

NOTES ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON (1:12-14)

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The Banquet (1:2-2:7)

[The Shulamite. Here for the first time the Shulamite addresses Solomon, who is before her. As expected, she expresses her joy at being face-to-face with him as she sits at his table. (It may be objected that ancient Israelites did not sit at tables while eating, but rather reclined on divans around the food. "... it is to be remarked that not till the Greek-Roman period was the Persian custom of reclining at table introduced, but in earlier times they sat (1 Samuel 20:5; 1 Kings 13:20; cf. Psalm 128:3). Reclining and eating are to be viewed as separate from each other, Amos 6:4 ..." [Keil and Delitzsch Commentary].)]

1:12 While the king is at his table, ...

1. This "king" is Christ, "King of the saints" (Revelation 15:3). His church knows Him not only as her *Husband*, but also as her *Lord*. She therefore submits to His authority and obeys His every command.
2. This table is "*his table*" – the table of Christ the King. Various tables in the Holy Scriptures are thusly identified:
 - i. The table of the gospel, provided by Christ the Divine Wisdom (Proverbs 9:1-6): "1 Wisdom has built her house, ...; 2 she has slaughtered her meat, she has mixed her wine, she has also furnished her table. 3 She has sent out her maidens, she cries out from the highest places of the city, 4 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, 5 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding.'"
 - 1) An allusion to this table is made by Christ in Isaiah 55:1-2: "1 Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance."
 - 2) All who come to this table will afterward come to ...
 - ii. The table of the Lord's Supper, called "the *Lord's table*" (1 Corinthians 10:21). Saints here partake of Christ by eating the bread representing His body broken for them and by drinking the wine representing His blood shed for their salvation (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). All who partake of this table will at last come to ...

- iii. The table of the "the marriage supper of the Lamb", in heaven at the last day (Revelation 19:9). Again, and forever, saints at this table will partake of Christ. While all three of these tables are rightly called Christ's table, this last one best fits the occasion here described. The Shulamite here speaks of having already come to this table, for she says that at it ...

.... **My spikenard sends forth its fragrance.** | *Spikenard* is the very aromatic oil derived from the plant named *nard*, which is like a *spike* in shape. This oil has been used for centuries as a perfume and an incense.

1. The Shulamite here speaks of "*my spikenard*". It is hers because Christ planted it in her, along with many other plants (4:12-14): "12 A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, 13 Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, 14 spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices." All these fruits and spices and flowers speak of the sweet and fragrant blessings of Christ to His church.
2. Her spikenard "sends forth its fragrance" because it is on her breath or she anoints Christ with it. Two other women in the gospels honored Christ by anointing Him with spikenard:
 - i. "Mary [of Bethany] took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard [and] anointed the feet of Jesus" (John 12:3);
 - ii. "a woman [unidentified by name] came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head" (Mark 14:3).

1:13 A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts. | Note that the scene has changed from Christ's *table* to His *bedroom*. *Myrrh* is a very aromatic natural gum or resin extracted from many tree species, most being small and thorny. This resin is bled from the tree when the tree is cut to its sapwood. These drops of resin become hard when they dry. Myrrh was expensive (implied by being given as a gift by the magi in Matthew 2:11). Myrrh was used as incense, in the holy anointing oil of the tabernacle (Exodus 30:23ff), as a pain killer when mixed with wine (Mark 15:23), and as perfume (Psalm 45:8; Proverbs 7:17; Solomon 3:6) – as in the present instance. Women would place a pouch filled with dried myrrh drops in their bosom. This is what the Shulamite calls a "bundle of myrrh ... between my breasts". (Since the trees from which myrrh comes are usually thorny, a woman would not place of bundle of their sprigs in her bosom.)

1. Christ's wife calls Him "my *beloved*" ("wellbeloved" in KJV). He is not only beloved by her, but also her beloved – her *well*-beloved, her *best*-beloved, her *only*-beloved. Christ has no rival in the heart of His church.
2. Christ's wife calls Him "a bundle of *myrrh*". He fits this description. Christ is fragrant as myrrh!
 - i. He is "perfumed with myrrh" even when He comes out of the wilderness (Solomon 3:6).
 - ii. "His lips are ... dripping liquid myrrh" (Solomon 5:13).
 - 1) His *breath* is fragrant, for "His mouth is most sweet" (Solomon 5:16) and He never has halitosis. The face-to-face relationship with Christ is a sweet experience from which no one should desire to turn away.
 - 2) His *speech* is fragrant, for "grace is poured upon Your lips" (Psalm 45:2). This is true when He preaches the gospel of grace, teaches the doctrine of grace, and speaks graciously and gracefully to sinners.
 - 3) His *kiss* is fragrant – for which reason His wife says "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth" (Solomon 1:2).
 - iii. "All Your garments are scented with myrrh" (Psalm 45:8).
 - 1) Christ's "garments" include:
 - i) the *plain mantle* He wears as our *Prophet* (see that of "course hair" in Zechariah 13:4, that of "camel's hair" in Matthew 3:14, that of "sackcloth" in Isaiah 20:2);
 - ii) the *beautiful ephod* He wears as our *Priest* (see multi-colored and artistically woven linen outer garment worn by Aaron in Exodus 25:5f);
 - iii) the *royal robe* He wears as our *King* (as in Revelation 19:16).
-- All Christ's garments are fragrant as myrrh, not merely *some* of them.
 - 2) Christ is delightful not only when He is *heard* and *seen*, but also when He is *smelled*. Many a woman, having been attracted to a handsome man with a pleasant voice, and having approached him in order to become better acquainted with him, could not bear to be close to him because his garments reeked of an unpleasant odor. Not so with Christ's wife. She smells Him and draws Him to her bosom.
 - iv. Christ's fragrance came from His blood when He was pierced on Calvary – just as the fragrant myrrh is extracted from a tree when it is cut. And as myrrh was *expensive*, so do we speak of "the *precious* blood of Christ", which is more valuable than silver and gold (1 Peter 1:18f).

3. Christ's wife calls Him "a bundle of myrrh ... *that lies all night between my breasts*".
 - i. Christ lies "between [her] breasts". She has embraced Him and drawn Him to her bosom as a token of her love to Him. Contrarily, false religion has fornicators between her breasts (Hosea 2:2).
 - ii. Christ lies between her breasts "all night". He will not desert her. She will not desert Him. Christ perfectly exemplifies the proverb "rejoice with the wife of your youth. ... let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love" (Proverb 5:19).

- 1:14** *My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi.* | This verse continues the thought of the preceding. (The plant here called *henna* is called *camphire* in KJV.) *Henna blooms* are the flowers of a tree used since antiquity to dye skin, hair and fingernails, as well as fabrics including silk, wool and leather. It was grown "in the vineyards of En Gedi" (pronounced *en'ge-dī* or *en-gē'dī*), a town in the wilderness of Judah on the western shore of the Dead Sea. (It was here that David sought refuge from Saul when he sought to kill David [1 Samuel 23:15-29].) En Gedi is the only place in southern Palestine mentioned in this Song; all other places mentioned are in northern localities except Heshbon, which is in eastern Palestine.
1. This "cluster of henna blooms" speaks of Christ as the *ransom* and *covering* for His church.
 - i. Christ is the *ransom* for His church. The Hebrew translated *henna* or *camphire* (*kôpher*) is generally translated *ransom* (Exodus 30:12; Numbers 35:31, 32; Job 33:24; 36:18; Psalm 49:7; Proverb 6:35 [KJV]; 13:8; 21:8; Isaiah 43:3; see also "sum of money" in 21:30). God uses this Hebrew word in expressly calling Christ the gracious ransom for convicted sinners (Job 33:24): "Then He is gracious to him, and says, 'Deliver him from going down to the Pit; I have found a ransom [Hebrew *kôpher*].'"
 - ii. Christ is the *covering* for His church. As henna was used as a dye to cover the undesirable gray hairs of old people, so is Christ the covering that hides the sins of His people. For His people declare, "I will greatly rejoice in Jehovah, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for ... He has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10). And Christ Himself is the covering righteousness (Philippians 3:9).
 2. Christ's church declares Christ to be her righteousness and covering in saying "My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms." Do you? Or would you instead have God see you in your uncovered sins and having no desire to be ransomed?