

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **Studies in the Song of Solomon: Song of Solomon 4:8-5:1**

Before we commence on the detail of our talk, it will be useful to remind ourselves once again of some of the background detail to this book. Solomon is the writer and the book describes through the use of Hebrew lyrics the love between Solomon and his bride. The book is given the title Song of Songs - in other words, this song is superlative and exceeds any other song ever written. When we consider Solomon, we soon realise from the historical books of the Old Testament that God's choice of the author, though divinely inspired, is a most unusual one. Solomon is a man who according to 1 Kings 11:3 had 700 wives and 300 concubines. In this, Solomon was a person who knew little of being faithful to one wife. We are reminded in Matthew 19:3-9 of the words of the Lord Jesus that it had always been in the mind of God that a man has only one wife and vice versa. What was the result of Solomon having so many wives? Again in 1 Kings 11:4-11 we have a list of devastating consequences: Solomon's heart was turned away after other gods, his heart was no longer loyal to the LORD; he set up idol worship and its associated abominations; he did evil. All this eventually brought God's judgement on the whole nation of Israel – the kingdom would be divided. With this as a back ground, we can consider Solomon and his life as a stark contrast to the beautiful book we are now considering.

From the Song of Songs it seems that Solomon was fully devoted to the Shulamite. Was there one, out of all his wives who had captivated his heart? Within this wonderful song there are occasions when love grows cold but there is also recovery. Therefore, whether we look at this Song as a personal love song or as prophetic of Israel or the Church, we always need to bear in mind what God requires from us: true heart affection. We continue our consideration of the Song of Songs from the middle of the honeymoon period. After the wedding the bridegroom takes the bride away on their first and special holiday. It is the time when both get to know each other in the personal and intimate way of a married couple. The section starts at chapter 4 verse 1, but we pick up our consideration at verse 8, at the point where the bridegroom seeks to draw the bride's attention away from the majestic setting of the hills and mountains. The bridegroom is not distracted from his bride, but it appears that the bride is both admiring the grandeur, and possibly fearful of the wild animals that dwell there. There is no doubt that the mountains are majestic and often in Scripture speak of greatness and permanence. However this creation is not all beauty and safety. There are many dangers in the world and we all need a place or a person in which to be safe. Solomon was just such a person for his bride. Solomon the man of great wealth and power was able to ensure the safety of his bride. Solomon would seek to draw her close to himself. The LORD through Solomon would present Himself as the only true place of safety.

How many times in the history of the nation of Israel they strayed away and danger and disaster followed. It is the same with us. When we walk close to the Lord and stay in the right path, many difficulties are removed. But, when we stray and seek to have a life style separate from the Lord, we become besieged with so many difficulties. Eastern customs are considerably different to those in the UK and this may be the first time that Solomon has seen his bride without a veil and the normal long robes. If we think of Jacob in Genesis chapter 29, it was not until after the wedding night that he discovered that he had married someone other than the girl he had courted! Solomon is not disappointed with his bride; everything about her is beautiful and delightful. In verse 9, his heart is completely captivated by both her eyes and the ornaments about her neck which enhance her beauty. Even one single link in the necklace worn around the neck captivates his heart, his affection. Do we remember those early days when we only had eyes for each other, nothing and no one else mattered. In Revelation 2:4 the Lord rebukes the Christians at Ephesus in that they had left their first love. The Lord Jesus would ever seek to have us in the affection of those early days after our conversion where He was the object of our full attention. We could not read enough about Him and we told people of Him. The challenge from Revelation 2 has always been true for God's people: are we still enjoying first love? As I said before, what is so amazing about this book is that it was written by Solomon who had many wives which was contrary to God's clear instructions. Therefore, morally Solomon was a most unlikely candidate to set forth God's intention for marriage.

The Bible clearly teaches that a man and woman marry for life and it is God's intention that the couple live out their life as a single unit giving honour to God. When the Lord spoke about marriage and divorce, He reaffirmed God's view of marriage and how that Moses liberalised divorce because of the hardness of heart of the people. If Solomon was in himself not the ideal example of the right behaviour concerning marriage, then the Song of Songs is a tremendous contrast to Solomon's life. Solomon and his many wives became a snare which turned his heart away from God to follow the idols that many of his wives worshipped. It was because of this failure that God divided the nation of Israel

into two after the death of Solomon. Yet the nation of Israel will be united again when the Lord Jesus returns and establishes His kingdom. Then the ten lost tribes of Israel will be brought back out of the nations in which they have been assimilated. Only God will be able to do this. As I have already said, it may be that amongst the many wives of Solomon there was one who captivated his heart and Solomon is caused by the Spirit of God to write the book describing for all time what should be true in contrast to the failure of his own life. So for the Christian today, marriage should be looked at as a life time commitment of love and fidelity for each other. Solomon now starts to talk of his bride's love. Her love is true and wonderful, better than wine, verse 10. Wine is that which cheers the heart of God and man. Solomon finds that the love of his bride gives him more joy and happiness than the intoxicating effects of wine. This should always be so between a husband and a wife; the love and affection should exceed the natural stimulants of life such as wine.

Next there is the fragrance of the perfumes, the spices that the bride has used to enhance her attractiveness to her beloved. In the book of Esther, when Esther was being made ready as a possible wife and queen for King Ahasuerus, her preparations took over a year in order that all the spices and perfumes could have the full affect on her body to make her ready for the presence of the king. There is a transforming affect today. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18 states, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." The Spirit would have us to be occupied on a daily basis with the Lord Jesus Christ, to consider His greatness and glory. This has a transforming affect. Day by day, we have the opportunity to be made more suitable for that coming day of glory when we will be brought into the presence of the King. Esther's preparations caused the various spices to become part of the person so that at all time the fragrance of those perfumes emanated from her very being and filled the room as the person entered. Did the Shulamite have the same preparations? I believe so. This would be no hurried event. All the necessary preparations would be made. Every detail must be right for the bride of a king. King Solomon was no ordinary king. When God in a dream had asked Solomon what he required? Solomon asked for wisdom and an understanding heart so that he would be able wisely to rule God's people. God gave him his request but also added riches and greatness. So great did Solomon become that nations near and far came to see him, listen to his words of wisdom and see the greatness of his kingdom. Yet the Lord Jesus when referring to Solomon and in comparison to Himself said "A greater than Solomon is here".

The bride who displayed such fragrance to please Solomon does not compare to the delight that the Lord Jesus has for His own bride. Ephesians chapter 5, "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." The fragrance of the heavenly bride will add its sweetness to the halls of eternity. In verse 11 we have some wonderful thoughts expressed concerning the lips and tongue of the bride. The Shulamite displayed a gracious character. Solomon in the book of Proverbs described the problem of living with a contentious woman, "better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman." The Shulamite was so different: sweetness came from her lips and tongue, like honey from the honeycomb. Not only sweetness but milk, that which was to feed and develop the relationship. We are to desire the sincere milk of the Word. God has provided the scriptures for our good, that we might grow and develop into strong and useful Christians.

Then Solomon speaks of her garments. Inwardly the perfumes sent out a fragrance which was appreciated by Solomon. The garments, by contrast, speak of the outward character of the person. There was a consistency with the Shulamite. As Christians we are to be consistent in all departments of our life, not only in the home or church gathering, but also in the more public areas of work and society. Solomon likens this to the very public display of Lebanon. The fragrance of the mighty forests disperses far and wide from the trees of Lebanon. From verse 12 we come to a more intimate section of this chapter. Solomon speaks of the Shulamite as a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. She has been kept pure from others, no defilement with loose morals. There were no other relationships; she had waited for the right person to marry. In this garden there are wonderful plants kept solely for her husband. The pomegranate is an interesting fruit. The fruit is always in nine segments and each segment contains numerous seeds each surrounded by rich juicy flesh. In Galatians 5:22-23 we have nine features of the fruit of the Spirit. Each of the nine aspects should always be seen in a believer. They enable the right display of character. If each feature is displayed then every sphere of our life would be a blessing to others. Such features enable the keeping of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as stated in Ephesians 4. The Shulamite then was a person who promoted, love, joy and peace; these are the features which make for a happy home. Longsuffering, kindness and goodness would be a barrier to prevent the difficulties of others from becoming distressing. Such features are positive promoting a healthy attitude seeking the good of others. Faithfulness, gentleness and self control would suggest that God comes first in the life and not self. This is the way of the Spirit in the lives of those given over to God's control. Continuing with the image of the pomegranate, with its many fruits within each segment, it speaks of the many and varied ways in which we can present the nine features of the fruit of the Spirit. Other fruits and spices which are mentioned bring to us the depth of character in the Shulamite which so far has remained hidden. We can liken the Shulamite to a person who has spent time with God. Enoch in Genesis is spoken of as a man who walked with God and had a testimony that he pleased God. We need a hidden life first before we can have a testimony to others. What better commendation

about Enoch, that he pleased God. This is a challenge for Christians today: do we please God? The hidden features of the Shulamite's character are reserved for the one she loves. However, the fragrance will go out beyond the home setting of husband and wife. The Shulamite, so confident in the work of God in her soul, speaks poetically of the north and south winds to come and blow on this garden. North winds from the colder climate across the mountains of Lebanon and the south winds from the dry and hot desert areas would not damage this one. In fact the alternating winds would only disperse this wonderful collection of fragrances so that others may appreciate and benefit. What should the church be today? One feature is to present to an unbelieving world the Saviour, His salvation and the loving heart of God, who desires not the death of a sinner. But within the company of the church the features of love and care for each other should be manifest. In the New Testament we have a lovely example of a husband and wife who display the features we have just considered. I recommend the study of Aquila and Priscilla where we see a couple who are devoted to the service of their Lord and Saviour and seek to be a help to others. Their lives are so balanced, "heirs together of the grace of life", (1 Peter 3). Out of the six times mentioned, three times Aquila is placed first and three times Priscilla. I believe in this way God gives testimony to their equal value in His sight. They provide a wonderful and challenging role model for Christian couples today.

We close our consideration of this amazing presentation of bride and bridegroom or husband and wife with verse 1 of chapter 5 where Solomon declares that he has come to his beloved. If, at the end of chapter 4 the Shulamite gives the invitation to come, Solomon responds by coming. This public record of such a delightful event is surely recorded for all time to instruct the people of God as to the sanctity of marriage. It is no light thing to enter into such a relationship which is God defined. Marriage is a life time relationship. We should be very careful, therefore, about our relationships and hold sacrosanct those affections, emotions and relationships which are only meant for the person we marry.

At the end of verse 1, we have what some commentators regard as a divine comment to this honeymoon period of Solomon and the Shulamite. God calls them friends. Christians are called friends of the Lord Jesus. Jesus said, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you", John 15. It is wonderful to be in such a divine relationship and counted as friends. Friendship has responsibilities as indicated in John 15. If we have friend's we treat them responsibly otherwise they will no longer want to be friends. We need to keep the things that Jesus taught if we are to remain in practical friendship. God is saying to this couple, "You are My friends". Have no secrets from God and each other. Drink and enjoy each other's company, for this relationship you go not to any other. Finally God calls them beloved. This I believe is deeper than friends and from God's standing can never be broken. We may lose the enjoyment of His friendship but we are always loved.

How did Solomon get on? Going back to 1 Kings 11 we see he failed. We are not told what happened to the Shulamite. Did she also fail or did she mourn the loss of her only love?

What a prophetic picture of both Israel and, sadly, the Church today, so broken and a failure in many ways, but we are still loved. The challenge is also to us who are married! Are we making our lives together a testimony that God can use to the blessing of others?

Let us pray. Lord make my life a fragrance of heaven that others may be attracted to Yourself. Amen.

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