

## THE SHULAMITE THINKS OF HER ABSENT SHEPHERD

### **TEXT: SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-11**

#### **Introduction:**

1. There are three principal characters in the Song of Solomon. There is King Solomon; there is the Shulamite woman; and there is the shepherd to whom the Shulamite has given her heart.
2. The romance in the Song of Solomon centers on the mutual love of the shepherd and the Shulamite woman. The Shulamite is devoted to the shepherd, and whenever he is absent, she longs for him and is constantly looking for his coming.
3. King Solomon, in all his worldly pomp and power, makes every effort to impress the Shulamite and to draw her affections from her beloved shepherd to himself. The Song of Solomon is symbolic as well as historical. The Shulamite woman represents the church (or the individual believer), who is betrothed to Christ.
4. The shepherd is a picture of Christ, “the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (I Peter 2:25), who loves the Shulamite and is loved by her.
5. The shepherd is absent right now although He visits us, makes His presence real to us, and has promised to come again and to receive us unto Himself.
6. “We love him, because he first loved us” (I John 4:19). King Solomon represents the prince of this world with all his worldly pomp, power, and magnificence.
7. “Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them” (Matt. 4:8).
8. Some people object to this interpretation and ask how Solomon could write such an unflattering portrait of himself. But the Bible tells us that Solomon was a sensualist and a polygamist.
9. First Kings 11:3 says Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines and that his heathen wives led him into idolatry. The Bible tells us that “outlandish women” caused King Solomon to sin (Nehemiah 13:26).
10. With his large harem, King Solomon was no model of marital purity. Song of Solomon 6:8 says, “There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.”
11. King Solomon was a notorious philanderer. One day in his travels, he spotted the beautiful young Shulamite woman and gave orders for her to be taken to his pavilion.

12. Therefore Solomon represents the tempter, the enemy of our souls, who uses the allurements of this world in his efforts to seduce us from our loyalty to Christ.
13. “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11).
14. “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (II Cor. 2:11).
15. But whenever Solomon flatters the Shulamite woman, she begins to speak of her true love, the shepherd. By the close of the Song of Solomon, King Solomon has left, and the Shulamite is united with her shepherd and resting in his love (cf. 8:5a).

### **I. THE SHULAMITE THINKS OF HER ABSENT SHEPHERD**

1. As we begin our exposition of Song of Solomon, we see that the Shulamite woman is longing for the kisses of her shepherd-lover (1:2).
2. By a figure of speech known as enallage, a change is made from the third person to the second. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine” (1:2). When her shepherd is away the Shulamite speaks as if he were present.
3. Wine can be exhilarating but its stimulating effects are transient. Her shepherd’s love was far better because it was permanent (cf. 8:6, 7).
4. The Lord has promised us, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5; cf. Deut. 31:6).
5. Jesus said, “And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:20).
6. “For thy love is better than wine” (1:2). The Lord Jesus Christ is enough to satisfy the Spirit-filled believer. We do not need wine or worldly pleasures.
7. Hudson Taylor said the Shulamite’s yearnings speak of the Christian’s “desire for perceptible manifestations” of the Lord’s presence, and “perceptible communications of His love” (*Union and Communion*).
8. Though the Shulamite is in King Solomon’s pavilion, she wishes her shepherd were with her. She imagines that he is, telling him that his “love is better than wine” (1:2).
9. Again we are reminded of Christ’s great love for us. The apostle Paul said, “Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it” (Eph.

5:25). Paul says in Galatians 2:20 that Jesus loved him and gave Himself for him.

10. “Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee” (1:3).
  11. The Shulamite compares her shepherd’s virtues to fragrant ointment, and declares that this is why the other virgins love him (1:3).
  12. The shepherd makes a similar remark in 4:10 (cf. 1:2, 3). To the Shulamite these perfumed ointments symbolized her lover’s many virtues.
  13. The high priest was anointed with “a holy anointing oil.” Our good Shepherd is also our great high priest. Therefore, we can “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).
  14. The shepherd’s name was very dear to her – “thy name is as ointment poured forth” (1:3). “A good name is better than precious ointment” (Ecclesiastes 7:1).
  15. “Name” stands for all that a person is.
- “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).
  - “Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6).
  - “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:10).
  - “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).
  - “But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27).
  - “And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour” (Acts 16:18).
  - “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9).

- “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (I Corinthians 1:2).
  - “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Philippians 2:10).
16. The Bible speaks often of the name of Jesus, because His name represents His person, His majesty, His authority, etc.
  17. Our Lord’s name means “Saviour” (Matt. 1:21). The angel said to Mary, “And thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). God the Father hath given him a name which is above every name (Phil. 2:9).
  18. Jesus said in John 16:23, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you” (John 16:23).
  19. Paul said, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...” (Col. 3:17).
  20. Peter said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
    - “Jesus! Oh how sweet the name!
    - Jesus! Every day the same!
    - Jesus! Let all saints proclaim
    - Thy worthy praise for ever.” – W.C. Martin
  21. The costly perfumes that permeated the king’s palace could not compare with the sweet fragrance of the Shulamite’s beloved shepherd (1:3).
  22. The Shulamite knows that her shepherd is faithful and true to her. Though her shepherd is away and though the other virgins love him, she knows he is faithful and true and she longs for him to come and claim her as his own (1:4).
  23. The women of King Solomon’s court are referred to as the “daughters of Jerusalem” (1:5) and they function as a background chorus.
  24. They are much different from the Shulamite, who was a poor country girl. Perhaps King Solomon had instructed them to look out for the Shulamite.
  25. The Shulamite woman is evidently referring to these daughters of Jerusalem when she says in verse 4, “Draw me, we will run after thee...we will be glad...we will remember...”
  26. “Draw me...” (1:4) pictures the believer’s desire for close fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

“Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord,  
To the cross where Thou hast died.  
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,  
To Thy precious, bleeding side.” – Fanny Crosby

“The king hath brought me into his chambers” (1:4).

27. King Solomon had brought the Shulamite into his chambers and she wanted her shepherd to come and rescue her (1:4). Solomon probably wanted to add this beautiful young maiden to his harem, but this was against her will. She feels herself in peril, but knows the shepherd can save her. She calls out to him – “Draw me...” But how could a poor shepherd get through to the inner compartments of the king’s pavilion? We are not told, but at the end of the Song of Solomon we discover that the shepherd did in fact deliver her. Love found a way.

## **II. THE SHULAMITE TELLS THE COURT LADIES ABOUT HER SHEPHERD AND ABOUT HERSELF**

1. The court ladies were pale and well dressed. The Shulamite was a poor country girl, accustomed to working long hours out in the vineyards.
2. She was sun-burnt, and says, “I am black, but comely...” (1:5, 6). She knew she was “comely,” because the king had been showering her with attention (cf. 1:9, 10).
3. Furthermore, her beloved shepherd told her she was “fair” (2:10, 13).
4. Today many modern women spend their money in “tanning salons,” but this Shulamite had a dark complexion from working under the hot sun. “I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me” (1:6).
5. The “tents of Kedar” (1:5) refers to the tents of Arabic nomads, Bedouin tribes from northwest Arabia who lived in tents made from dark goatskins. The Shulamite’s skin was very dark from the sun and as “comely” as the lovely curtains in Solomon’s palace (1:5).
6. “My mother’s children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards...” (1:6). The Shulamite lived with her mother (cf. 3:4; 6:9; 8:2, 5).
7. Since no mention is made of her father, he is presumed to be dead. Her brothers (“my mother’s children” – 1:6) may

have been her half brothers, children of the same mother but not the same father. They had been angry with her and made her the keeper of the vineyards.

8. Perhaps they did this to keep her away from her shepherd. Allow me to make an application here. Often a Christian's stiffest opposition comes from members of his own family. Jesus said, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matthew 10:36).
9. "...but mine own vineyard have I not kept" (1:6). The Shulamite was so busy taking care of the vineyards; she had no time to take care of her own physical appearance.
10. Nevertheless, she was the "fairest among women" (1:8). She was "black (sun burnt), but comely" (1:5).
11. King Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon, and "he let out the vineyard unto keepers" (8:11). Apparently the Shulamite's father was dead. Perhaps she, her brothers, and their little sister (8:8) worked the vineyard for King Solomon.
12. The interpretation is simple enough, and so is the application. Spurgeon said, "It is shocking to find men and women speaking fluently about religion, and yet their houses are a disgrace to Christianity. I suppose that none of you are as bad as that; but, if it be so, please spell this text over: 'they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard have I not kept.' The most careful and prayerful father cannot be held accountable for having wicked sons, if he has done his best to instruct them. The most anxious and tearful mother cannot be blamed if her daughter dishonors the family, provided her mother has done her best to train her up in the right way. But if the parents cannot say that they have done their best, and their children go astray, then they are blameworthy."
13. "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth..." (1:7). After talking to the ladies in Solomon's court, the Shulamite's thoughts wander once again to her lover (1:7).
14. Clearly the shepherd is her beloved, not the king who had brought her into his chambers (1:4). She wonders where her beloved shepherd is feeding his flock, and where he will be resting his flock at noon (1:7).
15. Shepherds often travelled long distances to pasture their flocks. The Shulamite was hoping she could go out and look for her beloved.

16. The Shulamite yearned to hear from her beloved shepherd. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?” (Psalm 42:1-3).
17. “For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?” (1:7b). The Shulamite was faithful to her beloved shepherd. “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (2:16).
18. “Turning aside from Christ after other lovers is that which gracious souls dread, and deprecate, more than any thing else” (Matthew Henry).
19. “If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock...” (1:8). The court ladies appear to be sarcastic in their response (1:8). Their taunt, “feed thy kids” (1:8) indicates that the Shulamite was a shepherdess.
20. The daughters of Jerusalem could not understand why the Shulamite would prefer her lowly shepherd to the rich and worldly king Solomon. And so they mock her – “Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock...” (1:8).
21. This is exactly what the Shulamite wanted to do. If her shepherd could not come to her rescue, hopefully she would be free to go out and look for him (1:8; cf. 1:4a).

### **III. KING SOLOMON TRIES TO WOO THE SHULAMITE (1:9).**

1. King Solomon speaks for the first time in verse 9. The Shulamite has been captured by Solomon and is virtually his prisoner. So far she has strengthened herself by keeping the thought of her beloved first and foremost in her mind. But now the powerful king tries to woo her (1:9-11).
2. He uses flattery and smooth words. He praises her beauty and promises to adorn her with beautiful jewelry (1:9-11). His offers are reminiscent of the offers of the world. Here Solomon represents Satan, who tempts us with glittering toys and worldly enticements. Satan dazzles; he deceives; and he destroys.
3. The Shulamite woman represents the meek and humble believer who is unimpressed with King Solomon’s worldly offers. “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting

the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (I Peter 3:3, 4).

4. “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (Proverbs 31:10).
5. Solomon speaks, not as a humble shepherd, but as a haughty king. He appeals to the flesh and stirs “the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (I John 2:16).
6. Satan is the prince of this world and he tries to seduce Christians away from Christ. To strong Christians, Satan’s enticements seem foolish – for example, Solomon compared the lovely Shulamite to a company of horses pulling Pharaoh’s chariot (1:9).
7. Many wealthy monarchs consider their horses far more valuable than their wives. Several hundred years before the birth of Solomon and his father King David, it was supposed that the people of Israel would, in the process of time, desire a king, “whose royal pomp and power would be thought to make their nation look great among their neighbors” (Matthew Henry).
8. The Lord graciously permitted the Israelites to have a king if that is what they desired, but He told Samuel the prophet they were wrong in wanting one (cf. I Sam. 8:7; Hosea 8:4).
9. Deuteronomy 17:16 says the king, “shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.”
10. King Solomon clearly disobeyed that commandment. “Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt” (I Kings 10:28). King Solomon “had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen” (I Kings 4:26).
11. In King Solomon’s day, Egyptian horses were greatly admired for their beauty. But the king’s compliments could not pull the young maiden away from her devotion to her shepherd. In like manner we must not let Satan’s flatteries deceive us.
12. Deuteronomy 17:17 also says the king should not multiply wives, as Solomon did to his undoing (cf. 1 Kings 11:1). We note that the Shulamite does not respond to King Solomon.
13. “The world offers the church and the individual Christian its patronage with promises of prestige, power, and pleasure if only they will fall in with its way of life instead of walking in



the path of separation from it (II Cor. 6:14—7:1). Harnessed to the world's social or political, commercial or ecclesiastical chariot, no spiritual liberty can be enjoyed. The controlling hands of worldly 'charioteers' will be upon the reins! If it were not for the absence of our Beloved there would be less opportunity to prove our fidelity to Him" (Arthur G. Clarke, *The Song of Songs*).

14. Remember what our Lord said to the church at Ephesus, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4).
15. King Solomon wanted to adorn the simple Shulamite woman with costly jewels and chains of gold (1:10). "Solomon is praising not so much the natural beauty of the Shulamite as the trinkets he has set upon her. He thinks he has greatly improved upon her natural loveliness. The world cannot appreciate the unadorned beauty of the Church. Take him to a simple prayer meeting where some believers are gathered at the throne of grace and he will find nothing attractive...The world will at once want to improve and embellish. It will suggest a better meeting place, a more elaborate ritual, some gorgeous vestments, or orchestrated music. The early Church, in the days of its pristine power, managed with none of these things" (John Phillips, *Exploring the Song of Solomon*).
16. Furthermore, King Solomon offered to add "borders of gold with studs of silver" (1:11). The church does not need the world's embellishments. Our treasure is in heaven. We can appreciate beautiful things, but we should be far more concerned with living for God.
17. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

"I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold;  
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;  
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands,  
I'd rather be led by His nail pierced hand.

Than to be a king of a vast domain  
Or be held in sin's dread sway,  
I'd rather have Jesus than anything  
This world affords today." – Rhea F. Miller

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. The devil allures us with silver and gold and the riches of this world. The devil said to Jesus, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:9).
2. Our Lord did not yield to Satan’s temptations. Neither did the Shulamite. And neither must we.