

# BIBLICAL LOVE

## **TEXT: SONG OF SOLOMON 1:12—2:7**

### **Introduction:**

1. Last week we stopped off at verse 11. The lovely Shulamite was being kept in King Solomon's palace (1:4), but she was yearning for her shepherd (1:7).
2. The court ladies taunted the Shulamite, saying, "If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents" (1:8).
3. The court ladies function as a background chorus in this wonderful love song. They are part of King Solomon's large harem, and they wonder why the Shulamite does not join with them.
4. The daughters of Jerusalem could not understand why the Shulamite would prefer her lowly shepherd to the rich and worldly king Solomon.
5. And so they mock her – "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock..." (1:8).
6. 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).
7. Then in verses 9-11, King Solomon tries to woo the Shulamite.
8. This brings us to 1:12, where we see the king sitting at his table.
9. Meanwhile, the Shulamite continues to describe her great love for her shepherd (1:12-14).

### **I. IT WAS A FRAGRANT LOVE**

1. "While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof" (1:12).
2. The Shulamite calls her beloved shepherd "my spikenard" (1:12). Her soul was alive with the lingering fragrance of his love. She could not forget him even if she had wanted to.
3. Notice the words, "spikenard...myrrh...cluster of camphire...cedar...fir" (1:12-17).
4. These are all words which denote a fragrant love. Arthur G. Clarke said, "While he is occupied with his duties in the world, the believer's moral and spiritual character should always be sending forth a fragrance of Christ" (*The Song of Songs*).

5. Spikenard was an aromatic oil extracted from a plant which grew in India. It was a rare and costly perfume. Mary of Bethany gave spikenard as her gift of love to the Lord Jesus shortly before He went to the cross (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8).
6. Spikenard and myrrh are connected in Scripture with death and burial. Once again we are reminded that the shepherd represents the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Shulamite woman represents the church. It is the sacrificial death and burial of Christ that makes Him precious to us (cf. Mark 14:3-9).
7. John 12:3 says that when Mary anointed our Lord with the spikenard, “the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.” It was a beautiful fragrance that filled the house. Our love for Jesus should be a beautiful fragrance that should fill your house and my house.
8. “A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me (1:13a). “Bundle” (1:13) refers to a scent bag that was worn in the bosom and suspended from the neck by a silk thread. Perhaps this bundle was given to her by her beloved shepherd.
9. As believers devoted to our great shepherd, we are to “put on Christ.”
10. “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).
11. The Shulamite compares her beloved to this sweet sachet, which was always close to her heart. “Myrrh” means “bitter” and reminds us of our Lord’s substitutionary death on the cruel cross of Calvary.

“Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume  
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
Sealed in the stone cold tomb.” – John H. Hopkins, Jr.

12. The Shulamite compared her beloved to “a bundle of myrrh” (1:13).
13. Like spikenard, myrrh was a fragrant perfume. It was extracted from an Arabian balsam and was widely used both at weddings and funerals in that part of the world.
14. When we think about myrrh we are reminded of the gifts of the wise men – gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Since myrrh

was used for preparing bodies for the grave, it was an appropriate gift for a baby born to die.

15. Myrrh represents our Lord's vicarious death. Christ willingly took our place on the cross so that we might escape the wages of sin.
16. The sweet smell of the myrrh reminded the Shulamite of her beloved. She even slept with it close to her heart in prospect of their coming wedding day (1:13).
17. "My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi" (1:14). The Hebrew word translated "camphire" in 1:14 and 4:13 means, "ransom, satisfaction, bribe, pitch, sum of money" (*Strong's Concordance*).
18. Matthew Henry said, "The word translated *camphire* is *copher*, the same word that signifies *atonement* or *propitiation*. Christ is *a cluster* of merit and righteousness to all believers; *therefore* he is dear to them because *he is the propitiation for their sins*."
19. The same word is translated "pitch" in Genesis 6:14. "Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch."
20. Those inside the ark were covered – they were safe from the judgment of Christ. The ark was a beautiful picture of Christ.
21. The Shulamite says that her beloved is like "a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi" (1:14). En-gedi, situated on the west shore of the Red Sea, was a fertile region well known for its vineyards and aromatic shrubs.
22. Solomon's father David had fled to En-gedi while running away from King Saul (I Sam. 23:29; 24:1).
23. Camphire was an aromatic plant. *Unger's Bible Dictionary* says camphire "is the henna plant. It is cultivated everywhere in the Holy Land. Its clusters of cream-colored flowers are much admired by the Orientals, and form a part of almost every nosegay (bouquet) during the flowering season."
24. So we can see that the love the Shulamite had for her beloved shepherd was a fragrant love. And the love the church has for the Lord Jesus Christ is a fragrant love.

## II. IT WAS A SWEET LOVE

1. “A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me... My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire...Behold, thou art fair, my beloved...” (1:13-16).
2. The Shulamite refers to the shepherd as her “beloved” (1:13, 14, 16; 2:3). She uses the term twenty-five times, and others use it seven times. The Shulamite also refers to “thou whom my soul loveth” (1:7; 3:1-4). All these references are to the shepherd, and never to King Solomon.
3. It is very clear that the Shulamite is talking in 1:12, 13, and 14, and that she continues speaking in verses 16 and 17.
4. Furthermore, it is clear that the Shulamite is being addressed in 1:15.
5. The question is, who is speaking in verse 15? Is it the shepherd or is it King Solomon?
6. Some commentators believe that the shepherd is talking. They say he came to the king’s palace to see his Shulamite. But this seems unlikely. It seems more likely that King Solomon is trying once again to woo the Shulamite (1:15; cf. 1:9-11).
7. “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes” (1:15). King Solomon is extolling the Shulamite’s great beauty and comparing her eyes to those of a dove (1:15). In the Bible, the dove represents gentleness and peace.
8. Our Lord said, “Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).
9. After the flood, it was a dove which brought the olive leaf back to Noah (Gen. 8:11), an evident sign that God’s wrath had been assuaged and that all was now well on the planet. When our Lord was baptized in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove (Matt. 3:16).
10. The Shulamite begins talking about her shepherd again in 1:16. “Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed is green” (1:16).
11. Whenever King Solomon would attempt to entice her she would start talking about her beloved shepherd.
12. “Our bed is green” (1:16) refers to the great outdoors as their house – the grass as her bed, with the overhanging cedar and fir branches as their roof (1:16, 17).

13. This forms an interesting contrast with King Solomon's ornate palace. The Shulamite has not yet married her shepherd; she is anticipating their wedding.
14. Soon her beloved shepherd would come and take her to his home. And soon our beloved shepherd will return for us. "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Peter 5:4).
15. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2b, 3).
16. "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys" (2:1). There is a popular Gospel song called "The Lily of the Valley."

"I have found a friend in Jesus, He's everything to me,  
 He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul;  
 The Lily of the Valley, in Him alone I see  
 All I need to cleanse and make me fully whole.  
 In sorrow He's my comfort, in trouble He's my stay;  
 He tells me every care on Him to roll.  
 He's the Lily of the Valley, the Bright and Morning Star,  
 He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul." – Charles W. Fry

17. It is a nice song but the words are not entirely Biblical. For example, it is "the lily of the valleys" (Song of Solomon 2:1).
18. Secondly, the "lily of the valleys" is not a reference to Christ. The Shulamite is talking in 2:1. She is the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys (2:1, 2).

"There the Red Rose of Sharon  
 Unfolds its heartsome bloom,  
 And fills the air of Heaven  
 With ravishing perfume:—  
 Oh! to behold it blossom,  
 While by its fragrance fann'd,  
 Where glory—glory dwelleth  
 In Immanuel's land." – from a poem inspired by the letters and last words of Samuel Rutherford, by Mrs. A. R. Cousin

19. Though her love for the shepherd was a sweet love, the Shulamite often saw herself as plain and unworthy (2:1).

20. The rose here in 2:1 should not be confused with the beautiful roses we are accustomed to seeing. The Shulamite is referring to wild flowers that grew in the fields of Israel.
21. “The Hebrew refers to the flower of some bulbous plant such as the narcissus or meadow saffron, both common in parts of Palestine” (Clarke, *The Song of Songs*).
22. King Solomon probably heard what the Shulamite said, and so he compliments her by telling her that she is “as the lily among thorns” compared to the other young maidens (2:2).
23. Thorns are a sign of God’s curse upon the ground because of man’s sin. “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee” (Genesis 3:17, 18a).
24. Thorns do not bear fruit. They hinder God’s people and will someday be destroyed. “But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place” (II Samuel 23:6, 7).
25. “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters” (2:2). The women of Solomon’s court wore expensive gowns and jewelry, but to King Solomon they were as unsightly thorns (2:2; cf. Matt. 6:28, 29).
26. The Shulamite talks again in 2:3 and she compares her beloved shepherd to an apple tree – “his fruit was sweet to my taste.” Theirs was a sweet love. Our love for Christ should be sweet. If it is not then something is wrong and we need to make it right.

“Yes, ‘tis sweet to trust in Jesus,  
 Just from sin and self to cease;  
 Just from Jesus simply taking  
 Life, and rest, and joy, and peace.” – Louisa M. R. Stead

27. Life, and rest, and joy, and peace can only be found in Christ.
28. The Shulamite “sat down under his shadow with great delight” (2:3). Sitting down signifies rest. Sitting down “with great delight” signifies joy and peace.

29. Jesus said, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11).

### III. IT WAS A COMFORTING LOVE

1. Theirs was a fragrant love, and a sweet love, and also it was a comforting love. “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love” (2:4).
2. The Shulamite felt that to be with her beloved shepherd was like being in a “banqueting house” (2:4). At that time King Solomon was feasting at his big dinner table (cf. 1:12). The shepherd could not provide a banquet such as Solomon was accustomed to, but what he could set before the Shulamite was better because of their great love for each other.
3. Flapping over King Solomon’s pavilion were his big and colorful banners. The Hebrew word usually refers to an army’s banner or standard (6:4, 10; cf. Numbers 1:52; Psalm 20:5).
4. But the Shulamite had a banner which meant more to her than any banner in King Solomon’s palace – “his banner over me was love” (2:4).

“The Lord is mine and I am His, His banner over me is love,  
He brought me to His banqueting table, His banner over me is love...”

5. “Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.” (2:5, 6).
6. “Stay me (strengthen me) with flagons (raisin cakes).” The Shulamite was overwhelmed with love for her shepherd. Longing for his company had brought her to the point of physical exhaustion (2:5, 6).
7. “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12).
8. The Shulamite misses her beloved shepherd and wishes he were there to comfort her and embrace her. “His right hand doth embrace me” (2:6b).
9. The Bible has much to say about the right hand of God. There are scores of references in both the Old and New Testament.
  - “Thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy” (Exodus 15:6).

- “At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11).
  - “Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139:10).
  - “These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand” (Rev. 2:1).
  - “And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne” (Rev. 5:7).
10. If the shepherd did actually visit her in the palace, then 2:6 should be understood literally.
  11. More than likely though she is so overwhelmed with thoughts of her beloved that it is as if he were actually with her, holding and embracing her.
  12. “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: (I Peter 1:8).
  13. “I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please” (2:7; cf. 3:5; 8:4).
  14. “Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love” (Proverbs 5:19).
  15. Apparently these worldly court women were trying to arouse (“stir up”) the young Shulamite’s passions. Perhaps they wanted her to acquiesce and yield to Solomon’s advances. But she had already given her heart to her beloved shepherd, and all her love was reserved for him.
  16. These court ladies had apparently already yielded to the king’s solicitations, and now they wanted the virtuous Shulamite maiden to join with them.
  17. “Roes” (2:7) are referred to seven times in the Song of Solomon (cf. 2:9, 17; 3:5; 4:5; 7:3; 8:14).
  18. They are known for being swift. The “hinds” (2:7; cf. 3:5) were known for being sure-footed.
    - “Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe” (II Samuel 2:18).
    - “The Gadites...were as swift as the roes upon the mountains” (I Chronicles 12:8).
    - “Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter” (Proverbs 6:5a).
    - “Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words” (Genesis 49:21).



- “He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet: and setteth me upon my high places” (II Samuel 22:34; cf. Psalm 18:33).
  19. The roes and the hinds are swift to escape danger, and with God’s help so would the young Shulamite maiden. Worldly people will try and tempt us to do things that are not right but we must remain faithful to our beloved shepherd.
  20. “Constant meditation upon the excellencies of our Beloved will preserve us from succumbing to the enticements of the world” (Clarke, *The Song of Songs*).

**CONCLUSION:**

“Be this, while life is mine, my canticle divine:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Sing this eternal song through all the ages long:

May Jesus Christ be praised!” – translated from German to English by Edward Caswall