

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

The Tyranny of the Southern Kingdom of Judah:
A Polemic against Judah and her Kings

A play from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible (ESV)
with notes, appendix and map

Eastside Church of the Cross
SSR

Updated, 4th July, 2011

Our Story:

A King who abuses his power splits lovers as he splits a nation

Location:

Judah, Israel, around 930 BC. The Maiden is in the royal court of King Solomon.

The Cast:

THE MAIDEN:

M A **PRINCESS BUTTERCUP**¹ CHARACTER AND THE HEROIN IN OUR TRADGEDY,
A **SHULAMMITE WOMAN 6:13 (ISSACHAR, ESDRAELON)** WHO LOVES A
SIMPLE SHEPHERD AND NOT THE KING SHE IS FORCED TO MARRY.

KING SOLOMON:

K THE KING—A **PRINCE HUMPERDINCK** CHARACTER—WHO BREAKS UP
TRUE LOVE THAT HE MIGHT INCREASE HIS HAREM.

THE SHEPHERD:

B OFTEN CALLED **MY BELOVED**. A **WESLEY FARM-BOY** CHARACTER WHO IS
DENIED TRUE LOVE WHEN THE KING TAKES THE WOMAN HE LOVES.

THE COURT WOMEN :

w SOLOMON'S HAREM; ADDRESSED AS **DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM**

¹ I here use the movie old 1987 movie, *The Princess Bride*, to suggest an illustrative parallel with Song of Solomon.

The Text of the Play:

Present below is the complete translation of Song of Solomon using the English Standard Version (ESV), with a few changes based on the Massoretic Hebrew text, including using Yahweh where the English translates the name as Lord.² Scene notes appear in and above the ESV as SMALL CAPS or *italics*. To clarify some of the pronouns (where the English flattens them), I referenced the Hebrew and sometimes put the subject of the pronouns in brackets before the text.

E.g. [*To the King*]: We will run after you

given “you,” in the Hebrew, has the 2nd person masculine ending, referring to male. My notes in the text are set off with [brackets].

Reading the Play

This was meant to be read by four actors. They will be reading from the ESV, and their parts are marked in the *left column* on each page. As they read, they should turn and face the character designated in the *right column*.

For example, in the follow sample from Scene 1, **M**, the Maiden is speaking to **B**, the Shepherd.

M [*Of the Shepherd*]: ²Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine;
³your anointing oils are fragrant;
your name is oil poured out;
therefore virgins love you.
⁴Draw me after you!

B

Whoever is playing the Maiden, should, in some way, indicate that the object of her speech is the Shepherd (and not Solomon). You will also notice a “q” in the right column, and often indicates the Maiden is speaking as to the court women (narrating the whole event to them), or to the audience. so a “q” in the right column would mean facing the court women, the audience or looking into the middle nowhere (it seems the court women are the captive audience of the whole narration).

These column marks (M,K,B,w,q) are meant to be quick-guides for those reading the play, but the same information is in the all-caps and italics text inserted above the ESV text.

² For LXX and Vulgate translations, see Robert Norris work

SCENE 1 *BOUND BY THE KING: TRUE LOVE DENIED*

Location: In the Harem of the Royal Court

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.³

MAIDEN TO HER ABSENT LOVER , THE SHEPHERD [FARM BOY]

M

[Of the Shepherd]: ²Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!

B

For your love is better than wine;

³your anointing oils are fragrant;

your name is oil poured out;

therefore virgins love you.

⁴Draw me after you!

THE COURT WOMEN ANSWER

w

THEIR CONTRASTING LOYALTY TO SOLOMON

K

[To the King]: We will run after you.⁴

MAIDEN

M

The king has brought me into his chambers.

w

THE COURT WOMEN

w

[To the Maiden]: We will exult and rejoice in you.

[To the King]: We will remember your love more than wine, rightly do they love you.

MAIDEN

MAKES A CASE TO BE LET GO: NOT WORTHY OF SOLOMON

M

⁵I am very dark, but lovely,

O daughters of Jerusalem,⁵

like the tents of Kedar,

like the curtains of Solomon.

w

³ Read negatively: "this Solomon sings ... hear the tune of the king." Contrast this to the song sung as the last verse of the book. Two songs are sung in contrast, the last song a call to Northern resistance.

⁴ The narrative switches without introducing the speaker; Shifts in pronouns will help our reading. This is especially true in 5:7, where the woman is beat. The sudden beating indicates something about the larger story, and that story involves multiple characters who are not "properly" named or introduced to us.

⁵ In speaking judgment against Jerusalem, Jesus addresses the "Daughters of Jerusalem." Jerusalem is the center of apostate Israel, the place where corrupt kings take unlawful wives, so Matthew 14:4 -- Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." Luke 27:26 Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear *it* after Jesus. ²⁷And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. ²⁸But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹"For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed *are* the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' ³⁰"Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' ³¹"For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

M ⁶Do not gaze at me because I am dark,
because the sun has looked upon me.
My mother's sons were angry with me;
they made me keeper of the vineyards,
but my own vineyard I have not kept!

**MAIDEN
TO HER BELOVED "WHERE CAN I FIND YOU?"**

M [*To the Shepherd*]: ⁷Tell me, you whom my soul loves, B
where you pasture your flock,
where you make it lie down at noon;
for why should I be like one who veils herself [DIGUISED AS SHE GOES OUT LOOKING]
beside the flocks of your companions? [IN ANOTHER HAREM]

**THE COURT WOMEN
RESPOND TO HER DESIRE TO LRSBR FOR HER TRUE LOVE; APPEALING TO HER⁶**

w ⁸If you do not know, M
O most beautiful among women,
follow in the tracks of the flock, [OF SOLOMON, WITH US]
and pasture your young lambs
beside the shepherds' tents. [HAVE CHILDREN]

**SOLOMON
ANSWERS THE MAIDEN'S "NOT WORTHY" SPEECH⁷**

K ⁹I compare you, my love, M
to my mare among Pharaoh's chariots. [AS A PRIZE HORSE GIVEN TO EGYPT IN TREATY]⁸
¹⁰Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments,
your neck with strings of jewels.

THE COURT WOMEN

w ¹¹We will make for you ornaments of gold, M
studded with silver.⁹ [THE BENEFITS OF SOLOMON'S COURT WILL WIN YOU]

⁶ Solomon and the court women seem to know of her love for the common shepherd (and later, she is beaten for it), but both try to woo her to stay; as Solomon does, compare his to Humperdinck's appeal that Buttercup stay. Alternative: This is a speech from the shepherd answering the maiden. However, the mention of "my mare among Pharaoh's chariots" has the echo of royalty.

⁷ Alternative: This is the shepherd boy answering the maiden—if the previous alternative were to hold.

⁸ She is as a prize given in treaty, a covenant bride (as are most of Solomon's women).

⁹ Later in chapter 8 she will look back on this and explain how love has no price – it can be manufactured in the heart by gifts of gold.

**TO THE COURT OF WOMEN
ABOUT HER SHEPHERD,
SHE CONFESSES HOW SHE IS COMPELLED BY HER LOVE FOR HIM:**

MAIDEN

[DRAWN TO HER SHEPHERD, A COMMONER; ESCAPES WITH HIM WHEN SHE CAN]

M

12 While the king was at his table...¹⁰

q

MAIDEN, WITH THE SHEPHERD

My nard¹¹ gave forth its fragrance.

13 My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh
that lies between my breasts.

14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms
in the vineyards of Engedi.

SHEPHERD¹²

B

[To the Maiden]: **15** Behold, you are beautiful, my love;
behold, you are beautiful;
your eyes are doves.

M

MAIDEN TO THE SHEPHERD

THE REAL HOUSE OF DELIGHT; THE HOUSE THAT LOVE BUILT

M

16 Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.
Our couch is [truly] green;
17 the beams of our house are [truly] cedar;
our rafters are [truly] pine.¹³

B

MAIDEN

STATES HER STATUS IN THE HAREM; ONE MORE LILY AMONG THE HAREM

2:1 I am a rose of Sharon,¹⁴ a lily of the valleys.¹⁵

SHEPHERD

B

2 As a lily among brambles,
so is my love among the young women.¹⁶

M

¹⁰ NIV, NKJV = table, ESV = couch (reclining to eat). As the king is reclining in banquets, the Maiden's thoughts go to her young shepherd.

¹¹ Nard: fragrant plant from India. "My nard" would here refer to her beloved.

¹² The pronouns in Hebrew indicate that a woman is being addressed.

¹³ The Palace of Solomon is cedar and pine, but she speaks of a home built of true cedar with rafters as strong as their love. Solomon's many treaty wives did not constitute a home, but a harem.

¹⁴ Sharon: She is a *daughter of Sharon*, a prized princess from that region. In the time of David, a place in Bashan, 1 Chr 5:16, in the northern kingdom (cf. 1 Chr 27:1, 29). Shitrai ruled in that region under David (v. 31).

¹⁵ A common trophy in the harem of Solomon, a treaty bride from Sharon and mere flower among many

¹⁶ The other women are not to be compared.

**MAIDEN
OF/TO THE SHEPHERD**

M B

3 As an apple tree among the trees of the forest,
 so is my beloved among the young men.
 With great delight I sat in his shadow,¹⁷
 and his fruit was sweet to my taste,
 4 He brought me to the house of wine,¹⁸
 and his banner over me was love.
 5 Sustain me with raisins;
 refresh me with apples,
 for I am sick with love.
 6 His left hand is under my head, [see also 8:3]
 and his right hand embraces me!

MAIDEN'S PREDICAMENT OF LOVE OUT OF SEASON

7 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
 by the gazelles or the does of the field,
 that you not stir up or awaken love
 until it pleases.¹⁹ W

[The first scene of our story has ended in conflict. The Maiden has awakened love—a love she will be denied by the end of our tale. She is the heroine of the tragedy, and Solomon is the cause of her deep sorrow.]

¹⁷ She has experienced his shadow, a completed action. The Maiden has known him, and so she is not waiting to be known by a man, but has been taken from the man she has known. Solomon is to her as David was to Bathsheba. The Northern Kingdom stands to lose her daughters and cities to the overtaking hand of Solomon (and then Solomon's son). All of this is typified in a woman who lost her true love.

¹⁸ "His fruit was sweet to my taste", it was the place of intoxicating love, a "house of wine".

¹⁹ As she recalls what it meant to be under the shadow of the Shepherd, she is sick for what she lost. She lost true love. The King has stolen a wife, like David taking Bathsheba: "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" ⁴Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. ⁵And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David", 2 Sam 11:2ff. Recall also *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, where true love was stolen by marriage to the Emperor's son

SCENE 2 – NIGHT VISITS: CAUGHT ESCAPING AND FORCED BACK

Location: The Palace at night. The Maiden meets her Shepherd Boy who comes in the shadow of the night to be with her until the day breathes.

MAIDEN SPEAKING AS HER SHEPHERD CAME FOR HER

M ⁸The voice of my beloved! **B**
Behold, he comes,
leaping over the mountains,
bounding over the hills,

⁹My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
Behold, there he stands
behind our wall,
gazing through the windows,
looking through the lattice.²⁰ [COMING IN SECRECY, SPEAKING FROM OUTSIDE]

¹⁰My beloved speaks and says to me:

SHEPHERD

B "Arise, my love, my beautiful one,
and come away, **M**

¹¹for behold, the winter is past;
the rain is over and gone. [HE HAS COME TO TAKE HER AWAY FROM HER WINTER]

¹²The flowers appear on the earth,
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.

¹³The fig tree ripens its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my beautiful one,
and come away. [IT IS THE SPRINGTIME OF THEIR LOVE]

¹⁴O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the crannies of the cliff,
let me see your face,
let me hear your voice,
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely."

²⁰ He comes to the palace of the king three times in this drama, and when the Maiden leaves to go after him, she must veil herself, for when caught, she is beaten (5:6).

MAIDEN

M

15 Catch the foxes for us,
the little foxes
that spoil the vineyards,
for our vineyards are in blossom.²¹

16 My beloved is mine, and I am his;
he grazes among the lilies.

17 Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee,
turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle
or a young stag on cleft mountains.²²

B

Location: The day passed, dawn came, and her young Shepherd retreated. She is alone again in the palace, the day has gone and another night returns. Can she continue these nightly retreats, escaping the king's palace to be with her lover?

MAIDEN

THE SHEPHERD CANNOT MAKE IT PAST THE FOXES TO BE WITH HER.
SHE STEALS AWAY IN THE NIGHT TO FIND HIM

M

3:1 On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not.

2 I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.
I sought him, but **found** him not.²³

3 The watchmen **found** me²⁴
as they went about in the city.
"Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"

q

²¹ Solomon takes cities as vineyards and doles them out to his keepers, 8:11, and those little foxes harvest them for the king... The fruit of all the vineyards was for Solomon who took of all the regions by the month; 1 Kings 4:26 "Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. ²⁷And these governors, each man in his month, provided food for King Solomon and for all who came to King Solomon's table. There was no lack in their supply. ²⁸They also brought barley and straw to the proper place, for the horses and steeds, each man according to his charge." Like tax collectors, the little foxes spoil the vineyard, even as Solomon took of the first fruits of thousands of vineyards (8:11-12), and would do the same to the Maiden: Song 8:11 "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; he leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand silver coins. [To Solomon]: 12 My own vineyard is before me. You, O Solomon, may have a thousand, And those who tend its fruit two hundred."

²² Their reunion in the darkness is dangerous, and the Shepherd must flee at dawn.

²³ She is not speaking of the King, Solomon, for she has him -- even by the old view. She seeks her shepherd boy, the one whom her soul loves, as she escapes in the night to go find him.

²⁴ The next time they find her, they beat her (5:6-8). Solomon's foxes are keeping watch over the vineyard.

SHE FINDS THE SHEPHERD AND THEY RETREAT TO THE HOME VILLAGE

M

4 Scarcely had I passed them
 when I found him whom my soul loves.
 I held him, and would not let him go
 until I had brought him into my mother's house,
 and into the chamber of her who conceived me.²⁵

w

5 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, [THE PAIN FROM TRUE LOVE DENIED]
 by the gazelles or the does of the field,
 that you not stir up or awaken love
 until it pleases.

MAIDEN SPEAKING,**AS SOLOMON COMES TO GET HER: THE PAIN OF LOVE WHEN LOVE IS DENIED—
 TAKEN BY THE FORCE [3:6] OF THE KING TO BE MARRIED AGAINST THE WILL**

M

6 What is that coming up from the wilderness
 like columns of smoke,²⁶ [TIME ENOUGH FOR THE SHEPHERD TO ESCAPE]
 perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
 with all the fragrant powders of a merchant?

q

7 Behold, it is the bed of Solomon!²⁷
 Around it are sixty mighty men,
 some of the mighty men of Israel,²⁸

8 all of them wearing swords
 and expert in war,
 each with his sword at his thigh,
 against terror by night. [SOLOMON'S SWORDSMEN BEAT HER IN 5:6-7]

9 King Solomon made himself a carriage
 from the wood of Lebanon.

10 He made its posts of silver,
 its back of gold, its seat of purple;
 its interior was inlaid with love
 by the daughters of Jerusalem.

11 Go out, O daughters of Zion,
 and look upon King Solomon, [HE IS THE MAN THAT TAKES WHAT HE PLEASES]
 with the crown with which his mother crowned him
 on the day of his wedding,
 on the day of the gladness of his heart.²⁹

²⁵ The King brought her into his chambers in 1:4. She escapes his palace and finds the one her soul loves, and takes him into her chambers.

²⁶ Columns of smoke lead kings; the smoke by day and fire by night bespeak military procession.

²⁷ He takes his bed with him, for what David did with Bethsheba at home, Solomon turns into a traveling blight.

²⁸ More of those little foxes who keep the vineyards – the Shepherd did not catch them but they catch her.

SOLOMON
SHALLOW PRAISES; A DESCRIPTION OF HER BODY
-- ECHOING THE SPEECH OF THE SHEPHERD OF 1:15

NOTICE THE FAR DIFFERENT RESPONSE TO THE SAME SPEECHES

K

4:1 Behold, you are beautiful, my love,
 behold, you are beautiful!
 Your eyes are doves
 behind your veil.
 Your hair is like a flock of goats
 leaping down the slopes of Gilead.

2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes
 that have come up from the washing,
 all of which bear twins,
 and not one among them has lost its young.

3 Your lips are like a scarlet thread,
 and your mouth is lovely.
 Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate
 behind your veil.

4 Your neck is like the tower of David,
 built in rows of stone;
 on it hang a thousand shields,
 all of them shields of warriors.³⁰

5 Your two breasts are like two fawns,
 twins of a gazelle,
 that graze among the lilies.

M

MAIDEN
WILL ALWAYS ESCAPE IN THE NIGHT

M

6 Until the day breathes
 and the shadows flee,
 I will go away to the mountain of myrrh³¹
 and the hill of frankincense.

[I.E., IN THE NIGHT]
 [SHE WILL GO AWAY TO HER MYRRH
 -- HER WESLEY IN 1:13]

q

²⁹ His glad heart was the taking of women to himself. It was his gladness which was their sadness, especially those who had awakened love before he came and took them.

³⁰ Treaty wives do protect a kingdom, as part of their function is to be a defensive tower and a shield; the vassal state that gives them will desire their good, and not attack their suzerain (Solomon in this case). There is a kind of kingly wisdom in treaty wives, but Solomon's wisdom was undone by over-extension. He took many wives to himself, and the Hebrew scriptures do not laude him at this point (1 Kings 11, and Song of Solomon).

³¹ Her Wesley is a bundle of Myrrh to her (1:13), and the mountain of myrrh she retreats to while the king is eating in his feasts (1:12-13) – even as Solomon has come to get her, the words of affection are aimed elsewhere. He cannot force her love to be directed to him, anymore than he can secure the loyalty of the Northern Kingdom through burdensome policies. Solomon's treaties and his treaty wives will not be like a tower of David nor a pillar of shields, for the South will not prevail against the North.

SOLOMON³²

HE MUST HAVE WHAT HIS EYES WANT

- K** ⁷You are altogether beautiful, my love;
there is no flaw in you.
- ⁸Come with me from Lebanon, my bride;
come with me from Lebanon.
Depart from the peak of Amana,
from the peak of Senir and Hermon,
from the dens of lions,
from the mountains of leopards.³³
- ⁹You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride;
you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes,³⁴
with one jewel of your necklace.
- ¹⁰How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride!
How much better is your love than wine,
and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!
- ¹¹Your lips drip nectar, my bride;
honey and milk are under your tongue;
the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.
- ¹²A garden locked is my sister, my bride,³⁵
a spring locked, a fountain sealed.
- ¹³Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates
with all choicest fruits,
henna with nard,
- ¹⁴nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,
with all trees of frankincense,
myrrh and aloes,
with all chief spices—
- ¹⁵a garden fountain, a well of living water,
and flowing streams from Lebanon.
- ¹⁶Awake, O north wind,
and come, O south wind!
Blow upon my garden,
let its spices flow.

M

³² Bullock suggest this is the Shepherd now speaking. But how could it be? Solomon just showed up, and the Maiden is present. It would seem that all three would be together in one place if this is the Shepherd speaking. Instead, I suggest that the Shepherd escapes, and Solomon is left with her.

³³ He has come North to retrieve her just as he goes North to retrieve the vineyards of a rival nation. And, as his policy cannot overcome true love, nor will it prevail against tribal identity. Solomon has not won the heart or affections of his forced bride or his subjugated vassals. His nation is being built like he builds his harem, and true love cannot be forced.

³⁴ Solomon wants what he sees, and he is captivated to have control over the 12 tribes of Israel.

³⁵ A forced covenant relationship: who can oppose the king? Solomon takes a bride as he subjugates the 10 Northern tribes.

MAIDEN

SPEAKING TO SOLOMON; LOOKING AT THE SHEPHERD

M Let my beloved come to his garden,
and eat its choicest fruits.³⁶ **q**

SOLOMON

TAKING WHAT HE WANTS³⁷

K **5:1** I came to my garden, my sister, my bride,
I gathered my myrrh with my spice,
I ate my honeycomb with my honey,
I drank my wine with my milk. **M**

COURT WOMEN/OTHERS

“GIVE IN TO SOLOMON’S INTOXICATING POWER”

w “Eat, friends, drink,
and be drunk with love!”³⁸

³⁶ The words can refer to her Shepherd boy, who she loved before she should have awakened love. In answering Solomon with words aimed for the one her soul really loves, she is committing to sneak out at night and continue the rendezvous. Solomon cannot hear. But soon he will know, and she will be beaten.

³⁷ It could be that at this point, Solomon’s seals the deal in marriage.

³⁸ Abandon yourself to the intoxicating excesses of the King. The friendship is through a giving up of ones freedom, and is contrasted to the Maiden’s use of friend later when she calls her beloved, the Shepherd, a friend – 5:16. Two kinds of friend and two kinds of love are in contrast, and the one is a friendship flowing from the affects of power, food and wine, the other flows freely from the heart. Here, the King is friend to those whom he feeds with his ill-gotten resources. A better kind of king is needed, one who will a real friend for the people. In fact, by the time we get to the Gospels, it is a different kind of king who becomes a friend to sinners.

SCENE 3 – NIGHT VISITS: SOLOMON’S CONTROL WITH FISTS

*Location: Solomon has taken the Maiden back to Jerusalem, he has brought the Maiden back to the place where her heart found no rest.
Any future night escapes will be now dealt with more severely...*

MAIDEN

DREAMING OF HER BELOVED AFTER (DESPITE) BEING TAKEN BY SOLOMON

M

²I slept, but my heart was awake.³⁹

q

A sound! My beloved is knocking.

SHEPHERD:

CALLING TO HER FROM OUTSIDE THE PALACE [AS THROUGH THE LATTICE]

B

"Open to me, my sister, my love,
my dove, my perfect one,
for my head is wet with dew,
my locks with the drops of the night." [ANOTHER NIGHT VISIT]

M

MAIDEN:

SHE SENDS HIM AWAY,

FOR SHE CANNOT BE WITH HIM NOW THAT SHE IS SOLOMON’S

M

³I had put off my garment; [SHE HAS NOW BEEN WITH SOLOMON]
how could I put it on?
I had bathed my feet;
how could I soil them?

q

⁴My beloved put his hand to the latch,
and my heart was thrilled within me.

⁵I arose to open to my beloved,
and my hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers with liquid myrrh,
on the handles of the bolt.

⁶I opened to my beloved,
but my beloved had turned and gone. [STARTLED BY THE BY THE FOXES, OR V3]
My soul failed me when he spoke. [FORCED MARRIAGE LOSSES TO TRUE LOVE]
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.

³⁹ In the night, her heart was not at rest in the love of Solomon, but she longed for another—her Wesley.

**MAIDEN:
SEEKS HIM IN THE NIGHT, TO REJECT THE LOVE OF THE KING**

M

7 The watchmen found me
as they went about in the city;
they beat me, they bruised me,
they took away my cloths,
those watchmen of the walls.

8 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
if you find my beloved,
that you tell him
I am sick with love.

q

**COURT WOMEN:
WHAT MAKES HIM SO SPECIAL?
THEIR QUESTION SHOWS THAT SOLOMON WAS NOT THE BELOVED**

w

9 What is your beloved more than another beloved, [WHO IS HE THAT YOU RUN AFTER?]
O most beautiful among women?
What is your beloved more than another beloved, [HOW COULD HE BE SO GREAT?]
that you thus adjure us?⁴⁰ [THAT YOU'D BE BEAT FOR HIM?]

MAIDEN: DESCRIBES HER SHEPHERD

M

10 My beloved is radiant and ruddy,
distinguished among ten thousand.

11 His head is the finest gold;
his locks are wavy,
black as a raven.

12 His eyes are like doves
beside streams of water,
bathed in milk,
sitting beside a full pool.

13 His cheeks are like beds of spices,
mounds of sweet-smelling herbs.

His lips are lilies,
dripping liquid myrrh.

14 His arms are rods of gold,
set with jewels.

His body is polished ivory,
bedecked with sapphires.

15 His legs are alabaster columns,
set on bases of gold.

His appearance is like Lebanon,

⁴⁰ The Maiden speaks of someone the women know not. I.e., he is not Solomon. She loves a common shepherd, and must describe him.

choice as the cedars.

16 His mouth is most sweet,
and he is altogether desirable.
This is my beloved and **this is my friend**,⁴¹
O daughters of Jerusalem.⁴²

**COURT WOMEN:
“TELL US MORE”**

w **6:1** Where has your beloved gone, M
O most beautiful among women?
Where has your beloved turned,
that we may seek him with you? [YOUR “FRIEND”... SO WHERE IS HE NOW?]

MAIDEN

M **2** My beloved has gone down to his garden w
to the beds of spices,
to graze in the gardens
and to gather lilies. [HE GETS THE LILY, HE COMES TO THE GARDEN]
3 I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine;
he grazes among the lilies. [THERE WILL BE MORE NIGHT VISITS]

SOLOMON:

**AS IN 1:9, SHE SHOULD BE HAPPY TO STAY
(WHY? BECAUSE HER BEAUTY APPEALS TO HIM)**⁴³

K **4** You are beautiful as Tirzah,⁴⁴ my love, M
lovely as Jerusalem,
awesome as an army with banners.
5 Turn away your eyes from me,
for they overwhelm me—
Your hair is like a flock of goats
leaping down the slopes of Gilead.
6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes
that have come up from the washing;
all of them bear twins;
not one among them has lost its young.
7 Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate
behind your veil.
8 There are sixty queens and eighty concubines,
and virgins without number.

⁴¹ Contrast use of friend in 5:1

⁴² She knows something the harem does not: free and happy friendship to a husband based on his qualities, not his position as king. Wake up, O Daughters of Jerusalem (vassal cities), Solomon is not your friend but your king.

⁴³ This may be the Shepherd's Goodbye speech – he has lost his beloved to a king

⁴⁴ 1 Kings 14:7 -- Northern Kingdom Jeroboam I capital until Omri (885-874 BC) built Samaria

⁹My dove, my perfect one, is the only one,
 the only one of her mother,
 pure to her who bore her.
 The young women saw her and called her blessed;
 the queens and concubines also, and they praised her.

¹⁰"Who is this who looks down like the dawn,
 beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun,
 awesome as an army with banners?"

MAIDEN:

HOW SHE WAS FORCED INTO THE HAREM

M

¹¹I went down to the nut orchard
 to look at the blossoms of the valley,
 to see whether the vines had budded,
 whether the pomegranates were in bloom.

W

¹²Before I was aware, I was set among the chariots of a prince.⁴⁵ [FORCED CAPTIVE OF SOLOMON]

COURT WOMEN:

THEY ADJURE HER TO THE HAREM

w

¹³Return, return, O Shulammite,⁴⁶
 return, return, that we may look upon you.
 Why should you look upon the Shulammite,
 as upon a dance before two armies?⁴⁷

M

[TWO COMPETING NATIONS/MEN]

SOLOMON⁴⁸

K

^{7:1}How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
 O noble daughter!
 Your rounded thighs are like jewels,
 the work of a master hand.

M

²Your navel is a rounded bowl
 that never lacks mixed wine.
 Your belly is a heap of wheat,
 encircled with lilies.

³Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.

⁴⁵ This reading is not the ESV. The NASB has "Before I was aware, my soul set me over the chariots of my noble people" – this is difficult to make sense of.

⁴⁶ In the Esdralon (a region of the northern Kingdom, part of the Jezreel valley). **A Shulammite was given to David (1 Kings 1:3). N.B. It is a battle over this same woman that causes Solomon to kill the man (the brother) who wants her.**

⁴⁷ The two armies are Solomon and the Shepherd. But the story works on a different plane, for Solomon uses his armies to overwhelm the Northern kingdom, and as he takes vassal states for himself, the treaty wives are forced to dance.

⁴⁸ This follows the same sequence as in chapter 1, where the Maiden expresses her true love for the Shepherd (not Solomon) and then Solomon and the Court Women attempt assuaging words.

⁴Your neck is like an ivory tower.

Your eyes are pools in Heshbon,
by the gate of Bath-rabbim.

Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon,
which looks toward Damascus.

⁵Your head crowns you like Carmel,
and your flowing locks are like purple;
a king is held captive in the tresses. [IRONY: THE KING IS CAPTURE NOT CAPTIVE]

⁶How beautiful and pleasant you are,
O loved one, with all your delights!

⁷Your stature is like a palm tree,
and your breasts are like its clusters.

⁸I say I will climb the palm tree
and lay hold of its fruit.

Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
and the scent of your breath like apples,

⁹and your mouth like the best wine.
It goes down smoothly for my beloved,
gliding over lips and teeth.

MAIDEN:

REJECTING SOLOMON FOR THE LAST TIME

HER DESIRES ARE FOR HER BELOVED

¹⁰I am my beloved's,
and his desire is for me.

¹¹Come, my beloved,
let us go out into the country
and lodge in the villages;

[WHICH THEY DO AGAIN IN 8:4FF]

¹²let us go out early to the vineyards
and see whether the vines have budded,
whether the grape blossoms have opened
and the pomegranates are in bloom.

There I will give you my love.

¹³The mandrakes give forth fragrance,
and beside our doors are all choice fruits,
new as well as old,
which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.

HER LOVE WOULD NOT BE ILLICIT IF SHE WAS THE SHEPHERD'S SISTER

8:1 Oh that you were like a brother to me
who nursed at my mother's breasts!
If I found you outside, I would kiss you,
and none would despise me.

M ²I would lead you and bring you
 into the house of my mother—
 she who used to teach me.
 I would give you spiced wine to drink,
 the juice of my pomegranate.

YET, SHE HAS HIM ILLICITLY

³His left hand is under my head,⁴⁹
 and his right hand embraces me!

**DO NOT STIR UP SUCH LOVE, IT IS NO GOOD FOR A WOMAN OF THE KING TO LOVE
 ILLICITLY**

M ⁴I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
 that you not stir up or awaken love
 until it pleases.

w

SHE ESCAPES

⁴⁹ Recalling what she said of him earlier: Song of Solomon 2:6 As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste, 4 He brought me to the house of wine, and his banner over me was love. 5 Sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love. 6 **His left hand is under my head**, and his right hand embraces me!

SCENE 4 TRUE LOVE: NO MATCH FOR SOLOMON

Location: The Maiden and the Shepherd in the wilderness, escaping to their garden

NARRATOR

ARRIVAL OF THE SHEPHERD WITH HIS ONE MAIDEN⁵⁰

w? ⁵Who is that coming up from the wilderness,
leaning on her beloved?

MAIDEN

M Under the apple tree I awakened you.⁵¹ B
There your mother was in labor with you;
there she who bore you was in labor.

MAIDEN

LOVE, TRUE LOVE: THE CLIMAX OF THE SONG AND THE PLACE THE MAIDEN WANTS TO BE

M ⁶Set me as a seal upon your heart, q
as a seal upon your arm,
for love is strong as death, [THE PRICE SHE MAY PAY]
jealousy is fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
the very flame of the Yahweh.

⁷Many waters cannot quench love, [SOLOMON CANNOT CHANGE HER HEART]
neither can floods drown it.
If a man offered for love
all the wealth of his house,⁵² [MONEY CAN'T BUY ME LOVE, SEE 1:11]
he would be utterly despised.

MAIDEN

HOW SHE WAS HARSHLY KEPT (BY HER BROTHERS) FROM THE SHEPHERD AT THE FIRST

⁸We have a little sister,
and she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister
on the day when she is spoken for?⁵³

⁹If she is a wall,
we will build on her a battlement of silver,
but if she is a door,
we will enclose her with boards of cedar.

⁵⁰ The contrast here is with Solomon coming with his armies in 3:6; no pomp here.

⁵¹ Recalling again 2:3, "3As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men."

⁵² See 1:11, "We will make for you ornaments of gold, studded with silver."

⁵³ Solomon takes vassals, and the next city to rise will be called to him. "Shall we let Solomon take and take and take? " The Northern Kingdom is called to guard against the excesses of the Southern Kings.

**MAIDEN
THEN SOLOMON FOUND ME**

(SOLOMON IS A KING WHO CAN DESTROY WALLS THAT FRUSTRATE A SHEPHERD)

M

- 10 I was a wall,
and my breasts were like towers; [KINGS TAKE CITIES AND WOMEN]
then I was in his eyes
as one who finds peace. [A TREATY BRIDE]
- 11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon⁵⁴ ["MASTER OF WEALTH"];
he let out the vineyard to keepers;
each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.
- 12 My vineyard, my very own, is before me;
you, O Solomon, must have the thousand, [1000 CONCUBINES AND QUEENS]
and the keepers of the fruit two hundred. [A SMALL PART IS LEFT IN HIS WAKE]

q

SHEPHERD, CALLS UPON HER TO MAKE A SONG (AS IN 2:14)

- 13 O you who dwell in the gardens,
with companions listening for your voice;
let me hear it.⁵⁵ [SING US *YOUR* SONG]

**MAIDEN'S SONG:
SHE SINGS TO HIM (AS IN 2:17)**

- 14 Make haste, my beloved,
and be like a gazelle
or a young stag
on the mountains of spices.⁵⁶

B

⁵⁴ Solomon has a farm called, "Get Rich Ranch" and he gets all the goods.

⁵⁵ Solomon has his Song, and the Northern Kingdom has its song. She sings the Song of the North, which is a call to all the companions listening for it, to make haste like young stag, who love their country. They must not let it go to Solomon, nor shall they let their daughters become his concubines.

⁵⁶ Young men of Israel, hear the voice of your women, make haste and come to their rescue.

APPENDIX: NOTES ON INTERPRETING *SONG OF SOLOMON* AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

Some of the notes in sections I – III are lifted out of secondary texts verbatim, though I have not gone back to give references for those. Assume Bullock is being quoted where possible.

First roadblock to interpretation: “The book is profuse with symbolism”

Therefore, “We cannot flaunt our own exegetical sophistication in the face of the ancient hermeneutics; there is no room for exegetical snobbery.”



Some Major Views:⁵⁷

1. Dramatic (Hebrew Play)
2. Allegorical
3. Types/Typological
 - a. Love of God and Israel
 - b. Christ and the Church/Believer⁵⁸
 - c. Used for romantic ways of speaking about God⁵⁹
4. Cultic/Mythological (Ugaritic mythology)
5. Wedding Cycle (poems culminating in a wedding)
6. Didactic (instruction on purity and love)
7. Literal:
 - a. celebrates love of man and woman
 - b. three-character view

I. The Three-Character View

I am arguing for a three-character view. There is certain positive data which support this view.

A. The Two Kingdoms (the enormity of a *split kingdom in the Bible*)

1. Divided under Solomon for his sin (1 King 11 – see quote below)
2. Hebrews 8/Jeremiah 31/Hosea 1 (restored = eschatology)
3. Sharon is a Northern place name who David ruled through a vice-regent (1 Chronicles 27).
4. “Daughters of” is also an ancient designation of satellite cities. The Daughters of Babylon is for the cities around the capital city. The Sharon is becoming a Daughter of Jerusalem, and so the Harem in Song of Solomon can have reference to the vassal cities. Sharon, a region in the Northern kingdom is being subjected to Solomon’s rule, and the treaty bride given from that region is a woman who

⁵⁷ Not included in this list are many medieval and Roman Catholic views, including Mary as the Beloved, see Richard Norris’, Song of Song in *The Church’s Bible*, 2003.

⁵⁸ Origen (d. 258) is often credited with the beginning of this interpretation.

⁵⁹ So the name given to <http://www.shulamite.com/>, which describes itself as “A webring dedicated to those who passionately search for God as Lover and Bridegroom” (last accessed Feb, 27th, 2009). See especially Mike Bickle’s “Studies in the Song of Solomon” as published and promoted by the IHOP-KC Mission (fotb.com or ihop.org).

loves another. Sharon does not want to be a daughter of Jerusalem as the Shulamite woman does not want to be a concubine to the king.

B. OT Books dedicated to the rule of a king

* Ruth, the King David lineage book.

“The major purpose of Ruth seems to include showing that David’s kingship is legitimate... Now the primacy of David must be established, even though there is a Moabite in the line.” – Genealogy of David!

* Song of Solomon, the tragic twin of the Book of Ruth

C. Problems with the traditional/allegory view of Solomon to Christ.

1. All views are hermeneutical solutions, not textual. See my discussion of Canon below.

2. 1 Kings 11:4, “For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.” – also showing how the Bible is ready to speak against the king.

3. Chapter 5:6-8

As Archer wisely noted, Solomon with his enormous harem presents a poor analogy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

D. The Destructive Pattern of Solomon.

1 Kings 11:1-11 – Solomon and his foreign women. 1 Kings 12 – Solomon and his strong arm. The Shulamite woman, black of skin, like the tents of Kedar. From Kedar? A foreign shepherd people (Jer 49:28ff.) with other gods (gods they keep!), see Jer 2:10f.

E. Theological issues to explore (patterns of Solomon):

1. The King Takes what is not his

Pharaoh takes Sarah -> Solomon takes the Shulamite
David takes Bathsheba.

2. Ps 120:5 – The tents of Kedar; 1 Chr 1:28 – son of Ishmael

3. Jesus uses the phrase, “O Daughters of Jerusalem” in Luke

II. Some Objections that have been give against the Three-Character view I have presented:

“The three-character version sees the Song as the story of Solomon’s failure to win the fair maiden from an ordinary shepherd, her true love. However, the absence of any certain identification of the Shulamite (6:13) or even whether she is an actual historical figure makes this interpretation tenuous [to some].

One of the difficulties of this view is in seeking to determine when the bride is addressing Solomon and when she is addressing her shepherd-lover. One interpretive help to who is speaking is that *dôd*, “beloved,” is wed throughout the book to refer to the male whereas the female is addressed as *ra’yâ*, “beloved.” Some have suggested that the “warm sentiments” represent her addresses to her shepherd-lover, and the formal speeches are to the king. Furthermore the admirations for the bride in chapter 4 are said to be from the king in 4:1–7 and from the shepherd in 4:8–15 .”

III. Books that expound upon the three-character view:

My basic outline comes from C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, Moody Press, 1988, p 207ff.

See also: *The Song Of Songs*, by Arthur G. Clarke, Kansas City, Kansas: Walterick Publishers

Andrew Hill (Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*)

Hill and Walton affirm that "The book is likely a northern kingdom satire on the reign of Solomon and his exploitation of women (ironically to his own demise) and a memorializing of the exemplary character of the Shulammitite maiden who rejected the wooing of the king out of faithfulness to her common-lover"

See also Ginsburg, J. S. Jacobi (1771) and Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (437), and Harper.⁶⁰ Driver notes that Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra (d. c. 1164), "also distinguished between the lover and the king."⁶¹

IV. Reading the Play

To measure the merits of this view of Song of Solomon (as presented above), I suggest that it is best *read as a play* to see how it works. No individual section stands logically on its own; it is the force of the whole play that makes the argument.

One of the problems with the traditional view (the two-character view that sees only one man throughout) is making sense of the negative statements in the poems. Those negatives make sense in the three-character/modern view. In reading, I try to accentuate parallels with modern analogies, such as *The Princess Bride* (where the Maiden, Princess Buttercup, is captured by the Humpardinck, though she really loves her farm boy, Wesley).

"The Princess Bride is Goldman's abridgment of an older version by Morgenstern, **which was originally a satire of the excesses of European**

⁶⁰ Regarding ongoing research in Biblical studies (which often give way to fresh readings of old texts) I would direct you to the prophet Nahum. If one contrasts the interpretation of Nahum before the decryption of Egyptian hieroglyphs to the history of interpretation after the Rosetta Stone, one finds that much was gained by the advances in Egyptian studies. See especially John Calvin's misreading of the historical situation of Nahum. Biblical studies advanced with the decipherment of the Akkadian cuneiform tablets, the language of Ugarit was discovered and published. These breakthroughs mark advances in our understanding of the ancient Near East and the Semitic languages. Likewise, archaeology sheds new light on Biblical studies (see especially the work being done on Qumran and Second Temple studies).

⁶¹ A new publication: *Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Song of songs* [Perush Ibn 'Ezra 'al Shir ha-shirim] by Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra. Published in 1982, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Richard .A. Block (Cincinnati, Ohio)

royalty. The book, in fact, is entirely Goldman's work. Morgenstern and the "original version" are fictional and used as a literary device." – Wikipedia.com

This satire element matches what I am arguing as the theme of Song of Solomon.

V. History and Canon

An objection to C. Hassell Bullock's (representative) use of canon.

For Bullock, the presence of a book within the canon of scripture is, in itself, a clue for finding the meaning of a book. Each book, he argues, made it into the canon because of a relevance factor—being relevant to those who included it. And that relevance is universal (the argument goes) so that a book in the canon must have meaning within the universal standard of relevance. Conversely, a book cannot mean something that goes against these notions of relevance. This principal is often employed with Solomon's Song by interpreters who must fit the book's meaning into the overall canon.

My contention is that it may not always serve us well to be boxed into a meaning for a book based on what *it cannot mean*. Likewise, we should not insist on a certain range of acceptable applications to which we must make the meaning of a text conform.

How does Song of Solomon fit into the canon? Must all books of the canon work in certain useful ways (where useful includes our notions of relevant)? Must Song of Solomon meet our criteria of application and relevance? Can it be a misshaped collection of love poems with no coherence?

According to a well represented view of the Song of Solomon, the book is useful in exploring true love. In this case, the usefulness of the interpretation justifies its inclusion in the canon, and validates the interpretation ("if it is in the canon, it must be useful in ways x, y or z, and true love fits in that criteria".) That, of course, creates a circular argument. It is circular in that the final meaning of the Song of Solomon is validated because we have a range of topics that it must fit within, and since it is in canon (and none of the other topics seem to fit), it must be about that topic—true love, in this case. Such circular reasoning limits our reading of the text according to our template of valid canonical topics.

The reading of the three-person view may rob the traditional view of some of its power of application, but application is not the substance of why a book is in the canon.⁶² Canonicity cannot become a category of hermeneutics in the strictest sense. We are free to let the text mean what it means, even if we find that its application is less than applicable. The tyranny of application can enslave a text (as may be the case with certain readings of Revelation).

⁶² Though a little effort would show how Song of Solomon is as useful and applicable as such books as Kings, Judges and Ruth.

In contrast to a canon-sensitive hermeneutic, my hermeneutic is that an effort must be made to read the book as internally consistent. It does not need to be consistent within a fixed definition of canon, but it must carry within itself human communication that communicates. And so long as words and stories have meaning, we have to make sense of passages such as 5:6-8:

I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away *and* was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.⁷ The watchmen who went about the city found me. **They struck me, they wounded me;**⁶³ the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me.⁸ I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick!

VI. Reading The Song of Solomon through the Lens of the New Covenant

All of scripture works to tell one story, from the first Adam to the Last Adam—from being denied access to the tree of life in Genesis, to access restored in Revelation.

The scriptures follow a unity at the level of Salvation History wherein a single story emerges (though told by many themes). Within that story, there is the tale of kings—God as Creator-King, Adam as Vassal-King handing over creation to a Rival-King, Yahweh as Exodus-King, David as Typological-King preparing readers to look for a Future-King, and finally, Jesus, that Future-King Now-Preset, who turns out to be the God-King in flesh who has returned to reclaim his Temple-Creation.

Solomon and the split between the two kingdoms is part of the drama, and Song of Solomon sings that storyline to us – **it is poetic, but is also narrative**. Its genre is poetry, its place is within the narrative of the kingdom of God. It is the part of the story where the bard comes in with a song, not as a poetic-genre unto itself, but to express the tale as when Moses sings after the exodus. And minimally, this song prepares us to expect or want a better kind of King.

The arrival of Jesus is the arrival of that king; he turns out to be Shepherd figure who sings a song to answer Solomon's song. Ironically, Jesus' tune was one that Israel was not listening for. Jesus as King did not conduct a life that obviously and overtly opposed the excesses and corruptions of the rulers (Kings continued to take unlawful wives—and hence John the Baptist died). Through Jesus, God becomes the Shepherd who comes and engages a nation as a husband wooing a bride. He allures the woman out to the desert that he might make a new covenant.

⁶³ Various commentaries treat this as either poetic (the public opinion wounded her), part of a dream sequence, or allegorical. What I take as a clue to the overall reading of Song of Solomon, these other views must make pains to “make it work”. They do that by having no clear narrative structure for this pericope. This is not a way to say that my reading must be right, for it is still possible that my notion of what makes for proper canonical books is not sufficient here—“narrative coherence” may be a forced idea.

Hosea is our prophetic paradigm that teaches us to think this way about the story. Hosea tells the story of a King who will reverse the division caused by Solomon—a King is going to bring Israel in a new covenant:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her; I will bring her into the wilderness and speak comfort to her. I will give her her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope. She shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. “And it shall be, in that day,” Says the Lord, “That you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ And no longer call Me ‘My Master,’ – Hosea 2:14-16.

The new covenant is a new song. It is a wedding song; it is a husband taking a bride. The bride has called out for redemption as a people in Egypt calling for an exodus, and in singing back to his bride, the bridegroom comes from heaven to deliver her. But the dowry is costly, and the redeeming God who becomes the bridegroom becomes a living sacrifice. And like her husband, the bride is beaten—and to follow her Shepherd is for her to live a life in the wilderness with the God-Man who tabernacled in the far country. Bride and Bridegroom—they both enter into a wilderness dance of suffering and rejection though nourished by the Spirit.

The national split enacted in the fleshly lusts of Solomon is the chorus of the prophets, where they sing a new song of healing (the reunion of the North and South). The future of the two nations from the standpoint of the prophets is the refrain of hope and healing, where they looked to a new exodus, a new covenant, a better future and a better king:

Reversal of Solomon’s Split: Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel Shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel! – Hosea 1:11

A New Wilderness and Marriage Covenant: In that day I will make a covenant for them, with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, To make them lie down safely. “I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy. – Hosea 2:18

A New King David: For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.–Hosea 3:4-5

All of these prophetic words are Christ-trajectories, where the Apostles of the New Covenant will locate their fulfillment in the work of Jesus and his creation of a nation of priests. Even the Hosea texts themselves are quoted by Paul, Matthew and Peter as finding their eschatological meaning in Jesus as the long expected Christ.

V. Summary and History

The three-character reading of Song of Solomon is first and foremost motivated by redemptive history. I discussed the redemptive part above. Throughout I have made repeated reference to the historical books of the Bible.

The historical backdrop of King Solomon and his personal impact on the two nations—followed, as it was, by the eschatological trajectories of the prophets who spoke of a reversal—is *historical*. The attraction here is the grounding of the text in its original setting.

If we start with the history of Solomon's era, instead of starting with a notion about the universal message of love, we have a better chance at not imposing on the text an allegorical reading. The author may or may not have intended to write an allegory, but we must let any such literary message emerge from the author's words. In this way, we should dismiss immediately any such reading of the text that is the product of the reader's imagination (i.e. not verifiable from objective methods). Many of the popular interpretations of the Song of Solomon are completely subjective and fail to stand up under objective scrutiny. The problem for evangelical Christians at this point is that a non-objective pious reading of the text (where Christ, God and the church, are found under phrase) is accepted because of its utility. However, even a pious truth is not ultimately helpful if it is not the intended meaning of the Song of Solomon. Our goal is to know the meaning of the text as the author intended, not to derive good and useful truths not conveyed. We have to catch the message being thrown, not cast a message originally unknown.

Following the history of Israel as recorded in the Bible (and affirmed by Iron Age archaeology), I have sought to let the book of Kings be a guide to how we read the Song of Solomon. Yes, I still suffer from know with certitude that the author's message is the one I am catching, but I am consciously letting history be the driving force. I may be wrong, but the reading fits within history, it accounts for the negative passages, and it even makes sense in the entire story of redemption (as suggested above in my relating Song of Solomon to Hosea).

Original intent is difficult to reconstruct from the Song of Solomon because of the shape of the Song.⁶⁴ We are left doing what we must always do in these situations, and that is to do historical research. And good history is never so easy nor as clean as the easy answers some may desire. Therefore, my interpretive answers are a matter of percentages, not absolutes, through I rank those answer within the range of reasonableness and in that vain, my reading has some historical merit. The context of that history picks-up with Yahweh's promise of a united kingdom under David:

⁶⁴ And the shape of the text as we have it from Qumran seems to omit the elements that I have been treating as crucial, namely 5:6-7. The breaks in the existing Qumran texts suggests (though not conclusively) something else about that part of the story.

...as the LORD hath sworn to David, even so I do to him; to translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba. – 2 Sam 3:8

And in the context of that divine kingdom, the split under Solomon makes for a sad song, 1 Kings 11. I summarize it this way:

- Solomon’s Song is the tune of the King who takes.
- Solomon follows the path begun by his father,⁶⁵ and the house is divided as wives accumulate in Jerusalem.
- Ultimately, his actions split the kingdom.
- The Song of Solomon is a living tune that speaks of the only divine nation led astray.
- A similar song is found in Hosea, where marital love becomes the vehicle for a polemic.⁶⁶ The Maiden’s final Chorus is a rival tune and a polemic against the Southern Kingdom and the wickedness of Solomon and his sons.

Living under Solomon’s ways, a northern prophet may have penned Song of Solomon in harmony with 1 Kings 11. Both being a tractate against a king gone bad:

But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, *and* Hittites—²from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love.³ And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart.⁴ For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of his father David.⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.⁶ Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as *did* his father David.⁷ Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that *is* east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon.⁸ And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.⁹ So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,¹⁰ and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded.¹¹ Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, “Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.

⁶⁵ Not only in the taking of Bathsheba, but in the echo of a Shulamite in 1 Kings 1.

⁶⁶ A “polemic” is a theological rebuttal or answer contrary to a competing theological view.

¹²“Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³“However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.”

The plot is complicated further by the presence of a Shulamite-like woman (recall, our Maiden in Solomon’s Song is a Shulamite) in the fight for David’s throne. We are first introduced to the woman in 1 Kings 1:

Therefore his servants said to him, “Let a young woman, a virgin, be sought for our lord the king, and let her stand before the king, and let her care for him; and let her lie in your bosom, that our lord the king may be warm.” ³So they sought for a lovely young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found **Abishag the Shunammite**, and brought her to the king. ⁴The young woman *was* very lovely; and she cared for the king, and served him; but the king did not know her.

Holladay’s *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p 364, lists Shulamite as possibly meaning women of Shunem (the tribe found in our 1 Kings 1:3). That is, the otherwise unknown word “Shalamite” from Song 6:3, is close enough linguistically to Shunammite that the relationship might stand.

Abishag and the Maiden from Solomon’s Song share parallel lives in terms of how they function within the kingdom story. Abishag is brought into the service of the King because of her beauty. After King David dies, her fate is tied to the story of the throne. Who would get David’s throne after his death, and who would get the beautiful virgin Abishag (a kind of *rose of Sharon* from among all of Israel)?

1 Kings 2:¹³Now Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. So she said, “Do you come peaceably?” And he said, “Peaceably.” ¹⁴Moreover he said, “I have something *to say* to you.” And she said, “Say it.” ¹⁵Then he said, “You know that the kingdom was mine, and all Israel had set their expectations on me, that I should reign. However, the kingdom has been turned over, and has become my brother’s; for it was his from the LORD. ¹⁶“Now I ask one petition of you; do not deny me.” And she said to him, “Say it.” ¹⁷Then he said, “Please speak to King Solomon, for he will not refuse you, that he may give me Abishag the Shunammite as wife.” ¹⁸So Bathsheba said, “Very well, I will speak for you to the king.”

The one who thought he had David’s throne (Adonijah, son of David’s wife Haggith), was denied it, and makes a request to be gifted a woman. The life of the Israelite woman is transferred freely by the power of the king, and her identity is lost in the power struggle of two men vying for power.

Abonijah’s request was for a woman, and as Gene Rice puts it, “The women of a deceased or displaced king belonged to his successor and were symbolic of the new

king's legitimacy and authority"⁶⁷ The woman was a sign of the king's power, and her value was as the property of the king. Solomon valued her as he valued his crown, and to release her would be as to release power. So he had Abonijah killed:

Bathsheba therefore went to King Solomon, to speak to him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her and bowed down to her, and sat down on his throne and had a throne set for the king's mother; so she sat at his right hand. ²⁰Then she said, "I desire one small petition of you; do not refuse me." And the king said to her, "Ask it, my mother, for I will not refuse you." ²¹So she said, "Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah your brother as wife." ²²And King Solomon answered and said to his mother, "Now why do you ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom also—for he *is* my older brother—for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah." ²³Then King Solomon swore by the LORD, saying, "May God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah has not spoken this word against his own life! ²⁴"Now therefore, *as* the LORD lives, who has confirmed me and set me on the throne of David my father, and who has established a house for me, as He promised, Adonijah shall be put to death today!" ²⁵So King Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he struck him down, and he died. – 1 Kings 2:19-25

In this tragedy, brothers and women are the victims—Solomon is willing to kill for his power as the harem is the emblem of his glory. Women and brothers need relief from his reign, and vassal servants seek a yoke easier than his:

Then Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, ⁴"**Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.**" – 1 Kings 12:3bf.

A king who makes burdens light is a king who rules well, signified in not forcing women into roles they do not wish to play. The wisest man was a failure king who used the whip to extract goods from the Northern tribes. It was not his wisdom—not his Proverbs—that passed to his son, but his whip. King Rehoboam failed to hear the book of Proverbs and increased Solomon's tyranny:

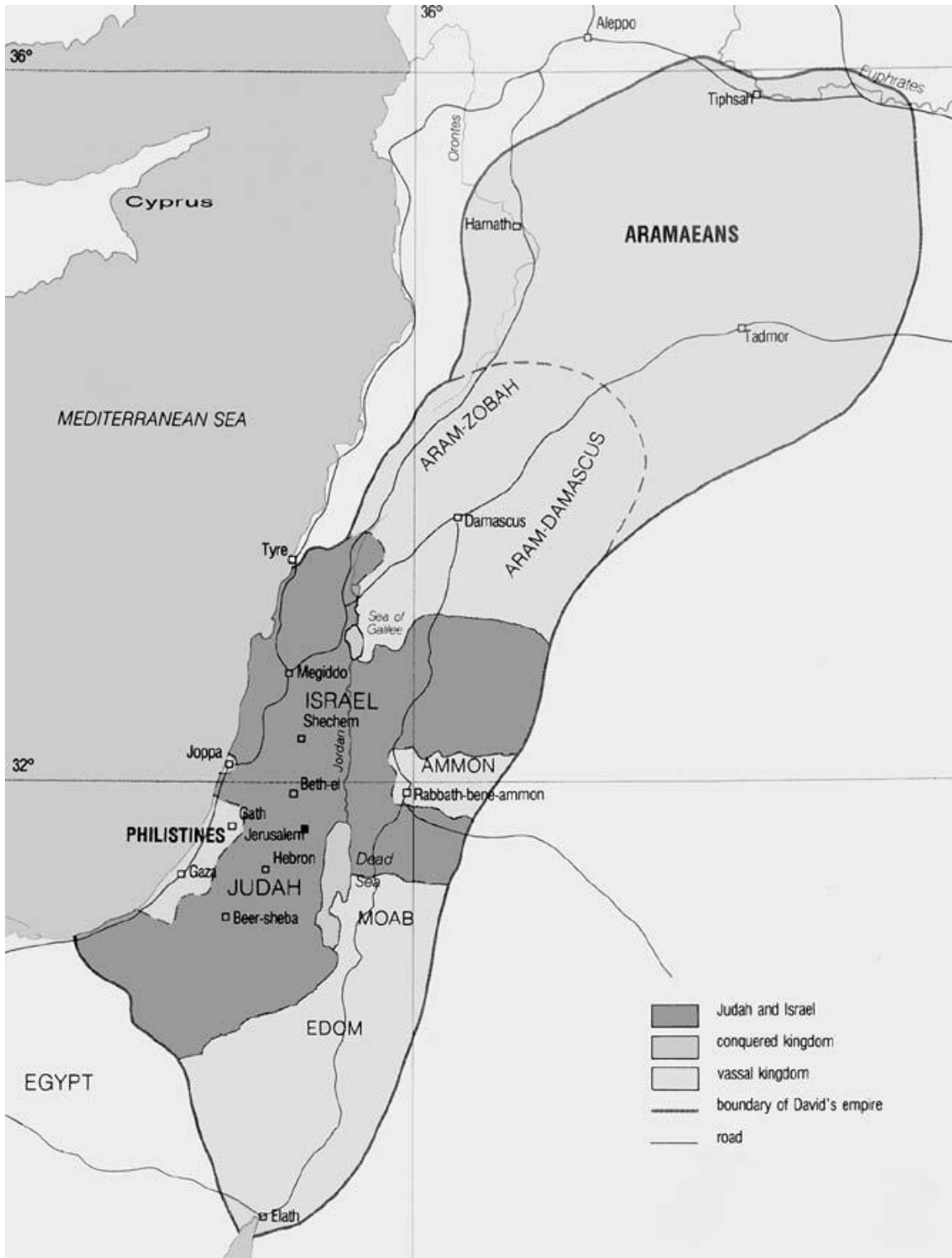
Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make *it* lighter on us'—thus you shall say to them: 'My little *finger* shall be thicker than my father's waist! ¹¹' And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!" – 1 Kings 12:10-11

Who was Solomon? His tune is played for us in the book that has his name; by the testimony of his own son, he chastised his vassal servants. The fists of his guards were

⁶⁷ Rice, *1 Kings, Nations Under God*, p. 23, International Theological Commentary, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1990.

used to women (Song of Solomon 5:6-7) and as he oppressed the helpless in his courts, he split God's nation.

The two books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings are the entire album while Song of Solomon is the hit single. What was needed was a third book of Kings and a New Song (Rev 5:9, 14:3).



Map 1
The kingdom in the time of Solomon

Tools for Studying the Old Testament for those who have not studied Hebrew:

The
ENGLISH-HEBREW
REVERSE
INTERLINEAR
OLD TESTAMENT
ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION



CHIP MCDANIEL, GENERAL EDITOR
C. JOHN COLLINS, ESV TEXT EDITOR

SONG OF SOLOMON

CHAPTER 1

1 The Song of • Songs, which is Solomon's.

→ 1 שִׁיר 3▶ 2 הַ 3 שִׁירִים 4 אֲשֶׁר • 5 לְשִׁלְמֹה 6
שִׁיר הַ שִׁיר אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמֹה
NCcSMC XD NCcPMNH XN PL, NPHSMN

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is

→ → 1 יִשָּׁקֵנִי 2 מִן 3 מִן 4 נְשִׁיקוֹתַי 5▶ 6 הוּא 7 פִּי 8 כִּי 9 דֹד 10 אַתָּה 11 דוֹד
יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִן מִן נְשִׁיקָה הוּא פִּי כִּי אַתָּה דוֹד
VqAJSM3 RBSC1 PM NCcPFC RBSM3 NCcSMS CK RBSM2 NCcPMS

better than wine;

8 טוֹבִים 11 מִן 12 יַיִן
טוֹב מִן יַיִן
NCcPMN PM NCcSMP

3 • • your anointing oils are fragrant; your name is oil poured out;

1 לְ 2 רִיחַ 3 דָּ • 4 שְׁמֵנֶיךָ • 5 טוֹבִים 6 דָּ 7 שֵׁם • 8 שְׁמֹן • 9 תּוֹרֵךְ 10 שְׁמֹן
לְ רִיחַ אַתָּה שְׁמֵן טוֹב אַתָּה שֵׁם שְׁמֹן שְׁמֹן
NCcSMC NCcSMC NCcSMC NCcSMC NCcSMC NCcSMC NCcSMC NCcSMC NCcSMC NCcSMC