

## Dr. Lloyd Carr, Song of Songs, Lecture 2

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This is the second lecture by Dr. Lloyd Carr on the Song of Songs. Dr. Carr. We were talking a moment ago about the song in a natural interpretation, Song of Solomon, as not allegory, not typology, not drama, but simply as poetry, love poetry.

And I want to take some time now to look at those two elements. First, what it means to say this is poetry, and then specifically what we mean by love poetry and how this particular book relates to the ancient Near Eastern love poetry of which we have some examples. We'll talk about that now for the next several minutes.

First, the song is poetry. A poem is a work. The Greek word itself means something constructed or put together.

I always get a laugh out of people who come into a poetry reading and say, well, I just jotted this down the back of the envelope on the way in tonight. My immediate reaction is, that ain't poetry. Poetry takes some work, some shaping, some structuring, some choice of words and idioms and formats.

Now, when we talk about poetry in the ancient world, we've got a variety of things to choose from. There are, of course, the Greek poets, there are the Latin poets, and then in the modern day, the contemporary poets, the classics, and all the rest of it. And when we think of poetry in English, we tend to think in terms of either a free verse sort of thing, like much contemporary poetry, or more formalized structures where we've got rhythm and rhyme, certain sequences of stanza lengths and that kind of thing.

But when we're talking about biblical poetry and ancient Near Eastern poetry generally, we have a little different perspective. The key idea or the key method in ancient poetry is not necessarily rhyme or rhythm. There is a little bit of that, but not a lot.

Rather, the hallmark of biblical poetry particularly and ancient Near Eastern poetry generally is what's called parallelism. That means that a statement is repeated or added to in a certain way that gives a repetition. We might call it thought rhyme rather than word rhyme.

The Book of Psalms is full of these sorts of things. There are several different categories, just to mention two or three. One is the standard normal parallelism where the second line repeats the idea or the thought of the first line.

The second approach to this is where the second line reverses the idea of the first line, antithetical parallelism. Or you may get a situation where the second line adds

to the first line and then the third line adds to the second line. So, it's sort of a step movement, a line at a time.

Or you have a particular passage, which we'll talk about in more detail later, a poetic form, parallelism, which is called chiasm or cross-shaped, where you've got a statement made, a second comment about that, and then in the next line the second comment is picked up first, and then the first part of the first line is commented on in the last half of the second line. So, the first half of the first line and the second half of the second line go together, and the opposite, the first half of the second line and the last half of the first line go together. That's cross-shaped.

Now we'll come back to that. It's an important point because that has a great deal to say about how we understand the Song of Solomon. But these are ways of expressing these thought rhymes.

A couple of examples from the Song of Solomon. Chapter 2, the eighth verse. The voice of my beloved, behold he comes leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

Leaping on the mountains, bounding over the hills. Not two separate ideas, but two ways of saying the same thing. And that's parallelism in the full and normal sense of the word.

Another example. Chapter 2, verse 6. This is parallelism, but it's a little bit different. In this one, the second line adds to the first line.

This poor young lady is madly in love with the guy. Oh, that his left hand was under my head, and his right hand embraced me. She doesn't want both hands under her head.

She wants one around her back and one under her head. So, there's an addition to the idea here in this verse. And we'll find many, many examples of that through this book and in your other studies in Psalms and in many of the Prophets and other sorts of things.

The standard mark of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Adding or saying the same thing in two or three different ways. Now, specifically, the Song of Solomon is in the category of what we would identify as love poetry.

Now, that's not unusual. Every nation has its love poetry, whether it goes all the way back to ancient Mesopotamia, which we'll look at in a minute or two, or down to the one that somebody just finished five minutes ago for his new girlfriend. Love poetry.

Lots of it. Now, the difference is, some of it's good, and some of it isn't. I love you, I love you, yeah, yeah, yeah.

That says one thing, but how do I love thee? Let me count the ways is a much better expression of love poetry. Now, what are we dealing with here? Well, we do have a lot of examples of love poetry from the ancient world. Several collections, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and a few other bits and pieces from various places.

And they have certain elements with them. Let's look first at some of the Mesopotamian love poetry. Now, a couple of things about this, and I'm going to read some of these, rather than just try to quote them for you.

Certainly, as I said, this is common in many languages. There are a lot of parallels, a lot of differences, similarities, and differences in these love poems. Let's look at them first, and then we'll come back, look at some of the common elements, and then look at some of the differences.

Babylonian love poetry, the Mesopotamian stuff, there are two groups. There's one early group that goes back possibly as early as the third millennium B.C., and then another one which comes out of the first millennium, about the time, maybe a little bit later, than the Song of Solomon from these, Babylon and Mesopotamia. Now in Mesopotamian poetry and Babylonian poetry, there are collections of individual pieces.

When we were talking about drama a few minutes ago, I mentioned that there is a series of stage directions or directions to the readers as to where this is to be done and how it's to be quoted. And the love poetry in ancient Mesopotamia has these elements in it. But the thing that's important in this ancient Babylonian and Mesopotamian love poetry is that it's related to the worship.

It's a fertility ritual, a fertility worship. Whether we're looking at the Canaanite material from Ugarit or elsewhere, we're looking at the Babylonian material, we're looking at the earlier Sumerian material, the key theme in all of it is the relationship between the god and the goddess, and the fertility which comes to the land when the marital relationship between the god and the goddess is fulfilled. This is a common theme through all of the ancient Near Eastern fertility religions, and apart from Israel, throughout the ancient world completely.

Now, what that means is the reenactment of the sacred marriage between the god and the goddess is carried out on a yearly basis between sometimes the king, the Nuzi, and the high priestess who is the embodiment of Inanna, the goddess. So the king and the goddess have a marriage union, the sexual union, as part of the ritual worship on a regular basis in the community. The same thing occurs in the later material.

You've got the Nuzi and Inanna in the first one, you've got Baal, and Anat in the Canaanite cult, those kinds of things going on all the time. And love poetry is tied in with those specific relationships. Let me give you an example.

In the Babylonian material, the chief god is Marduk, and his goddess is Ishtar, and he's also got a girlfriend on the side, her name is Zarpanitum, and there's a relationship going on here that is fairly explicitly spelled out. Now let me quote here. This is from the relationship between king Dumuzi and the goddess Inanna.

She is getting ready to welcome him into the temple, palace, into the sacred bedchamber, and the poet says, she picks up the buttock stones and puts them on her buttocks. Inanna picks the headstones and puts them on her head. She picks the lapis lazuli stones and puts them on the nape of her neck.

She picks ribbons of gold, and puts them in her hair, on her head. She picks the narrow gold earrings, and puts them on her ears. She picks the sweet honey, and puts it about her loins.

She picks bright alabaster, and puts it on her anus. She picks black willow, and puts it on her vulva. She picks ornate sandals, and puts them on her feet.

And in the navel of heaven, the house of Enlil, the temple, Dumuzi met her. Now this is a love poem from this period, and it's very explicit, and it's very obviously tied in to the fertility cult. In the next sequence, Marduk, this is the Babylonian account, Marduk speaking to Ishtar, his Arpanism, that's his consort, the queen, Ishtar's sort of the girlfriend here.

So Arpanism is sleeping in her cell, her room. But you are my short silvery girl. Sounds like blondes had more fun in ancient Babylon too.

You are the mother, Ishtar of Babylon, the beautiful one, the queen of the Babylonians. You are the mother, a palm of Carnelian, the beautiful one. And so there's descriptions here, there's these love poems that come out of these sorts of things.

Now in Egypt, we have a similar kind of thing. There's one collection called the Songs of the Orchard, and these are fairly short, and this is one little example. The pomegranate says like her teeth are my seeds, like her breasts my fruit.

Here is the poem, the poem of the pomegranate tree speaking, identifying itself with the girl in the poem. Very common ideas, both from Egypt and from Mesopotamia. Let me give you a couple of other examples of Egyptian literature and the way some of these ties in with the Song of Solomon.

First, in chapter 1, verse 10 of the song, we get this, well actually beginning at verse 9. I compare you, my love, to a mare from Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are comely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels. We will make you ornaments of gold studded with silver.

That's a kind of an interesting little passage. One of the Egyptian poems, is from the so-called Chester Beatty cycle of poems, this is number 39 in this collection. The woman is speaking to her lover.

Please come quick to the lady love like the king's steed, the pick of a thousand from all the herds, the foremost of the stables. It is set apart from the others in its feed, and its master knows its gate. As soon as it hears the crack of the whip, it's no holding back.

There's not a captain in the territory who can pull ahead of it, but well the lady love knows he cannot go far from her. You're like a mare among Pharaoh's chariots, the ultimate in sex appeal. Now, mares would never pull the chariots, those were pulled by the stallions.

One of the things that the enemy learned to do to disrupt the chariot charges was to turn a mare in heat loose among the stallions. That caused all kinds of problems. Well, the girl in Song of Solomon knew that one.

Another example, is chapter two, twelfth verse. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The winter is past, and the rain is over and gone.

The fig tree puts forth its figs, the vines are in blossom, and they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, come away, oh my dove, come away. One of the Egyptian love poems, this is in that early collection I mentioned, read just a part.

The voice of the turtle dove speaks out. The voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The voice of the turtle dove speaks out, it says, the day is breaking, which way are you going? Lay off little bird, you must, you scold me so.

I found my lover on his bed and my heart was swept to excess. We said I shall never be far away from you while my hand is in your hand and I shall stroll with you in every favorite place. He sets me up as the first of the girls, he doesn't break my heart.

But there it is the love poetry and this idea here, this comment on the song of the turtle dove. One other example, over in chapter six. Beginning at the eighth verse, we read part of this before.

There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, maidens without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her. Again, in the Egyptian love poetry.

My dove, my perfect one, is the only one. One, the lady love without a duplicate, more perfect than the world. She is like the rising star at the start of an auspicious year.

She whose excellence shines, whose body glistens, glorious her eyes when she stares, sweet her lips when she converses. She says not a word too much. High her neck, glistening her nipples, a true lapis, her hair, her arms finer than gold, her fingers like lotus flowers unfolding.

Her buttocks droop when her waist is tight. Her legs reveal her perfection. Her steps are pleading when she walks the earth.

She takes my heart in her embrace. She turns the head of every man. All are captivated at the sight of her.

Everyone who embraces her rejoices, for she has become the most successful of lovers. When she comes forth, anyone can see there is none like that one." This is a song about one of the goddesses, but the idea is there. It's a love song.

We've got examples of that from Babylon, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Canaan, all around the place. It's a common theme in love poetry. What are some of the elements of love poetry? Does the Song of Solomon share these? Yes, there is, actually.

One of the very interesting things, and this runs right across the examples that we have, all of them. The songs are speeches, the man and the woman. The fascinating thing about it is that in every example we've got so far, the woman speaks twice as many lines as the man does.

Babylon, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, Song of Solomon. The pattern is consistent. Twice as many lines to the woman as to the man.

Now that's more than just happenstance. You might get it once or twice, but when it occurs in all the literature, it looks like this is a pattern, and the song fits the pattern. A couple of other things.

Some of the common elements. Very common is what we call the I-Thou statements. If they're talking about the lover to someone else, they will say he or she or my beloved or my lover in the third person.

But when they're talking to each other, it's always in the I-Thou relationship. Now that doesn't mean much to us in English because we don't have a singular form for the second person. It's I, you, he.

We, you, they. But if you, for instance, speak German or French or Latin or many other languages, there is a separate form in the second person singular. For instance, in French, it's je for me, tu for you.

But if it's you in a group, it's vous, not tu. You use that singular form tu only in family or very close relationships, never with a superior or never with a stranger. And in the Hebrew and in the translations here, in the song and in the Egyptian material and the Mesopotamian literature, it's always in this singular form.

You, tu, if it was French, this personal intimate relationship expression, the I-Thou form. This is common across the literature. A second element that comes in frequently here in the literature is the idea of the joy and the excitement that the lovers are either anticipating or sharing.

Again, that runs all the way through the literature. Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arms. Love is as strong as death.

The excitement of that relationship. Oh, that you were like a brother to me that nursed at my mother's breast. If I met you outside, I would kiss you.

None would despise me. That longing for intimacy, joy and excitement. And right alongside that, there is the problem of some sort of hindrance or something getting in the way.

Love is never smooth. In this case, in Song of Solomon, this young lady has some brothers. Chapter 1. My brothers were angry with me.

They made me the keeper of the vineyard, but my own vineyard I have not kept. We don't want our little sister getting into trouble with you. Chapter 8, verse 8. We have a little sister.

She's not grown up yet. What'll we do for her when she's spoken of? If she's a wall, we'll build upon her battlements of silver. If she's a door, we'll enclose her with boards of cedar.

Anything to keep her away from this guy who's coming around. Sometimes it's the weather. There's a very interesting little poem in the Egyptian thing.

He's describing, the man is describing his intent to go meet the woman. She's across the other side of the Nile River. He's going to swim the Nile to get to her.

The crocodiles will be like mice to me because I want to get with you. That idea is there as well. You know that old story of a young man who called up his girlfriend and told her how much he loved her.

He would go through hell and high water to be with her. Then he said, if it rains tonight, I won't be over. Well, you don't find that in these things.

There is that joy and the excitement, the anticipation of the union and the time together, but there are always these objections and obstructions in the way. But in the love poetry, they are set aside and the consummation is arrived at somewhere along the line. That joy and excitement is part of it.

Another common element in love poetry is what we might call physical descriptions. This isn't in the Song of Solomon, but way back in the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, chapter 2, when Adam is created and God can't find any partner suitable for him, he puts him to sleep and takes a rib from Adam, verse 21. And verse 22, from the rib that he had taken, he made a woman and brought her to the man.

And then verse 23, I find it interesting that the first recorded words of the human species in the Scripture, now Adam named the animals, we don't know what he named them because we don't have those words, but the first recorded words of the man are here in verse 23. And it's a love poem. This, at last, is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called a woman because she was taken out of man. See, right back in the Garden of Eden, God knew that love was an important part of relationships. And when Adam woke up, came out of that God-induced anesthetic, and saw that gorgeous creature standing beside him, wow, at last, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.

Now, that's a good start, not very elaborate, but it's a good start. And when we get into the Song of Solomon and other literature as well, we get very precise descriptions of the physical beauties of the characters. For instance, in chapter 4 of the Song, behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold you are beautiful.

Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats moving down the slopes of Gilead. Those long, black-haired goats coming down, looks like her hair rippling as she moves.

This next image is a little strange but listen to it for a moment. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing. All of them bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved.

A little translation problem, we'll get to that a bit later, but again, it's a description of the girl. Verse 5, your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle that feed among the lilies. Verse 7, you are all fair, my love, there is no flaw in you.

Come away with me from Lebanon, my bride, come away with me. 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 than any spice. Your lips distill nectar, my bride, honey, and milk are under your tongue.

The scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon. Fairly precise descriptions. Chapter 5, I said earlier that the girl speaks twice as much as the man does in these poems, and here's an example of it.

Verse 10 of chapter 5, my beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold, his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set.

His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh. His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels.

His body as ivory work, encrusted with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars.

His speech is most sweet, he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved, this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. She's pretty explicit there.

We have another example of this, chapter 7, and this is a description of the young lady. How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden. Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand.

Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.

Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes like pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Beit Rabim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus.

Your head crowns you like caramel, and your flowing locks are like purple. A king is held captive in the tresses. How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, delectable maiden.

Very, very explicit. These are the kinds of descriptions that we have, physical descriptions, in the stories here in the love poetry in Song of Solomon and elsewhere. Another element here is the description of physical intimacy between the man and the woman.

Sometimes it's spelled out very specifically as the bedroom. Verse 2 of chapter 8. If I met you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me. I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, into the chamber of her who conceived me, the bed-chamber.

I would give you spiced wine to drink and the juice of pomegranates. Then she goes on to describe that relationship. Verse 11 of chapter 6. 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.

Before I was aware, my fancy set me in the chariot beside my prince, the garden. In Egyptian love poetry, there are a number of references to secluded places along the river where the lovers can hide and not be found. This, again, is a common theme, whether we get it from Mesopotamia, from Egypt, or the song.

Another series of ideas that are common to the literature is the emphasis on looking at the beloved, seeing the person, describing him, and hearing the voice. There's one in the Egyptian poems where the woman hears her lover's voice beyond the marsh as he comes to her. We have that sort of thing here.

I heard my beloved on the mountains. There are a number of those kinds of things. There is a great deal of physical contact, kissing, touching, fondling.

The comment there, his left hand under my head, his right hand embracing me, it's more than just putting his arm around me. It's actual intimate physical fondling of each other as part of the description. It's quite explicit and quite obvious.

Ultimately, the sexual union between the lovers is spelled out very, very clearly. In the song, we'll come back to this in a few minutes when we talk about the structure of the book, in verses 16 of chapter 4 through chapter 5, verse 1, 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. I come to my garden, my sister, my bride. I gather my myrrh with my spice.

I eat my honeycomb with my honey. I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink.

Drink deeply, O lovers, in your love-making is the idea there. The last phrase there could be translated as an address to them, O lovers, or drink deeply in your love-making. The text can go either way.

So, this is the consummation of the relationship. And we find it not only here in the Mesopotamian poetry, we find it spelled out quite clearly, and also in a number of the Egyptian poems as well. This is the woman speaking, Take my breast, for you its gift overflows.

Better indeed is one day in your arms than a hundred thousand anywhere else on earth. And those kinds of ideas are there. This cute little poem is not directly related, but it's got something of the idea.

It's the man speaking, I'll lie down inside and act as if I'm sick. My neighbors will come in for a visit, and with them my girl. She'll put the doctors out, she knows how to fix my hurt.

Those kinds of ideas run through the love poetry, Song of Solomon, and others as well. Now a third, or what are we up to now, about six or seven I guess, whatever it is, another common theme that runs through the love poetry. Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Egyptian, Babylonian, Biblical.

And that is the use of family terms to describe the relationship. Come to me my sister, my bride. Sister, she's not his sister, she's his girlfriend, his bride, his wife-to-be in this case.

There are references to my brother. You find it in Egyptian poetry, you find it elsewhere as well. Let me get one here for us.

Number 12. I must depart from the brother, and as I long for your love, my heart stands still inside me. My brother, my loved one, my heart chases after your love.

I set my mind, and the brother came to me. You're the sole concern for me, my brother. My heart remembers well your love.

One-half of my temple was combed. I came rushing to see you, and I forgot to finish my hair. And we have that sort of thing back and forth.

Brother, lover. Sister, bride. Another theme that comes through frequently, and this gives some support to the idea that this song is about King Solomon because we have references in these to the king and the queen.

King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him. The one who is dressed like the queen coming up on the day of the wedding. There are references here.

Verse 12 of chapter 6. Before I was aware of my fancy, set me in a chariot beside my prince. Now these are, again, common terms in the literature and in both the love

poetry from the ancient world and from the biblical material. That reference in chapter 6 of Song of Solomon, verse 12.

A couple of references that are quite close to that. When toward the outer door I set my mind, the brother comes to me. I set my eyes upon the road, my ear listening that I may ambush Mehi.

Mehi is a some debate whether he was a real prince or whether he was just a kind of fictional prince who inspired these songs. It may be a pseudonym to hide the identity of whoever it is. But she's setting out to ambush him.

My sole concern, I have set the love of my brother for him. My heart will not keep silent. I've sent the messenger off and he's going to bring me to him.

There's another reference to Prince Mehi in these poems. It's number 33. Mehi in this one is a negative character.

My heart proposed to see her beauty while I was sitting in her house. I found Mehi in his chariot on the road with his burly gang. I do not know how to take myself from his presence.

Shall I pass by him at a walk? The river is a roadway for I have no place for my feet. How foolish you are, my heart. Why would you stroll by Mehi? If I pass beside him, I'll have to tell him my troubles.

See, I'm yours, I'll say to him. And he'll shout out my name. But he'll pass me on to the harem with the first man of his troop.

He's not very consistent. She loves him, but she can't get anywhere with him. Those sorts of problems.

Now, the idea here of the prince or the king or the princess or the queen has made some people think that, yeah, this really was a princess and a queen and king Solomon. But the evidence from the literature is that sister, brother, prince, princess, queen, and king are just standard forms that are used in the literature. The woman in Egyptian poetry wants to be treated like his sister, just like here in the Song of Solomon.

If you were my brother, I could kiss you right out in the street and no one would be surprised. You're not, so I can't, but boy would I like to. We have that thing over and over again.

Brother, sister. The king, and queen, same sort of thing. Common motif, common ideas.

Now, there are all of these elements that run through the literature, but there are some very interesting differences in the Song of Solomon and the rest of the ancient Near Eastern love poetry. I said a while ago that Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Egyptian, and Babylonian love poetry is cult-related. It has to do with religion and with the worship.

It's God-centered or God's-centered. Song of Solomon has none of that in it. One of the reasons which I think that this cannot be an allegory, talking about God's love for Israel or Christ's love for the church, is that none of the literature, none of the vocabulary, none of the God words or the cult words appear in the Song.

Not a single one of the normal religious words in the rest of the Old Testament crop up here. The only possibility and this is just on the very edge of possibility, is in chapter 8, verse 6. The text reads, "...set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is as strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave, its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame." Several of the versions translate that last part of that line as a flame of Yahweh. Now, the problem is that Yahweh's name doesn't appear in the text.

There is an abbreviation, Yah, which is the first half of Yahweh, which sometimes is used as the God name in the Old Testament. Some of the commentators have suggested that this is a flash of fire from God. But the term is used simply as a superlative.

It's a mighty flame or a vehement flame, a flame that would come from God, but God is not specifically identified in this context. That's the only reference anywhere in the Song of Solomon of any single one of the religious words. You won't find any of them in the book.

That came to me as quite a shock when I was working through the commentary on writing the commentary for this book, going through the Hebrew lexicon and identifying all the words and their references in the Song of Solomon. I got about halfway through the list and I realized, have I missed something? None of these religious words appeared, so I went back and double-checked, and sure enough, not a single one was there. This is, if I may say it without sounding irreligious, this is a purely secular book.

God's activities in the cultic sense just don't appear. They're just not there. That's one of the very clear distinctions between this book and the rest of the ancient Near Eastern love poetry.

There's another element that I find kind of fascinating. Much of the other literature is related to the hunt, going after wild animals to either capture or kill them. For

instance, in Egyptian love poetry, come quick to the lady love like a gazelle running in the desert.

Its feet are wounded. Its limbs are exhausted. Fear penetrates its body.

The hunters are after it. The hounds are with them. They cannot see because of the dust.

It sees its resting place like a mirage. It takes a canal as its road. Before you've kissed your hand four times, you'll have reached her hideaway as you chase the lady love.

It's the golden goddess who has set her aside for you, friend. This is just one example of many of these kinds of hunting motifs. Now, in ancient Israel, hunting was not part of the culture.

We don't find any references to it in the biblical material. There are some other people who hunt, but it's never seen as one of the great things that the king or the mighty men do. There was too much respect for life in Israel.

If the lion came after your sheep, you killed the lion. If the bear came after them or the wolves came after them, you killed them. But you didn't hunt for sport.

Life was too valuable, even animal life. So we don't find the hunt motif in the Song of Solomon as we do in other nature poetry. A third element that is distinct here is in the literature from the other parts of the ancient Near East, there is a confusion between God and nature.

The whole fertility ritual is based on that situation. Nature will not produce. The animals will not produce young.

The crops won't grow unless we as God and goddess, priestess and king, or priest and priestess, or whatever unless we have this physical sexual union, there will be no fertility in the land because the gods and the land, the creation, are one and the same. In the biblical material, there is that great gulf between God and the creature. Nature is God's creation.

It is not God. And in Song of Solomon, that distinction is kept clear. Nature is good.

Nature is there. Nature is important. Nature is what we are.

But we are not God. And that is distinctly biblical where it is confused in the other literature. Another series of references, this is a kind of a minor thing, but it is of interest.

In the biblical material, there are a number of references, to the vineyard, to wine, to the drinking, to the excitement and the joy that comes with that celebration. In the non-biblical literature, there are a number of references to wine, but there are also a large number of references to the brewing of beer. Now, I am not sure, but I have not been able to find any reference in the biblical or extra-biblical material to the brewing of beer in ancient Israel.

My guess is that the grain was too valuable to spend making beer out of. It had to be used for food. Plenty of grapes so they could make wine.

And we find that reference here, but we don't find references in the biblical material to the brewing of beer. Again, a very interesting distinction. And finally on these distinctions, one of the things which comes across to me very, very clearly is in the biblical record, Song of Solomon, there is a sense of commitment.

There is the unity of this man and this woman. There is no trace here of infidelity. There is no trace of things falling away, or of the relationship deteriorating.

Oh, you've got some ups and downs in the story. We'll come back to that the next time we come around here. But there is no sense in the song that this relationship is going to fall apart.

You do find that in the literature from the other parts of the ancient Near East. In the non-biblical literature, there is a sense of fidelity, but it's not really solid. If somebody else comes along, well, maybe we'll switch.

We don't find that here. Another thing that's missing from this love poetry, and particularly from the biblical material, is there is nothing here that talks about family, and raising children. There is certainly the sexual encounter, but it's not developed into a family relationship.

There's nothing in here that would suggest growing old together or simply growing old with the memory of a lost spouse. This is a cohesive piece that focuses on the unity in this relationship. We find the other things in the other literature.

We don't find it here in the Song of Solomon. Now, one final thing on this section. Something about the vocabulary of the biblical song.

Here again, I'm going to have to refer to some detailed notes because this gets a little complicated. Song of Solomon is a relatively short book. We'll come back to some of the implications of that later.

Including the title, verse 1, the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's, there are only 117 verses in the song. So, we've got 116 plus the title. The title, as I said earlier, is set off to the side.

Now, in this book, 117 verses, there are 470 different words, different Hebrew words. They come in different forms, of course, but the roots are 470 of them. Now, immediately we have a problem because of those 470, 10%, 47 of them, occur only once in the literature.

There's nowhere else in the ancient literature, in the Hebrew literature, that these words appear. 47 of them. That's 10% of the vocabulary.

We have no real idea what it means. We can make a guess, but we can't be sure. There are another 51 words that occur fewer than five times.

And many of those, they occur four or five times, but they occur in identical contexts. So, we've got no way of checking what they mean because we might as well just have it once, have it five times, saying exactly the same thing. We just don't know.

There are another 45 which occur between six and ten times in the whole of the literature, not just in the song, but in the whole of the literature. And there are 27 others that occur fewer than 20 times in the whole of the Old Testament. Now, I'm not very good at arithmetic, but I think we've got close to 200 words here that occur fewer than 20 times in the whole of the Old Testament.

And over 100 of those occur fewer than five times. Now, that puts us in a little bit of a problem. Since these words are not very common, we can't always be sure of their meanings.

Now, that's compounded in the Song of Solomon. I said we have 117 verses, including the title line. Of those 117, 99 of them have one or more of these unusual words.

So, only 18 verses in the song have words that are common. That gives us a bit of a problem of interpretation. 50 verses have words that are not used outside the Song of Solomon.

Another 12 have words that are used fewer than three times. And all that boils down to is that there are lots of verses here where we can't be precisely sure of exactly what they mean. We get the sense.

We get a broad understanding. But when it comes right down to the precise details of the text, more than half the time, 97% of the time, we have to say, Hmm, this is a

good guess, but I really can't be sure. And that makes it very tough on commentators.

Commentators don't like to be caught without being able to tell you exactly what it says. But in the song, you can't. Come close, and give some ideas, but that's the best we can do.

A little later on, we'll look at several passages and look at some of these problem texts, what the options are, and why certain suggestions are made as to what that particular verse means. Now, vocabulary. A lot of unusual words in the song.

Some other things. The song, the Song of Songs, like the other literature, is loaded with common love poetry vocabulary. Now, what do we mean by that? Well, among other things, we're looking at the Egyptian, the Mesopotamian, the Babylonian, the biblical material.

There are certain common groups of words which appear. For instance, pet names, the fox, the gazelle, the beloved, the sister, the bride, the king, the queen. These are common names and they run through those.

The song has them as well. But there are other specific things which are of interest in this love poetry literature. There are animal names.

The gazelle, the fox, the dove, the turtle dove. Those sorts of things in the literature. In the literature from Babylon and Egypt, we have Egyptian and Babylonian animals.

In the song, we have animals from Palestine. They are generic in that they're animal names, but they are site-specific or locale-specific. Those kinds of things.

We have the same thing with plants or flowers. In Egyptian literature and in Babylonian literature, you get references to the papyrus reed or the lotus flower. In the biblical material, you get references to the rose of Sharon, a biblical term.

You get, again, plant names, but they're local names. You get the same thing with the collection of jewels, of spices, of trees. You talk about the cedars of Lebanon in the biblical material.

You don't find those phrases in the non-biblical love poetry. So, there's common vocabulary like this, but it doesn't have a universal flavor. It has a local flavor.

And, of course, that's exactly what you'd expect. Love poets use what's at hand. So if you're in Egypt, you use what's there in Egypt.

Papyrus plants and crocodiles and marshes. In Babylon, you talk about the river and the plants there. In Israel, you talk about the desert.

You talk about the mountains. You talk about the springs of En-Gedi. Local stuff which marks the vocabulary of the poems.

Another element in the vocabulary is a large number, and this is, again, across the board, not just in the biblical material, is what we call double entendres, words that have double meanings. My sister, my bride. Well, maybe she's my bride.

She's certainly my girlfriend. She's going to be my bride, but there is that relationship. There are a number of references here.

We looked at a couple of them in the seventh chapter, where the description of her rounded thighs like jewels, the work of a master hand, navel as a rounded bowl. What exactly is he describing there? Well, we'll look at that a little bit later, but it's quite explicit, and quite specific. And the meaning here is not hidden, but disguised.

And we've got a number of these cases through here. There are references to putting the hand to the hole in the door. Double meanings in all of those words.

We'll come back to those as we get down to it. And then there are three words in Hebrew that are used for the word to know. And they occur here, and let me just run down them specifically, as they come through both in the song and in some of the other literature.

There is the word to know, that is to have discernment, to understand. And the song has the girl trying to get other people to understand what she means about her lover, to know what she means. That is the idea in some of those.

Another term that is used frequently is the term to recognize or to look at. Quite common in the Old Testament, and it occurs in the song. Look at my beloved, set your eyes upon him, or on my lover, on her.

That word is never used of the sexual relationship in the Old Testament. The third word is the word yada, which means knowledge gained by the senses or by experience. To know is to experience.

And that one is used specifically of a sexual relationship. And the song uses that twice in this book. In chapter 1, verse 7, tell me you who my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon.

For why should I be like one who wanders beside the flocks of your companions? Let me know, tell me where this is to take place. Very obviously a double meaning here

in this word. Then, finally, on this section, the use of the word love in the Old Testament.

Now, you've probably heard that among the Greeks they had three different words, actually four. The word agape, which means the godly love, that elevated love that we talk about. The word phileo, which means kind of a brotherly love, the city of brotherly love, Philadelphia.

And the word eros, which usually has sexual overtones to it. The erotic would be the kind of fourth term. Stargaze occurs in the Septuagint but does not occur in the New Testament.

But these words have different implications, and different connotations with them. Unfortunately, in Hebrew, there's only one, the word ahav. And it's used for all three of these.

In fact, if you look at the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the same Hebrew word is translated by all four of the Greek words. So, in Hebrew, there is no distinction between erotic love, brotherly love, or sexual love, in terms of vocabulary. There are certainly differences in the actual meaning and the carrying out of them, but the vocabulary is there.

And so, when you see the word love coming up in the Old Testament, you have to stop and ask yourself, which particular emphasis is the author trying to bring to our attention? And again, this goes back to the problem of vocabulary. It's up to how you interpret, how you understand the context and the vocabulary that surrounds it. So, the problem of vocabulary is a very critical one in understanding the teaching of the Song of Solomon.

There are a couple of others. We'll get to those in the next round. This was the second of four lectures by Dr. Lloyd Carr on the Song of Songs.