

This eBook is an illustrated version of the public domain literature, The World English Bible version of Song of Solomon. The edition layout, foreword, and included illustrations are protected by the copyright laws of the United States of America, and by Sarah Lange Wathen.

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FOREWORD

Song of Songs of Solomon, also known as simply *Song of Songs* in Jewish tradition, and *Song of Solomon* or *Canticle of Canticles* to Christians, is one of the shortest and most thrilling books of The Old Testament. Believed by many to have been written by Solomon himself around 900 BCE, this beautiful poem portrays the relationship between a woman and a man, from courtship to consummation. Mostly a dialogue between two lovers, “Beloved” is the female protagonist and “Lover,” the male, with commentary from a chorus, sometimes known as Daughters of Israel, referred to as “Friends” in this World English Bible translation.

Filled with surprisingly sensual and erotic language, the song has often been interpreted by many as a parable to the relationship between God and Israel, or between Christ and the Church, or Christ and the human soul, for Christians. This ancient text is one of the most overtly mystical books of the Kabbalah, having no parallel in the whole of Hebrew literature, and many Jewish scholars have interpreted the language to be metaphorically anthropomorphic. It has also been suggested that the song is a messianic text, the lover being interpreted as the Messiah. Historically, Christian mystagogues insisted the sexual language in the song was an allegory to the soul and Christ, believing it should be reserved for only the spiritually mature and that studying it may be harmful for the novice. More recently in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI referred to *Song of Songs of Solomon* in terms of its apparent literal meaning, stating that erotic love and self-donating love is shown therein as two halves of true love, both giving and receiving.

The authorship and origin of *Song of Songs of Solomon* has been as widely researched and debated as has its content. The first clause of the title, “which is of Solomon,” can be construed to mean that the song was either written *by* Solomon, or *for* Solomon, and evidence for both meanings exists. Most scholars note that the poem shows similarities to various forms of Ancient Near Eastern love poetry, particularly certain Sumerian erotic passages of the period. Some even suggest that the song is not a single work, but rather a collection of folk love songs from northern Palestine, the references to royalty accounted for by a wedding custom called “The King’s Week,” kept up among the Syrian peasants to the present day.

Differing interpretations and mistranslations of the original Ancient Hebrew text have abounded for centuries, and have provided a fascinating framework for religious legends and romantic myths. One of the most famous and loved mistranslations from 2:1, “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys,” helped form a major character in John Steinbeck’s, *The Grapes of Wrath*, “Rose of Sharon” (often called “Rosasharn”), who is depicted as fragile throughout the novel, because of her pregnancy. More recent studies have concluded that the original Ancient Hebrew phrase actually refers to the Sharon Plain on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and a flower that blooms there in late summer, not the flowering plant commonly referred to as the Rose of Sharon today.

Another flower species mentioned in the above verse, Lily of the Valley, is a sweetly scented, yet highly poisonous, flowering plant. If ingested, even in small amounts, this deadly plant can induce abdominal pain, vomiting, and a reduced heart rate. Ironically, laboratory studies have shown the odor of the flower to attract mammal sperm in a dramatic manner, and even to imitate the role of progesterone in stimulating sperm to swim, a reaction known as the Lily of the Valley phenomenon. Even more interestingly, Christian legend also names this plant as “Our Lady’s Tears” or “Mary’s Tears,” in reference to the story that it sprang from the weeping of the Virgin Mary during the crucifixion of Jesus. The Lily of the Valley is used as a symbol of humility in religious paintings, as a sign foreshadowing Christ’s second coming and also as a reminder of the power of men to envision a better world. Scholars now believe that the original Ancient Hebrew text in *Song of Songs of Solomon* does not, in fact, refer to this flower; however, the mistranslation of the biblical phrase may have had influenced the development of the modern plant name. Certainly, scientific fact and religious legend are now woven together to encourage a captivating reading of the song!

Whatever debates may rage over *Song of Songs of Solomon*, the beauty of the poetry and rapturous character of the dialogue is undeniable. A stunning change of pace within the larger biblical narrative, the luscious imagery drips with charisma and begs to be enjoyed on its own terms. However flawed or imprecise a translation from Ancient Hebrew to Modern English may be, the spirit of the story survives. Not a biblical scholar or an authority on ancient literature, as an artist, I allowed the poetry itself to speak to me and encourage visual form. Some passages all but scream for visual illustration, for example:

5:10 My beloved is white and ruddy.
The best among ten thousand.
5:11 His head is like the purest gold.
His hair is bushy, black as a raven.
5:12 His eyes are like doves beside the water brooks,
washed with milk, mounted like jewels.
5:13 His cheeks are like a bed of spices with towers of perfumes.
His lips are like lilies, dropping liquid myrrh.

Also consider the plentitude of flora and fauna imagery, with their allusion to the glorious circle of life, which is of course the ultimate purpose of the act for which the urgent lovers yearn. Is it difficult to find divinity in a fragile, shivering newborn fawn, or blush at the inherent sexuality in the fleshiness of fat, juicy grapes and the flowing of milk and honey?

7:8 I said, "I will climb up into the palm tree.
I will take hold of its fruit."
Let your breasts be like clusters of the vine
the smell of your breath like apples,

See, also:

4:5 Your two breasts are like two fawns
that are twins of a roe,
which feed among the lilies.

The passion is obvious, the language as dripping and sweet as a lover's words...and therein lies an illustrator's hidden challenge—to avoid cartoonish pictures too like the **effusive, flowery declarations** from a cajoling, hopeful lover, giddy with lust, yet instead, to uncover the authentic desire within our human hearts that make such language valid for all of us.

5:1 I have 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.

I relied partially on my knowledge of historical religious imagery, practiced in artful visual representations of difficult language. For example, I found the perfect model for Beloved's surely orgasmic expression, which I felt must have occurred during certain passages in the song, in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *Saint Teresa in Ecstasy*. No dime store pop-romance imagery, this work in marble, stucco and paint is generally considered to be one of the sculptural masterpieces of the High Roman Baroque period. The sculpture illustrates a moment where divinity physically blesses an earthly body, Saint Teresa's most famous vision being of a seraph driving a burning golden arrow through her heart, causing a transcendent spiritual-bodily pain. Bernini is often said to have carved Saint Teresa's heavenly expression after the moment one is overcome by orgasmic climax. Reciprocally, I borrowed that scandalous legend surrounding this famous work to clarify my own perception of Beloved's face, and I hope to encourage further insight into the complicated nature of our understanding of *Song of Songs of Solomon*, in drowning her in the duplicitous Lily of the Valley, in *Illustration #6*.

My notes here only hint at the vast amount of literature and visual artwork available to aid in understanding *Song of Songs of Solomon*, not to mention religious instruction in many denominations, and I encourage readers to form his or her own interpretation on both the text and my illustrations, and to seek further knowledge, through research and contemplation, into this fascinating work of literature.

Sarah Lange Wathen
Illustrator & Editor

SONG OF SOLOMON

World English Bible

Book 22 Song of Solomon

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

1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for your love
is better than wine.

1:3 Your oils have a pleasing fragrance. Your name is oil poured forth,
therefore the virgins love you.

1:4 Take me away with you. Let us hurry. The king has brought me
into his chambers.

Friends

We will be glad and rejoice in you.
We will praise your love more than wine!

Beloved

They are right to love you.

1:5 I am dark, but lovely, you daughters of Jerusalem,
like Kedar's tents, like Solomon's curtains.

1:6 Don't stare at me because I am dark, because the sun has scorched me.
My mother's sons were angry with me. They made me keeper
of the vineyards. I haven't kept my own vineyard.

1:7 Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you graze your flock,
where you rest them at noon; For why should I be as one who is
veiled beside the flocks of your companions?

Illustration 1; Sarah Lange Wathen, Copyright 2013

Lover

1:8 If you don't know, most beautiful among women, follow the tracks
of the sheep. Graze your young goats beside the shepherds' tents.

1:9 I have compared you, my love, to a steed in Pharaoh's chariots.

1:10 Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with
strings of jewels.

1:11 We will make you earrings of gold, with studs of silver.

Beloved

1:12 While the king sat at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance.

1:13 My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh, that lies between my breasts.

1:14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards
of En Gedi.

Lover

1:15 Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful.
Your eyes are doves.

Beloved

1:16 Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, yes, pleasant; and our
couch is verdant.

Lover

1:17 The beams of our house are cedars. Our rafters are firs.

Illustration 2; Sarah Lange Wathen, Copyright 2013

Beloved

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

Lover

2:2 As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

Beloved

2:3 As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved
among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight,
his fruit was sweet to my taste.

2:4 He brought me to the banquet hall. His banner over me is love.

2:5 Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples; For I am
faint with love.

2:6 His left hand is under my head. His right hand embraces me.

2:7 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, or by
the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor awaken love,
until it so desires.

2:8 The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping on the mountains,
skipping on the hills.

2:9 My beloved is like a roe or a young hart. Behold, he stands
behind our wall! He looks in at the windows. He glances
through the lattice.

2:10 My beloved spoke, and said to me, "Rise up, my love,
my beautiful one, and come away.

2:11 For, behold, the winter is past. The rain is over and gone.

2:12 The flowers appear on the earth. The time of the singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

2:13 The fig tree ripens her green figs. The vines are in blossom.
They give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one,
and come away."

Illustration 3; Sarah Lange Wathen, Copyright 2013

Lover

- 2:14 My dove in the clefts of the rock, In the hiding places of
the mountainside, Let me see your face. Let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.
- 2:15 Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards;
for our vineyards are in blossom.

Beloved

- 2:16 My beloved is mine, and I am his. He browses among the lilies.
- 2:17 Until the day is cool, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved,
and be like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of Bether.
- 3:1 By night on my bed, I sought him whom my soul loves.
I sought him, but I didn't find him.
- 3:2 I will get up 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 I didn't find him.
- 3:3 The watchmen who go about the city found me; "Have you seen
him whom my soul loves?"
- 3:4 I had scarcely passed from 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, into the chamber of her who conceived me.
- 3:5 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, or by
the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor awaken love,
until it so desires.
- 3:6 Who is this who comes up from the wilderness like pillars
of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all spices
of the merchant?
- 3:7 Behold, it is Solomon's carriage! Sixty mighty men are around it,
of the mighty men of Israel.
- 3:8 They all handle the sword, and are expert in war.
Every man has his sword on his thigh, because of fear
in the night.
- 3:9 King Solomon made himself a carriage of the wood of Lebanon.
- 3:10 He made its pillars of silver, its bottom of gold,
its seat of purple, its midst being paved with love,
from the daughters of Jerusalem.
- 3:11 Go forth, you daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon,
with the crown with which his mother has crowned him,
in the day of his weddings, in the day of the gladness
of his heart.

Illustration 4; Sarah Lange Wathen, Copyright 2013

Lover

- 4:1 Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful.
Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is as a flock
of goats, that descend from Mount Gilead.
- 4:2 Your teeth are like a newly shorn flock, which have come
up from the washing, where every one of them has twins.
None is bereaved among them.
- 4:3 Your lips are like scarlet thread. Your mouth is lovely.
Your temples are like a piece of a pomegranate behind your veil.
- 4:4 Your neck is like David's tower built for an armory, whereon a
thousand shields hang, all the shields of the mighty men.
- 4:5 Your two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe,
which feed among the lilies.
- 4:6 Until the day is cool, and the shadows flee away, I will go
to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense.
- 4:7 You are all beautiful, my love. There is no spot in you.
- 4:8 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.
- 4:9 You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride.
You have ravished my heart with one of your eyes, with one
chain of your neck.
- 4:10 How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride!
How much better is your love than wine! The fragrance of your
perfumes than all manner of spices!

4:11 Your lips, my bride, drip like the honeycomb. Honey and milk
are under your tongue. The smell of your garments is like
the smell of Lebanon.
4:12 A locked up garden is my sister, my bride; a locked up spring,
a sealed fountain.
4:13 Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates, with precious fruits:
henna with spikenard plants,
4:14 spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind
of incense tree; myrrh and aloes, with all the best spices,
4:15 a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, flowing streams
from Lebanon.

Illustration 5; Sarah Lange Wathen, Copyright 2013

Beloved

4:16 Awake, north wind; and come, you south! Blow on my garden,
that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden,
and taste his precious fruits.

Lover

5:1 I have 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.

Friends

Eat, friends! Drink, yes, drink abundantly, beloved.

Beloved

5:2 I was asleep, but my heart was awake. It is the voice
of my beloved who knocks: "Open to me, my sister, my love,
my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew,
and my hair with the dampness of the night."
5:3 I have taken off my robe. Indeed, must I put it on?
I have washed my feet. Indeed, must I soil them?
5:4 My beloved thrust his hand in through the latch opening.
My heart pounded for him.
5:5 I rose up to open for my beloved. My hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock.
5:6 I opened to my beloved; but my beloved left; and had gone away.
My heart went out when he spoke. I looked for him, but I
didn't find him. I called him, but he didn't answer.
5:7 The watchmen who go about the city found me. They beat me.
They bruised me. The keepers of the walls took my cloak
away from me.
5:8 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved,
that you tell him that I am faint with love.

Illustration 6; Sarah Lange Wathen, Copyright 2013

Friends

5:9 How is your beloved better than another beloved, you fairest
among women? How is your beloved better than another beloved,
that you do so adjure us?

Beloved

5:10 My beloved is white and ruddy. The best among ten thousand.
5:11 His head is like the purest gold. His hair is bushy,
black as a raven.
5:12 His eyes are like doves beside the water brooks, washed with milk,
mounted like jewels.
5:13 His cheeks are like a bed of spices with towers of perfumes.
His lips are like lilies, dropping liquid myrrh.
5:14 His hands are like rings of gold set with beryl.
His body is like ivory work overlaid with sapphires.
5:15 His legs are like pillars of marble set on sockets of fine gold.
His appearance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.
5:16 His mouth is sweetness; yes, he is altogether lovely.
This is my beloved, and this is my friend, daughters of Jerusalem.

Friends

6:1 Where has your beloved gone, you fairest among women?

Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?

Beloved

- 6:2 My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices,
to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
- 6:3 I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. He browses
among the lilies,
- 6:4 You are beautiful, my love, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem,
awesome as an army with banners.
- 6:5 Turn away your eyes from me, for they have overcome me.
Your hair is like a flock of goats, that lie along
the side of Gilead.
- 6:6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes, which have come up
from the washing; of which every one has twins; none is
bereaved among them.
- 6:7 Your temples are like a piece of a pomegranate behind your veil.
- 6:8 There are sixty queens, eighty concubines, and virgins
without number.
- 6:9 My dove, my perfect one, is unique. She is her mother's
only daughter. She is the favorite one of her who bore her.
The daughters saw her, and called her blessed; the queens
and the concubines, and they praised her.
- 6:10 Who is she who looks forth as the morning, beautiful as the moon,
clear as the sun, and awesome as an army with banners?
- 6:11 I went down into the nut tree grove, to see the green
plants of the valley, to see whether the vine budded,
and the pomegranates were in flower.
- 6:12 Without realizing it, my desire set me with my royal
people's chariots.

Illustration 7; Sarah Lange Wathen, Copyright 2013

Friends

- 6:13 Return, return, Shulammite! Return, return, that we may gaze
at you.

Lover

- Why do you desire to gaze at the Shulammite,
as at the dance of Mahanaim?
- 7:1 How beautiful are your feet in sandals, prince's daughter!
Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands
of a skillful workman.
- 7:2 Your body is like a round goblet, no mixed wine is wanting.
Your waist is like a heap of wheat, set about with lilies.
- 7:3 Your two breasts are like two fawns, that are twins of a roe.
- 7:4 Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are like the pools
in Heshbon by the gate of Bathrabbim. Your nose is like
the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus.
- 7:5 Your head on you is like Carmel. The hair of your head like purple.
The king is held captive in its tresses.
- 7:6 How beautiful and how pleasant you are, love, for delights!
- 7:7 This, your stature, is like a palm tree, your breasts
like its fruit.
- 7:8 I said, "I will climb up into the palm tree. I will take hold
of its fruit." Let your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
the smell of your breath like apples.

Beloved

- 7:9 Your mouth like the best wine, that goes down smoothly for
my beloved, gliding through the lips of those who are asleep.
- 7:10 I am my beloved's. His desire is toward me.
- 7:11 Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field.
Let us lodge in the villages.
- 7:12 Let's go early up to the vineyards. Let's see whether the vine
has budded, its blossom is open, and the pomegranates are in flower.
There I will give you my love.
- 7:13 The mandrakes give forth fragrance. At our doors are all
kinds of precious fruits, new and old, which I have stored
up for you, my beloved.
- 8:1 Oh that you were like my brother, who sucked the breasts

of my mother! If I found you outside, I would kiss you;
yes, and no one would despise me.

8:2 I would lead you, bringing you into my mother's house,
who would instruct me. I would have you drink spiced wine,
of the juice of my pomegranate.

8:3 His left hand would be under my head. His right hand
would embrace me.

8:4 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up,
nor awaken love, until it so desires.

Friends

8:5 Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on
her beloved?

Beloved

Under the apple tree I aroused you.

There your mother conceived you. There she was in labor
and bore you.

8:6 Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm;
for love is strong as death. Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol.
Its flashes are flashes of fire, a very flame of Yahweh.

8:7 Many waters can't quench love, neither can floods drown it.
If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love,
he would be utterly scorned.

Friends

8:8 We have a little sister. She has no breasts. What shall we
do for our sister in the day when she is to be spoken for?

8:9 If she is a wall, we will build on her a turret of silver.
if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.

Beloved

8:10 I am a wall, and my breasts like towers, then I was in his eyes
like one who found peace.

8:11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon. He leased out the vineyard
to keepers. Each was to bring a thousand shekels of silver
for its fruit.

8:12 My own vineyard is before me. The thousand are for you, Solomon;
two hundred for those who tend its fruit.

Lover

8:13 You who dwell in the gardens, with friends in attendance,
let me hear your voice!

Beloved

8:14 Come away, my beloved! Be like a gazelle or a young stag
on the mountains of spices!

Illustration 8; Sarah Lange Wathen, Copyright 2013