

Dr. Lloyd Carr, Song of Songs, Lecture 3

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This is Dr. Lloyd Carr's third lecture on the Song of Songs. Dr. Lloyd Carr. One of the major problems of the Song of Solomon is trying to figure out exactly how the piece is structured.

There are two or three options. Most contemporary commentators hold to the position that what we've got here in this book is really just a collection of isolated poems that have been pulled together on the basis of a common theme, that is, love poetry, but that there's no real unity or cohesiveness in the units, that they're scattered over a wide variety of individuals, individual writers, authors, different times and places, but that somewhere along the line they were collated, brought together, and organized into the form that we now have them. That's a fairly common point of view, and there's some ground for it in the parallels, for instance, in the Egyptian love poetry, where we have a number of collections gathered together, and then the collections are gathered together.

For instance, in the Egyptian material there are the Chester Beatty songs, which have an internal cohesiveness, and then there's a series of seven that alternate between the man and the woman speaking back and forth. There's a series of other songs that are similar to that that have been collected, and then the collections have been brought together. I want to come back to that in a few minutes because there's an interesting little piece in the middle of that collection which some have picked up as an interpretive point in dealing with the Song of Songs that has something to do with death and funeral arrangements, as was quite common in Egypt, but we'll come back to that in a couple of minutes.

The idea here is that these various poems from different places and different times are brought together because they have this common theme of their love relationship. That's a very interesting perspective, but to me, it has a major problem to it. One of the things that shows up in the poem very clearly is there are a large number of very precise repetitions of verses, of words, of ideas, which give the indication to me at least that this piece is very carefully structured.

It isn't just a haphazard collection, and we'll want to look at that in some detail in a moment or two. A second problem dealing with the interpretation of the song or the structure of the song is, one, is it or isn't it a unity? And second, if it's a unity, if it is one kind of piece from one author from one particular period, does it have any kind of sequential order in it? In other words, does it go from start to finish? But as we said earlier on in this discussion, one of the things about the song is it doesn't work as a drama because there's no cohesiveness to it in the sense that it starts, moves to

a series of plot events, and then comes to a conclusion. The song as we have it is kind of circular.

You start in one place, you go around and around and around, and come out in the same place so that there doesn't seem to be any progression. Now that has some implications for the interpretation of the song, and what it means, and again we'll look at this in a little more detail later on, but at this stage suffice it to say that if this is a sequential series of things, that the events are moving from a beginning to some sort of conclusion on to the end, it poses some major problems with the content of the song. This is a series of love poems, either arranged or by one author, and the events in the story as it unfolds seem to be out of sequence in what we would consider a normal relationship.

The relationship between the man and the woman here is very obviously sexual, and there's a fairly clear indication that right from the beginning this is what's on the mind of this young couple. And that hardly is the thing you want to say, that the biblical record sort of approves of a premarital sexual relationship. And the situation here is, well if this is sequential, that is a hard argument not to have to make.

The third difficulty here, and at least the third approach is not really a difficulty, is to look at this book, this collection of poems, as a particular form that will help us get around the ethical and moral problems, if we take it as a sequential thing, and also respond, I think, fairly strongly to the idea that this is simply a haphazard collection of materials. And that has to do with the way the song is put together. Now I mentioned earlier that one of the ways that we could look at this is what's called the chiasmatic structure.

The word comes to us from the Greek letter chi, which is a letter that looks like a capital X in the English alphabet. The letter is used to describe this form which is cross-shaped. And as I described earlier, an example of that would be where you've got an A section and a B section in the first half of a verse, or the book or whatever, and then in the second half of the verse, you reverse the B section and the A section.

So, the two outside ends are on this part of the X, and the two inside ends are on that part of the X. Now this is a fairly common structure in the biblical material. We've talked about it before, and we have a good example of it in many of the Psalms and in other places, sometimes in chapters. And in the case of the Psalm of Solomon, we've got, I think, a good case that can be made for the whole book being arranged in the chiasmatic form.

Now I said earlier on that there are a total of 117 verses in this psalm, counting the introduction, the title, 1-1. That probably is a later edition. So, the text itself is a total of 116 verses, plus the title.

And it's very interesting that the center point of the book, which happens to begin in verse 16 of chapter 4 and conclude at the end of chapter 5, verse 1, a two-verse sequence there in the middle, that the rest of the verses, the other 114 in the psalm, are divided exactly in half, before and after those two verses in the middle. You say, well, so what? Put two in the middle, you've obviously got half on either side, but there's more to it than that. Because verses 16 of chapter 4 and 1 of chapter 5 are the pivot in this psalm, around which everything else resolves.

We'll take a little time and look at some of the precise details on this, but what we've got is a series of steps leading up to 4:16 and 5:1, and then from 5:2 on to the end of the book in chapter 8, those steps unwind in the reverse order. And we've got a lot of very detailed vocabulary, a lot of similar ideas, a lot of similar expressions, working out from that, so that looking at the structure of the book, 4.16 to 5.1 is the hinge on which the two halves of the book revolve, or around which the point around which they revolve. Now, let's look at that in a little bit of detail.

A couple of things to start with. First, the book breaks down into five fairly clear units. If you've got your Bibles handy, you might want to follow through on this one.

The first unit starts at verse 2 of the first chapter, not counting the title in this, and it goes through chapter 2, verse 7. The second unit starts in chapter 2, verse 8, and runs through chapter 3, verse 5. Then the third unit starts in chapter 3, verse 6, and runs through to chapter 5, verse 1, so that the last pivot verse is the end of section 3. Section 4 begins at 5, verse 2, and ends at verse 4 of chapter 8, and then section 5 begins at the fifth verse of chapter 8, and goes through to the end of the book, chapter 8, verse 14. Now, that sounds pretty straightforward, but let's look at it again in a little more detail. In the first unit, chapter 1, verse 2, through verse 7 of chapter 2, I've called that unit anticipation, in which the lover and the beloved are looking forward to their union and to their fellowship and their time together.

They're looking forward to that. That unit ends with verse 7, and this is the phrase. The woman is speaking, I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please, or probably a better translation of that last phrase, until it is ready until everything is set.

Now, that's the climax of this first unit. The unit begins with a call, O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth. So, there's the anticipation, and now at the end of this first unit, don't get started too quickly.

Don't stir up love until it's ready. The second unit begins with verse 8 of the second chapter, the voice of my beloved, behold he comes leaping on the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.

We'll come back to this unit in a little more detail later on. But the theme here in the second unit, I've identified as found and lost and found. So, the story in this section has the girl finding her lover, and then in chapter 3, in the first verse, he sort of disappears.

She has to go hunting around the city for him, and then at the end of that unit, verse 4 of chapter 3, she finds him again in her wanderings. And this unit ends the same way the first one did. Verse 5 of chapter 3, I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please until things are ready.

So, anticipation in the first unit ends with that little phrase about the gazelles and the hinds of the field and not getting love started too soon. The second unit, they're together, they're separated, and now they're back together again. And again, this adjuration, don't get started too quickly.

The third unit begins with the phrase, the passage we looked at earlier, this wedding procession coming up from the wilderness, like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense. It ends with 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 my honey, I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink deeply, O lovers, or in an alternate translation, drink deeply in your lovemaking.

This unit, I've identified simply as consummation. If we're looking at this as a marriage poem, this would be the wedding celebration and the beginning of the honeymoon, beginning with this procession coming up and then fulfilled there in the garden as the lover and the beloved consummate their marriage. Now, notice, that this unit does not end with don't stir up or awaken love until it please, because now it's time.

This is the wedding, this is the marriage, this is the time for the love to be expressed. But the idea of consummation is right there and it starts off as the unit does with this growth towards the wedding and the celebration. Unit 4, beginning in 5.2 and concluding in 8.4, is the reverse of the second unit, which was found and lost, and found again, that's kind of in a parenthesis.

This one, it's a losing in chapter 5:2 following. My beloved was knocking, I wouldn't let the door open, and he went away, left me for a while, and then she goes out trying to find him, and ultimately she does. If you find my beloved, tell him I am sick with love, and then there's a discussion back and forth between the daughters of Jerusalem, and ultimately, by the time we get down to chapter 8, the fourth verse, they are found again.

It repeats many of the ideas of the second unit in chapters 2:8-3:5, lost and found. Then the final unit, beginning at 8.5 on to the end of the chapter, I've identified simply as affirmation. This is an approval, a statement of certainty that all that's gone before is now brought to bear, and this is the affirming of the whole relationship.

And in the last section here, well, back up just a moment. The section begins, in verse 5 of chapter 8, who is that coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved? Now that's very close in anticipation to the beginning of the third unit. What is this coming up from the wilderness like a column of smoke? So, there is that, one of those kind of things there, spelling it out.

Then it concludes, verse 14, make haste my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices. Now the 8.14 conclusion is not exactly like the ones in the earlier account, don't stir up love until it pleases, but you still got the gazelles and this link here, this is what my beloved is like, and there is that unity. So again, it's not an exact or precise parallel, but it's very, very close.

The third, is the marriage ceremony, and this fifth one concludes with the idea of consummation. The other three with the idea of don't get started too quickly, and here we are. Now the sections begin, as I've already indicated, one with either the idea of arousal, chapter 2, the 10th verse, or the arrival of one of the lovers and the invitation for the other one.

So, the units seem to fit rather neatly into this get started, don't go too fast, get started, don't go too fast, get started, consummate, get started, don't go too fast, get started, consummation again at the end, and the affirmation. So that structure seems to fit fairly closely. Now beyond that, there are some very specific details about the book and the structure of it.

There's this repeating cycle, but there is also a series of very close parallels in vocabulary all the way through these units. Let's look at it a little more closely here in the song and some of the structures of it. Anticipation.

The first chapter, first two verses after the introduction, after the title. 1, 2 to 1, 4. Oh that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth, for your love is better than wine, your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is oil poured out, therefore the maidens love you. Draw me after you, let us make haste, the king has brought me into his chambers, we will exalt and rejoice in you, we will extol your love more than wine, rightly do they love you.

The beloved, the woman, her first request is to her lover to kiss her, take her into the chamber and there exalt and rejoice in their love. This is her first request. Now just in passing, notice the use of the term king here in the middle of the fourth verse.

Some have taken this as a reference to King Solomon and he's trying to get this girl into his harem and maybe not the case. This is simply one of those standard forms of the king, queen, bride, lover, sister, brother vocabulary which is common in the love poetry. So it's probably just a, well, he's treating me like a queen to take us into this situation.

Immediately, however, in verse 5, down through verse 7, you get a change of mood. I'm very dark but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Don't gaze at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has scorched me.

My mother's sons were angry with me, they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept. Tell me, you whom 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? Now this unit is expressing not her request but some kind of uncertainty. She's a shy little lady.

She can be pretty bold in certain circumstances, we'll see that later on, but there's this tension between the shyness and the boldness. One of her reasons for her shyness is she doesn't think she's very pretty. So, what's unusual? Most girls don't think they're very pretty, even though a lot of them are.

She's just a normal person at this point. Apparently, according to verse 6, she doesn't want anybody to look at her because she's all sunburned. She's been scorched by the sun.

And she tells us that her brothers weren't too happy with her, so they made her grow out in the field and take care of the vineyard. And she got sunburned. Probably her forehead got burned, her nose got red and her arms were sunburned.

And she's not too happy with that. But she's concerned she still wants to be with her lover. She doesn't want the others, but she knows he will be concerned, he will be happy with the way she is.

And so, she goes looking for him. In the seventh verse, she goes out, he's obviously working with the sheep, and he says, tell me where you pasture your flock, I want to come find you. Tell me where you rest at lunchtime, I want to come find you.

She doesn't want to be considered, like verse 7, one of the wanderers. Who would they be? Probably the local prostitutes. They would be the ones who would be wandering around looking for the shepherds and other people.

She doesn't want to be confused with them. She wants to find her own lover, her own friend. She's very shy, and very uncertain.

Now, in the third section, verses 8-11 of the first chapter, her lover appears and he speaks and he's quite encouraging. If you do not know, O fairest among the women, follow in the tracks of the flock and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents. I compare you, my love, to a mare of 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. Now he's telling her, yeah, you're pretty, pretty, you're very good looking, you're beautiful.

In fact, you are the ultimate in sex appeal. This mare, who's let loose among the war chariots and the stallions, causes all kinds of confusion. Honey, that's what you do to me.

I love you and let's share this. You're beautiful, your cheeks, your ornaments, your neck, and in fact, we're going to give you even more gold and silver ornaments. In the next little section, 12-14 of the first section, the girl is speaking again.

While the king was on his couch, again a reference back to verse 4, the king and again, in this case, her lover. My nard gave forth its fragrance, her perfume. My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts.

My beloved to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En Gedi. So she's starting to see herself through her lover's eyes rather than through the eyes of those who want to despise her and turn her away. She's already forgotten that she's sunburned.

She's just rejoicing in his interest in her. And then this first section finishes up with what I think is a kind of a bantering exchange between the lover and the beloved. Look, you're beautiful, my love.

You are beautiful. Your eyes are like doves. The rabbinic tradition has the idea that beautiful eyes are the sign of a beautiful character.

So he not only likes her looks, he likes who she is and what she is. You're beautiful. Your eyes are like doves.

You are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely. Our couch is green. The beams of our houses are cedar.

That's plural there. There are houses, not just one house. And the rafters are pine.

What's he talking about here? Well, obviously, the lover and the beloved are out somewhere in the country. They're on the hill, perhaps, where they're lying down in the shade. And they're under that shade of that tree.

The rafters over them are pine beams or cedar beams. And the roof is the leaves or the needles on the trees. Very ordinary picture, but look what they do with it.

It becomes the place where they are together, where they're sharing their love. And this becomes a very interesting motif that follows through the rest of the poem. Now, in the first part of chapter 2, which is the end of this first unit, she responds, I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Exactly the flower here, we're not sure. Sharon, of course, was the plain along the northeast coast of ancient Israel. Wild flowers grew there.

And this is perhaps some kind of a daffodil or one of those types of flowers that grow from bulbs. The word rose means something that produces bulbs or is bulbous, not the rose like we have. So, it's some kind of maybe a daffodil or one flower, something like that.

She's a lily from the valleys. Not the lily of the valley as the old King James version has it, not like our little white bell-shaped flower, but a lily that grows in the valleys down there with Sharon. She's identifying herself as just a little simple country girl, but he's not having any of that.

Like a lily among the brambles, so is my lover, my beloved, among the maidens. Girl, you're the prettiest one around. You're like the only lily among all the thorny bushes down there in the valley.

I really think a lot of you. She responds, in verse 3, as an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight, I sit in his shadow and his fruit is sweet to my taste.

He brought me to the banqueting house, banner over me was love, sustained me with raisins, refreshed me with apples, for I am sick with love. His left hand was under my head, his right hand embracing me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please.

This last unit is the woman speaking again as she responds to the compliments and the obvious enjoyment her lover has in her presence, and she is delighted to share that. Now, we're not going to go through the whole book like this, but this gives you an idea of how the interchange is taking place. Lover to beloved, the daughters of Jerusalem, the women who are there watching, interesting group.

They appear a number of times, and it might be to the point here to make just a comment about them because it does bear a little bit on the interpretation. In the Hebrew idiom, to call someone a son of something is to not necessarily indicate simply the physical descent from that person, but rather it expresses someone who has the character or the characteristics of the person that he is being identified with. The son of the father has some of the characteristics of the father, maybe the physical appearance or the attitudes, the mental things.

The biblical material talks about certain people being children or sons or daughters of righteousness, that is, they show the character of being righteous. Or, for instance, the case in the New Testament where Jesus talks about people being the children of the devil, your father the devil. They have devilish characteristics.

Well, here I think we have a similar kind of thing. The daughters of Jerusalem are the women who show the characteristics of the city girls, a little more sophisticated, a little more involved in the culture of the community, where she identifies herself simply as a farmer's daughter, a vinekeeper's daughter, working out there in the fields. So, she's a country girl.

These city girls, well, they are really the best. They've got all the better clothes, they have all the better things going on, and here she is being compared with them, and her lover said, you're the best of the bunch, much better than those girls. So she responds, okay, city girls, don't get things going too quickly.

Let's let love take its appropriate time. On this second chapter, this is kind of anticipating something that I was going to do a bit later on, but since we're here, we'll look at it right now. I mentioned the other day, the last time we were looking at this, that one of the problems with the interpretation of the song is the vocabulary.

Over half the words in the song are unusual words. Only about 18 verses in the song do not have an unusual word in them, and in this fourth verse, we've got a couple of instances of this kind of thing. Now, I picked this particularly because this text is one that is very often set to music and sung with the children down in the primary school or in church on Sunday mornings.

He brought me to the banqueting house, his banner over me was love. The implication is that Jesus brought us into his presence, into the banquet room, and now we are recipients of his great love for us, as the New Testament spells it out. Now, that's all perfectly true, but getting it from this text is a little bit tricky, a couple of reasons.

Notice we're in the context here, and if you try to take the texts in their context, it makes much more sense. We're in the context here of a relationship of a young

woman delighting in the physical presence of her lover. With great delight, I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

Verse 5, sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples, I'm so much in love I'm sick. Here, are the two things. One, apples were often considered in the ancient world as an aphrodisiac.

They got love stirred up. Next verse, don't get going too quickly. Raisins.

There are a number of texts in the literature, both biblical and other ancient Near Eastern texts, where raisins, or more specifically, little cakes made with raisins, were part of the offerings that were made to the pagan goddesses as part of the fertility ritual. So, raisins also have this overtone of sexual arousal. Now, verse 4 is right in the middle of that little bit.

That might suggest to us we need to be a little bit careful about how we interpret this particular verse. He brought me into the banqueting house. Now the term there is one that occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament, it's specifically here, and it means the house of wine.

Two little word combinations. Now, what in the world is the house of wine? Well, there are a couple of possibilities. It could be simply the vineyard where the grapes are grown and the wine is gathered.

That's one possibility. The second possibility is it could be the place where the wine is manufactured, or where the grapes are tropped on and the juice is collected, and then it's bottled, set aside, and ultimately, as it ferments and matures, it becomes wine. The house of wine there would be this.

This is taking place. The third option is that it's the place where the wine is consumed. In contemporary terminology, the tavern or the pub, the club.

Now, any one of those would make sense in this context. He brought me to the banqueting house. Maybe they're out in the fields, in the vineyard, hiding behind the vines.

Maybe they're in the storeroom hiding there. They've been looking for somewhere to express their love, so maybe they're in behind the wineskins in that place. Or, possibly, or even more likely, he brought me to the banqueting house.

He took me down for a glass of wine, out to the pub. Not with the intent of getting me drunk, but at least just getting me warmed up a little bit. Brought me to the banqueting house.

His banner over me was love, and that's where we get some real difficulty in dealing with this particular verse. Now, this gets a bit confusing, so I'm going to have to make some references here to some notes. I'm working out of my commentary on the Song of Solomon in the Tyndale Old Testament series published by InterVarsity.

This is the unit in chapter 2, verse 4. Now, the problem here is twofold. The first is the term that's translated here as banner. His banner over me was love.

It's not a very common word. It occurs 18 times in the Old Testament and a number of times in the Book of Numbers and here in this passage in Song of Solomon. The word is not very common, and where it does occur in Numbers and the rest of the Old Testament, it seems to be some kind of symbol or a flag.

It's used in the context of battle, where they're going out to war, and the battle flag is used to identify this unit as opposed to that unit. The word here is common in this context. The only use here in Song of Solomon is a noun like the ones in the Old Testament, and it probably has something of the same meaning.

We're not absolutely certain of that. Something which is a symbol to identify the individual. Here it may be, I'm flying his flag.

I'm wearing his pin. I'm wearing his ring or whatever you do to identify yourself with this individual person. I'm flying his banner.

Well, that's one possibility. The difficulty with that is that it doesn't make a great deal of sense in the context to do it that way. I think a better understanding of this is to look at the possible use here that this may not be a noun but a verb.

There are a number of references to the verbal form, and in either case, they're related to the same idea where if it's a noun it's the banner that's flying. If it's a verb, it means to look on, to look at the banner, to gaze at it, to identify it, and therefore to move toward it. Now, the term here is not only in the Hebrew.

It's also common in the Akkadian, ancient Near Eastern dialect. There, this same verbal root has the sense, not always, but occasionally, has the sense of to desire or to wish, to look upon with desire. Now, if that is valid, and there's fairly good evidence for it, what we've got here is not that I'm waving his banner or I'm carrying his flag, but rather he was looking at me with desire, and that makes much better sense in the context.

He brought me into the house of wine. His desire, or perhaps better, his intention, I could tell by the look he was giving me, was love, or more specifically, his intention was to make love to me. Now, bank running house, house of wine, look, intending to

make love, hardly the kind of thing you want the primary kid singing in Sunday school, or probably not to sing in church on Sunday morning.

The idea here is very closely tied in with the context of the book and the immediate context of these verses, and the intention here is simply to fulfill what goes on in chapter 5, oh, that his left hand was under my head and his right hand embracing me. She is anxious, he is anxious, and verse 4 is simply one other step in that direction. We will look at a little more of some of this cross-reference, chiasmic structure of the song as we move on down, but let me just finish up with one other little observation here.

In chapter 8, the woman says, if 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. I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, into the chamber of her that conceived me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the juice of my pomegranates, oh, that his left hand were under my head and his right hand embraced me.

I adjure you, oh daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please. So, at the end of the book, we've got the same ideas, the same motifs, and some of the same vocabulary as we have at the beginning. And if you look at the book carefully, you see this over and over and over again, not just in big sections, but right down to specific words, individual terms in the exact same order or in reverse order, so that there is a very clear structural arrangement in this book.

It didn't just happen. This has the marks of very carefully worked out, edited, structured work. So the book itself has far more to suggest that it is a unity, carefully put together than it is simply some kind of haphazard collection.

Now, the next thing we need to examine as we come to understand the purpose of the book is who are the characters that are involved? And this gets a little bit confusing as well. I can find the page that I had marked. The number of characters in the book varies depending on who you talk to.

And a lot of it comes out of who and what is going on here. Now, one of the problems that we have when we start to identify the characters here is how many different units or sections are there in the book. And there is absolutely no agreement on that. Let me just give you an example here.

The Revised Standard Version, which I am reading from, divides it into 36 different units in the eight chapters. It doesn't identify any speakers. It simply assumes that you can tell this is a woman speaking, this is a man speaking, or this is a group speaking.

The New English Bible has a total of 38 chapters and it divides them up into three groups, the bride, the bridegroom, and the various companions. The New International Version has 32 units, the lover, the beloved, and the friends. The Jerusalem Bible, the French translation, has 26 characters or sections.

The Vulgate, the Latin Catholic Bible, has 44 in it. The rabbis in the Hebrew tradition see it as 21 units. They don't seem to care who is speaking.

They just divvy it up any old way to get 21. And others range from 28 to 29. I mentioned earlier Calvin Seerfeld, the Toronto scholar who did the oratorio based on the Song of Solomon.

He divides it up into 62 separate speeches and songs. Apparently, nobody can really agree. More or less, somewhere in the 30s is the probability, but we can't be absolutely certain.

Now, what is the problem? The woman in the story is fairly straightforward, and fairly obvious. There's just one major female character here and we're not exactly sure who she is. There are a couple of possibilities.

Over in chapter 6, 13th verse, somebody or some group of people, obviously this looks like a plural, says, return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon you. Now, we'll come back to this section a little bit later. I want to examine some of the details in it here.

But for this point, at this stage, the important thing is this identification of this young lady as the Shulamite, or if you take that as a proper name, as Shulamith. Possibly, it could be either way. Now, who or what is the Shulamite or who is the Shulamith? Traditionally, in early rabbinic interpretation and most of the other commentators, she is identified as a girl from the country, perhaps from the little city of Shunem up in Galilee, although the link between Shunem and Shulam is a later New Testament identification.

There's no identification like that in the Old Testament period. But it's possible she may be the girl from Shunem. That sets up one interesting little possibility.

Back in the book of 1 Kings, we've got the story of King David. The books of Samuel do most of the stories of the reign of David. But here in the first chapter of 1 Kings, we get this comment.

King David was old and advanced in years, and although they covered him with clothes, he couldn't get warm. Therefore, his servant said to him, let a young maiden be brought for my Lord, the King, and let her wait upon the King and be his nurse. Let her lie in your bosom, that my Lord, the King, may be warm.

So, they sought for a beautiful maiden throughout all the territory of Israel, and they found Abishag, the Shunemite, and brought her to the King. The maiden was very beautiful, and she became the King's nurse and ministered to him, but the King knew her not. The idea here is that this young lady, Abishag, the Shunemite, might have been the woman in the story of Solomon.

In the story in the book of Kings, one of Solomon's brothers wanted to take Abishag as his wife, and he promptly got himself expelled from the kingdom because he was trying to claim the King's place, which was Solomon's. If this song is about Solomon, then maybe the Shunemite is Abishag. That's pushing it a little bit, because as I said a moment ago, Shulam and Shunem, there's no Old Testament identification for the link of those two names, but perhaps there is some kind of link.

Whatever, this young lady is a country girl who is in the situation here of having to make a choice. Now, the second and most difficult identification here is how many men are involved in the story, and it boils down to two options, basically. One is that this is the story of the Shunemite, Abishag or some other girl from Shunem, who is being brought into the harem of King Solomon.

He's already got 700 wives and 300 concubines, but he wants one more, so he is going to bring this young lady in. Unfortunately for King Solomon, she's got a boyfriend back in Shunem, a country boy, a shepherd, and she loves him. She doesn't want to come into the harem, and if she is going to be taken into the harem, it's going to be against her will.

She wants her own beloved, her own boyfriend. So the tension is set up here between the king wanting her, and she wants her boyfriend, her boyfriend wanting her, and some kind of struggle going on. Unfortunately, when it comes to identifying whether it was the boyfriend or King Solomon making a particular speech to the girl, the commentators can't agree.

Some would say very clearly, that this is Solomon. Some would say, oh no, very clearly, that's the other guy. And simply on the basis of the text, it's impossible to decide.

Certainly, there seems to be a repudiation of the Jerusalem girls and all the things they stand for. So, if it's a two-man sequence, we've got a major problem with interpretation and trying to assign the speeches and sort other things out. The other option, of course, is if there is simply one woman and one man, her lover.

That makes much more sense out of the continuity in the story, and it avoids the problem of trying to identify who said what, to whom, and under what

circumstances. Now, there are a couple of other groups of people involved here. We've already talked about the daughters of Jerusalem.

They occur several times in the text. We've already mentioned in verse 6 of the first chapter the fact that this young lady's brothers made her go out in the field and get sunburned, taking care of the vineyards. And we also have over at the end of the book, chapter 8, verse 8 following, another reference, an indirect reference, to the brothers who are not identified but who are speaking.

There's this comment, we have a little sister, she has no breast, and she's not mature yet. What should we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken of? Somebody is going to be after her. How do we protect her? So, we've got the brothers and the sister, we've got the girls from Jerusalem.

And then, if we read the passage here in the middle section correctly, we've got the guests at the wedding feast. We'll see them when we look in a few minutes at chapter 7 and the celebration of the wedding. There are a number of cases here where these individuals come back and forth, but we'll take some time in a moment or two and look at those individually once we look at something of the purpose of the book.

This was Dr. Lloyd Carr's third lecture of four on the Song of Songs.