

Bible Study # 85
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Mr. John Ogwyn

The Writings Series—Song of Solomon

This evening we **are continuing this series on the Writings, but we are getting into another part of the Writings—the Festival Scrolls.** Again, these are books that we don't tend to go through very frequently. I don't think the Song of Solomon tends to be one of the books that is most frequently heard or quoted from in sermons and Bible studies. Yet it is a very important part of the Bible and there is a very important lesson that is to be learned from it.

We have covered the Psalms, Proverbs and Job in the traditional Jewish order. The next five books (the part of the Writings we are in now) are the books that are called the Megillot or the Festival Scrolls. This is because these five books were traditionally read at certain festival occasions.

The Song of Solomon was the first of these five: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther. We will be going through each of those books in the next five Bible studies (counting this evening).

These books were traditionally read in the temple, and later in the synagogues, during the various festival seasons. Song of Solomon was traditionally read during the Days of Unleavened Bread—normally on the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Ruth was traditionally read at Pentecost. Lamentations was read at a festival that was held in the summer in the fifth month of the sacred year—the month of Ab. It is a month that would normally correspond with our July/August (last of July/first of August). The ninth of Ab was the date. It was the commemoration of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple. After the destruction of the temple, it became a national day of fasting that the Jews took upon themselves. It is sort of like Thanksgiving in reverse. It was a day of lament.

The ironic thing is that 600 plus years later, when Titus and the Romans destroyed the temple, they destroyed it on the anniversary of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple. The two times the temple was destroyed, it was destroyed on the same day—the ninth of Ab. So, they had an additional reason to fast.

Even later history in 1492, the decree that expelled all of the Jews from Spain (which was a major center of Jewish settlement) was issued on

the ninth of Ab. It was just a matter of weeks before Columbus sailed to discover America. All their property was confiscated and they were expelled. So, this date has played a significant role in Jewish history. The book of Lamentations was read on that date.

Ecclesiastes was normally read on the Sabbath during the Feast of Tabernacles. And then Esther was read at Purim, which is a national holiday that commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from Persia. It is normally read in the 12th month of the sacred year, which would correspond with February/March. We're approaching Purim. It should be right around this time. I would have to check the calendar and do a little calculation to figure out exactly when.

The point is that these books were traditionally read on these occasions. When properly understood, each of these books explains significance to these occasions—significance that has very direct implication for us today. We are going to see that as we go through. I am not going to comment on the others any further this evening.

This evening we **are focusing on the Song of Solomon, which was traditionally read at the Days of Unleavened Bread.** At first thought, that may seem an odd book to read during the Days of Unleavened Bread. In fact, a lot of times people have had trouble understanding the significance of the Song of Solomon. Some of the Rabbis around the time of Christ and after, who were somewhat embarrassed by the plain language of Song of Solomon, decided it was an allegory—that it was the story of God and Israel.

Many of the early Catholic fathers were similarly embarrassed by the plainness of the book and finally decided it was an allegory about Christ and the Church. But the one thing they were all convinced of was that it certainly didn't mean what it said—they found this rather embarrassing and didn't see why something like that should be in the Bible.

If you understood it from the standpoint of the Days of Unleavened Bread, what is the purpose? What do the Days of Unleavened Bread teach us? We are reminded of the importance of putting sin out of our lives. The message of the Days of Unleavened Bread is not a totally negative message. It is not just a matter of getting rid of the leavening. It is not the seven days of not having bread at all; it is the seven days of unleavened bread. We make a replacement. We get rid of the leavening and we eat unleavened bread. So many times the

emphasis on putting away sin can come across as a negative matter. I think, particularly for the young people, sometimes it is a negative matter, and they feel that somehow they are missing out by putting away sin.

The story of the Song of Solomon provides the other part of the story. The reality is there is nothing that is worth having—nothing that is good or beneficial to us—that God commands us to put away.

This particular book describes and shows the joy that is available to a young couple who have remained chaste and saved themselves for one another for marriage. The joy that they are able to have is something that even Solomon, with all of his wealth and women, couldn't have. It is simply not available in a harem, and that's made plain in this book.

It is a beautiful story. It describes the trials of a beautiful peasant maid from Shulam. One day as she was tending the family vineyard, she was seen by the servants of Solomon as they passed by; she was drafted to be a part of Solomon's harem. When the king beholds her, he falls violently in love with her and tries to woo her with blandishments and enticements. During all of this, she remains faithful to her shepherd lover and pines away for her absent fiancé.

Now, when the king is finally convinced of the constancy of her love for the shepherd, he dismisses her from his presence and allows her to return home with the shepherd. The story ends on a triumphant note, with her and the shepherd returning to her mother's house. She has proved that love is capable of heroic endurance.

Let me read a quote from the *Soncino Jewish Commentary*—a quote from the introduction to the Song of Solomon. “The tale she tells to their assembled friends makes a strong protest against the luxury and vice of the court and pays testimony to the beauty and dignity of pure love and fidelity.”

I will be going through the Song of Solomon in the Jewish Publications Society translation (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/jps/>), and utilizing the *Soncino Jewish Commentary*. There are many different ways that I have seen of presenting this book. Of all the ones that I have seen, the one that seems to respect the clear and plain meaning of the text the best is the one that is laid out here in the *Soncino*.

There are all sorts of allegorical interpretations and all sorts of things that come in, but this is ultimately a beautiful love story. There are lessons that we can learn. But I think one of the greatest and most important things is, as this

book was read every year during the Days of Unleavened Bread, people in general and young people in particular were reminded of the fact that there are benefits and blessings that are in store when you do it God's way.

Putting away sin doesn't mean missing out on all the fun. Putting away sin doesn't mean having this sort of miserable life where you never have any fun or never get to do anything. That's not where God's way leads. There are benefits and depths of happiness and joy that come from doing it God's way that can never be duplicated any other way—and that's an important lesson to learn for the Days of Unleavened Bread. Putting away sin is not God's punishment for us.

Song of Solomon 1:1, “The song of songs, which is Solomon's.” The term “song of songs” is a superlative. It means the best or the choicest of Solomon's songs. We are told in I Kings 4:32 that Solomon wrote 1,005 songs, and this is the best that he wrote. This is the choicest of the songs. It is the epitome of the songs that Solomon wrote.

Many of the rabbis and early Catholic fathers were really perplexed in how this wound up in the Bible. They couldn't figure out why this should be a part of the Bible. Solomon wrote 1,005 songs, and this song is the only one that God picked out to be put into the Bible. So, it should tell us that there is something that is important here.

It starts out with the words of the young lady who is referred to as the Shulamite. What we have here are words that she is speaking to her absent shepherd lover.

You have to realize that different parts of the Bible are written in different ways. The way you read the book of Acts or the book of I Samuel is totally different than something such as the Song of Solomon, which was written in a poetic verse. In many ways, it was written to be performed with a chorus and with characters. It is not written as a prose account. It's not written in the detailed historical way as the book of Acts, for instance, or the books of Kings, Chronicles or Judges. It is written as a poem or as a song. It is written almost like a little play—a musical production that involves different ones singing their part. You have to sort of put yourself in that opening. It's as though the curtain opens and the Shulamite is standing there and she is singing.

Verses 2-4, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is better than wine. Your ointments have a goodly fragrance; your name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the maidens love you. Draw me, and we will run

after you; the king has brought me into his chambers; we will be glad and rejoice in you; we will find your love more fragrant than wine! Sincerely do they love you.”

As we go on through, this tells the story of what happened to her. The story that is set out is that she was tending the vineyard and had been conscripted by Solomon’s retinue. Solomon had various palaces and at certain times of the year, he moved from area to area. That was not uncommon in that area.

If you wanted to be cool in the summer, you didn’t turn on the air-conditioning. They didn’t have any. They had a summer palace, which was normally located up in the mountains at a higher elevation where the temperature was cooler. It was not uncommon that the court would move several times in a year. There would be this great panoply and parade and you could see the dust off in the distance. The horsemen and the chariots would come and Solomon would finally come in this big contraption in which he moved. And then would come this gigantic retinue that moved when the court was transferred from palace to palace. So, this is sort of the story.

She is standing here musing this and she is expressing this. This is after she has been taken. The king has brought her into his chambers. Perhaps this is being spoken as a soliloquy as she is sort of musing or speaking to herself. Most likely the ladies of the harem would be close by and hear this.

Verses 5-6, she makes the statement, “I am black [The word that is rendered “black” is a word that literally means “ruddy” or “sunburned.”], but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am swarthy, because the sun has tanned me; my mother’s sons were incensed against me; they made me keeper of the vineyard; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.”

In other words, she hasn’t pampered herself. She is comparing herself to the pampered ladies of Solomon’s court. She has been outdoors and is tanned. For some of them, all they did all day long was sit around and pamper themselves. They rubbed on various ointments, oils and all sorts of things. She, from an early age, had been helping on the farm by working out-of-doors. She is tan and ruddy from the sun. She is, in a sense, comparing herself to these pampered ladies of Solomon’s court.

Verse 7, “Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you make your flocks to

rest at noon; for why should I be as one that veils herself beside the flocks of your companions.”

Note here that she is addressing her absent shepherd lover. She asks the question, ‘Where are you feeding your flock? Where do you make your flock to rest at noon?’ When she thinks in terms of meeting her fiancé, it is not sneaking off in the dark of night.

Even the commentary brings that out. It says: “Being modest, she says at noon—not like the wanton ladies of the court who seek their lovers at night because they are up to things they shouldn’t be.”

Verse 8, at this point there is a chorus from the women there in the court—the harem. They respond, “If you know not, O you fairest among women, go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock and feed your kids, beside the shepherds’ tents.”

At this point, Solomon comes in and begins to speak to her.

Verses 9-10, “I have compared you, O my love, to a steed in Pharaoh’s chariots. Your cheeks are comely as circlets, your neck with beads.”

You have to understand that some of the comparisons don’t always come down; some of it is cultural. If you were trying to woo some girl and you told her she looked like a horse, she probably wouldn’t take it as a compliment. ‘When I look at you I think of a horse,’ wouldn’t be something that you would necessarily want to tell your wife or your fiancé. She probably wouldn’t appreciate that. But this was a culture where, when they thought of horses, they thought of beauty and the graceful movements. It was not an insult or a put-down.

Verses 12-13, she responds, “While the king sat at his table, my spikenard sent forth its fragrance. My beloved is unto me as a bag of myrrh, that lies betwixt my breasts.”

Solomon is sitting there, and even while the king is sitting there and speaking, her thoughts wander to her shepherd lover, her fiancé. He’s described like a perfume bag that sends forth a smell that wafts out and you can follow it. She is not being attracted to, or won over, by Solomon in the same way. She is being drawn to the one to whom she pledged herself and desires to marry.

Solomon continues and tries to flatter her.

Verse 15, “Behold, you are fair my love; behold, you are fair; your eyes are as doves.”

Ignoring Solomon’s flattery, she responds. She mentally addresses her absent lover.

Verses 16-17, she describes, “Behold, you are fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant; also our couch is

leafy. The beams of our houses are cedars, and our panels are cypresses.”

Verses 16 and 17, her allusion is to the out-of-doors. Her mind hearkens back to the shepherd lover, the fiancé from whom she has been taken away. She thinks about the out-of-doors. Solomon has all these things to impress her and she says, “the beams of our houses are cedars and our panels are cypresses.” She’s thinking of the cedar trees under which they rest and shelter during the heat of the day. The word “houses” is plural and has certain significance. In other words, we have not one place but many in the forest glades.

Song of Solomon 2:1, “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.” A rose of Sharon or a lily of the valley is a common wildflower. She is not comparing herself to one of the pampered hothouse plants of Solomon’s harem but to a common wildflower. She says, ‘I am just like a common wildflower.’

Verse 2, Solomon responds, “As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.”

Verses 3-6, she continues, “As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. Under its shadow I delighted to sit, and its fruit was sweet to my taste. He has brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me is love. ‘Stay me with dainties; refresh me with apples; for I am lovesick.’ Let his left hand be under my head, and his right hand embrace me.”

We come to this refrain, which marks the end of the section.

Verse 7, “‘I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, that you awaken not, nor stir up love, until it please.’” This is repeated as a chorus several times in the book. We will see that this ends a section.

We opened with this scene. She is here and begins to speak. The chorus answers her. Then Solomon, in his attempt to flatter, answers her. But her heart, her mind and her thoughts are going back to this absent shepherd lover, to the fiancé whom she loves. The first section concludes with the failure of the king and his court ladies to persuade the peasant girl to be disloyal to her lover.

Verse 8 begins a new section. The scene is no longer Jerusalem but a royal residence in the country. It is probably in the north of Palestine from which the lovers hail. Again, the speakers are the Shulamite and the daughters of Jerusalem.

This section is devoted to an account of how one spring morning her shepherd came and invited her to join him in the field. To prevent this meeting, her brothers transferred her to work in the vineyard, from which she has then been taken by force to the royal court. She finds consolation in the certainty that her lover would seek her. His approach is traced until he reaches the wall of the building in which she is confined. Peering through the lattice window, he fails to see her and pleads for the sound of her voice. To reply, she sings to him selections of the vineyard song. In the next verse, she addresses him in rapturous language. Then fearing for his safety, she exhorts him to depart until the shadows flee away and they can meet again.

It opens up in verse 8 as she is anticipating the fact that he is coming to rescue her. The scene opens up as she anticipates his coming.

Verses 8-9, “Hark! my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart; behold, he stands behind our wall, he looks in through the windows, he peers through the lattice.”

Verse 10-12, “My beloved spoke, and said unto me: [Then it quotes what he said as he has finally come here and has found where she is; he has come and approached the section of the palace where the harem is located.] ‘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 is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard [That would more properly be, “the voice of the turtledove”—you don’t normally hear the voice of a turtle.] in our land.’” – “the time of singing is come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.”

Verses 13-14, “‘The fig-tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines in blossom give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, that are in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is comely.’”

Verses 15-17, then she responds, “‘Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom.’ My beloved is mine, and I am his, that feeds among the lilies. Until the day breathe [breaks], and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be you like a gazelle or a young hart upon the mountain of spices.”

In other words, ‘flee away until evening, until the day breaks and the shadows flee away. Go

until sunset, until it gets dark.’ She is afraid he is going to get caught and get into trouble there.

Song of Solomon 3:1, “By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but I found him not.” Disappointed at the non-appearance of her lover with the coming of night, her sleep is troubled. She has feverish dreams and finally decides to go in search for him.

Verses 2-4, “I will rise now, and go about the city, in the streets and in the broad ways, I will seek him whom my soul loves.’ I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: ‘Saw you him whom my soul loves?’ Scarce had I passed from them, when I found him whom my soul loves: I held him, and would not let him go, until I brought him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.”

Verse 5, we then, again, conclude this section with, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, that you awaken not, nor stir up love, until it please.” This refrain marks the end of the second section.

She describes her dream.

In chapter 3:1, her fiancé had not reappeared that evening and in her dreams, she was fitful and seeking to find him. Notice what she wanted to do when she found him. What she anticipated doing was bringing him into her mother’s house, bringing him home to her family. This was not something that involved her sneaking around away from her family. The evidence was that he was her acknowledged lover of whom her mother approved. The section ends with verse 5.

The third section begins in verse 6. This is Solomon’s appearance at Shulam. It is a graphic description of the arrival of the king and all the pomp and ceremony.

Verses 6-7, “Who is this that comes up out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfume with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchants? Behold, it is the litter of Solomon; threescore mighty men are about it, of the mighty men of Israel.”

Solomon had this giant litter that he traveled with that was carried. It took 60 men that were all around it to carry it. It was like a coach that was carried on poles that you’ve perhaps seen pictures of. There were four poles coming out, two in front and two in the back, and 15 big, strong men on each pole carrying it. You can imagine what this thing was like. The litter of Solomon, 60 mighty men of the mighty men of Israel, is about it.

Verses 8-9, “They all handle the sword, and are expert in war; every man has his sword upon his thigh, because of dread in the night. King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon.” This is a covered litter. It’s like a couch long enough for the rider to recline. It’s covered with a canopy and resting on pillars at four corners. It has curtains hung around to exclude the sun. It has a door, sometimes of latticework, on each side. He had this thing made of the wood of Lebanon.

Verse 10, “He made the pillars thereof of silver, and the top thereof of gold, the seat of it of purple, the inside thereof being inlaid with love, from the daughters of Jerusalem.” It was sort of like a portable bedroom on which Solomon was transported around. And here comes this procession—Solomon is coming up from Jerusalem to Shulam.

Verse 11, “Go forth, O you daughters of Zion, and gaze upon King Solomon, even upon the crown wherewith his mother had crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of gladness of his heart.”

We have this descriptive inset in verses 6-11 of Solomon’s appearance at Shulam.

Song of Solomon 4 begins the statement of the shepherd, who is addressing his beloved after the arrival of this retinue.

Song of Solomon 4:1, “Behold, you are fair, my love; behold, you are fair; your eyes are as doves behind your veil; your hair is as a flock of goats, that trail down upon Mount Gilead.”

Again, you get the description of all the comparisons. We’re talking about rural, agricultural society and some of the comparisons don’t come down. They lose a little something in transitions to our urban society. If you tell your wife or your fiancé that she has hair like a goat, she may not necessarily know that it’s a complement. The description is like a flock of goats that are coming down the mountain and their hair is glossy and sleek and the sun reflects from it. He describes all these various things.

Verses 2-12, “Your teeth are like a flock of ewes all shaped alike, which are come up from the washing; whereof all are paired, and none fails among them. Your lips are like a thread of scarlet, and your mouth is comely; your temples are like a pomegranate split open behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David built with turrets, whereon there hang a thousand shields, all the armour of the mighty men. Your two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies. Until the day breathe [breaks], and the shadows flee away,

I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. You are all fair, my love; there is no spot in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, with me from Lebanon; look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; you have ravished my heart with one of your eyes, with one bead of your necklace. How fair is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine! And the smell of your ointments than all manner of spices! Your lips, O my bride, drop honey—honey and milk are under your tongue; and the smell of your garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden shut up is my sister, my bride; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.”

This is an allusion to something. The beauty of his beloved conjures up in his ardor a garden splendid in color and fertility, but it is a garden secluded to all, except its lawful possessor. She's chaste and modest. Just as gardens are walled in to prevent the intrusion of strangers, he describes her as a garden shut up, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. She's not wide open to strangers, but she is chaste and modest.

Verse 15, “You are a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and flowing streams from Lebanon.”

Verse 16, she responds, “Awake, O north wind; and come, you south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his precious fruits.”

Song of Solomon 5:1, the shepherd responds, “I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” –An invitation to a wedding feast.

Verse 2 is a description of her dream; a day of excitement is followed by troubled dreams, “I sleep, but my heart wakes [In other words, she's dreaming and this is what she dreams.]; Hark! my beloved knocks: ‘Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.’”

Verses 3-6, she responds, “I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the hole of the door, and my heart was moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with flowing myrrh, upon the handles of

the bar. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had turned away, and was gone....”

She goes to sleep and in her dream she sees the action that has passed. Solomon and his retinue have arrived with all of the pomp and ceremony and all the commotion that has been caused.

In the meantime, the shepherd has come and has found her. They have some time there, and he goes into this ardent reiteration of his love for her and of his desire to take her away as his wife. She desires that; she desires to come away with him. She calls upon the wind to blow them away together. But then he has to leave and she goes to bed. She wakes up and addresses him. She takes her time coming and opening the door. And when she opens the door he is gone.

Verses 6-7, in her dream, “I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had turned away, and was gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that go about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my mantle from me.”

Verse 8, then she speaks, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, what will you tell him? that I am lovesick.”

The daughters of Jerusalem, which is the chorus, respond.

Verse 9, “What is your beloved more than another beloved, O you fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you do so adjure us?” They say, ‘What's so special about him?’

She responds in song to the daughters of Jerusalem as to what's so special.

Verses 10-16, she says, “My beloved is white and ruddy, pre-eminent above ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are curled, and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside the water-brooks; washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as banks of sweet herbs; his lips are as lilies, dripping with flowing myrrh. His hands are as rods of gold set with beryl; his body is as polished ivory overlaid with sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold; his aspect is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

Song of Solomon 6:1, the daughters of Jerusalem respond, “Where has your beloved gone, O you fairest among women? Where is your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?”

She then responds. She is perhaps jealous of the interest that has been aroused in her beloved. She offers an evasive reply.

Verses 2-3, “My beloved is gone down to his garden, to the bed of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine, that feeds among the lilies.”

The rest of the chapter seems to recount another futile attempt on the part of the infatuated Solomon to win her love for him. Of course, unfortunately for him, the wrong moment is chosen because she has just made another passionate declaration of her love to the shepherd—a love that is stronger than death. The king extols her physical beauty and endorses the words of the court ladies who had sung her charms.

Verses 4-6, Solomon opens up, “You are beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away your eyes from me, for they have overcome me. Your hair is as a flock of goats, that trail down from Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes, which are come up from the washing; whereof all are paired, and none fail among them.”

Verses 9-10, “My dove, my undefiled, is but one; she is the only one of her mother; she is the choice one of her that bore her. The daughters saw her, and called her happy; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. Who is she that looks forth as the dawn, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners?”

She recalls what she was doing on the faithful day when she was so praised and made her attempt to run away. She begins to describe what had happened. She reminisces here.

She interrupts her royal suitor.

Verses 11-12, she says, “I went down into the garden of nuts, to look at the green plants of the valley, to see whether the vine budded, and the pomegranates were in flower. Before I was aware, my soul set me upon the chariots of my princely people.”

In effect saying, ‘Have I been going out to meet the king and to lure him to myself? When I was tending the vines and seeing what nuts and fruits were ripe in my garden, I was taken and brought to the court. Let him release me now that I may return home.’

Nuts grow very plentifully in the northern part of Palestine, which was where Solomon had his summer palace. She said, ‘I was engaged in this task and before I was aware, the servants of the

king carried me away. Before I realized it, I found myself here at the court.’

Song of Solomon 7:1, “Return, return, O Shulamite; Return, return, that we may look upon you. What will you see in the Shulamite? As it were a dance of two companies.”

(You may have trouble following it because the numbering of the verses in the Jewish translation is one verse off from the NKJV.)

In Song of Solomon 7, Solomon responds. Realizing that his attempts have failed, he implores her not to flee from his presence but to allow his eyes to feast upon her beauty.

Verse 2, “How beautiful are your steps in sandals, O prince’s daughter!...” He goes on and describes her beauty.

Verse 6, he concludes, “...the king is held captive in the tresses thereof.”—Speaking of her hair.

Verse 7, “How fair and how pleasant are you, O love, for delights!” He finishes this statement.

What we have here is Solomon’s final attempt to entice her and to keep her there.

Verse 11, the Shulamite begins to speak; she responds, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.”

She openly rejects the kings’ wooing. None can separate her from her only beloved.

At this point she addresses the shepherd who now reappears

Verse 12, “Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.” She addresses him and urges their departure from the palace to their former meeting places in the fields. Thrilled at the thought of her impending homecoming, she envisages the familiar scene. She is eager to be home again. She implores him, ‘Let’s hurry away.’

Verses 13-14, “Let us get up early to the vineyard; let us see whether the vine has budded, whether the vine-blossom be opened, and the pomegranates be in flower; there will I give you my love. The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and at our doors are all manner of precious fruits, new and old, which I have laid up before you, O my beloved.”

Song of Solomon 8:1-3, it continues, “O that you were as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! When I should find you without, I would kiss you; yea, and none would despise me. I would lead you, and bring you into my mother’s house, that you might instruct me; I would cause you to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate. His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me.”

Verse 4, then the section ends, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem: Why should you awaken, or stir up love, until it please?” Again, there is this refrain that ends in chapter 8:4 that marks the end of another section. The section ends here with verse 4.

In Song of Solomon 8:5, we have the concluding part. We now see her return. The villagers see the lovers approaching and their curiosity is whetted. Every familiar scene they pass brings back sweet memories of former meeting places.

Song of Solomon 8:5-7, “Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? Under the apple-tree I awaken you; there your mother was in travail with you; there was she in travail and brought you forth. Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave; the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be contemned.”

Now her brothers speak.

Verses 8-9, “We have a little sister, and she has no breasts; what shall we do for our sister in the day she shall be spoken for? If she be a wall, we will build upon her a turret of silver; and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.”

This is the statement her brothers made. The last seven verses record her reminisces and triumphs. She reminds her brothers how unnecessary their fear had been for her chastity when beset by temptation.

At an early age, when she was young and not mature, they made the statement, “What shall we do for our sister in the day she shall be spoken for?” –At the time of her marriage.

“If she be a wall”—a wall is there to protect from intrusion or intruders and to keep out strangers. So, if she is figuratively a wall, if she remains a virgin, “we will build upon her a turret of silver.” They say, ‘We will give her many gifts. We will be very generous at the time of her wedding.’

Continuing, “and if she be a door”—you know, a door revolves on its hinges. Somebody knocks and it’s opened. So, it’s a poetic contrast between one who remains chaste, as opposed to someone who was just wide open. The brothers’ statement had contrasted—if she is chaste we will provide well for her, but if she is a door (figuratively speaking, a loose woman), “we will enclose her with boards of cedar.” It is

barricaded to prevent a door from being broken into.

She responds, reminding her brothers about their concern for her years earlier.

Verse 10, “I am a wall [She says, ‘I have retained my chastity and now I am grown and am mature.’], and my breasts like the towers thereof; then was I in his eyes as one that found peace.”

Verses 11-13, the shepherd is speaking, “Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; he gave over the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof brought in a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me; you, O Solomon, shall have the thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof, two hundred. You that dwell in the gardens, the companions hearken for your voice: ‘Cause me to hear it.’”

The shepherd makes a contrast between what Solomon has and what he has. He says, “Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon.” Baal Hamon is a site near Jerusalem. It literally means “owner of a multitude.” It’s a description of Solomon’s harem. He is described as owner of a multitude. “You, O Solomon, shall have the thousand.” He says, ‘You keep your thousand because, “My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.”’ He is speaking of his bride. He says, ‘You, Solomon, you keep your thousand.’

Verse 14, then she says, “Make haste, my beloved, and be you like a gazelle or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.” –The conclusion of the story.

As we go through we see a contrast. Solomon saw in this Shulamite girl something that he didn’t find in his harem. There was something special about her. And, yes, there was. What he found was virtue and constancy. That’s so totally different than the flattering, flaunting attitude of the harem and all of the things that Solomon had gathered around him.

Solomon spent his life in a quest for happiness and fulfillment. For all that he gathered to himself, he really missed out on an awful lot. The only woman that he ever found, that came close to the ideal that his mother had taught him about in Proverbs 31, wouldn’t have him on a “bet.” She was faithful to someone else. She was looking to someone who really loved her and not someone who was simply infatuated for the moment.

We will go back through and hit the high points with some of the questions and bring out a few things. We noted that the title is a superlative. It describes her in 1:5-7 as being ruddy or sunburned because of the outdoor work of

keeping the vineyard that her brothers had insisted she perform.

Her response to Solomon's blandishments is recorded in 1:12-13. Even while the king sat at his table speaking, her thoughts were wandering to her shepherd fiancé. She compares herself in 2:1 to a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley—a common wildflower. The seasonal setting of the book, according to verses 12-13, is springtime. It is the seasonal setting of the Days of Unleavened Bread. It describes it as a time when the flowers appear on the earth and the time of singing is come. The trees are budding out. It is the time that our attention is turned to new life, to new beginnings, to a fresh start. It is certainly the time that is the romantic time—the beauty and everything all around—springtime.

We saw the refrain—used in 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4—that marks the end of a section. It is used three different times in the book. It is like Act 1 and Act 2 is over; it represents a scene change.

In Song of Solomon 3:4, where did she desire to take her fiancé once the two of them were reunited? Well, she desired to take him back to her mother's house. It didn't involve some sort of clandestine thing, away from parental approval.

The last half of chapter 3 (beginning in verse 6) describes the coming of Solomon with his retinue to the royal residence in North Israel. It describes all the glory and grandeur of which Solomon makes his entrances and exits.

In chapter 4:8, the shepherd desires his bride to flee from Lebanon with him and to escape the clutches of Solomon and the royal harem.

We have already commented on verse 12. She describes herself as a shut-up garden, a spring sealed up. This was the reference that we find back at the end of the book. Her brothers made the comment of the allusion to a wall, a garden sealed up, referring to her. She was chaste. She had retained her chastity.

In chapter 5, we have the dream that she had as she wandered the streets looking for her fiancé and was unable to find him.

Song of Solomon 7:10, notice the KJV where he says, "I am my beloved's and his desire is towards me." (The numbering of the verses in the Jewish translation is one verse off from the KJV. The Jewish translation I am reading from is verse 11, but in the KJV, it is verse 10 of chapter 7.) This is a reference to the relationship that is described and their faithfulness toward one another.

The story ends in chapter 8. We have already noted that her brothers had promised when she

was a young girl that if she remained chaste and a virgin, they would help her and provide a large dowry. If she proved loose (in other words, a door opening to every passerby), they would deal with her sternly. She reminds them of their promise, the dowry that they had promised and the fact that she had remained a virgin.

The comparison that we have drawn in 8:11-12 is that Solomon had his vineyard (his harem), which he shared with others. The shepherd ends on the note of stating that his wife is his alone, and he has something that even Solomon doesn't have.

Verses 12-13, "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me; thou, O Solomon, shall have the thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred. You that dwell in the gardens, the companions hearken for your voice: 'Cause me to hear it.'"

He is asking for her response. He declares his love, faithfulness and commitment to her.

Verse 14, her response—her "I do"—is to call him and to say, "Make haste, my beloved, and be you like to a gazelle or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices." The barriers are no longer there.

It ends up as a very beautiful story—a story of the joy that a young couple can have when they have saved themselves for marriage to one another. It is far, far superior to the pleasures of a dissolute Solomon. There was something that Solomon could never have or could never take part in because Solomon, by the choices he made, certainly cut himself off from the simple pleasures. Solomon had his harem, his thousand women. He had his wealth, greatness and his grandeur. But what he didn't have was one woman who loved him with all her heart and who was really faithful to him. Solomon never had a happy marriage. He had all the women that he could ever imagine. But the only one that he finally found was loved and committed to her fiancé.

In fact, there's an interesting allusion in the book of Ecclesiastes where Solomon makes reference, in Ecclesiastes 7:28, to not being able to find the woman that he was looking for among a thousand. The problem was that he was looking in the wrong places because the women that Solomon surrounded himself with—the women who were a part of his court and harem—were not the people that reflected the kind of virtue, constancy, love and depth of commitment that we find in the Shulamite girl in the Song of Solomon.

We have a story that is a story of love. It is a story of commitment and a story of heroic endurance during very trying circumstances. It is the story of an attempt to attract and to draw away someone. Yet it was unsuccessful because there was a depth of commitment that is described in very beautiful and poetic language.

The Song of Solomon is a song that celebrates the commitment and constancy of young love that is based on a moral foundation, on a foundation of God's law. God is not against young people. God is not against love. God designed love. God designed marriage. God designed our first parents. God created and established the institution of marriage. God designed the attraction that men and women should have and feel for one another. That's not something that sort of sneaked in or evolved. God designed that. I think one of the greatest of all physical blessings is the blessing of a happy marriage. Yet sin so often mars the situation.

We have a beautiful story, a story that young people were to be reminded of every year. Every spring there was a reminder of the importance of constancy, commitment, of doing it God's way: waiting and saving themselves for the right time, resisting the blandishments, the allurements, and the enticements of the world, resisting all the glitter and glamour that was out there to attract and entice them. They say, 'There's something worth waiting for.' There **is** something worth waiting for.

It is a book, when put in the context of the Days of Unleavened Bread, which paints a very beautiful story—a very beautiful story that Solomon could only write and sing about. He could never experience it because of the situation in which he found himself. Solomon didn't follow his own advice. He gave terrific advice to his son in the book of Proverbs. Solomon was not one who really followed all of his own advice. The book of Ecclesiastes bears that out.

I think Song of Solomon is a very beautiful story, a beautiful poetic story that is brought out. It clearly shows that God is not against young people; He's not against love. God is very much for that.

There is a way of doing it that leads to happiness, and there is a way that leads to sorrow. Even in the context of the Days of Unleavened Bread and the messages that are related to removing and getting rid of sin, we should be reminded of the fact that what God has in mind to replace sin with is the joy of doing it His way. That is certainly something worth waiting for and worth desiring.

The next Bible study, we will be going through the book of Ruth. Each of these five Festival Scrolls is a book that is relatively short. They are poetic and very descriptive of some things that can be very helpful and very important for us to learn and to understand.