Dr. Lloyd Carr, Song of Songs, Lecture 4

Another part of the book which I want to look at in a little more detail is over near the end, beginning in chapter 6 at verse 13 and going on down into chapter 7. Now this passage is considered, normally, to be a summary or a description of the wedding celebration. Some of the commentators have argued that the whole book of Song of Solomon is tied into a wedding celebration, as was common in the Ancient Near East, and it was read and used in that context.

Beginning in verse 13 of chapter 6, we had pick up this comment, "Return, return, O Shulammite, return, return, that we may look on you. Why should you look upon the Shulammite, as upon a dance before two armies?" Then verse 7, or verse 1 of chapter 7, "How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden!" Then a description that follows here. Now, this poses a bit of an interpretive problem, and I think it's a good example of the kind of thing that we need to look at when we are dealing here with the song and some of the issues that we need to face as we turn to the text.

Now, we've got here a request and a question, and then a response. The question comes from the group, apparently; it's a plural form: "we." The response in the end of verse 13 is from the woman herself identified there. The description beginning in verse 1 of chapter 7 is either the words of the onlookers (the wedding guests), or the words of the lover--and there's no way of really telling. The argument can be taken both ways; some would suggest that because of the very intimate descriptions in these five verses that it is the lover husband who is doing it; others would say, "No, the indication is fairly clear here that this is the wedding party speaking." But as we look at the text you'll see that this does pose some significant problems.

The request to the young woman is to come back--to return--that we can look at you, that we can watch you. The term here is possibly (as one of the commentators says) not just to come back, but actually to get involved in the dance--to turn and to twist. I'm not sure that really holds, but it does give us a little bit of an insight as to what possibly may be going on here. In any event, it's some kind of celebration in that they want to

look at the young lady as she is dancing. Her response is, "Why do you want to look at me? There's lots of prettier girls around here." That's the implication; she doesn't say that. But the emphasis here is on her person: "*Why am I the center of attention?"* Well for one thing she's the bride, so of course she's the center of attention on that day. But there's more to it than that.

The last part of verse 13 talks about a dance before two armies. That's one of the issues that we need to look at in more detail. The term "dance" is translated variously by the various translators in the commentaries. The New English Bible talks about the dancers of the two armies--it may be just a group, it may be a dance itself. The concept is partly identified by this last part of the verse: the dance (the RSV says) before two armies, probably better the dance *of* two armies. Now what in the world is that all about? Precise meaning is elusive, as it often is in the Song--some of these texts are very difficult to interpret. I think what we've got going here is some possibility of a dance of two groups; kind of a counter dance where you've got one group doing one thing, another group doing another. The Shulammite, the key person in this, is sort of dancing between these two groups. The meaning is not really clear, it's not absolutely certain, but it's quite evident that there's something going on here where she is the center of attention. She's a bit shy about it, and as we read the rest of this we'll probably see why she was a little shy.

The group responds to her in this dance, "How graceful are your feet in your sandals, O queenly maiden!" Now there's one of those queen/king motifs cropping up again--not that she is a queen, but that she has the bearing and the presence of a queen on this particular day. The idea here of graceful feet, of course, was an important thing in ancient Israel; it's an idea here that her feet in sandals are beautiful to look at. Now the term here, "your feet in sandals," may mean simply her feet or, in the context, it may mean the steps of the dance--she is a good dancer. That would fit perfectly well here also. Certainly she is a graceful individual and carrying this on nicely-- "the queenly maiden."

Now we get into some other parts which are a little more explicit (in fact, quite a bit more explicit), and again gives us a problem of interpretation. What is going on here precisely? "Your rounded thighs are like jewels." The Jerusalem Bible takes it, "the curve

of your thighs," the NIV chickens out a bit, "your graceful legs." But the term is of the upper part of the leg--the thigh part. And it's used exclusively of that way; some of the commentators here as elsewhere, somehow avoid the obvious for reasons which would be evident in certain cases.

Now, the term the "rounded thighs" refers, as I said to the upper part of the leg, and it occurs only three times in the book; here in the Song and in Jeremiah. The meaning in the Jeremiah passage is quite obvious--the turning or the shaping. So, the instruction here is having to do with the shape of the upper part of this young lady's legs. The point is not the whole of the leg, but simply the upper part, and the term here is that it's like jewels, it's ornament, it's beautiful to look at. That comes through very clearly on the basis of the vocabulary. The suggestion here by some of the commentators, and I think with some validity, is that jewels were often placed on the legs and around the hips. Particularly in the fertility rituals I read earlier in quotations of Mesopotamia where the goddess Inanna put certain kinds of jewels on her hips and on her legs and all around her pelvis area as part of the ritual of entertaining the king in the sacred marriage rite. So that may be part of it here--whether she's actually wearing jewels on her hips at this point is not clear, but they at least would be in the category of jewels. If they are not jewel-ish themselves, they certainly are very beautiful. Interesting little comment here that they are like the work of the master craftsman--the hand of the master. Now the physical body is beautiful, the hand of God made it, and perhaps that's what is behind this.

Chapter seven verse two is beginning a very frank description of the young lady. I talked earlier about the allegorical interpretation of much of the song. This is a classic example of how allegorizing will hide the very clear, very obvious meaning of the word: "Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine." One of the very famous allegories takes this passage as the navel is the central part of the church where the altar stands, and the "rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine" is where the communion wine is stored. Now, that's a nice picture, but it certainly doesn't grow out of this passage for a couple of reasons. First of all, the term "navel" is not quite accurate. The term only occurs three times in the Old Testament: here, in Proverbs chapter 3, and in Ezekiel

chapter 16. In Ezekiel it refers to the umbilical cord of the new baby, in Proverbs it talks specifically about the flesh, and here, the term "the navel" is identified as the rounded bowl. The most common understanding of this passage is that this is the female sexual organ: the vulva, and that this is a very clear description of her at this point. The second half of the verse, "your belly is a heap of wheat encircled with lilies;" again, a different verb, and it's this idea that it's the center of the body, below the navel, the abdomen, and particularly the internal organs. It's used a number of times in Job and Psalms of the womb and the fetus, which is carried there, so this is a passage which is explicitly linked to the reproductive circumstances, and it occurs here in this particular place. Now it's obviously not talking about the internal organs here because it's apparent on the outside: "belly is a heap of wheat encircled with lilies." The brownish color, perhaps, of her skin the color of wheat.

This passage is quite explicit, and very obviously describing the physical beauties of the young lady. Verse 3: "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle." They are beautifully matched, if you will, and they are there for the viewing of the ones who are watching the dance. Verse 4: "Your neck is like an ivory tower." A shapely, long neck, perhaps like the famous statue of Queen Nefertiti with the beautiful long neck; maybe that's what he's referring to here. "Your eyes are like pools of Heshbon by the gate of Bath-Rabbim." Heshbon was a city across the Jordan Valley, and according to some of the archeological excavations, there were some pools outside the gate, so maybe that's what he's talking about here. Perhaps dark and blue-ish black, very still, with no wind ruffling them: Her eyes are like that. We've had comments about her beautiful eyes earlier in the story, so maybe we've got that repeated here.

Verse 4 now gets a little bit weird, I suppose: "Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus." Lebanon is a mountain that stands to the west of the city of Damascus, ten thousand feet high, solid limestone; hardly what you'd consider a good image for a young lady's nose. But perhaps it's just the color that he's talking about, not that it's particularly large or obtrusive; just that it's obvious, and she's not sunburned like she thought she was; she has got a beautiful complexion, and that's what

the image here is. “Your head crowns you like Carmel.” Mount Carmel, in the northern part of Israel, along the south edge of the region of Galilee, crowned with beautiful trees and gardens in the Armageddon valley down below. “Your flowing locks are like purple.” Earlier on, her hair was described as the goats on the hills of Gilead. The long, black-haired goats coming down, and looking at it from a distance, they would ripple as they moved, and that was the image of her hair: flowing locks with that beautiful purple-black tone to them. “In fact, you’re so attractive, the king is captured in your hair.”

Now, this is a very explicit description of the woman at the dance, and they’re all enjoying it, and now in verse 6, we get another comment. Some of the commentators say this is just an extension of the first part and these are the words of the group, but when you get to verse 7, it seems to switch to the lover rather than the wedding guests, and so verse 6 probably makes the break. “How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, delectable maiden.” Now is this “my beloved one”? Possibly. Or is it the guests saying, “Yes, you are the loved one and this is your lover”? Probably it’s him speaking: the delectable maiden. “You are stately as a palm tree, your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches. O may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, and your kisses like the best wine that goes down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth.” This seems to be the lover speaking, describing his concern and his interest, and what he wants to do as this marriage is consummated.

The tenth verse picks up the woman’s response, “I am my beloved’s; his desire is for me. Come my beloved, let’s go forth into the fields and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyards, see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love, the mandrakes give forth fragrance, and over all our doors are choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.” So here is her invitation again; the invitation’s early; now we’ve got an invitation here at the end. Again, this kind of speech is common in the love poetry. Let me just quote two little sections from the Egyptian poetry that relates to this. Verse 12: “Let us go out early to the vineyard, see whether the

vines have budded," and this is the Egyptian love poem: "I'm standing downstream on the canal of a prince, entering into the canal of pray for I must go to prepare the boose on the hill overlooking the locks. I will wait with you at the entrance that you may take my heart to the palace of Re, I will retire with you to the trees which belong to the park, I will cut from the trees of the park a handful from my fan, I'll show you how it is fashioned, and my face is set towards the shed (towards the place where the love is to be consummated). My arms are full of Persea branches, my tresses are laden with sobs; when I am there, I am the mistress of the two lands, there I am happiest of all." Then one other brief one: "O my lover, it is pleasant to go to the canal with you, to bathe in your presence. I will let you see my perfection in a garment of royal linen, wet and clinging. Then I'll go into the water at your bidding, and I'll come up to you with a red fish who will be happy in my fingers, so come on down and look me over." Love poetry is not exclusive to the contemporary age; Egypt, Israel, and here we've got a very clear example of that sort of thing.

One final comment on the passage before we look at something about the purpose of the book, that is the section which begins in chapter four, where he picks it up in the first verse, "your beautiful mouth." Actually, the section I should begin in is chapter three, verse six, where the wedding procession, but this is the subunit in there, where the beauty of the woman is described, and it goes through many of the same terms that we've seen in the earlier part and the later part of the book, but one thing I want to point out here is the repetition that runs through this section. I suggested earlier that the middle section, 3:6 to 5:1, is the consummation of the marriage, and that, again, is borne out by some of the vocabulary. It's here we get a very frequent repetition of the bride and the idea of the garden, and I want to come back to that in just a moment. But look first at the bride-- verse 8, chapter 4: "Come with me from Lebanon, my bride." This is an invitation to her. Verse 9: "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride." Verse 10: "How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride; how much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils of any spice." Verse 11: "Your lips distill nectar my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue." Verse 12: "A garden locked is my sister, my bride; a

garden locked, a fountain sealed." Then down to verse 1 of chapter 5: "I come to my garden, my sister, my bride; I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with honey, I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink, drink deeply in your lovemaking."

Now the last verse of chapter 4, verse 16: "Awake, O north wind and come, O south wind, blow upon my garden, let its fragrance be wafted abroad, let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits." Now this garden motif is common in the biblical material; the Garden of Eden, obviously, the first one. It may simply mean, here, as a garden. In Isaiah chapter five there is a reference to the vineyard, the garden, as God's planting-- in this case, the nation of Israel-- but it's more than that. The garden was a place of retreat for royalty. Remember the story back in the Old Testament of the king wanting Naboth's vineyard for his little retreat place, and how Elijah had to come down in judgment on the king for stealing the garden from the poor man. The garden in the Old Testament also becomes a kind of a cult center, a worship center. There are a number of references in 2 Kings, for instance, about King Manasseh, who built altars to the Baals, the pagan gods, in the gardens, and then in King Manasseh's funeral he was buried in the garden of Uzzah. Uzzah was one of the Arabian goddesses, a fertility cult, and obviously it's a garden there that is associated with this particular woman and with her worship, the cult that is associated with fertility.

But there is more than that; there are about twenty references in the song to the garden, and in this book it has very specific erotic overtones. The passage we just read, "Let my beloved come to his garden. I am his exclusively, my bride is a locked garden, a fountain unsealed." And then he comes to the garden and takes the garden, possesses it in chapter five in that first, pivotal point. Chapter 6, second verse: "My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices to pasture his flock in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, he is mine. He pastures his flock among the lilies." Again, very specific, erotic overtones to this passage. The concept of the garden as the place of cultivation is also very common not only in this book but in some of the other literature from the ancient world, and love songs particularly. The plowing of the garden often used

as a euphemism for the sexual union. It's a very common idea, and I think we have that here. So what we've got in this middle section, particularly chapter four through verse one of chapter five, is the preparation for the culmination of the wedding ceremony.

Now, in the time that we have left, let me look just briefly at the purpose of this book. Why in the world is this book in the canon? Rabbi Akiba in A.D. 90 said that this is the most sacred book of all the sacred books. It's the holiest of the holies, and nobody has ever questioned whether it ought to be in the canon. Now, he also said that those who sing the words to this song in the taverns and pubs aren't worthy of a life to come. So there was some problem with the book even early on in Judaism. It was seen as, obviously on the part of many of the people, as simply a collection of love songs. A bit ribald in places and the kind of things that would be sung when a person had a few too many drinks in him. Well, that's quite possible, but it was also seen as an allegory or a pattern of God's love for Israel. The choice of Israel, the lover and the beloved, and ultimately, of course, as it came into the Christian community, the relationship of Christ to the church and you can find literally hundreds of examples of allegorizing of these various texts to deal with one or other of these issues or many, many other issues.

But the question we have to ask is: Why did the author, whoever he or she was, write it? What were they intending to do? And here we've got a variety of opinions, as always. What if that it's a carryover from the pagan world of the fertility rituals, that somewhere along the line they adopted the Egyptian Horus worship and brought that in or the Mesopotamian Innana/Dumuzzi cult or the Baal/Anath cult from Canaan and took these common themes-- and we see a lot of parallels in this and the other literatures. They edited out all of these negative connotations of the idols and then just said, "Yeah, this is the worship of God." We use the same vocabulary, we use the same images, but we'll clean it up a little bit. So this is kind of an expurgated fertility ritual.

There's a related idea to this that Marvin Pope, in his Anchor Bible Commentary, develops quite extensively, and he bases it partly on the Egyptian love poem connections. He sees this not as a fertility ritual for encouraging crops and growth and families and that kind of thing, but rather as a cult associated with the dead. This is a burial ritual.

Now he does have some link here with the Egyptian love poetry, because in the middle of that collection there's a very extensive poem called the Song of the Harper, which is, quite obviously, a service for the dead. It talks about going down to the tombs, it talks about putting the mourning clothes on, and all the rest of it. And it's stuck right in the middle of this collection of love poetry from Egypt. So there may be some link, between love and death, in fact as you've probably noticed already in chapter 8 verse 6 the text reads: "Set me as a seal on your heart, a seal on your arm, for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave." So is this a suggestion that this is a funeral poem? Not really; that doesn't fit very well. The text here, "Love is as strong as death," simply indicates that when love calls, like death calls, you've got to answer it. There's no turning back. It's an insistent demand that is inbuilt into what we are as human beings. I don't think this has anything to do with death as such, and certainly not a death cult as Pope would tend to argue in parts of his work. Not in burial ceremonies at all.

Okay, so if it's not a cultic ritual, either ceremonial, fertility or death, what is it? At one level this book is like all of Scripture a book of instruction. All scripture is given for inspiration, by inspiration, for our instruction, and this is part of what we have here. All right, has it got something to say about the relation of God to Israel? Well you can get that out of it if you take the text and allegorize it, but God isn't mentioned in the book, and Israel isn't mentioned in the book. So that might be pushing it a little bit to get those ideas out of it. Is it dealing with Christ and the church? Well this is Old Testament. If you pick up an old copy of the King James version of the Bible and read the headings on it you'll probably see that it's got a lot to say about Christ and the church, but you don't find that in the text, and that's a bit of a difficulty. Is it instructing us then about those things? Well, if it is it's only very indirectly, and if we want to get some concept of that I suppose we can do so, but the text doesn't give much support to it. Then what else is it trying to instruct us about? Is it instructing us about what a nasty guy King Solomon was with all those wives and concubines, and here he is trying to seduce this poor innocent country girl and well, Solomon's supposed to be a great fellow, but was not really all that great? Is that what this book is trying to tell us?

Well if it is, the book of Kings does a better job of telling us what Solomon's problems were. It's much more obvious. He was a good man, he did good things, but he also did some pretty dumb things and brought down, paved the way for the ultimate decline and fall of the kingdom of Israel. After his death the kingdom split, and a very short while after that, a couple of hundreds of years, it was down the tubes in the exile. So perhaps this is a critique of Solomon, perhaps it's trying to tell us something about that, perhaps not. One contemporary writer has suggested that this whole book is not just a critique of Solomon, but it's a critique of the whole Old Testament establishment, that they went off the track from about Abraham's time and never did get back on track, and this book is simply saying that the whole thing is simply messed up and that we got to turn back to God somehow. Again, that may be there, but it's not very clear, not very obvious, at least to me.

So if it's not a cultic ritual, if it's not some kind of death ceremony, if it's not clearly trying to teach us about the history of the church or the history of Israel, or king Solomon or the exile, or whatever, what is it about? And I think that is the key to our situation here. This is a book of celebration. It's a celebration of married love, as I think I have figured out here in chapter four and five where the marriage is the consummation and that is certainly here that God intended us as human beings to enter into this marital relationship. One of my colleagues used to say-- she was a biologist and knew this stuff pretty thoroughly. She said, "God made two delicious flavors of people and I like them both, male or female and that's the way it is, that is how he made us." So this is a celebration of the union that has been destroyed in the fall. We are coming back together into that oneness. And that specifically means this is a celebration of our humanity. I mentioned earlier on that the first recorded words of the human species, back in the book of Genesis, are, "At last this is flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone. She should be called woman because she was taken out of man." That love song, the first recorded words, and I think that that's a very important perspective for us to keep in mind as we come to the Song of Solomon. The author here is celebrating the femaleness of the female, the

maleness of the male, the sexuality of both, and the fact that God has put his approval on this relationship.

Now, there are certain limits to it. One of the things I suggested if we looked at this book as a chronological sequence, we've got some moral issues and some moral problems. But if we take it as a chiastic structure, where everything hinges around this marriage celebration at 4:16 and 5:1, those moral problems are not present. Is the Scripture encouraging extramarital sexuality or premarital sex? Certainly not. Oh, it happened; it happens all the time, but that's not the ideal. God's ideal is one man, one woman, married in this life until death do us part. As we turn to the New Testament we find that repeated over and over and over again. Paul in the Epistles to Corinth, for instance, and other places glorifies the relationship: marriages honorable, the bed is undefiled. These things are part and partially the way God made us and how he made us. And, so I think if this text is telling us anything, it is telling us, "Recognize your humanity. See who you are and what you are and remember, you are what God made you." If the Song of Solomon is anything in a kind of a summary, it's the idea that we have a book here which is God's own commentary on Genesis 1: "At last, flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone." And we are working out that idea of Torah. I said way back as we started this series that the Torah is the base for all the rest of the Old Testament Scripture. It sets it down. And so the wisdom literature, Song of Solomon among it, is a commentary on the Torah, and this is the commentary on that first section of Genesis: "Male and female he created them, and behold it was very good."

One of the things in dealing with any part of the biblical material is there is so much in it that no individual, no single book could possibly begin to cover all the possibilities, and for that reason one of the things we try to do when we are dealing with the biblical text is to give some kind of bibliography of where you can find more information on the particular topics. Now for many of you it will not be of any interest and you will drop it after this and never go back to it. Others will want to follow through on it. And so I thought I would try to pull together a number of books and articles and things that may be of some help in getting into the details of the Song of Solomon. I've

made a number of references to extra-biblical literature quoted from the Egyptian poems a number of times. And they are not easy to find but there are a couple, a number of books which have published them. The one that I find most useful is this one called *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*. It's edited by William K. Simpson, and it's got translations not just by Simpson but by a number of other people. It's the stories, it's instructions, it's poetry, it's got the love poetry in it, and the versions I was reading were from this. There are many other versions of these materials. I find that Simpson, at least for me, has a better grasp of the poetry, the sense of the poetry, and so I prefer his readings over many of the others. That will deal with the Egyptian material.

I also quoted extensively from the Babylonian and the Canaanite materials. There is a very heavy book, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature,* by Professor W. G. Lambert, published by Oxford Press. It deals specifically with the texts from Babylon. Now it's very scholarly, very heavy; it's very expensive, but it is probably in your seminary library or possibly even in your public library if you've got a good one nearby. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* by W. G. Lambert. If you are interested in following through on those things, that might be a possibility as well. A third collection, and this is one of the standards, this comes in two editions, this is the small volume.

There is a larger one that is quite a bit more extensive, quite a bit heaver, and quite a bit more expensive. *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, edited by James B. Pritchard. This covers not just Mesopotamia and Egypt and Babylon, but it covers the whole of the ancient Near East, and it's not just poetry but it's got history and inscriptions of various types. Very, very useful tool. If you are serious about your biblical studies you may want to pick up a copy of this because it's wonderful background for the biblical material generally. *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts* by James B. Pritchard. It often goes by its abbreviation ANET from the title *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* and sometimes referred to as ANET in the circles.

Another book which I do not have is out of print by Samuel Kramer called *The Sacred Marriage Ritual*. You may find it in a used book shop or in a used account somewhere in a library. It deals very explicitly with the sacred marriage ritual,

particularly in Babylon, and the implications that come through with that. Those are materials on the extra-biblical material. There is also a great deal of stuff available in the biblical material. I mentioned Pope's commentary earlier. He has a 50-page bibliography, over a 1000 references, and none of them later than 1975. So there's all kinds of stuff available. Let me make just a few suggestions on that.

I made reference during the course of our work together here to my commentary in the Tyndale Old Testament series simply called *The Song of Solomon*. The Old Testament series is published by InterVarsity Press. It's available in paperback, and overall it's a very good commentary and a very good series. I happen to think it's a pretty good commentary too, but that's beside the point. If you're interested in following through with some of the things I've been talking about, you'll find it expanded considerably in this little commentary. Also I have three little articles devoted specifically to the Song of Solomon. All of them were published in the Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society, and they are available in the libraries, and you can probably order copies of them from the journal. The first one was published in 1979 in volume 22; the title is "Is the Song of Songs a Sacred Marriage Drama?" And in it I go through the details of the history of drama, specifically from Egypt, some of the Babylonian material, and looking at whether or not the Song of Solomon fits that pattern. My conclusion is that it does not for a variety of reasons, and this little article expands considerably on the material in the commentary on the song.

The second article, also basically on the song, is published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society* in 1981, volume 24; its title is "The Old Testament Love Songs and Their Use in the New Testament." Now, it deals both with the Song of Solomon and with the other Old Testament love songs—Isaiah 5, Psalm 45-- and gives us some methods or some tools for deciding how we interpret the Old Testament love songs, How can we deal with them? I use as the basis for that how the songs are treated in the New Testament. And as I indicated earlier in our discussion, if the biblical record makes it clear, then it's clear. The Psalm 45--Hebrews 1 relationship is an example there.

And then the final article doesn't deal directly with the Song of Solomon, but it

does deal with a broad problem of the inspiration of Scripture and the place of these various book in the canon. This was published in December of 1982, volume 25. The title is "The Love Poetry Genre in the Old Testament in the Ancient Near East: Another Look at Inspiration." And it deals with how we deal with these texts and how the biblical material dealt with them as well. Those are specifically on the Song.

Now there are a number of commentaries on the Song, let me mention two or three of them here for you--some quite elaborate, some not so elaborate. Marvin Pope in the Anchor Bible Series--monstrous volume on the Song of Songs; he goes everywhere and does everything. Complete translation, a large, lengthy section, about 140 pages on the interpretation of the Song of Solomon, and if Pope hasn't covered it, you're done when it comes to that. It is very, very extensive. I've suggested earlier, I think he's not right on on his identification of the Song with the death motif, but it does a good job of dealing with the text. Another very important collection is Roland Murphy, who is a Catholic priest in the Hermeneia series, just titled "The Song of Songs." Murphy is one of the outstanding scholars on the Song of Solomon, and the Hermeneia series is a good one. Murphy's book is very, very useful. He's got a good bibliography; he goes into a great deal of detail in the text. While his perspective and mine don't jive all the way down the line, he certainly recognizes the natural interpretation of human sexuality as a very, very important part of this book and of this interpretation. Murphy, I think, deserves your attention if you're serious about this study.

A number of others are also worthy of mention. Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs*; this is published by Fortress Press. It's in the Continental Commentary series. This series is primarily a collection of European commentaries translated into English. Very, very useful; has a number of illustrations. My one caveat with the text is, it's so easy these days to photograph and scan these things; why bother with line drawings and the illustrations? But if you can get around that, it's well worth looking at. He has a very good perspective on much of the commentary and comes down fairly much in the same category that this has concerns with our humanity and our sexuality. Three or four other short ones: J.A. Motyer, in *The Bible Speaks Today* series, his message of the Song of

Songs—Motyer is the editor of the text of the Song, edited by Tom Gledhill. This is a little more popular, a little more easy to read than Keel, Murphy, or Pope. Perhaps it will be a little bit easier to read than my commentary, which is fairly detailed and specific. Gledhill's work is very good and will certainly be worth your attention.

Helmut Gollwitzer has a little book called *Song of Love.* It's supposedly a commentary on the Song of Songs, although his subtitle is "A Biblical Understanding of Sex." He deals with that issue in the light of what's going on in the Song of Songs. He's quite straight forward and I think has a good perspective on that whole question. Joseph Dillow has a commentary called *Solomon on Sex*. The subtitle is "A Biblical Guide to Married Love," published by Nelson, and I think still in print. As he works through the books dealing with some of the questions and the issues, he is more concerned with the application of the text rather than the explication of it. Finally, there's a fairly recent book by Andre LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, a hermeneutical essay on the Song of Songs. Again, a kind of quasi-commentary dealing with some broader issues. If you find this of interest, LaCocque argues here that the text is from a woman's hand and has a female perspective on the Song.

Those are some of the current ones, and as I mentioned there are many, many more, both ancient and modern, and there are thousands of articles on the Song, so there's plenty of work here to keep you busy for the rest of your life. I've made a number of references already to the commentary I wrote, the Tyndale series. The dedication is for Gwendolyn, my sister, my bride, my beloved, my companion, my friend. Gwen is a poet, and we've been talking a lot about poetry here. She's been asked by the producers to read a poem for us. Gwen, it's all yours.

Gwen: The title of the poem is "Wedding Ring."

Could it be true that this gold band encompasses the years
from our first recognition through merriment and tears,
through doubt and pain?
Our lives recast the promise slipped into the past
among the children's souvenirs.

But it is true that gold endures the ravages of time
and bares its own reminder on this hand of mine,
telling me this circle, once closed around a vow,
is ancient and is new each day.
It held me then and holds me now.

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