

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Song of Solomon 6:4-12

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, January 10, 2016

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, January 10, 2015**, is from **Song of Solomon 6:4-12**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the **International Bible Lesson Forum**.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Song of Solomon 6:4-12

(Song of Solomon 6:4) You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.

The Song of Solomon or Song of Songs (meaning the greatest of songs) celebrates human love and may have been written by King Solomon, or by someone else when Solomon was king and in his honor. The love song has been interpreted in various ways. Throughout the centuries, it has sometimes been interpreted as an expression of God's love for Israel or Christ's love for the Church. Characters in the story include King Solomon, a shepherd, a shepherdess, and a chorus. The love story celebrates true love; for example, the love Adam and Eve enjoyed as God intended from the beginning and the love of Jacob for Rachel. The story reveals the development of human love, the dreams of lovers before they are married, and some blessings of marriage. The Song of Solomon teaches the Biblical standard of marriage from courtship (including eager expectations), to marriage, and to the consummation of marriage.

For a short time following King Solomon's death, beautiful Tirzah became the capital of the Kingdom of Israel, while Jerusalem with the temple remained the capital of the Kingdom of Judah. Since both beautiful cities are named, many believe the Song of Solomon was written during King Solomon's lifetime. Imagine how a humble shepherd from the hills would feel upon seeing from a distance and then entering either of these great cities for the first time. From within his culture, he would describe his lover in

ways that might seem strange to us. He feels such awe when he looks upon the beauty of his lover and has such respect for her that he compares his experience to seeing his king's army with their banners flying marching out to protect the city.

(Song of Solomon 6:5) Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me! Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead.

When the shepherd looks into his lover's eyes, they have a powerful magnetic attraction and put a spell upon him. Her lovely eyes pull her more deeply into his heart as he thinks of their coming marriage. Imagine a shepherd watching a flock of goats descending a hill, a common sight for him. He uses his shepherding experiences to describe the beauty that he sees in her long flowing dark hair (many goats were black).

(Song of Solomon 6:6) Your teeth are like a flock of ewes, that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved.

As in the time of Jacob, many sheep were white, and the shepherd describes the perfect beauty of his lover and idealizes her using images familiar to him. Her teeth are as white as a flock of freshly washed white sheep and they glisten when she smiles. Her perfect teeth are in perfect alignment and rows with none missing (which might say

something about the lack of good dental care at that time for many other people).

(Song of Solomon 6:7) Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.

Some translations interpret the Hebrew as either “temples” or “cheeks.” What he can see of her behind her veil, he describes as a blushing red or the red of cosmetics, similar to the red color of pomegranates on the inside (a refreshing fruit).

(Song of Solomon 6:8) There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number.

When the shepherd imagines the beauty of all the queens and their maids in the court of a king, he admires the beauty of his betrothed and considers her more lovely than any other woman.

(Song of Solomon 6:9) My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her. The maidens saw her and called her happy; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her.

His beloved floods his heart with perfect peace, represented by a beautiful dove. She is perfect in every way. She is as perfect as a “pure child” (NASB). She is “undefiled” (KJV). No woman is like her (the reason some compare Mary, the mother of Jesus, to her). Such is his

deep love for her that he says of his beloved that she is the favorite of her mother and to her mother she is as an only daughter compared to others. [As he imagines???] even the queens in a royal court [would] praise her and consider her blessed or happy. Or, King Solomon knows all the women in his court praise his newest queen and consider her happy, which seems unlikely to me???

(Song of Solomon 6:10) “Who is this that looks forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners?”

The shepherd continues to describe his beloved as one who brings him joy in the morning, joy during the day, and joy in the evening every time he thinks of her. She is his first thought at dawn. When he looks at the beautiful moon as he watches his sheep, he considers her as fair as the moon. He imagines the bright expression of her face when she sees him. Unlike some other translations that repeat the image of an army with banners, the NIV continues with the celestial imagery of stars in procession (perhaps constellations marching across heaven). She is as majestic as the heavenly constellations. The shepherd elevates her far above himself and all others in her glorious splendor.

(Song of Solomon 6:11) I went down to the nut orchard, to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom.

The ESV introduces verses 11 and 12 as the action and words of the shepherdess: “She.” Not having a modern calendar, perhaps the wedding was planned for the time of “new growth in the valley,” a time for “new beginnings.” Perhaps they would be wed when the pomegranates were in bloom, so she went into the valley to see if the pomegranates were in bloom and think about her wedding day.

(Song of Solomon 6:12) Before I was aware, my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince.

King Solomon was known for his horses and chariots, but even as her lover idealized his beloved, so she may have idealized the man she would soon marry (rather than referring to a marriage with King Solomon). The verse has never been easy to translate. Her shepherd was her prince, her desire above all others. Perhaps the verse refers to her anticipation of their wedding, and their love for one another made the time pass quickly until their wedding day, much as the seven years Jacob worked for Rachel passed quickly because of his great love for her.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. The Book of Proverbs celebrates and promotes wisdom and living wisely according to the will God. Why do you think the Bible includes the Song of Solomon?

2. What are some benefits that men and women might expect from one another in marriage that might be compared to great cities; such as Tirzah and Jerusalem?
3. What are some experiences of a shepherd that the shepherd used when describing his beloved?
4. Read Song of Songs 6:8-9 again. When you compare the Christian faith to all the religions of the world, how do you rank Christianity? Give a reason for your answer.
5. Read Song of Songs 6:11. How much attention do you give to Jesus each day? Give a reason for your answer.

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly
International Bible Lesson.

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