

Song of Solomon

¹ Solomon's song of songs.*

Woman:

² Kiss me, kiss me with your mouth again and again,† for your love is sweeter‡ than wine.

³ I love the way you smell from the perfumed oils you use. You have quite a reputation§—it spreads like spilled perfumed oil. It's not surprising that all the young women adore you!

⁴ Take me by the hand—let's run! (The king* has brought me to his bedroom.) Let's be happy together and find pleasure in your love.† Your

* **1:1** Each speaker is not explicitly identified in the Hebrew text as shown in this translation, but it is usually clear from the context and gender of the words used who is speaking. Additionally this book is poetry, and therefore translation needs to be more fluid than with prose. † **1:2** Literally, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." The repetition of the word "kiss" forms a superlative, just as "song of songs" really means "the best song." In addition the poem begins in the third person but then immediately switches to the second person. Such changes are smoothed out for less confusing reading. ‡ **1:2** Literally, "better." § **1:3** Literally, "name." * **1:4** In love poetry of the time "king" was also a term of endearment. † **1:4** The verb moves to the first person plural, which could mean the change of speaker (some versions believe this line is spoke by the "friends" of the woman). However, it is taken here to be an inclusive form, indicating the woman and the man together.

love is far better than wine! Women are right to adore you so!‡

⁵ I'm black, but I'm beautiful, women of Jerusalem,§ like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. ⁶ Don't look down on me because I'm black, because the sun has burned me. My brothers were angry with me and made me look after the vineyards, so I couldn't look after my own vineyard.* ⁷ My love, please tell me where you're taking your flock. Where will you rest them at noon? For why should I have to wear a veil while looking for you† among the flocks of your companions?‡

Man

⁸ If you really don't know, you who are more beautiful than any other woman, then follow the tracks of my flock, and let your goats graze near the shepherd's tents. ⁹ My darling, to me you're

‡ **1:4** Referring back to the young women of verse 3. § **1:5** Her dark complexion was an issue for these women of Jerusalem, as it still is in some societies. Accordingly the woman tells them not to look down on her (verse 6). * **1:6** In other words, the woman could not look after herself. Note also that in literature of the time, "vineyard" was often used as a fertility metaphor. † **1:7** "Looking for you": implied. ‡ **1:7** The idea seems to be that the woman may have to hide herself during her search if she does not know where her love will be. Some have suggested that wearing a veil in such circumstances may have been like prostitutes who wished to keep their identity secret. Others suggest that the woman thinks other men may be attracted to her and she wishes to avoid that. Yet others suggest emending the text from "wear a veil" to "wander."

like a mare among Pharaoh's horses[§] that pull his chariots, ¹⁰ Your beautiful cheeks adorned with ornaments,* your neck with strings of jewels. ¹¹ Let's make you some gold ornaments inlaid with silver.

Woman:

¹² As the king lay on his couch, my nard perfume gave off its fragrance. ¹³ My love is like a pouch of myrrh,[†] lying all night between my breasts. ¹⁴ My love is like a bunch of fragrant henna flowers in the vineyards of Engedi.[‡]

Man:

¹⁵ Look at how very beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful! Your eyes are as gentle as doves.

Woman:

¹⁶ And you, my love, are so handsome—how charming you are! The green grass is our bed, ¹⁷ with cedar trees as beams for our “house,” and pine trees for the rafters.

2

Woman:

§ 1:9 To be compared to a horse is not a modern-day complement, but this serves as a reminder that this is a very different culture than today. In addition chariots were pulled by stallions, so there may be some additional meaning here.

* **1:10** It seems the ornaments the woman is wearing reminds the man of the decorations worn by the chariot horses. † **1:13** A perfume placed in a small bag and worn on a string around the neck under clothes. ‡ **1:14** Engedi means “spring of the young goat” and in the context may have a double meaning, together with the “vineyard” symbolism already mentioned.

¹ I'm just a flower from the plain of Sharon, a lily found in the valleys.

Man:

² Just as a lily stands out among the brambles, so you, my darling, stand out among other women.

Woman:

³ My love is like an apple tree* among the forest trees, compared to other young men. I love to sit down in his shade and his fruit tastes sweet to me. ⁴ He took me to drink of his wine,† wanting to show his love for me.‡ ⁵ Feed me raisins to give me energy, give me apples to revive me, for love has made me weak!§ ⁶ He supports my head with his left hand, and holds me close with his right. ⁷ Women of Jerusalem, swear to me by the gazelles or the wild deer that you won't disturb* our love until the right time.

⁸ Listen! I hear the voice of my love! Look! Here he comes, leaping on the mountains, skipping over the hills— ⁹ my love is like a gazelle or a young deer! Look, he's there, standing behind our wall, looking through the window, peering through the screen. ¹⁰ My love calls out to me,

* **2:3** The apple is not usually grown in Israel so perhaps another fruit is meant. The main point is the contrast between a fruit tree and the ordinary trees of the forest that do not produce an edible fruit. † **2:4** Literally, "He took me to the house of wine." ‡ **2:4** The word often translated "banner" is more probably "intention" or "wish to." § **2:5** Or "I'm totally lovesick!" * **2:7** "Rouse" or "awaken" in the sense of "interrupt." Since it's clear that love is already "awakened" in this situation, it seems that the woman is asking for privacy.

“Get up, my darling, my beautiful girl, and come away with me! Just look! ¹¹ Winter has finished; the rains are over and gone. ¹² Flowers are blooming everywhere; the time when birds sing has come; the call of the turtledove is heard in the countryside.† ¹³ Fig trees start producing ripe fruit, while grape vines blossom, giving off their fragrance. Get up, my darling, my beautiful girl, and come away with me!”

Man:

¹⁴ My dove is out of sight in the crevices of the rock, in the hiding places of the cliff. Please let me see you! Let me hear you! For you speak so sweetly, and you look so beautiful!

Woman:

¹⁵ Catch the foxes‡ for us, all the little foxes that come and destroy the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom!§ ¹⁶ My love is mine, and I am his! He feeds* among the lilies, ¹⁷ until the morning breezes blow and the shadows disappear. Come back to me, my love, and be like a gazelle or a young deer on the split mountains.†

3

Woman:

† **2:12** The turtledove is a summer visitor to Israel. Its soft call “trrr-trrr” gives it its name, and is a sign that spring has come, like the arrival of the cuckoo in northern Europe. ‡ **2:15** Or “jackals.” § **2:15** The meaning of this verse, and the speaker, are both uncertain. * **2:16** Or “finds pleasure.” † **2:17** Literally, “the mountains of Bethel.” However, there is no such place name known. Bethel means split or cleft, indicating two mountains with a ravine dividing them.

¹ One night when I was lying in bed, I longed for the one I love. I longed for him, but he was nowhere to be found. ² So I said to myself,* “I will get up now and go through the city, looking in its streets and squares for the one I love.” I looked for him but I didn’t find him. ³ The watchmen found me as they went through the city. “Have you seen the one I love?” I asked them. ⁴ Only a little farther on after I’d passed them I found my love! I held him close and would not let him go until I’d brought him to my mother’s house, to the room of the one who conceived me.† ⁵ Women of Jerusalem, swear to me by the gazelles or the wild deer that you won’t disturb our love until the right time.

Women of Jerusalem:

⁶ Who is this coming in from the wilderness like a plume of smoke,‡ like a burning sacrifice scented with myrrh and frankincense, with all kinds of imported perfumed powders?§

Woman:

⁷ Look, it’s Solomon’s sedan chair,* accompanied by sixty of Israel’s best warriors. ⁸ All of

* **3:2** “So I told myself”: implied. † **3:4** “To the room of the one who conceived me”: or, “into the room of my conceiving,” which may be a euphemism for wishing to have a child. ‡ **3:6** The dust thrown up by travelers in a dry wilderness would be the first sign of their approach. However, the emphasis of this verse is certainly on the accompanying scent. § **3:6** Some see this speech of the women of Jerusalem as continuing through the next verses. * **3:7** Literally, “bed” or “couch.” A sedan chair was a portable chair used by royalty, carried on poles. It certainly was not a wheeled carriage, as some translations suggest.

them are expert swordsmen who have battle experience. They each carry a sword strapped to the thigh, ready for any night-time attacks. ⁹ (Solomon's sedan chair[†] was made for him with wood from Lebanon. ¹⁰ Its posts were covered in silver, and the back was covered in gold. The seat cushion was purple. The interior was lovingly decorated.[‡])

Women of Jerusalem, ¹¹ come out! Look, women of Zion! See King Solomon wearing the crown that his mother placed on his head on his wedding day, his happiest day.

4

Man:

¹ How beautiful you look, my darling, how beautiful! Your eyes are like doves behind your veil. Your hair flows down like a flock of goats* descending Mount Gilead. ² Your teeth are as white as a flock of sheep that are just shorn and washed. None of them are missing—they are all perfectly matched.[†] ³ Your lips are as red as scarlet thread. Your mouth is gorgeous. Your cheeks[‡] are the blushing color of pomegranates behind your veil. ⁴ Your neck is as tall and shapely as David's tower, with your necklaces

[†] **3:9** “Sedan chair”: a different word is used but the meaning is the same. [‡] **3:10** The meaning of the last part of this verse is unclear. Possibly “The interior was inlaid with ivory.” * **4:1** Goats were usually black in color so presumably corresponding to the woman's hair. [†] **4:2** In other words, each upper tooth is matched by a lower tooth. [‡] **4:3** Or “temples.” One of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q Canta) can be read as “chin.”

like the hanging shields of a thousand warriors.
⁵ Your breasts are like two fawns, two gazelles feeding among the lilies.

⁶ Before the morning breezes blow and the shadows disappear, I must hurry to those mountains of myrrh[§] and frankincense. ⁷ You are incredibly beautiful, my darling—you are absolutely flawless!

⁸ Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come from Lebanon.* Come down from the peak of Amana, from the peaks of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains where leopards live. ⁹ You have stolen my heart, my sister,[†] my bride. With just one look you stole my heart, with just one sparkle from a single one of your necklaces. ¹⁰ How wonderful is your love, my sister, my bride! Your love is sweeter than wine. The way you smell from your perfumed oils is better than any spice. ¹¹ Nectar drips from your lips; milk and honey are under your tongue. The smell of your clothes is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

¹² My sister, my bride, is a locked garden, a spring of water that is closed, a fountain that is sealed. ¹³ Your channel[‡] is a paradise of pomegranates, full of the best fruits, with

§ 4:6 See 1:13. * 4:8 It is thought that Lebanon is used symbolically here (together with the other locations mentioned) as remote and inaccessible. † 4:9 “My sister”: this is a term of endearment and not to be taken literally. Some commentators believe this also applies to the term “bride” which is only used in this section of the book. ‡ 4:13 Continuing the metaphor of a spring and fountain.

henna and nard, § 14 nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all kinds of trees producing frankincense, myrrh, aloes, and the finest spices. 15 You are a garden fountain, a well of living water, a flowing stream from Lebanon.*

Woman:

16 Wake up, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow on my garden so its scent may be carried on the breeze. Let my love come to his garden and eat its best fruits.

5

Man:

1 I enter my garden, my sister, my bride! I gather myrrh with my spice. I eat my honeycomb with my honey. I drink wine with my milk. Let us eat our fill of love! Let us be drunk with love!*

Woman:

2 Though I was asleep, my mind† was racing. I heard my love knocking, and calling out, “Please open the door, my sister, my darling, my dove,

§ 4:13 “Henna and nard”: two exotic perfumes. * 4:15 Some commentators believe that in contrast to the images of verse 12 that speak of a sealed fountain that what was once locked is now open. Others believe that this is now the words of the woman and should begin with “I am...” (No verb is supplied in the Hebrew.) * 5:1 Some take this last line as being spoken by the women of Jerusalem, in which case it could be translated, “Friends, eat and drink, and become drunk with love.” † 5:2 “Mind”: literally, “heart,” but in Hebrew the heart is primarily the source of thought. Emotions are more often located in the bowels. (See e.g. KJV for Genesis 43:30; Lamentations 1:20 etc. and even in this very chapter—verse 4, translated here as “deep inside.”)

my perfect love. My head is soaked with dew, my hair is wet from the night mist.”

³ I replied,[‡] “I’ve already got undressed. I don’t have to get dressed again, do I? I’ve already washed my feet. I don’t have to make them dirty again, do I?” ⁴ My love thrust his hand into the opening. Deep inside I longed for him. ⁵ I got up to let my love in. My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, as I grabbed the handles of the bolt. ⁶ I opened up to my love, but he had left—he was gone! I was crushed as a result.[§] I looked for him but I couldn’t find him. I called him but he didn’t answer. ⁷ The watchmen found me as they went through the city. They beat me, they hurt me, and stole my cloak, those watchmen of the walls. ⁸ Women of Jerusalem, promise me if you find my love and wonder what you should tell him, tell him I am weak with love.

Women of Jerusalem:

⁹ Why is the one you love better than any other, most beautiful of women? In what way is the one you love better than any other that we should promise you that?

Woman:

¹⁰ My love has dazzling good looks and is very fit—better than ten thousand others! ¹¹ His head is like the finest gold*, his hair is wavy and black

[‡] 5:3 Implied. [§] 5:6 “As a result”: literally, “when he spoke,” but this makes no sense since the text has already stated that he was gone. ^{*} 5:11 It is unsure as to what comparison is being made—some believe it is to a bronzed complexion, others to some valued beauty.

as the raven. ¹² His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, washed with milk and mounted like sparkling jewels.† ¹³ His cheeks are like a flowerbed of spices that produces‡ fragrance. His lips are like lilies, dripping with liquid myrrh. ¹⁴ His arms are round bars of gold inlaid with jewels. His abdomen is like carved ivory inlaid with lapis lazuli.§ ¹⁵ His legs are columns of alabaster set on bases of gold. He looks strong, like the mighty cedars of Lebanon. ¹⁶ His mouth is the sweetest ever; he is totally desirable! This is my love, my friend, women of Jerusalem.

6

Women of Jerusalem:

¹ So where has your love gone, most beautiful of women? Which direction did he go so we can look for him with you?

Woman:

² My love has gone down to his garden, to his flowerbeds of spices. He enjoys feeding* in the gardens and plucks lilies. ³ I am my love's, and my love is mine! He is the one who feeds among the lilies.

Man:

⁴ You are beautiful, my darling, as pretty as Tirzah, as lovely as Jerusalem—you look†

† **5:12** “Mounted like sparkling jewels”: or, “sitting beside pools.” ‡ **5:13** Septuagint reading. Hebrew “towers.” § **5:14** “Lapis lazuli”: sometimes translated “sapphires” but it seems these were unknown at the time. * **6:2** “Enjoys feeding”: The verb is literally “to pasture” or “to graze.” See 2:16. † **6:4** The word used here is the same as for the “looks” of the man in 5:10.

stunning! ⁵ Please turn your eyes away from me—they're driving me insane! Your hair flows down like a flock of goats descending Mount Gilead. ⁶ Your teeth are as white as a flock of sheep that are just shorn and washed. None of them are missing—they are all perfectly matched! ⁷ Your cheeks are the blushing color of pomegranates behind your veil. ⁸ There may be sixty queens and eighty concubines, and countless more women, ⁹ but my love, my perfect love, she's the only one! She's her mother's favorite, special to the one who gave birth to her. Young women see her and say how lucky she is; queens and concubines sing her praises.‡

¹⁰ Who is this who is like the dawn shining down from above, beautiful as the moon, bright as the shining sun? You look stunning!§ ¹¹ I went down to the walnut orchard to see if the trees were in leaf in the valley, to find out whether the grapevines had budded or the pomegranates were in bloom.

¹² I was so excited it was like I was riding in a royal chariot.* ¹³ Come back, come back, Shulammite woman; come back, come back, so we can look at you!†

‡ **6:9** Some see the following words as being the song of praise, but it seems just as probable to be the continuation of the man's speech. § **6:10** The same word is used as in 6:4. * **6:12**

The Hebrew of this verse is so obscure that the meaning is very unclear. Other possible translations among many could include: "I don't know how but I found myself in a nobleman's chariot with my love." Or "Before I knew it I was in a chariot beside a prince." † **6:13** Some see this line as spoken by the women of Jerusalem.

Woman:

Why do you want to look at the Shulammitte dancing the dance of two camps?‡

7*Man:*

¹ How beautiful are your sandaled feet, princess!* Your curved thighs are like ornaments made by a master craftsman. ² Your navel is like a round bowl—may it never lack spiced wine!† Your abdomen is like a mound of wheat surrounded by lilies. ³ Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. ⁴ Your neck is as elegant as a tower made of ivory. Your eyes shine like the pools of Heshbon by the Bathrabbin gate. Your nose is beautiful, prominent like the tower in Lebanon that faces Damascus. ⁵ Your head is as magnificent as Mount Carmel; your black hair has a purple sheen, as if a king‡ was held captive in your locks! ⁶ How beautiful you are, my love—how attractive are your charms! ⁷ You are as tall and slender as a palm tree; your breasts are like its clusters of fruit. ⁸ I tell myself, “I will climb the palm tree and take hold of the fruit.” May your breasts be like bunches of grapes on the vine, and your breath have the scent of apples! ⁹ May

‡ **6:13** “The dance of two camps”: meaning unclear. Some see it as a reference to the place name in Genesis 32:1-3 in which case it would be the “dance of Mahanaim,” but what this would indicate is unknown. * **7:1** “Princess”: literally, “daughter of a noble.” † **7:2** The meaning of this phrase is unclear. ‡ **7:5** Purple was the color of royalty.

your kisses§ be like the best wine, going down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth.*

Woman:

¹⁰ My love is mine, and I am the one he desires! ¹¹ Come, my love, let's go out into the countryside, and spend the night among the henna flowers.† ¹² Let's go early to the vineyards and see if the vines have budded and are in flower, and if the pomegranates are blossoming. There I will give my love to you. ¹³ The mandrakes‡ give off their fragrant scent; we are surrounded§ by all kinds of delights, new as well as old, which I have saved up for you, my love.

8

Woman:

¹ How I wish you were like a brother to me, one who nursed at my mother's breasts! Then if I met you on the street I could kiss you and no one would tell me off. ² Then I could take you home to my mother's house, where she used to teach me.* I would give you spiced wine to drink from the juice of my pomegranate. ³ He supports

§ 7:9 Literally, "mouth." * 7:9 "Over lips and teeth": as per some versions. Hebrew: "over lips of sleepers." † 7:11 "Henna flowers": or "villages." The same word "henna" is used in 1:14 and 4:13. It seems unlikely that they would wish to go to the villages if they wished to have privacy. ‡ 7:13 A plant thought to be an aphrodisiac and associated with fertility. See for example Genesis 30:14-16. § 7:13 "We are surrounded": literally, "over our doorways." * 8:2 Or "To the room of the one who bore me," paralleling 3:4.

my head with his left hand, and holds me close with his right. ⁴ Women of Jerusalem, swear to me that you won't disturb our love until the right time.

Women of Jerusalem:

⁵ Who is this coming in from the wilderness holding her love close to her?

Woman:

I woke you up under the apple tree where your mother conceived you, and where she gave birth to you.† ⁶ Stamp my name as a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm,‡ for love is strong as death, passion as unyielding as the grave—its arrows flash like fire, a blazing flame of the Lord. ⁷ Floods of water cannot extinguish love; rivers cannot submerge it. If a man offered everything he owned in order to buy love he would be completely rejected.

Woman's brothers:

⁸ We have a younger sister whose breasts are still small. What shall we do for our sister when someone asks to marry her? ⁹ If she is a wall, we will build a silver tower on it. But if she is a door, we will bar the way with cedar planks.§

Woman:

¹⁰ I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers.

† **8:5** What this means is unclear. ‡ **8:6** As an indication of ownership. § **8:9** Some take the image of the wall as representing virginity, and the door as someone who is promiscuous. In any case, the woman identifies herself as a wall in the following verse, indicating faithfulness in any case.

So when he looks at me he's happy!*

Woman:†

¹¹ Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon which he leased to tenant farmers. Each of them paid him one thousand silver coins for the fruit it produced. ¹² But I own my vineyard, it is mine alone. One thousand silver coins are for you, Solomon, and two hundred for those who look after it.

Man:

¹³ My darling, sitting there in the gardens with companions listening to you—please talk to me!

Woman:

¹⁴ Come quickly, my love! Be like a gazelle or a young deer on the mountains of spices.

* **8:10** Literally, “Then in his eyes I am as one who brings peace.” The woman is contradicting her brothers and is saying she is mature. † **8:10** Some believe the man is speaking the following verses.

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Language: English

Dialect: American

Translation by: Dr. Jonathan Gallagher

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2024-02-21

PDF generated using Haiola and XeLaTeX on 22 Feb 2024 from source files dated 21 Feb 2024
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