

## Prophecy And Love In The Song Of Songs

Christ and the Church

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If I were a Jewish rabbi I would have to ask everyone under the age of thirty to leave the room at this time. Now I will not do that because I would have to leave too, and that would make giving the sermon quite impossible. I will be thirty in two weeks, so maybe I can give myself a little bit of leeway here.

The reason why this would have to be so, said these Jewish sages, is that no one should read or study the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon) until one is thirty years of age, that one is not mature enough until that time to handle it. This is absolute nonsense.

If they had understood and taught their children what this book means, who knows how many acts of fornication may have been avoided. Who knows how many silly relationships that teenagers might have gotten into would not have ended up in terrible loveless marriages. Who knows how many marriages would have been saved. God put the Song of Solomon (or the Song of Songs) in the Bible. "All Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness." That is only one of the purposes of the book of Song of Songs, but it is not the purpose that we are going to look at today.

If the Jews had understood the Song of Songs, they may have figured out that the Messiah would come first as the loving elder brother to give Himself for His church, and not as a conquering hero as they thought. They may have concluded that God would call and work with the *spiritual* Israel made up of those who love Him and follow Him wherever He leads, rather than by just birth into a physical family. That is another part of the Song of Solomon that we are not going to take up today.

What we are going to look at in this book is first *prophecy*, believe it or not. Then after this we are going to look at the God-plane loving relationship, because that is what this book is all about.

We are going to turn to Romans 15:4 which is a general scripture that tells us the Old Testament is very much an important part of our study.

**Romans 15:4** For whatsoever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

I think this scripture applies in stages to the Song of Songs. If there ever was an Old Testament book that gives us hope, it is this one—the Song of Songs. If you know the story of the Song of Songs, you know what a hopeful book it is just from the idea of love that is shown there from Christ in the type of "the Beloved." We not only find increased hope for the future, but it also tells us a great deal about how we ought to live as Christians. This sermon is going to pursue those two thoughts: (1) The prophecies found in the book that give us hope, and (2) the instruction that is going to improve our Christian lives—our spiritual lives and our relationship with Christ right now.

You may think that I have vastly overblown the Song of Solomon, but I have done this for a purpose. It is only eight chapters long, and they are short ones. The longest one I think has 16 or 17 verses, but totally it only has 117 verses, and it can easily be read at one sitting. It will go really fast once you get into it. It did with me. It is poetry too. I get the feeling that some people think, "Well, how much real manly meaning can we get out of 117 verses of poetry?" You might be surprised.

You may also have noticed I've been calling it " *The Song of Songs*," and trying not to call it "The Song of Solomon." I have done this for a purpose too.

**Song of songs 1:1** The song of songs, which is Solomon's.

God Himself calls it the *Song of Songs*. He says Solomon has something to do with it, but He Himself calls it the Song of Songs. I thought it would be a good idea if I did too, because it teaches us something. Such a title raises it to another level, a whole different plane than merely a song. This is **the** Song of Songs. This form in the Hebrew of the way these words are put together is called a superlative form. It is like good, better, best. It means here that God says this is the best of all songs.

You might remember Casey Kasem. He has the American Top 40. Well, God's Top is 150. He put them in the Psalms. But there is one that did not make the list, because it so far out-strips the rest of them. He put it as His whole entire separate book, and He called it the **Song of Songs**. It is His number one.

We are going to go to Exodus 26:31-33 because I want to show you on what level this is. This is where God is going over the plans with Moses for the tabernacle.

**Exodus 26:31-33** You shall make a veil woven of blue and purple and

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scarlet yarn, and fine linen thread. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim. You shall hang it upon the four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Their hooks shall be of gold, upon four sockets of silver. And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the *Most Holy*.

Do you know what that says in Hebrew? I do not know what it says in the *King James Version*. I did not look. But that word is **the** Holy of Holy. That is the same form of wording we have here in the Song of Songs. That is what level this is on. God has His Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, or in the Temple, and here we have the Song of Songs—*the* best of songs—God's number 1.

Some commentators have decided to call this "The Most Sublime Song." That is okay, but even this does not do it justice. It really means that this is the best song that ever was. That is what kind of level we are talking about here. When God raises something to such a high level, when He puts it on such a high plane as that, it is one thing we ought to take notice of. He does not call things what they are not. He calls things what they are, and there is something in this book, the *Song of Songs*, that we need to understand. It is a special book, and it is vastly important for us.

It is a shame that we have kind of ignored this book for a long time. I remember that in my years at Ambassador College we spent less than an hour on this book in my entire four years. It was either an afterthought to the Old Testament survey, or it was an afterthought to the study of the Psalms, Proverbs, or Job—the "wisdom" literature.

I remember my instructor said basically these things, and I have got them in my notes even today. He said it is not a marriage manual. I think he was somewhat wrong about that. He said it is probably an allegory of Christ and the church. He was wrong about that too, not all the way. I am going to change the word "allegory" a little bit later in the sermon. It is about Christ and the church, but it is not an allegory. That is my opinion at least.

He also gave us a few technical details about who wrote it, and when it was written. He said it was read by the Jews at Passover time. Now he should have gotten something out of that if it is important enough to read at Passover time, but that was it. End of class. Close your books. Go home.

I tried to remember if I had ever heard a whole sermon or Bible study on the Song of

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Songs, and I came up with zilch. I remember turning to it several times during sermons or Bible studies, but if I remember correctly, it was my Dad who did it the few times I do remember. But to use a radio term, I think this song has not had a lot of "air time" that it deserves. Our hymnal does not have one song from the Song of Songs. Interesting.

I think we shied away from this book for a few reasons. You may think these are a little strange, a little funny, but there is a serious intent behind it. The first one is that the Song of Songs seems to be borderline erotic, and we do not trust Solomon one bit when it comes to sex. What can you believe from a guy who had so many wives and concubines? The second thing is that the Song of Songs is poetry, and it does not seem to have any real story flow or historical significance. How many of us had such a bad experience in high school literature class with poetry? We kind of shy away from poetry. We would rather read a good novel.

The third thing is that the Song of Songs does not seem to contain any recognizable wisdom, or proverbs, or law, because the principles are hidden underneath. The fourth thing is that the Song of Songs does not seem to have any obvious prophetic material. That is another thing that is kind of hidden underneath. The fifth thing (and I think the most important) is that its meaning and application has simply escaped us most of the time. We have not spent enough time going through it, but this last reason—the meaning having escaped us—has not really discouraged Bible commentators from talking about it.

It is thought that of all the books of the Old Testament, the Song of Songs has had the most people weigh in on what they think it means. It has had more opinions written about it than any book of the Old Testament. I went out and bought a commentary in preparation for this sermon on the Song of Songs, and this commentary is supposed to be "*the one*"—the authority—that everybody these days reads on it.

The commentator had 223 pages or so just in his introduction. He described things like when it was written, who wrote it, and what its theme is. He had about forty pages of bibliography that he had combed through for over who knows how many years of things written in the Church Fathers, and all the Jewish rabbis and commentators who have written about it too. I did not look at the bibliography except to say, "Hmmm. That's interesting. Forty pages," and then go on to the next thing. Then he proceeded to have about 500 more pages of commentary. He was quoting so many people that it was hard to keep everybody straight.

More theologians have written opinions about this book than any other. Now some of their opinions are really stupid and ridiculous. You would be surprised. Maybe you

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would not be surprised. One Jew said that the description in chapter 7 of the Shulamite by the Beloved (which starts at the feet and goes through to the head and describes about everything in between) is a geographical reference to the Holy Land, that her feet are the southern border of Israel. The toes were dipping in the Red Sea, and her knees were this and that. Her navel was Jerusalem, because it is right in the center, and that her breasts are Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. It really got ridiculous.

The "Christians" were no better. They took everything that is mentioned in here as a symbol of something. Spikenard is mentioned in here a couple of times. Every time Solomon mentioned spikenard in this Song, they said this had to mean Christ's anointing by Mary at Bethany. It does not have anything to do with Christ's anointing at Bethany by Mary. She poured spikenard on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair, but this has nothing to do with the Song of Songs. There is more to it than just one simple occurrence.

No matter how ridiculous they were, the theologians had to be heard on this subject because it is a gem. It is intriguing. They just have to say something. They have got to give their opinion.

Now I do not claim any special revelation on the meaning of the book by any means, but I should say that my understanding is not the end of all this either, because it has so many layers in it. You can see it on so many different levels. With just a change or two with your perspective you can see these different layers, and that is why there is so much commentary about it. People can come at it from one perspective or another and get something very important out of it. Because of what we have been through, and what we see ahead in the near future for us, we can pull a few pertinent prophecies and a lot of plain good old instruction from these few eight chapters.

Remember that I said a few minutes ago the one reason we avoided the Song of Songs was that we do not see much of a story flow in it. But there is one. It is not necessarily straight through. It is not a straight line from beginning to end. There are a few times that it looks like it jukes here and it jukes there, or goes back in time. There is a dream that maybe is something that should be future, or may be past, but there is a flow to it. There is a bit of a story.

We also get confused about who is speaking. In the *New King James* we see that they kind of say, "This is the Shulamite, and this is the Beloved, and these are the daughters of Jerusalem speaking," or whatever. That is just their opinion. Other Bibles do not have that at all. They just do the text straight through and let you come up with it all by yourself. So there is a problem there. We are not sure who all the characters are. There

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might be one group of women called "the daughters of Jerusalem," and another group, and then her brothers, and maybe some vineyard keepers, and who knows, the whole bridal party.

There are lots of characters in there and we are not sure how they relate to one. We do not have any notes like a play to tell us that the Shulamite enters here, and the daughters of Jerusalem sing this chorus, or whatever. We do not know. It is like a lot of the Psalms. We do not have the music. So here with the Song of Songs we do not know all the stage directions about who comes in and who goes out. To understand the book, one way or another, we have got to start putting answers to some of these questions.

Another thing. How in the world are we to understand this as a whole? Are we to understand it as love poetry, that some bard there in Israel got kind of melodramatic one night and started to write love poetry? Or is it a drama based on a true story, like Shakespeare, who looked back and saw the history of King Lear and pulled it up and made it into a play? Is that how we are supposed to look at it? Or is it some Wagnerian opera, with a lady who has a horned hat on her head, singing opera? Is it something like that, where it goes back into the myths, legends, and fables of ancient times? Some people think that.

Is it an allegory between God as the Beloved and Israel as the Shulamite? That is what the Jews will tell you. Is it an allegory of Christ and the church, Christ being the Beloved and the Shulamite being the church? Is it an instruction manual on how to catch a mate, with Solomon giving us some tips on telling you what you have to do? Now it certainly has some of these elements. Maybe it has elements of all of them, but the Song fits a whole different category much, much better.

You have got to remember who the ultimate author of this book is. It was a Man (maybe I should say a God) who loves to speak in parables.

**Matthew 13:10-17** And the disciples came and said to Him, Why do you speak to them in parables? He answered and said to them, Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard

Prophecy and Love in the Song of Songs by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear, for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Before we go any further we have to ask ourselves what is a parable? How do we define it? The *Oxford Companion Bible*, on page 567 says, "A parable is a picturesque figure of language in which an analogy refers to a similar or different reality. From *The New Bible Dictionary*: "A parable is a form of teaching which presents the listener with interesting illustration from which can be drawn moral and religious truths." We can understand that. That is pretty simple.

The *Holman Bible Dictionary* says: "Parables are stories told to provide a vision of life, especially life in God's Kingdom. Parable means the putting along side for purposes of comparison and new understanding. Parables utilize pictures such as metaphors and similes, and frequently extend them into a brief story to make a point or disclosure."

All these are pretty simple and easy to understand. I think the best one is from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* where he defines the Greek term "parable." This is what he says:

Parable literally denotes a placing beside. It signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison. It generally is used of a somewhat lengthy utterance or narrative drawn from nature or human circumstances, the object of which is to set forth a spiritual lesson. [So far he has really said nothing new.] It is the lesson that is of value. [This is where we start getting an explanation that is good for us here.] The hearer must catch the analogy if he is to be instructed.

This is getting into what Jesus said. If you do not catch the analogy, you are not going to get out of it what all the prophets and righteous men wanted to know. Quoting:

Such a narrative or saying dealing with earthly things with a spiritual meaning is distinct from a fable which attributes to things what does not belong to them in nature.

Foxes talk or do all these things in fables, but in a parable things appear in their natural guise. He gives some advice here. Continuing the quote:

Two dangers are to be avoided in seeking to interpret the parables in scripture: (1) That of ignoring the important features, and (2) that of trying to make all the details to mean something.

This is where we get into the difference between an allegory and a parable. Allegory is a form of teaching or a form of literature in which everything in the story has a symbolic meaning. If you describe Joe Blow, and every time you describe an article of his clothing, it stands for something else. In a parable when you describe Joe Blow, you want people to get a general idea of what Joe Blow is all about, not necessarily attaching a meaning to everything, because when you do that you start taking the analogy too far and you get way out on a limb.

Jesus makes it plain that parables cannot be fully understood unless the meaning is revealed. He said it is a mystery, and it is given to us to understand these things, and it is done through the giving of the Holy Spirit. He said that these parables were given to *hide* the meaning to those who do not have it revealed to them. He did not give these parables to make it plain to those who were watching or listening. He made it so that it would be obscure to them.

He could then "zap" somebody with the Holy Spirit and make him understand, apart from everybody else so that He could work with them individually. He says, "Blessed are your eyes and your ears because you have the Holy Spirit and you can understand these things." But to all these theologians who have written their opinions in the past, they do not really understand. They may get one thing here or there, but they do not understand the whole picture. They do not get it.

Because we know God's Word, understand His plan, and have the Holy Spirit, these parables mean something wonderful to us. The Song is just a long parable, or maybe we could say a collection of related parables with a very common theme. It is a story drawn from human experience, just like Vine said there, that has a higher spiritual meaning than just the story itself.

We do not need to attach a meaning to every symbol that comes up. Her feet do not necessarily have to mean the southern border of Judah. We just need to get a general impression of what He is trying to get across. If we catch the analogy, if we grasp the important features, all the symbols then take on their proper meanings and their proper



Prophecy and Love in the Song of Songs by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

proportions, because it is important. If you inflate one symbol out of what it really should naturally be, then you could start going out on the limb again and getting out of it.

Any understanding of the Song must consider the book's characters first. All of the action revolves around them. There are two main characters: a young woman called "the Shulamite," and a man called "the Beloved." In supporting roles we have "the daughters of Jerusalem " and the Shulamite's brothers, and along the way there are a few incidental characters that move the plot along. Basically that is it. So we just have to get these four down, and what they mean.

When you read the Song of Solomon, you can never have Ephesians very far from your memory. These are the scriptures that I have been getting to through this whole thing.

**Ephesians 5:22-32** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

From our knowledge of the wedding supper in Revelation 19:7-9, and the bride and the bridegroom motif of Matthew 25:13 (the parable of the ten virgins), we can easily see Christ as "the Beloved." He is the ardent suitor of Shulamite. Shulamite is either the church as a whole, or could mean the individual Christian. I need to make sure I stress this because it flits between the two of these. Sometimes it is both. Sometimes it is one or the other. You have to be very careful when you read through this and try to figure out whether it is talking about an individual Christian or the church as a whole, or both. Just be very careful when you go through that.

There was an interesting fact that one of the commentators brought out, and that is why she is called "Shulamite." In Hebrew they do not have vowels, necessarily, in the

Prophecy and Love in the Song of Songs by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

writing. They have little points that they put down to tell you how to pronounce it. The root of that name *Shulamite* is *shlm*, with a "t" on the end to tell what part of speech it is. But Solomon's name is *shlm*. What they said was that Shulamite means "Mrs. Solomon." They said it could be just as easily translated "Solomoness," like lioness and lion. What are *you* called? "Christian." What is Christ called? "Christ." It is a very similar idea that is tried to get across in here. We have Solomon as "the Beloved" and Solomoness as the Shulamite. It is kind of interesting to think about.

The daughters of Jerusalem and the Shulamite's brothers is a little bit harder to pinpoint, but we can get a pretty good hint if we compare scriptures. Before we go into them specifically I just want to pull a principle out of Luke.

**Luke 8:19-21** Then His mother and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. And it was told Him by some, who said, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You. But He answered and said to them, My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.

Now what is interesting is that though these daughters of Jerusalem and brothers of Shulamite can claim a family relationship, the proof is in their hearing and the doing God's Word. The other account of this thing in Luke 8, in Matthew and Mark, is they stress obedience to God and submission to His will. They are kind of a little bit different from Luke. Luke says, "...who hear the word and do it," and they say, "...who do His will."

Let us go to the Song of Songs and look at these people—the daughters of Jerusalem and the brothers.

**Song of songs 1:5** I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem.

**Song of songs 2:2** Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

What we see here is that they are contrasted. Daughters are called thorns. The Shulamite is called a lily. A lily is beautiful, and a thorn is ugly and useless, so we see here a negative symbol. You might want to note Matthew 13:7, 22, where good seed is thrown among the thorns and the thorns come up and choke it. So thorns are a negative symbol. You might also want to write down Ezekiel 16:44-48 and Revelation 17:5. You

Prophecy and Love in the Song of Songs by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

might say these show competitors for Christ's affection.

We should probably think of these "daughters of Jerusalem " as false Christian churches in a general sense. In a more individual sense we might just call them "the unconverted." They have never been called. What is interesting here is that the Beloved chooses the Shulamite over these. That is what sets them apart. His love sets them apart.

Now we are going to look at the sons.

**Song of songs 1:6** My mother's sons were angry with me.

That is as far as we need to go. In chapter 2, verse 3, we get "the Beloved" in comparison to "the sons."

**Song of songs 2:3** Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons.

This does not sound too bad. Here they are called "trees of the woods." The *New King James* translates this poorly. It literally means "trees of the wildwood" or "trees of the bush country," or "trees of the scrub." So here we have another negative symbol very similar to the thorns. These brothers of Shulamite represent His competitors. The way trees are represented in the Bible, whether the trees are good or bad, is they show whether a person is good or bad. When they are a symbol for a person, the type of tree is very important.

We sing, "Blessed and happy is the man who shall never walk astray." Psalm 1 tells you that the righteous man is a tree planted beside the waters, and he is fruitful. But He says the unrighteous man is not so. He is going to be burned as chaff. So what we have here are unrighteous trees as compared to the very beautiful productive apple tree, which is Christ. These guys do not hold a candle to Him.

In Judges 9:7-15 is a parable that Jotham gives about trees. Ezekiel 31 talks about Egypt as a tree, as a leading nation. In Matthew 3:10 John the Baptist said, "The ax is laid to the root of the trees." He was talking to the Pharisees. In Matthew 12:33 the Pharisees are considered trees that do not bear good fruit. In Jude verse 12 trees are compared to unrighteous church leaders, and apostate.

Prophecy and Love in the Song of Songs by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

You get the idea here that these trees of the wildwood are opposites of Christ. They are either corrupt church leaders, or maybe in a more general sense we could call them the leaders of the world—the ones who were her guardians before Christ called her. They were the ones who were supposed to teach her. We may even think of them as false shepherds.

Ezekiel 34 and Acts 20:28-31 talk about savage wolves. We do not need to know necessarily their identification for today, but I wanted to give it to you so that in your own study you can understand where they fit in all this. We have gone through that. Now we are going to get into a couple of these prophecies. Just like Jesus' parables, this parable has prophetic overtones. A few sections apply directly to the church today.

First we are going to look at the two dreams that the Shulamite has. I think they have the most direct application to us. What we are going to do is compare them to each other, and we are going to compare them to the ten virgins and with the recent history of the church of God. We may not be doing all these things in that specific order. I am going to try to inject them as we go along.

First we will go back to Matthew 25 and just quickly read through the parable of the ten virgins because we need that as a base for going through the parable in the Song of Songs.

**Matthew 25:1-13** Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him! [This is important. Remember that.] Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, No, lest there should not be enough for us and you: but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us! But he answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Prophecy and Love in the Song of Songs by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Just to sum up here, the parable tells us of the whole church being asleep. Half had enough oil to last them, the other half did not. They had to go out to buy, and they missed out on the wedding. Now we are going to read the first parable here—the first dream.

**Song of songs 3:1-5** By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him. I will rise now, I said, And go about the city; In the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love. I sought him, but I did not find him. The watchmen who go about the city found me, To whom I said, Have you seen the one I love? Scarcely had I passed by them, When I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go, Until I had brought him to the house of my mother, And into the chamber of her who conceived me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, By the gazelles or by the does of the field, Do not stir up nor awaken love Until it pleases.

Let us look at the foolish virgins in chapter 5

**Song of songs 5:2-8** I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. [She says] I have taken off my robe; How can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart went out to him when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen who went about the city found me, they struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick!

That is sad. What we have here instead of five wise and five foolish virgins, we have the Shulamite reacting to two very similar circumstances in different ways. One might say in chapter 3 she has a Philadelphian reaction, and then in chapter 5 she has a Laodicean reaction.

In the first instance (chapter 3), you might want to look at this in its context. The first

Prophecy and Love in the Song of Songs by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

things she says is that she is sleeping. She is on her bed, but she is seeking him. The light had not gone out yet. She was very much trying to do her best, but for some reason she is asleep, and she seeks him there on her bed, but she cannot find him.

I think that is good to think about, because we have to get out of our bed to really find him. So she arouses herself. Notice it does not say he came and knocked. Maybe like in the parable of the 10 virgins she heard the cry, but she got up herself and she went out. She made the effort to go out of the house to go into the city to search the highways and the byways till she found him. (I'm getting ahead of myself here a little bit.)

She goes to the watchmen. Why did they not attack her this time? Have you ever thought about that? She was too strong for them. It was not the right time. My own interpretation is that she was so confident she was going to find him in her search for him, and that they left her alone. They do not even answer her. She just said that she passed them by. They saw her there, but they did not do anything to her. There must have been a look on her face, or a bit of protection, or what have you, but they would not mess with her.

As soon as she passed this test with the watchmen, she finds him. What does she do when she finds him? The picture here is that she nearly tackled him. She grasped him. She clutches him so tight that there is no way that he is going to get away again. And then she says she would not let him go till she brought him to her mother's house. Now what portion of Scripture does that remind you of? Isaac! It was Isaac.

You could think of Jacob too. When Jacob wrestled with Christ he would not let Him go, and He blessed him. But I was thinking of the mother's house—the idea of what happened when Rebekah came back from Padanaram where the servant had gotten her. Jacob took Rebekah into his mother's tent. What this says is, "I would not let him go until he married me!"

Listen to what she tells the daughters of Jerusalem. She said, "This experience is so wonderful and so all-consuming that you had better be ready for it when it comes, because otherwise you are not going to survive it." In one way it is a warning, and in another way it is an encouragement. But luckily God calls us when He knows that we are ready.

Now to the bad experience.

**Song of songs 5:2** I sleep, [This time she admits it. She is not just on her bed. She sleeps.] but my heart is awake. [She is alive, but she hears the

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voice of her beloved.] He knocks, saying...

This time he had to come all the way through town and knock on her door, saying, "Hey! Are you in there?"

**Song of songs 5:2 Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; For my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.**

He beseeches her to let him in. "I want to come in." He praises her. He calls her his beloved. But she comes up with some bad excuses. She says, "I am naked on my bed. I do not want to get up. It is warm in here. I have washed my feet. I finished my work for the day. I do not want to get them dirty again." She said it is going to take too much effort. She might get cold. She may get dirty.

What does he do? He jiggles the lock. He tries to get in. He tries to work his way around so that he can lift the latch, but he cannot. It has to be opened from the inside. She has to *let* him in. So what did he do? He is rejected. He goes away.

But suddenly her heart yearns for him. She goes and lifts the latch and opens the door, but he is gone. Do you know what it says there? It says, "My heart went out to him." In the Hebrew that means, "I nearly died." She recognized that she lost her chance, or at least had come to the point where she was really on thin ice.

We might say, at this point, she starts to repent. She goes out to seek him and she cannot find him. She calls. She does the same searching that the Shulamite did in the other dream, but she cannot find him. He is not around. What has happened?

The watchmen find her and they beat her, and they bruise her. They take away her veil, or her outer covering. This is interesting too. They said this was a very light diaphanous summer cloak. Her righteousness was paper thin, and it was easily ripped off her. That is what this says. Remember, it says that righteousness is the fine linen, the clothing of the saints. This was such a paper-thin garment she had on that the watchmen were able to just pounce on her and take it. She did not have a whole lot of strength. She said, "They struck me. They wounded me and took my veil away from me." Then listen to this: She is wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. And then she says, "Daughters of Jerusalem, if you find him, let him know that I still love him."

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An interesting thing happens next. The daughters say, "How is your beloved different from everybody else's?" Do you know what she does? She preaches them a sermon on Christ. In verse 10 she starts describing Jesus Christ.

**Song of songs 5:10-11** My beloved is white and ruddy, chief among ten thousand. His head is like the finest gold.

He is made of the best materials that ever were. His head is where He does all His thinking. He leads from his head. We do not want to pin these things down too much, because then we would be skipping into allegory again.

**Song of songs 5:16** His mouth is most sweet.

That is a bad translation. "His *word* [what He says] is sodelicious!"

**Song of songs 5:16** Yes, he is altogether lovely. [There is no more lovely in the universe.] This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!

Remember, He called us friends. Guess what *they* say?

**Song of songs 6:1** Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you?

They were convinced. We might say they were converted. They want to find the Beloved too. This Shulamite here was so out of it she could not remember where he had told her he was going. He said it back in chapter 5, verse 1: "I have come to my garden." She knew all the time that he was in his garden, but now she suddenly remembers, and she says, "My beloved has gone to his garden." What is he doing there? In verse 3 she says, "He feeds his flock among the lilies."

If you are following my timeline here, he is in the place of safety with his flock. Now whether you want to take this physically or spiritually, I do not think that it matters. It just depends on how you interpret this. He is there, and He is teaching His flock among the lilies.



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At this point you may say that I have taken this a bit too far. Maybe I have, but I do not think so, because I want to show you that there is something else in chapter 2. This chapter 2 is the closest thing I have even seen in the Bible to telling us when and where of *the place of safety*.

**Song of songs 2:8-9** The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes. [That gives you a time frame.] Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice.

Do you know what this means? The wall there is of the house. What are we? We are the house of God. He is looking through a window into the house of God. Whom does He see in there? Shulamite! The first one here, it says, "He is looking." It means that it is a piercing gaze. Do you know what that means? He is judging! He is evaluating. He is looking in and seeing who in the church has got it.

"Gazing through the lattice." Have you ever looked through a lattice? You cannot get a real good gaze through a lattice. So not only is He looking piercingly through the window, occasionally He goes over to the lattice and gives us a few quick glimpses. He is always keeping His eye on us. That is what it means.

**Song of songs 2:10-13** My beloved spoke, and said to me: Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!

What is that description telling you? Springtime! It has got to be springtime! If He comes at the Day of Trumpets, and you count back 3-1/2 years, you have got to come to the springtime. Remember He said, "Pray that your journey be not in the winter." Well, that does not necessarily mean in the winter season. It means wintry weather, whatever the season. That is one of its meanings.

Even in springtime we can get these terrible cold blasts that come in every once in a while. He says to pray that it does not happen, because you are leaving in the spring and you might just hit the last part of wintry weather. That is my interpretation of it.

Where does He say we will be going?

**Song of songs 2:14** O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; For your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely.

Every one of the commentators I have read said this reminds us of the stronghold of the Edomites called "the rock"—Petra; Selah. That is what it means. Did you know that this word *dove* does not mean just dove. It means "rock dove." There is a special kind of dove that nests in little parts of the cliff just big enough for her to put a nest up there.

This is wonderful! There is so much in this little book of 8 chapters. Read the whole chapter of Psalm 27 when you get a chance. Read Psalm 29:1-2. Psalm 27 has to do with some of the protection He says He will give the righteous man, and the beauty He wants to see in us. Psalm 29:1-2 has to do with the beauty of holiness. That is what He says at the end of verse 14 of Song of Songs, chapter 2. He says He wants to see your countenance and hear your voice, because it is lovely. "You are beautiful. You are holy." Of course this is my personal interpretation. I do not want you to think this is dogma, but it has got a lot going for it.

Let us go to Psalm 91. My *New King James* calls this "The Safety of Abiding in the Presence of God." My own personal margin says, "Place of Safety Psalm."

**Psalm 91:1-2** He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.

He then goes through several verses of how He is going to keep us safe, and that the things that happen all around us will not affect us because He is there with us.

Listen now to verse 14. I want you to get this because this is where the sermon takes a turn. We are going to talk about "the love." God is speaking here of the righteous person.

**Psalm 91:14-16** Because he [the righteous person] has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. [What is the cleft of a rock?] He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.

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[How does He do this?] With long life [What is longer than eternal life?] I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.

All this is in a Psalm that has a lot to do with the place of safety. What put him in the place of safety? He showed his love for God. That was the determining factor.

What is the main theme of the Song of Songs? Love. Really more correctly we should say it is the loving relationship that was built and developed between God and His people. Some have called it the "I Corinthians 13 of the Old Testament." Paul gives us a catalog of how a Christian who has love acts. The Song not only does this, but it speaks of things in a more emotional sense as it relates directly to our relationship with Christ.

Now the love of the Song of Songs is passionate! It is ardent! It is extremely sexual in its nature, but that is just a figure. Remember John 17:3. "This is life eternal that you *know* God and His Son." That "know" is a sexual term. It means "intercourse." If you look in both the New and the Old Testament that word "know" is used of the most intimate relationship that human beings can have with one another.

Remember that this is a higher "God-plane" relationship that we are talking about here, so it uses the best human imagery that is possible to describe this. Do not get bogged down in the sexuality of it. Get bogged down in the "intimacy" of it, because the love that God wants to see from you given to Him, as well as your brethren in the church, is a passionate, ardent, zealous, deep, strong feeling, as well as an action. Let us look at Song of songs 8:6-7 and see how intimate this love is. Shulamite is speaking.

**Song of songs 8:6-7** Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm. [The heart is his mind and his emotion. The arm is his action.] For love is as strong as death, Jealousy [zeal or passion] as cruel as the grave. [That is a bad interpretation. It should be "hard, inflexible, unyielding as the grave."] Its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it [he] would be utterly despised.

This is a love than cannot be bought. She says that this is almost an elemental force of the universe, because its opposite is death. Its opposite is the grave. It is love that you produce in your life with God's help that is going to give you life. She says that it is just as strong as death—that other malevolent force that you do not want to be part of. What does it say in I Corinthians 15? That death (is overcome) is swallowed up in victory

Prophecy and Love in the Song of Songs by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>) through love.

Shulamite's brothers pop in here and they say:

**Song of songs 6:8** We have a little sister.

We have other people to train. And they say, "What can we do to train her right?" Maybe this is the repentance of the false shepherds, and the answer they give here. They answer their own question. They say, "We will build upon her a wall and a battlement and we will enclose her." Shulamite responds here in verse 10.

**Song of songs 6:10** I am a wall. [Some say she says, "I was a wall."] Then I became in his eyes as one who found peace.

Do you know what that really means? She says, "I became, through all this process, as one who found peace, security, contentment, completion." Remember, we are an unfinished creation. This word could also mean grace, or favor. She became a wall. She stood up. In this case it is a sexual metaphor here for swains or suitors who wanted to get in bed with her. But she said that because she was a wall and not a door where they could get in. She was a wall, and found that love is the key to eternal peace, contentment, grace, favor.

Go through this book and see how she shows her love throughout the eight chapters of the Song of Songs. See how she shows her love to the Beloved. It is quite an education.

You might want to read I John 3:16 on through to I John 5:5, because this is the New Testament interpretation, if you will, of this love. Remember the apostle John talks about love all the time in his three epistles. It seems to be every other word.

There is a tradition that has been written down that says people got tired of hearing the apostle John coming into the church and say, "Love one another. This is the love of God, that you love one another."

Remember an old man a few years ago who said, "Let us go back to Genesis 1, 2, and 3. We have two trees. One is the way of give that is out flowing concern: Love for your neighbor, and love for God. The other tree is the one of get—of selfishness, of vanity, lust, and greed."

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It seems that when apostles get old, everything is stripped away except the bare essentials. "Love one another. Love God. Live the way of give rather than the way of get."

Jot these verses down: Song of songs 2:16, 6:3, and 7:10. Go through there and look how her attitude changes. In the first one she says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his, and he feeds his flocks among the lilies." What she sees is a 50-50 partnership, and he is feeding. In chapter 6, verse 3 she says, "I am his, and he is mine, and he feeds his flocks among the lilies." Now he is first, not her, and she says now she is like kind of an employee. It is 60-40, or 75-25; but he is still feeding her.

In chapter 7, verse 10 she says, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me." She totally dropped "My beloved is mine," and he does not have to teach her anymore. She finally got it. Of course she had somewhat of a claim to him, but she was humble enough to realize that did not matter. It was his love for her and his claim on her, because he had redeemed her, and she owed him everything. Once she reached that point, she knew that his entire impulse, his desire, and everything about him was to her. She realized how all-encompassing his love is. She got it.

This book is wonderful. There is so much in it. What we have here is the love of God—the mutual love between Him and His church. Once we understand this, it is so much easier to do it. It is not the sickly sweet sentimentality of the Protestant churches. There is a little bit in there of that, but it is minor.

It is a zealous, passionate, hard, (in the sense of unyielding) inflexible in the truth. It is unable to be quenched. It is a pure fire that water cannot quench. No flood, none of these slings and arrows (or however it says in one section of Scripture) that is thrown against us will ever put it out. On the other hand, it is very eager to please, quick to submit, very happy to follow the lead of Christ. She goes wherever He wants her to go. Very faithful, very giving. Paul said, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

Song of Songs has so much in this little book of eight chapters, it is incredible. It is **thebest** of songs. It is God's number 1 song. It is so packed full of little gems, of not only prophecy, but also of how we should love God in response to His unflagging love to us.