mine in the chariots of Phar’aoh I have likened you, O girl companion of mine. <sup>10</sup> Your cheeks are comely among the hair braids, your neck in a string of beads. <sup>11</sup> Circlets of gold we shall make for you, along with studs of silver.”**

The girl, though, is not impressed. She resists his advances and lets him know that the object of her love is someone else.

<sup>12</sup> “As long as the king is at his round table my own spikenard has given out its fragrance. <sup>13</sup> As a bag of myrrh my dear one is to me; between my breasts he will spend the night. <sup>14</sup> As a cluster of henna my dear one is to me, among the vineyards of En-ge’di.”

The Shulammitte’s lover makes his way into Solomon’s camp and encourages her. He voices his affection for her, assuring her of his love.

<sup>15</sup> **“Look! You are beautiful, O girl companion of mine. Look! You are beautiful. Your eyes are [those of] doves.”**

The Shulammitte yearns for the nearness of her dear one and the simple pleasure of dwelling at one with him out in the fields and woods. She, too, assures him of her love.

<sup>16</sup> “Look! You are beautiful, my dear one, also pleasant. Our divan also is one of foliage. <sup>17</sup> The beams of our grand house are cedars, our rafters juniper trees.

The Shulammitte is a modest girl. She says:

<sup>2</sup> “A mere saffron of the coastal plain I am, a lily of the low plains.”

Her shepherd lover thinks her to be without compare, saying:

<sup>2</sup> **“Like a lily among thorny weeds, so is my girl companion among the daughters.”**

Separated again from her lover, the Shulammitte shows how she esteems him above all others by comparing her lover to a fruit tree among the trees of the forest, and solemnly charges the daughters of Jerusalem that they are under oath by what was beautiful and graceful not to try to arouse in her unwanted love for another.

<sup>3</sup> “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my dear one among the sons. His shade I have passionately desired, and there I have sat down, and his fruit has been sweet to my palate. <sup>4</sup> He brought me into the house of wine, and his banner over me was love. <sup>5</sup> Do YOU people refresh me with cakes of raisins, sustain me with apples; for I am lovesick. <sup>6</sup> His left hand is under my head; and his right hand—it embraces me. <sup>7</sup> I have put YOU under oath, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the female gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that YOU try not to awaken or arouse love [in me] until it feels inclined.

The Shulammitte remembers the time when her shepherd answered her call and invited her to the hills in springtime. She sees him climbing upon the mountains, leaping with joy.

<sup>8</sup> “The sound of my dear one! Look! This one is coming, climbing upon the mountains, leaping upon the hills. <sup>9</sup> My dear one is resembling a gazelle or the young of the stags. Look! This one is standing behind our wall, gazing through the windows, glancing through the lattices. <sup>10</sup> My dear one has answered and said to me,

She remembers her lover’s invitation to join him in viewing the beauties of early spring.

**Rise up, you girl companion of mine, my beautiful one, and come away. <sup>11</sup> For, look! the rainy season itself has passed, the downpour itself is over, it has gone its way. <sup>12</sup> Blossoms themselves have appeared in the land, the very time of vine trimming has arrived, and the voice of the turtledove itself has been heard in our land. <sup>13</sup> As for the fig tree, it has gained a mature color for its early figs; and the vines are abloom, they have given [their] fragrance. Rise up, come, O girl companion of mine, my beautiful one, and come away. <sup>14</sup> O my dove in the retreats of the crag, in the concealed place of the steep way, show me your form, let me hear your voice, for your voice is pleasurable and your form is comely.”**

The shepherd boy whom she loves has invited her to go for a walk with him on a lovely spring day. She wanted to accept her lover’s invitation, but her brothers, jealous for the chastity of their sister and not sure of her steadiness, became angry with her. (1:6) To protect her from temptation, and taking advantage of the seasonal need, they set her to work guarding the vineyards from the foxes to prevent her from going with him.

(This is the work that brings her close to Solomon’s camp. Her beauty is noticed, and she is brought into the camp. And exposed to the sun’s rays while performing this work, the Shulammitte loses the fairness of her skin.)

**<sup>15</sup> “Do YOU people grab hold of the foxes for us, the little foxes that are making spoil of the vineyards, as our vineyards are abloom.”**

She pleads for him to hurry to her side.

<sup>16</sup> “My dear one is mine and I am his. He is shepherding among the lilies. <sup>17</sup> Until the day breathes and the shadows have fled, turn around, O my dear one; be like the gazelle or like the young of the stags upon the mountains of separation.

The Shulammitte describes her detainment in Solomon’s camp. Always, even during the night hours, she continues to long for her shepherd lover. Again she reminds the daughters of Jerusalem that they are under oath not to attempt to awaken love in her until it felt inclined.

**3** “On my bed during the nights I have sought the one whom my soul has loved. I sought him, but I did not find him. <sup>2</sup> Let me rise up, please, and go round about in the city; in the streets and in the public squares let me seek the one whom my soul has loved. I sought him, but I did not find him. <sup>3</sup> The watchmen who were going around in the city found me, ‘The one whom my soul has loved have YOU men seen?’ <sup>4</sup> Hardly had I passed on from them until I found the one whom my soul has loved. I grabbed hold of him, and I would not let go of him, until I had brought him into my mother’s house and into the interior room of her that had been pregnant with me. <sup>5</sup> I have put YOU under oath, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the female gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that YOU try not to awaken or arouse love [in me] until it feels inclined.”

Returning to Jerusalem in regal splendor, Solomon took the Shulammitte along. Seeing them approaching the city, several “daughters of Zion” commented about the appearance of the procession.

*<sup>6</sup> “What is this thing that is coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, being perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, even with every sort of scent powder of a trader?”*

*<sup>7</sup> “Look! It is his couch, the one belonging to Sol’o-mon. Sixty mighty men are all around it, from the mighty men of Israel, <sup>8</sup> all of them in possession of a sword, being taught in warfare, each one with his sword upon his thigh because of dread during the nights.”*

*<sup>9</sup> “It is the litter that King Sol’o-mon has made for himself from the trees of Leb’a-non. <sup>10</sup> Its pillars he has made of silver, its supports of gold. Its seat is of wool dyed reddish purple, its interior being fitted out lovingly by the daughters of Jerusalem.”*

*<sup>11</sup> “Go out and look, O YOU daughters of Zion, on King Sol’o-mon with the wreath that his mother wove for him on the day of his marriage and on the day of the rejoicing of his heart.”*

In this critical hour, the shepherd lover does not fail the Shulammitte. He follows his girl companion, who is veiled, and gets in touch with her. He strengthens his beloved with warm expressions of endearment, thereby assuring her of his love.

**4** “Look! You are beautiful, O girl companion of mine. Look! You are beautiful. Your eyes are [those of] doves, behind your veil. Your hair is like a drove of goats that have hopped down from the mountainous region of Gil’e-ad. <sup>2</sup> Your teeth are like a drove of freshly shorn [ewes] that have gone up from the washing, all of which are bearing twins, with none among them having lost its young ones. <sup>3</sup> Your lips are just like a scarlet thread, and your speaking is agreeable. Like a segment of pomegranate are your temples behind your veil. <sup>4</sup> Your neck is like the tower of David, built in courses of stone, upon which are hung a thousand shields, all the circular shields of the mighty men. <sup>5</sup> Your two breasts are like two young ones, the twins of a female gazelle, that are feeding among the lilies.”

She tells him she wants to get free and leave the city.

<sup>6</sup> “Until the day breathes and the shadows have fled, I shall go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.”

He then bursts into an ecstasy of love. A mere glimpse of her makes his heart beat faster. Her expressions of endearment are better than wine, her fragrance is like that of Lebanon, and her skin is like a paradise of pomegranates.

**7** “You are altogether beautiful, O girl companion of mine, and there is no defect in you. <sup>8</sup> With me from Leb’a-non, O bride, with me from Leb’a-non may you come. May you descend from the top of Anti-Leb’a-non, from the top of Se’nir, even Her’mon, from the lairs of lions, from the mountains of leopards. <sup>9</sup> You have made my heart beat, O my sister, [my] bride, you have

**made my heart beat by one of your eyes, by one pendant of your necklace. <sup>10</sup> How beautiful your expressions of endearment are, O my sister, my bride! How much better your expressions of endearment are than wine and the fragrance of your oils than all sorts of perfume! <sup>11</sup> With comb honey your lips keep dripping, O [my] bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue, and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Leb'a-non. <sup>12</sup> A garden barred in is my sister, [my] bride, a garden barred in, a spring sealed up. <sup>13</sup> Your skin is a paradise of pomegranates, with the choicest fruits, henna plants along with spikenard plants; <sup>14</sup> spikenard and saffron, cane and cinnamon, along with all sorts of trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, along with all the finest perfumes; <sup>15</sup> [and] a spring of gardens, a well of fresh water, and trickling streams from Leb'a-non. <sup>16</sup> Awake, O north wind, and come in, O south wind. Breathe upon my garden. Let its perfumes trickle."**

The maiden invites her dear one to come into "his garden".

**"Let my dear one come into his garden and eat its choicest fruits."**

He accepts the invitation, responding:

**5 "I have come into my garden, O my sister, [my] bride. I have plucked my myrrh along with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb along with my honey; I have drunk my wine along with my milk."**

Friendly women of Jerusalem encourage them saying:

***"Eat, O companions! Drink and become drunk with expressions of endearment!"***

The Shulammite, after having a bad dream, relates it to the court ladies. In the dream she hears a knock. Her dear one is outside, pleading for her to let him in. But she is in bed. When she finally gets up to open the door, he has disappeared into the night. She goes out after him, but he cannot be found, and the watchmen mistreat her.

**<sup>2</sup> "I am asleep, but my heart is awake. There is the sound of my dear one knocking!"**

**"Open to me, O my sister, my girl companion, my dove, my blameless one! For my head is filled with dew, the locks of my hair with the drops of the night."**

**<sup>3</sup> "I have put off my robe. How can I put it back on? I have washed my feet. How can I soil them?"**

**<sup>4</sup> My dear one himself pulled back his hand from the hole [of the door], and my inward parts themselves became boisterous within me. <sup>5</sup> I got up, even I, to open to my dear one, and my own hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the hollows of the lock. <sup>6</sup> I opened, even I, to my dear one, but my dear one himself had turned away, he had passed along. My very soul had gone out [of me] when he spoke. I sought him, but I did not find him. I called him, but he did not answer me. <sup>7</sup> The watchmen that were going about in the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me. The watchmen of the walls lifted my wide wrap off me.**

She tells the court ladies that if they see her lover, they are under obligation to tell him that she is lovesick.

**<sup>8</sup> "I have put YOU under oath, O daughters of Jerusalem, that, if YOU find my dear one, YOU should tell him that I am lovesick."**

They ask her what makes him so special.

***<sup>9</sup> "How is your dear one more than any other dear one, O you most beautiful one among women? How is your dear one more than any other dear one, that you have put us under such an oath as this?"***

At that she launches into an exquisite description of him.

<sup>10</sup> “My dear one is dazzling and ruddy, the most conspicuous of ten thousand. <sup>11</sup> His head is gold, refined gold. The locks of his hair are date clusters. His black [hair] is like the raven. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like doves by the channels of water, which are bathing themselves in milk, sitting within the rims. <sup>13</sup> His cheeks are like a garden bed of spice, towers of scented herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping with liquid myrrh. <sup>14</sup> His hands are cylinders of gold, filled with chrys’o·lite. His abdomen is an ivory plate covered with sapphires. <sup>15</sup> His legs are pillars of marble based on socket pedestals of refined gold. His appearance is like Leb’a·non, choice like the cedars. <sup>16</sup> His palate is sheer sweetness, and everything about him is altogether desirable. This is my dear one, and this is my boy companion, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

The court women ask her of his whereabouts.

**6** *“Where has your dear one gone, O most beautiful one among women? Where has your dear one turned, that we may seek him with you?”*

She tells them that he is shepherding among the gardens.

<sup>2</sup> “My own dear one has gone down to his garden, to the garden beds of spice plants, to shepherd among the gardens, and to pick lilies. <sup>3</sup> I am my dear one’s, and my dear one is mine. He is shepherding among the lilies.”

Once again King Solomon confronts the Shulammitte with expressions of praise. He tells her how beautiful she is, more lovely than “sixty queens and eighty concubines,”

**4** **“You are beautiful, O girl companion of mine, like Pleasant City, comely like Jerusalem, awesome as companies gathered around banners. <sup>5</sup> Turn your eyes away from in front of me, for they themselves have alarmed me. Your hair is like a drove of goats that have hopped down from Gil’e·ad. <sup>6</sup> Your teeth are like a drove of ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which are bearing twins, none among them having lost its young ones. <sup>7</sup> Like a segment of pomegranate are your temples behind your veil. <sup>8</sup> There may be sixty queens and eighty concubines and maidens without number. <sup>9</sup> One there is who is my dove, my blameless one. One there is who belongs to her mother. She is the pure one of the one giving birth to her. The daughters have seen her, and they proceeded to pronounce her happy; queens and concubines, and they proceeded to praise her, <sup>10</sup> ‘Who is this woman that is looking down like the dawn, beautiful like the full moon, pure like the glowing sun, awesome as companies gathered around banners?’”**

**11** **“To the garden of nut trees I had gone down, to see the buds in the torrent valley, to see whether the vine had sprouted, whether the pomegranate trees had blossomed. <sup>12</sup> Before I knew it, my own soul had put me at the chariots of my willing people.”**

Solomon appeals to her to come back.

**13** **“Come back, come back, O Shu’lam·mite! Come back, come back, that we may behold you!”**

This prompts her to ask:

“What do YOU people behold in the Shu’lam·mite?”

Solomon uses this as an opening to express further admiration for her. He tells her of her beauty, from the soles of her feet to the crown of her head.

**“Something like the dance of two camps!”**

7 “How beautiful your steps have become in [your] sandals, O willing daughter! The curvings of your thighs are like ornaments, the work of an artisan’s hands. <sup>2</sup> Your navel roll is a round bowl. Let not the mixed wine be lacking [from it]. Your belly is a heap of wheat, fenced about with lilies. <sup>3</sup> Your two breasts are like two young ones, the twins of a female gazelle. <sup>4</sup> Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are like the pools in Hesh’bon, by the gate of Bath-rab’bim. Your nose is like the tower of Leb’a-non, which is looking out toward Damascus. <sup>5</sup> Your head upon you is like Car’mel, and the tresses of your head are like wool dyed reddish purple. The king is held bound by the flowings. <sup>6</sup> How beautiful you are, and how pleasant you are, O beloved girl, among exquisite delights! <sup>7</sup> This stature of yours does resemble a palm tree, and your breasts, date clusters. <sup>8</sup> I have said, ‘I shall go up on the palm tree, that I may take hold of its fruit stalks of dates.’ And, please, may your breasts become like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your nose like apples, <sup>9</sup> and your palate like the best wine that is going with a slickness for my dear one, softly flowing over the lips of sleeping ones.”

But the maiden resists all his arts. Courageously she declares her devotion to her shepherd, crying out for him.

<sup>10</sup> “I am my dear one’s, and toward me is his craving. <sup>11</sup> Do come, O my dear one, let us go forth to the field; do let us lodge among the henna plants. <sup>12</sup> Do let us rise early and go to the vineyards, that we may see whether the vine has sprouted, the blossom has burst open, the pomegranate trees have bloomed. There I shall give my expressions of endearment to you. <sup>13</sup> The mandrakes themselves have given [their] fragrance, and by our entranceways there are all sorts of the choicest fruits. The new ones as well as the old, O my dear one, I have treasured up for you.

**8** “O that you were like a brother of mine, sucking the breasts of my mother! Should I find you outside, I would kiss you. People would not even despise me. <sup>2</sup> I would lead you, I would bring you into the house of my mother, who used to teach me. I would give you a drink of spiced wine, the fresh juice of pomegranates. <sup>3</sup> His left hand would be under my head; and his right hand—it would embrace me.”

For the third time, she reminds the daughters of Jerusalem that they are under oath not to try to awaken love in her against her will.

<sup>4</sup> “I have put YOU under oath, O daughters of Jerusalem, that YOU try not to awaken or arouse love [in me] until it feels inclined.”

Solomon, losing out in his quest for the Shulammite’s love, lets her go home. Her brothers see her approaching, but she is not alone. Seeing her approaching, and not alone, her brothers ask:

<sup>5</sup> ***“Who is this woman coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her dear one?”***

She recalls it to her lover’s mind that they met under an apple tree, the place of his birth.

“Under the apple tree I aroused you. There your mother was in birth pangs with you. There she that was giving birth to you experienced birth pangs.

Her love is as strong as death and its blazings as “the flame of Jah.” Insistence on exclusive devotion “as unyielding as Sheol” has triumphed and has led to the glorious heights of union with her shepherd lover.

<sup>6</sup> “Place me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; because love is as strong as death is, insistence on exclusive devotion is as unyielding as She’ol is. Its blazings are the blazings of a fire, the flame of Jah. <sup>7</sup> Many waters themselves are not able to extinguish love, nor can rivers themselves wash it away. If a man would give all the valuable things of his house for love, persons would positively despise them.”

Some of her brothers' earlier comments about their concern over her when "a little sister" are mentioned. In earlier years one brother had said concerning her:

**<sup>8</sup> "We have a little sister that does not have any breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day that she will be spoken for?"**

Another brother replied:

**<sup>9</sup> "If she should be a wall, we shall build upon her a battlement of silver; but if she should be a door, we shall block her up with a cedar plank."**

She declares she has proved herself a mature and stable woman. Since the Shulammitte had successfully resisted all enticements, being satisfied with her own vineyard and remaining loyal in her affection for her lover, she could properly say:

<sup>10</sup> "I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers. In this case I have become in his eyes like her that is finding peace."

King Solomon can have his wealth! She is content with her one vineyard, for she loves one who is exclusively dear to her.

<sup>11</sup> "There was a vineyard that Sol'o-mon happened to have in Ba'al-ha'mon. He gave the vineyard over to the keepers. Each one would bring in for its fruitage a thousand silver pieces."

<sup>12</sup> "My vineyard, which belongs to me, is at my disposal. The thousand belong to you, O Sol'o-mon, and two hundred to those keeping its fruitage."

The song concludes with an expression of her shepherd lover's desire to hear her voice...

**<sup>13</sup> "O you who are dwelling in the gardens, the partners are paying attention to your voice. Let me hear it."**

...and with the expression of her desire that he come leaping, crossing the mountains that separated them

<sup>14</sup> "Run away, my dear one, and make yourself like a gazelle or like a young one of the stags upon the mountains of spices."

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Does The Song of Solomon condone immorality?

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The Song of Solomon describes the constancy of the love of a young Shulammitte girl for a local shepherd boy. It contains some warm descriptions of their feelings for each other... The young couple committed no form of immorality. The Shulammitte girl is called "the pure one." At the end of the song, her virtue is viewed as proved. The young shepherd himself says about her: "A garden barred in is my sister, my bride, a garden barred in, a spring sealed up." (Song of Solomon 6:9; 4:12; 8:9, 10) No, the conduct of this couple was blameless.

Is it true that "there is no indication that the lovers are married"? Probably they were not, but notice that the shepherd calls the Shulammitte his "bride." What does he mean? In this context, the Hebrew word *cal-lah'* means either a bride just before marriage, or a new wife. (*The New Brown, Driver, Briggs Gesenius*) Since the

young shepherd calls her his *cal-lah'* several times, the couple are evidently planning on marriage. Hence, their passionate feelings are not out of place.

Is it true that the woman is “naked through most of the story”? Well, the text does not describe her clothes, but does that mean she has none? On one occasion, the shepherd says to her: “Your eyes are those of doves, behind your veil.” (Song of Solomon 4:1) If she is veiled, that sounds as if she is modest, does it not?

What about the statement, “she protests at one point that if her lover doesn’t take her to her chamber she will have to put on her gown again”? The only part of the book that mentions her gown, or robe, is chapter five. Here, the Shulammitte is describing a dream. She says: “I am asleep, but my heart is awake.” Then she relates how, in her dream, her shepherd knocks at the door of her chamber. She refuses to open to him. Why? “I have put off my robe. How can I put it back on? I have washed my feet. How can I soil them?” Surely this episode shows that the Shulammitte has a sense of decency!—Song of Solomon 5:2-6.

The apostle Paul said: “All things are clean to clean persons. But to persons defiled and faithless nothing is clean, but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.” (Titus 1:15) If looked at by people with minds tainted by this world’s immoral thinking, even something as clean and wholesome as the love of the Shulammitte for her shepherd can be made to look sordid.