

# The Song of Songs in the Hebrew Bible

*Inner-biblical allusions embodied by  
Solomon and the Daughters of Jerusalem*

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Moore Theological College

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## Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and to the best of my knowledge contains no materials previously published or written by another person. It contains no material extracted in whole or part by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. I also declare that any assistance received from others in terms of design, style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

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I consider that this thesis is in a form suitable for examination and conforms to the requirements of Moore College for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Abstract

The perception that the Song of Songs demonstrates minimal affinity with other biblical texts has been widely accepted. This thesis draws out overlooked allusions to other texts in the Hebrew Bible, arguing that the unrealised significance of the named characters (Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem) anchors the Song more firmly to Israelite history and religion than has previously been recognised. This is effected by first establishing the semiotic significance of Solomon and the daughters within the Song and then testing the explanatory power of the preliminary conclusions by applying them to exegesis of key verses from the Song.

The first stage of analysis defines the literary figures of Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem within the Song of Songs, with reference to the associations carried by their respective names from the wider Hebrew canon. Regarding Solomon, whose persona in the canon is composite, a set of criteria is defined for selecting which texts from the canon have most relevance to his characterisation in the Song. These are brought to bear on the analysis of his characterisation in the Song and on the assessment of the intent of the Solomonic superscription in Song 1:1. It is concluded that the enduring association between Solomon and אֶהְיֶה in the canon is negative and that this association is sustained in the Song, wherein he is characterised with reference to the critical elements of the account in 1 Kings 3–11.

With respect to the daughters of Jerusalem, language is offered to articulate the prevalent understanding that they function as surrogates for the external audience to the Song, and the way this effects the Song's didactic intent. The sense of the Hebrew idiomatic device of "daughter(s)" in construct with a place name is examined with a view to discerning whether the usual usage applies in the Song. The significance of the daughters' association with "Jerusalem," taking into account the cultural weight of this place name in the canon, is discussed with respect to the implications for the understood audience of the Song.

The second stage of analysis applies the preliminary conclusions drawn from the above to the exegesis of key verses from the Song: the adjuration repeated in 2:7; 3:5; 8:4, and the climactic description of love in 8:6–7. The preliminary propositions regarding the significance of Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem are found to have more satisfying

explanatory power than traditional justifications for the urgency of the adjuration and the content of the exhortation regarding love in 8:6–7. The exegetical conclusions refute the tendency to interpret the Song in relative isolation from the rest of the Hebrew canon and challenge prevalent Christian applications of the Song of Songs.

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## Abbreviations

AB	The Anchor Bible
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AIL	Ancient Israel and its Literature
<i>AJSLL</i>	<i>The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
AOS	American Oriental Series
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
ASBT	Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom & Psalms
BDB	Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907.
<i>BI</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BIBALDS	Berkeley Institute of Biblical Archaeology and Literature Dissertation Series
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
<i>BKC</i>	Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, eds. <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary</i> . Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1985.
BLH	Biblical Languages: Hebrew
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BO	Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry
BSC	Bible Study Commentary
BST	Bible Speaks Today
BTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche

CATR	<i>Canadian Theological Review</i>
CB	The Church's Bible
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
Concordia	Concordia Commentary
<i>CurrBiblicRes</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
DBI	Coggins, R.J., and J.L. Houlden, eds. <i>A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation</i> . London: SCM, 1996.
DBIm	Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds. <i>Dictionary of Biblical Imagery</i> . Downers Grove: IVP, 1998.
DOTP	McConville, J. Gordon, and Mark J. Boda. <i>Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets</i> . Downers Grove: IVP, 2012.
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EBib	Etudes Bibliques
FOTB	Focus on the Bible
GD	Gorgias Dissertations
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and Edited under the Supervision of M. E.J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HthKat	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JESOT	<i>Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JGH	Johann Gottfried von Herder's sämtliche Werke zur Religion und Theologie
JPSBC	The Jewish Publication Society Bible Commentary
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism



<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar Zum Alten Testament
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar Zum Alten Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LGRB	Lives of Great Religious Books
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NcoBC	New Collegeville Bible Commentary
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old and New Testaments
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	The Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
REC	Reformed Expository Commentary
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review &amp; Expositor</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>The Reformed Theological Review</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLit	Studies in Biblical Literature
SGBC	The Story of God Bible Commentary
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SHCT	Studies in the History of Christian Traditions
Siphrut	Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures

SOTSS	Society for Old Testament Study Series
SPOT	Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament
StudBib	Studia Biblica
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WG-RW	Writings from the Greco-Roman World
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZfE	<i>Zeitschrift für Ethnologie</i>

# Chapter 1 | Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Extant interpretations of the Song of Songs span almost two millennia, yet there is no decisive consensus as to the meaning of this book.

The Song eludes a historical connection to a specific moment on the biblical timeline, with proposed datings ranging from as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to as late as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. It suffers from a lack of resemblance to other biblical books, in terms of subject matter and genre, which produces the related difficulty of categorising it with other books in order to apply the interpretative strategy appropriate to its category.

From the earliest Jewish and Christian interpretations on record until the eighteenth century, the Song was usually interpreted allegorically. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it became briefly popular to read the Song as a drama with either two or three main characters (interpreters could not agree). Then in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as likenesses between the Song and other types of ancient Near Eastern literature were noticed, attempts were made to trace its roots to wedding customs, ancient fertility cults or sacred marriage rites from assorted ancient Near Eastern traditions. The most enduring comparison was to Egyptian love songs, which generated the contemporary approach of reading the Song as love poetry. Most current interpreters justify the inclusion of apparently secular poetry in the religious canon by relating the content of the Song to ideals for marriage (the presumed context for sexual love in a Judeo-Christian worldview) or by linking the central romance analogously to the love between God and Church. Others deny the need to “spiritualise” the content at all, holding that the celebration of embodied human sexuality is the Song’s unique and sacred contribution to the Bible. (All of these approaches will be discussed in the literature review, below.)

This background explains the current tendency in scholarship to interpret the Song in practical isolation from the rest of the Hebrew canon. There is a propensity to focus on the

experience of the anonymous central couple, sequestered in the walled garden that is the Song, without direct relation to other texts in the canon or to the theological and historical trajectory of the Hebrew Bible.

While the two primary characters in the Song are anonymous, the two secondary characters are not. “King Solomon” and “daughters of Jerusalem” are appellations which embody links to other biblical texts, or more accurately to literary figures generated by multiple texts across the canon. This thesis will use the figures of Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem as points of contact between the Song and other parts of Hebrew Scripture, allowing the inner-biblical allusions they encapsulate to suggest new interpretative avenues for the Song of Songs.

## 1.2. Literature Review

### 1.2.1. History of Interpretation

Markedly different approaches to interpreting the Song have been favoured at different phases of history. A helpful organising principle is to divide interpretative strategies into those that are *primarily* shaped by theological presuppositions, which inform the genre classification of the Song, and those that arise *primarily* out of literary considerations, dictating the way the Song is classified and interpreted, which leads to theological conclusions.

Broadly, interpretations from the earliest times on record until the eighteenth century were controlled by pre-existing religious concepts. Jewish and Christian interpretations were almost universally allegorical, as this approach delivered an interpretation that made the Song predominantly about Yahweh and Israel, or Jesus and the Church, consistent with established metaphors from the Hebrew Bible (Yahweh as Israel’s husband) and New Testament (Church as the bride of Christ, and earthly marriage as an image of this).

Two comments from Rabbi Akiva are popularly cited by modern commentaries as evidence that the earliest Jewish interpretations were allegorical. In the first oft-quoted statement, Akiva defended the Song’s canonicity:

Mercy forbid! No one in Israel ever disputed that the Song of Songs renders the hands impure, since nothing in the entire world is worthy but for that day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies!<sup>1</sup>

A second comment from Akiva on the Song appears among a list of those who have no place in the world to come, which includes “he who, at a banquet, renders the Song of Songs in a sing-song way, rendering it into a common ditty.”<sup>2</sup> This has been taken up as evidence that Akiva advocated for an allegorical reading of the Song, as the quote may imply that Akiva opposed himself to those who rendered the Song in a more “common” way.<sup>3</sup> While Akiva’s comments in the Mishnah and the Tosefta certainly reveal that he emphatically regarded the Song as holy Scripture, any attempt to reconstruct the particular method by which he interpreted it is conjecture. However, the Mishnah does contain concrete evidence of a Jewish tendency to allegorise the Song.<sup>4</sup> The Targum to the Song of Songs is the confirmation that allegorisation was established as the dominant Jewish method of interpretation by the time of the Targum’s compilation (between A.D. 700–900). In addition to the Targum, allegories of the Song were offered by prominent Jewish scholars including Saadia Gaon (10<sup>th</sup> century), Rashi (11<sup>th</sup> century) and Ibn-Ezra (12<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>5</sup> Ibn-Ezra’s is worth noting because it was the first to introduce the idea that the love interest in the Song was a shepherd and that the king was a separate character, a notion that would fail to enter the mainstream in its time but resurfaced in the dramatic interpretations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The earliest surviving Christian interpretations are also allegorical, but since the Targum post-dates the first Christian allegories by some four hundred years (the earliest extant Christian interpretation being a portion of Hippolytus’ commentary, ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> century),

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<sup>1</sup> Mishnah *Yadayim* 3:5.

<sup>2</sup> Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 7.

<sup>3</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 13.

<sup>4</sup> In reference to a Jewish tradition of maidens dancing at festivals, Mishnah Taanit quotes Song 2:11: “Go out, maidens of Jerusalem, and look on King Solomon, and on the crown wherewith his mother has encircled [his head] on the day of his espousals, and on the day of the gladness of his heart.” Then it adds: “‘the day of his espousals’ alludes to the day of the gift of the law, and ‘the day of the gladness of his heart’ was that when the building of the Temple was completed. May it soon be rebuilt in our days. Amen!” Mishna Taanit 4:8; see H. H. Rowley, “The Interpretation of the Song of Songs,” *JTS* 38.152 (1937): 338.

<sup>5</sup> A myriad of other Jewish allegorical interpretations add little to the present discussion, but are covered extensively by Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Commentary*, AB 7C (Doubleday, 1977); Murphy, *The Song of Songs*; Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

it is not possible to say with certainty whether a Jewish tradition of allegorisation prompted Christian interpreters to take the same approach or whether Jewish and Christian allegories arose contemporaneously.<sup>6</sup> The differences in Jewish and Christian theology were reflected in the emphases of their respective allegories, but the basic strategy was the same.

Origen's voluminous work on the Song (only partially preserved) was the most influential early Christian offering, resonating through subsequent centuries of interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Origen read the poem as a drama driven by dialogue between characters he identified as the Bride, her maiden-companions, the Bridegroom and his friends. He called this "A Drama of Mystical Meaning," pointing readers to the "spiritual interpretation" that emerged when the events in the drama were understood allegorically to represent events in the relationship between a Christian soul and Christ.<sup>8</sup> A similar approach was perpetuated by Gregory of Nyssa (ca. A.D. 335–395), who acknowledged the influence of Origen in the introduction to his homilies (covering Song 1:1–6:9), and treated the Song as a "mystical vision" wherein "the soul is in a certain manner led as a bride toward an incorporeal and spiritual and undefiled marriage with God."<sup>9</sup> Contemporaneously, Jerome introduced Origen's interpretation to the Western church, translating two of Origen's homilies on the Song himself and adapting Origen's reading of the Song in his *Letter to Eustochium* on the topic of virginity.<sup>10</sup> Thus Origen and his early emulators characterised the general approach that would prevail throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.<sup>11</sup> Occasional alternatives to the allegorical approach appeared but were poorly received: for example, Theodore of Mopsuestia (A.D. 350–428) proposed reading the Song as romantic poetry penned by

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<sup>6</sup> While disputed, there is evidence that Origen, who produced the banner allegorical commentary on the Song, was influenced by Jewish exegesis of the Song. See Pope, *Song of Songs*, 116.

<sup>7</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 21–22; Larry L. Lyke, *I Will Espouse You Forever: The Song of Songs and the Theology of Love in the Hebrew Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 105.

<sup>8</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R.P. Lawson, ACW 26 (Westminster: Newman, 1957), 21, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, trans. Richard A Norris, WG-RW 13 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 11, 15.

<sup>10</sup> F.A. Wright, trans., *Jerome, Select Letters*, LCL 262 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 52–159; see also Karl Shuve, *The Song of Songs and the Fashioning of Identity in Early Latin Christianity*, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 177–78.

<sup>11</sup> Richard A Norris, ed., *The Song of Songs Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, CB 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), xix–xx; Hannah W. Matis, *The Song of Songs in the Early Middle Ages*, SHCT 191 (Boston: Brill, 2019), 4–5; Astell observes that Origen's interpretation was the basis for all subsequent allegories, and notes that Littleproud in his history of the Song's interpretation identified only Theodore of Mopsuestia and Jovinian as exceptions to the prevailing mystical interpretation of the Song up until the Renaissance; Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1990), 4.

Solomon to his Egyptian wife, but this method of reading the Song was viewed with suspicion in Theodore's time.<sup>12</sup> In a similar era the monk Jovinian invoked a literal reading of the Song of Songs to refute the prevailing perception in the Western church that celibacy was superior to marriage, but he was condemned (at Rome in 390 and Milan in 395) for his attacks on asceticism.<sup>13</sup> By and large, non-allegorical readings of the Song of Songs failed to gain traction or form trends until the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Since the allegorical approach has dominated for the majority of the Song's interpretative history, its merits should be considered seriously. To contemporary readers, allegory can seem like a contrived attempt to sanitise the erotic content of the Song and justify its canonical status. Indeed, the early church's determination to quash Jovinian's assertion that celibacy was not superior to marriage—a position he partly supported with a literal reading of the Song of Songs—is evidence that Christian allegories of the Song sprung up in an era when the church was disinclined to laud sexual love. However, the metaphors of Bride/Israel/Church and Bridegroom/Yahweh/Christ arose quite naturally from established biblical categories. The concept of representing the relationship between God and his people as a “marriage” was not invented by an allegorist. The allegorists' instinct that romantic love and the divine-human relationship are inextricably intertwined in Hebrew Scripture is biblically sound and should not be discounted altogether.

However, the recognition of an *analogical* relationship between the pairs “Yahweh and Israel” (or “God and the Christian soul”; “Christ and the church”) and “husband and wife” (or “bridegroom and bride”) does not in itself justify an *allegorical* interpretation of the Song as a whole. A distinction is made here between “the extensive (narrative) understanding of allegory and the use of allegory for isolated applications of language,” that is, a sustained allegorical narrative employing multiple related metaphors versus isolated

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<sup>12</sup> It is likely that Theodore's posthumous condemnation by the Second Council of Constantinople was a factor in the failure of his views to enjoy enduring popularity (or even to survive—his interpretation of the Song can only be extrapolated from the comments made against it at the time). While contemporary scholars of the Song can give the impression that Theodore's literal reading of the Song was condemned, this may be a mischaracterisation. His denunciation by the Council was focused on the use of his writings in support of Nestorianism; his view of the Song appears to have been caught in the historical crossfire. See Longman, *Song*, 38–39; Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, *Song of Songs/Lamentations*, WBC 23B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 90; J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 73.

<sup>13</sup> Jovinian's views are known only from Jerome's refutation of them in his *Adversus Jovinian*. See Andrei Antokhin, “Jovinian: A Case Study of a Balanced Monastic Theologian,” *Phronema* 31.1 (2016): 113–14; Shuve, *Early Latin Christianity*, 204–5.

metaphors within a narrative.<sup>14</sup> Allegorical interpretation in the former sense demands that the text as a whole describes a single event (that is, a single coherent narrative), with every element of the surface text referring to its counterpart in the allegorical understanding. An important qualifier is that “the allegorical character of a text and the semantic interpretation of its metaphors can only properly be established in accordance with the relevant indications from the text itself.”<sup>15</sup>

The Hebrew Bible contains allegorical stories that meet both criteria above. For example, Nathan’s story about the rich man, the poor man and their respective sheep (2 Sam 12:1–4) and the Song of the Vineyard (Isa 5:1–6) both utilise multiple related metaphors that all pertain to the relating of a single “event,” and in both cases the text offers a key to interpreting the elements of the story allegorically: 2 Sam 12:7 explains vv.1–4, as Isa 5:7 unlocks vv.1–6.

By contrast, there is nothing in the text of the Song to signal that it should be interpreted allegorically, nor is there any explicit key to its symbols. A long history of allegorical interpretation has demonstrated that it is possible for an interpreter to construe every detail of the Song as a symbol for its allegorical counterpart. However, these efforts assume a controlling metaphor or narrative as the starting point, then allocate related metaphorical meanings to the finer details of the text to support the assumed narrative. The wild variation in details across different allegorical interpretations of the Song is evidence that the elements of the allegory spring largely from the interpreters’ imaginations, and not from parameters provided by the text itself.<sup>16</sup> This creates the issue that there is no consistency or control in the allegorical approach: “despite the pretense of exegetical precision, exaggeration and uncontrolled fantasy seem to be flaws endemic to allegorical exposition.”<sup>17</sup> Despite this, allegory persisted as the dominant mode of interpretation throughout the Middle Ages and the Reformation era.

Longman identifies that “an Enlightenment insistence that an interpretation be established by a literary argument rather than a simple traditional fiat is the first reason for

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Lemmer, “Movement From Allegory to Metaphor or From Metaphor to Allegory?: ‘Discovering’ Religious Truth,” *Neot* 32.1 (1998): 96–97; cf. Bjørndalen’s distinction between “texts which are allegories” and “texts part of which are allegories”; Anders Jørgen Bjørndalen, “Allegory,” *DBI* (1990): 14.

<sup>15</sup> Bjørndalen, “Allegory,” 16.

<sup>16</sup> Rowley offers a list of examples of allegories contradicting one another in the details (Rowley, “The Interpretation of the Song of Songs,” 342–44.).

<sup>17</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 93.



the failure of the allegorical approach of the Song.”<sup>18</sup> In the intellectual atmosphere of the Enlightenment era, the Song was no longer the untouchable “Holy of Holies,” but subject to investigation as a literary artefact. Freed from the theological presuppositions that anchored an allegorical approach in place, interpreters allowed the literary form and features of the Song to drive its genre classification and the interpretative strategies applied.

This shift in attitudes towards biblical literature was contemporaneous with a phase of increasing activity in Near Eastern archaeology through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In particular, the decoding of the hieroglyphs on the Rosetta Stone (1822) precipitated a period of renewed interest in Egyptology, which permeated Western art, literature, architecture and anthropology. This prompted a comparison between the Song and four collections of Egyptian love songs which were deciphered in the late nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

These factors gave momentum to two new approaches to reading the Song. Firstly, in the nineteenth century it became popular to read the Song as a dramatic narrative about human characters, without imposing a divine allegory.<sup>20</sup> The idea that the Song contained a dramatic plot was not entirely new, but the drama had historically been overlaid with allegorical meaning (the typical examples are Origen and ibn Ezra, both of whom read the Song as a continuous narrative populated by human characters, which was the vehicle for their respective allegories). The modern dramatic approach read the Song as an episode set in Solomon’s history. One version of this had two main characters: in 1885 Franz Delitzsch proposed a simple story in which Solomon takes into his courts a country maiden who, “by her beauty and by the purity of her soul, filled Solomon with a love for her which drew him

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<sup>18</sup> Longman, *Song*, 37.

<sup>19</sup> When scholars speak of the “Egyptian Love Songs” or “Egyptian Love Poetry,” they are referring to four main collections found in the Papyrus Harris 500, the Chester Beatty I Papyrus, the Turin Papyrus and a group known as the Cairo Love Poems, found on pieces of a vase. Some additional fragmentary sources are also included in the comprehensive analysis in Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> The “dramatic approach” is used here as an umbrella term for interpretations which read the Song as having a discernible plotline. Some commentators use the word “drama” simply to mean that the poetry of the Song contains narrative development, while others have used “drama” to mean that they read the Song as the script for an actual theatrical staging. Either way, dramatic interpreters argued that they could identify sustained characters and a storyline in the text of the Song.

away from the wantonness of polygamy.”<sup>21</sup> More popular was ibn Ezra’s three-character plot, revived by Heinrich Jacobi in the late eighteenth century and subsequently popularised in the nineteenth by Heinrich Ewald and Christian Ginsburg.<sup>22</sup> In this version, the love of a woman and a humble shepherd is threatened by King Solomon’s attempt to possess the girl for his harem; the King is recast not as beloved Bridegroom, but an unwelcome suitor representing the antithesis of true love.

The main difficulty of the dramatic approach as an interpretative movement is that it failed to produce an overriding consensus on the details of the drama. Interpreters who favour this approach agree on the presence of persistent characters in the Song—the woman, her beloved and Solomon—but it is possible for two scholars to come up with two different perceptions of the dramatic plot. (The difference between differentiating or conflating the characters of Solomon and the beloved is one obvious example.) Thus the movement suffered from the same issue as the allegorical approach: a deficiency of collectively agreed interpretative controls established from the text, which resulted in a variety of individual, imaginative readings. Ultimately, “lack of consensus among the advocates and the sheer weight of their speculative ingenuity caused the enterprise to founder and fade.”<sup>23</sup> However, the dramatic approach has survived in some forms: in the twentieth century, Waterman (1948) and Seerveld (1967) presented their own versions (Waterman’s was self-described as a “dramatic poem,” while Seerveld’s was set to music).<sup>24</sup> More recently, Provan recognises the presence of three characters and a “dramatic form” in the Song, though not adhering strictly to the classic three-character dramatic interpretation. Athas also recognises three persistent characters in the Song and uses the historical context of the Antiochene persecution, to which he dates the composition of the Song, to interpret the details of the drama.<sup>25</sup> Common to all of these interpretations, as to the original three-

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<sup>21</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. M.G. Easton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1877), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Heinrich Ewald, *Die Dichter Des Alten Bundes: Die Salômonischen Schriften*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1867); Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs: Translated from the Original Hebrew with a Commentary, Historical and Critical* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1857).

<sup>23</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> Leroy Waterman, *The Song of Songs: Translated and Interpreted as a Dramatic Poem* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1948); Calvin Seerveld, *The Greatest Song: In Critique of Solomon*, Canadian Revised Edition. (Willowdale: Toronto Tuppence, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> Iain Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 244–47; George Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, SGB 16 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 254–63.

character dramatic interpretation, is the perception of Solomon as an antagonistic character who is distinguished from the beloved.

A major contribution of the dramatic approach was its attention to the persistent characters in the Song and its relation of these to the wider Hebrew canon. In particular, the characterisation of Solomon in both the two and three-character versions drew on his depiction elsewhere in the canon (particularly 1 Kings 3–11). While the dramatic approach has fallen out of favour for legitimate reasons, the idea of bringing the figure of Solomon from the broader canon to bear on the Song has literary and theological merit and there is no reason to discredit this aspect of the interpretation.

The second approach which rose in popularity through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was to read the Song as a poem (or poems) purely about romantic love between a man and woman. While there is evidence this approach has been proposed occasionally in earlier history, it has only recently become the standard way of reading the Song. The current movement can be traced back to the 1778 publication of German philosopher, poet and literary critic Johann Gottfried Herder, who analysed the Song as an anthology of erotic poems.<sup>26</sup> Several commentators took up Herder's view in the following century, laying the groundwork for the type of reading that prevails today.<sup>27</sup> After witnessing a wedding in Syria in the nineteenth century, Wetzstein noted the resemblance between the toasts made between the bride and groom and the *wasfs* in the Song, an identification that was subsequently taken up by Budde, who claimed that the Song could be traced to Hebrew wedding customs.<sup>28</sup> Parallels were also drawn between the Song and sacred marriage rites from Sumeria, which had generated Akkadian and Canaanite versions, leading to the hypothesis that the Song reflected an Israelite manifestation of this literary tradition.<sup>29</sup> Pope

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<sup>26</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Salomons Lieder Der Liebe Die Ältesten Und Schönsten Aus Morgenlande*, ed. Johann Georg Müller, vol. 4 of *JGH* (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1827). Gerhards has subsequently argued that von Herder's intent was misunderstood and that his perception of the Song in fact "approximates the traditional religious-allegorical understanding," nevertheless Herder's proposition that the Song was folk poetry sparked a new direction in its interpretation. Meik Gerhards, "The Song of Solomon as an Allegory: Historical Considerations," in *Interpreting the Song of Songs - Literal or Allegorical?*, BTS 26 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 58–59.

<sup>27</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> J.G. Wetzstein, "Die Syrische Dreschtafel," *ZfE* 5 (1873): 270–302; Karl Budde, "Das Hohelied Erklärt," in *Die Fünf Megillot (Das Hohelied, Das Buch Ruth, Die Klagelieder, Der Prediger, Das Buch Esther) Erklärt*, KHC VXII (Freiburg I.B.: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1898), IX–48; see also Rowley, "The Interpretation of the Song of Songs," 355–57 for further elaboration and critique of this trend in scholarship.

<sup>29</sup> Theophile James Meek, "Canticles and the Tammuz Cult," *AJSLL* 39.1 (1922): 1–14; Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Biblical 'Song of Songs' and the Sumerian Love Songs," *Expedition* 5.1 (1962): 25–31.

revived associations between the Song and ancient funerary feasts.<sup>30</sup> However, none of these comparisons has survived criticism and each has fallen out of favour in turn.

The identification which has had the most enduring influence on current interpretations is the comparison between the Song and Egyptian love poetry. The resemblance was first noted by Egyptologists who translated the hieroglyphic transcriptions of Egyptian songs in the late nineteenth century. Subsequently throughout the twentieth century, other scholars noted the same with varying degrees of comment and interest but without significant ramifications for the interpretation of the Song itself.<sup>31</sup> In 1985, Michael V. Fox defined the field with his exhaustive comparison of the Egyptian love songs and the Song of Songs.<sup>32</sup>

While Fox does not claim dependency between the Song and Egyptian love literature, admitting this is impossible to prove, he hypothesises that the Song is “a late offshoot of an ancient and continuous literary tradition, one whose roots we find, in part at least, in the Egyptian love poetry.”<sup>33</sup> This is helpful insofar as it provides a clue to the Song’s genre and the literary features that might help to unlock its meaning. That is, “studying the Egyptian songs gives rise to new ideas about what to look for in ancient Near Eastern love poetry,” including the Song.<sup>34</sup> The strength of reading the Song as love poetry is that it is the most fitting strategy suggested by the literary features. It allows the appropriate recognition of persistent characters, consistent metaphors and some narrative continuity without pressing the material to produce an allegory which is not suggested in the text, or a detailed dramatic plot upon which it has proven difficult to reach a consensus.

However, this interpretative movement has generated debates over a multitude of ambiguities where interpretations of the poetic features differ. Even basic questions, such as how many poems the Song contains (one or many, and how many), are disputed.<sup>35</sup> This is just one example of the questions suffering from a lack of consensus.

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<sup>30</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 210–29.

<sup>31</sup> A summary of relevant publications in the first half of the twentieth century can be found in John B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry*, SBLDS 38 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 67–68.

<sup>32</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*.

<sup>33</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, xxiv.

<sup>34</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, xx.

<sup>35</sup> Recent scholars who read the Song as an anthology include: M.H. Segal, “The Song of Songs,” VT 12.4 (1962): 470–90; Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, Rev. and Aug. (New York: Ktav, 1974); Marcia Falk, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990);

A second issue is that reading the Song as love poetry raises questions as to its contribution as religious Scripture. Stripped of the allegorical layer, the poem is apparently devoid of references to God or any explicitly religious content. Contemporary interpreters (as outlined below) have found various ways to articulate a coherent position on this issue while honouring the interpretative strategies suggested by the Song's identification within the broad genre of ancient Near Eastern love poetry, but again, there is no decisive consensus.

#### 1.2.2. Contemporary Scholarship

It has so far been demonstrated that historical approaches to interpreting the Song can broadly be divided into those which allow theological presuppositions to suggest genre classification (allegory) and those that allow literary features to suggest genre-appropriate interpretive strategies leading to theological conclusions (drama and love poetry). Recent scholarship holds theological convictions in tension with the literary questions dictated by the content and form of the text itself. Broadly, current interpretations manage the tension via one of three basic approaches.

The majority approach is to accept the Song on face value as love poetry about a man and a woman and take it that this relationship points metaphorically (that is, analogously) to the relationship between God and the Church, without requiring the text to produce an allegorical narrative of the relationship (that is, not imposing what Lemmer terms the "extensive" or "narrative" understanding of allegory, noted above). Scholars who take this approach have tended to use the language of "metaphor" to denote the relationship between the pairs "Christ and Church" and the corresponding "husband and wife" (or "bridegroom and bride"). This *external* metaphor that likens the relationships to one another is distinct from the multitude of *internal* metaphors that the poetry employs to enrich the portrayal of the relationship(s). Murphy coined the language of the "grand metaphor" of one relationship for another, a metaphor that points the readers beyond earthly romance and arouses a longing for the sublime experience of divine love.<sup>36</sup>

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Longman, *Song*; Eliyahu Assis, *Flashes of Fire: A Literary Analysis of the Song of Songs* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009); each of these analyses breaks the Song into a different number of poems.

<sup>36</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 104.

Commentators of the past twenty years that develop their interpretation along these lines (with varying emphases and conclusions) include Longman, Hess, Estes, O'Donnell and Duguid.<sup>37</sup>

This reflects an appropriate reading strategy that is indicated by the identification of the Song's genre as love poetry in the tradition of similar Egyptian literature. The "grand metaphor" between two types of relationship is used not to corral the poetry into a strict allegorical narrative, but to enrich the conclusions the interpreter draws about the phenomenon of love in general from its depiction in the Song. It recognises that the poetic language is deliberately figurative and allows the possibility that it expresses multiple meanings.

In this approach there is a tendency to rely on the New Testament metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ to realise the Song's theological import as Christian Scripture. In one sense, it is theologically valid to extend the frame of reference for the metaphors in the Song to include the New Testament, since both Old and New Testaments together form the complete Christian canon. However, since the Song existed as Hebrew Scripture before the New Testament period, this thesis is interested in the prior question of how the Song is framed first by the Hebrew canon—the implications of which might suggest new avenues for Christian interpretation. New Testament-oriented approaches have typically passed over points of resonance between the Song and other texts in the Hebrew canon which might inform the Song's meaning independently of the New Testament metaphors.

Another issue is that among this subset of scholars, the role of Solomon in the Song is not settled. In some versions the beloved is identified as Solomon, in others the beloved is an anonymous person and the figure of Solomon is a separate character, and the perceived associations can be complex, depending on which aspects of Solomon's persona in the Hebrew canon are considered to be significant to the interpretation of the Song. For example, O'Donnell upholds a traditional view that the author of the Song is a repentant Solomon who sets himself up as a foil to the ideal love of the anonymous central couple, a

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<sup>37</sup> Longman, *Song*; Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, ed. Tremper Longman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Daniel C. Fredericks and Daniel J. Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, AOTC 16 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010); Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon: An Invitation to Intimacy*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); Iain M. Duguid, *The Song of Songs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 19, ed. David G. Firth (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015).

view which is tied to Solomon's history as a polygamist in 1 Kings 3–11.<sup>38</sup>

Contemporaneously, Hess maintains that "Solomon, as the king and symbol of wisdom and love, becomes an image for the male lover in the poem," a view which emphasises different, positive associations borne by Solomon.<sup>39</sup> That this diversity of views co-exists among contemporary scholars who take a basically similar approach to interpretation indicates the implications that Solomon's depiction(s) in the wider canon carry for interpretation of the Song, and the necessity to methodically define and defend the aspects of his persona which are taken to be relevant.

A minority group of Christian scholars presses beyond the broad metaphor of marriage as a picture of Christ and Church, employing techniques including analogy, typology and even allegory to demonstrate that the Song points, explicitly and in detail, to Jesus Christ. Iain D. Campbell proposed a messianic interpretation that is focused on Solomon's role as heir to the Davidic covenant and a type of the king to come.<sup>40</sup> Along similar lines, Hamilton advanced his "biblical-theological, allegorical, Christological" commentary which also makes heavy use of typology: Solomon is read as "a Shepherd-King who has cultivated a garden-city...the son of David who is the King in the Song is a type of one to come."<sup>41</sup> Both interpretations are motivated by the defensible conviction that the Song should be interpreted in the context of the Old Testament canon, and (as Campbell argues convincingly) that "it is impossible for the evangelical to ignore the role of Solomon."<sup>42</sup> However, the premise—that Solomon functions as a type of Christ and that his significance to the Song should not be minimised—does not lead inevitably to the conclusion, assumed by these interpreters, that Solomon is the central figure and the exalted bridegroom of the Song. This is a preconception that springs from the interpreters' emphasis on Solomon's messianic function and the messianic concern of the Hebrew Bible, rather than the depiction of Solomon in the Song itself.<sup>43</sup> The incongruence of Solomon

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<sup>38</sup> O'Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Hess, *Song*, 39.

<sup>40</sup> Iain D Campbell, "The Song of David's Son: Interpreting the Song of Solomon in the Light of the Davidic Covenant," *WTJ* 62 (2000): 17–32.

<sup>41</sup> James M. Hamilton, *Song of Songs: A Biblical-Theological, Allegorical, Christological Interpretation*, FOTB (Fearn, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2001), 35.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell, "Song of David's Son," 21; James M. Hamilton, "The Messianic Music of the Song of Songs: A Non-Allegorical Interpretation," *WTJ* 68 (2006): 338.

<sup>43</sup> Hamilton adopts Sailhamer's view that "the messianic thrust of the OT was the whole reason the books of the Hebrew Bible were written," and as such his own study "seeks the Song's exposition of pentateuchal

being cast as the “perfect bridegroom” when he is remembered in biblical history as a prolific polygamist (1 Kgs 11) is cursorily dismissed: Campbell sees the Song as describing Solomon’s one “perfect marriage” (which he admits is attested nowhere else in Scripture, and assumes must have occurred “despite” Solomon’s spiritual infidelity), while Hamilton posits, without justification, that Solomons’ harem is a “distant memory” replaced by an “idealized relationship” in the Song.<sup>44</sup>

While it takes a slightly different approach, similar issues are suffered by Mitchell’s prolific “Christological and Analogical” commentary, which is controlled by his *a priori* conviction that “Ephesians 5:21–33 is the closest biblical parallel to the Song and also is the passage that sheds the most light on the proper hermeneutical approach to the Song.”<sup>45</sup> He emphasises Solomon’s typological roles as wisdom-bearer and temple-builder, as well as perpetuator of the line of David, upon which Mitchell rests his assumption that Solomon’s marriage to the Shulammite must have “played a part in the history of Israel’s redemption,” while admitting that this is not recorded in the biblical historical books.<sup>46</sup>

All of the approaches cited above share an intention to interpret the Song in its canonical context and to give due weight to the role of Solomon, yet the shared assumption that Solomon is the ideal lover is at odds with the details of his depiction in the Song (as will be demonstrated as this thesis unfolds). Defining a controlling understanding of “Solomon” for the purpose of interpreting the Song is complicated by the fact that Solomon appears or is alluded to in multiple texts across the Hebrew canon, generating a multifaceted persona. This highlights the need for a method which carefully assesses Solomon’s depictions in the canon alongside the characteristics that are emphasised in the text of the Song, to ensure that the understanding of Solomon’s role therein accurately reflects the specific concern of the Song and not the well-intentioned concern of the interpreter.

A third group of scholars sees no need for a metaphorical, analogical or typological reading to legitimise the Song as Scripture. In 1937, on the question of the Song’s canonicity if it were “just” a poem about love, the Baptist scholar H.H. Rowley declared that “we need ask no other purpose of the Song” and “there is no incongruity in such a recognition of the

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messianism.” Hamilton, “Messianic Music,” 333; quoting John Sailhamer, “The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible,” *JETS* 44.1 (2001): 13–14.

<sup>44</sup> Campbell, “Song of David’s Son,” 27–28; Hamilton, “Messianic Music,” 338.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher W. Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, Concordia (St Louis: Concordia, 2003), 29, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 90.



essential sacredness of pure human love.”<sup>47</sup> A small, yet significant body of contemporary religious scholars accord with Rowley’s view that the Song is primarily a celebration of embodied, human romantic love, apparently secular but for its inclusion in a religious canon.<sup>48</sup> Its perceived contribution to the Hebrew Bible is that it affirms sexual enjoyment, particularly from a female point of view, upon which topic the Scriptures would otherwise be silent.<sup>49</sup>

This approach has the merit of reading the Song in a genre-appropriate way, taking seriously its affinity with secular love poetry from contemporaneous ANE traditions. It allows the sensual content of the Song to speak on its own terms, making no attempt to sanitise it due to pre-existing judgements about the suitability of the subject matter for Scripture. The argument that the Song lifts the taboo on human sexuality is affirmed by a majority of contemporary scholars, even those who would endow the Song with additional theological import.<sup>50</sup>

The shortcoming of this approach is not in what it includes, but what it omits. In accordance with the emphasis on the Song’s unique contribution and consequent lack of interest in relating the material in the Song to other texts in the Hebrew Bible, significant inner-biblical allusions are often overlooked. The conviction that it is not necessary to relate the content of the Song to grander theological themes from the canon leads to the Song being interpreted virtually in isolation, with the rest of the canon being largely disregarded for any possible significance to interpreting the Song. One major oversight is that the role of Solomon tends not to be well-accounted for by scholars who take this approach, with the presence of his name in the Song typically explained as a device intended to endow the

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<sup>47</sup> Rowley, “The Interpretation of the Song of Songs,” 358, 363.

<sup>48</sup> e.g. A. Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, OTG (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 13; Falk, *Song*; Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Random House, 1995), 11–14, 29; Exum, *Song*, 70; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, Revised and Updated. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 231.

<sup>49</sup> For this reason it is unsurprising that this interpretation is held by a number of feminist biblical scholars. It is impossible to judge whether this convergence is influenced more by the fact that a feminist reading generates an emphasis on female sexuality or that a text that centres female sexuality has naturally tended to attract the interest of feminist scholars.

<sup>50</sup> For example Estes, who ultimately sees the Song as pointing to “the inestimable quality of love that God has for his people” reads it first as a literal song of erotic love, which “counters the longstanding and false [Christian] dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual,” Fredericks and Estes, *Song*, 293, 299; Longman sees the Song’s affirmation of sexuality as its “crucial role in the Bible as a whole” without which the church would be left with “spare and virtually exclusively negative words” about sex, and additionally understands that the Song illuminates the divine-human relationship: Longman, *Song*, 59, 67–70.

lovers' encounters with Solomonic splendour.<sup>51</sup> There are multiple difficulties with this view including the understanding it necessitates of the superscription in Song 1:1 and a failure to satisfactorily account for the woman's apparent rejection of Solomon in 8:11–12 (both of which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis). Furthermore, to minimise the import of the historical Solomon so thoroughly in a canon in which he casts such a long shadow is possible, but problematic. There is no compelling textual basis for severing the content of the Song of Songs from the accounts of Solomon in the rest of the Hebrew canon. Rather, the juxtaposition of the depiction of two anonymous lovers within the Song and the material regarding Solomon in the rest of the canon suggests untapped opportunities for scholarly exploration.

Throughout the Song's long and varied history of interpretation, each new venture has usually involved a conscious rejection of frameworks that have been employed previously. Unfortunately, this means that the strengths of previous waves of interpretation have at times been discarded along with the entire interpretative strategy. Examining the history of the Song's interpretation reveals patterns that have persisted and ideas that have reappeared across multiple waves of interpretation, despite the difference in approaches.

A strength that is common to allegorical approaches and to those that employ the "grand metaphor" of marriage to point to the divine-human relationship is the instinct that human love and divine love have much to do with one another in the Song, as they do in the Hebrew Bible as a whole. That this connection goes beyond the bare existence of an analogous relationship is assumed by a majority of interpreters, yet each movement of interpretation has struggled to articulate the nature of the connection with particularity to the text of the Song of Songs and in relation to the figure of Solomon, whose name is in the title of the Song.

Another strength that has been common to all major waves of interpretation until recently, albeit manifested in different ways, is the supposition that meaningful links exist between the content of the Song and the content of the Hebrew Bible, and that these links should inform interpretation of the Song. Allegorical, metaphorical, typological and dramatic interpretations all begin with the assumption that the Song is a religious text and

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<sup>51</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 10; Exum, *Song*, 90.

seek through various means to integrate it with the religious canon. In particular, the dramatic approach emphasised that the “Solomon” character in the Song was drawn from the portrayal of Solomon elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Only recently have interpreters sought to dissolve the relationship between the Song and the canonical figure of Solomon, but prior to that it was universally assumed that Solomon and the Song belonged to each other. While Song 1:1 indicates that the Song has something to do with Solomon, there is work to do in the area of clarifying his function as a character in the Song, defining how this enriches or is enriched by his portrayal in the Hebrew Bible and articulating the implications of this for the interpretation of the Song. Clarity on these questions will shed light on the first issue named above, that is, the potential to articulate the interaction between romantic love and the divine-human relationship, as it is displayed generally in the Hebrew Bible, with particularity to the Song of Songs and to Solomon.

Surveying the history of the Song’s interpretation also reveals some surprising silences. For example, it is now well-established that the literary form of the Song invites analysis as love poetry in the same literary family as other ancient Near Eastern poetry, which suggests tools and techniques for interpreting it: readers are alert for metaphors, allusions and plays on words rather than allegorical symbols. What is surprising is how frequently the Hebrew Bible, the canon within which the Song is situated, is passed over as the primary point of reference for discerning the meaning of the poetic imagery in the Song. The Song is erroneously perceived as having few allusions to other biblical texts, and it has been common for scholars to seek the meaning of its images in extra-biblical ancient Near Eastern literature and art.<sup>52</sup> In actuality, the Song is replete with language familiar from elsewhere in the Hebrew canon. The significance of much of this overlapping language has been under-explored by recent commentators. Revisiting previously underappreciated inner-biblical allusions has the potential to clarify the interpretation of the Song as a whole. In particular, illuminating connections between the depiction of Solomon in the Song and the figure of Solomon in the broader canon may bring clarity to his role in the Song and his significance to the Song’s particular message about love.

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<sup>52</sup> The most influential recent examples of this are Pope, *Song of Songs*; and Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), aspects of whose work has been emulated by many subsequent interpreters; this will be discussed in more detail under 5.2.

The two related oversights above—the lack of attention to some inner-biblical allusions, and the lack of regard for Solomon’s import with respect to the Song—have suggested themselves in the course of the literature review, which has revealed these two areas as opportunities for further investigation. There is a third major avenue for investigation that this thesis aims to address. This represents a question which has so far not been raised in the literature review due to the fact that it is a question upon which scholarship is virtually silent. That is, a surprising omission common to all interpretations of the Song throughout history is the lack of any significant comment on the identity of the group character to whom the Song is addressed, the “daughters of Jerusalem.” They are universally interpreted as a simple literary device, existing only within the fictional confines of the Song to give the woman an audience to whom she can tell her thoughts. It has been typical for scholars to treat the phrase “daughters of Jerusalem” as though this idiom is unique to the Song. Only very infrequent reference has been made to the idiomatic usage of “daughter” and “daughters” that frequently appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, and then only cursorily. Furthermore, the daughters’ literary identity within the Song is typically formed with no reference to the wider theological import of “Jerusalem.” At most, the name of the city has been allowed to identify the daughters generically as urban women, without consideration for the particularity of Jerusalem and the significant theological and cultural associations it bears in the Hebrew canon.

In summary, the literature review has revealed that the focus of recent scholarship has been on the two anonymous main characters, whose anonymity has set the Song adrift from the biblical mainland. Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem, the two named characters who suggest links to other texts in the canon, have suffered from a lack of attention, as have a myriad of minor allusions to other biblical texts woven throughout the Song. Recognising these oversights exposes three avenues for further exploration:

1. The imagery employed to form the poetry of the Song might be interpreted with closer attention to the immediate literary context of the Hebrew Bible, rather than extra-biblical sources of imagery;
2. The content of the Song might be allowed to suggest the aspect of Solomon’s multifaceted persona in the canon that has most relevance to the Song, and this association be allowed to exert more influence over the interpretation of the Song;

3. The literary identity of the daughters of Jerusalem might be explored with reference to the idiomatic use of “daughters” and the significance of “Jerusalem” in the Hebrew canon.

These three lines of enquiry together represent an unrealised opportunity for a new foray into the Song.

### 1.3. Methodology

The view that the Song should be interpreted as a love poem using the content of the Hebrew canon as the first point of reference for interpreting its meaning is motivated by both literary and theological considerations. Applying analytic techniques suitable to an amatory poem is invited by the literary features of the text. Using other texts in the Hebrew canon as the source of meaning for significant language and images in that poem is informed by the conviction that the Song is religious Scripture, with the expectation that it can be related meaningfully to the other texts in the canon within which it is found.

To speak of relating the Song to other texts in the Hebrew canon raises questions regarding the chronology of composition and assumed direction of influence. The present study will not presume to date the Song absolutely (a question which the entire history of its interpretation has failed to settle). It is necessary only to establish a relative dating of the Song with reference to the other texts upon which it is supposed to draw.

Since the provenance of the Song is uncertain, its categorisation among the Writings in the Hebrew Bible is the major point upon which to hang a discussion of its relationship to other texts in the canon. The historical process of canon formation is subject to ongoing scholarly conversation, and the insufficiency of historical evidence to arrive at a conclusive evaluation of the issue is openly acknowledged by those participating in the debate.<sup>53</sup> A traditional view that the tripartite division of the Hebrew canon into Torah, Prophets and Writings corresponds linearly to three discrete stages of canon stabilisation has been challenged since the latter half of the twentieth century. While alternative views vary in the

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<sup>53</sup> Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone, “The Historical Formation of the Writings in Antiquity,” in *The Shape of the Writings*, ed. Julius Steinberg, Timothy J. Stone, and Rachel Marie Stone, Siphrut 16 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 52.

detail, the basic competing proposition is that the process of stabilising the Law and Prophets, in particular, was more synchronous and involved more *mutual* influence between the texts in the two collections than previously assumed.<sup>54</sup> Recent scholars (notably Chapman, Steinberg and Stone) have taken steps towards synthesising some of the contributions of both camps, a divide across which there has previously been little fruitful engagement.<sup>55</sup> Regardless of the position taken on the history of canonical development overall, there is a significant degree of consensus that the Writings were composed and collected with reference to the Law and Prophets, the stabilisation of which preceded that of the Writings.

Chapman, whose major work focuses on the development of the Law and Prophets in relation to one another, notes that the implication for the Writings is that “a grammar of Law and Prophets” was in place “prior to a full-fledged tripartite scriptural framework.”<sup>56</sup> Chapman’s notion of a “grammar” was developed by Seitz in his subsequent analyses of canonical development. Seitz argues that that the division of Law and Prophets is a foundational achievement of the canon which preceded the canonisation of the Writings. In appreciation of this achievement, it is possible to speak of “a foundational grammar, or conceptuality, that animates the Scriptures of Israel and orients them around these two blocks of material” and to affirm that “the Writings function in specific relationship to, and with specific authority grounded in, the Law and Prophets.”<sup>57</sup> While the historical process of stabilising the Writings as a collection was different for the Jewish and Christian canons, in both traditions “the authority of the individual writings presupposes a prior stability and logic in the books of the Law and the Prophets.”<sup>58</sup>

Morgan’s characterisation of the Writings as “post-exilic responses to an emerging Scripture (Torah and Prophets)” harmonises with this view.<sup>59</sup> Of most relevance to the

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<sup>54</sup> An exhaustive overview of the proponents of the linear threefold theory and alternatives proposed over the past century is offered in Stephen B. Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation with a New Postscript* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 1–69.

<sup>55</sup> See for example the “Postscript” in Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets*, 293–310; Steinberg and Stone, “Historical Formation.”

<sup>56</sup> Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets*, 308.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation*, ASBT, ed. Craig A. Evans and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 55–56.

<sup>58</sup> Seitz, *Goodly Fellowship*, 100.

<sup>59</sup> Donn F. Morgan, *Between Text and Community: The “Writings” in Canonical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 3.

discussion of perceived inner-biblical allusions in the Writings (that is, in the Song) is Morgan's argument that the Writings are essentially "referential in nature" and best understood as "responses of communities with Torah and Prophets as their central textual tradition."<sup>60</sup> Morgan does not insist that the *composition* of any given text in the Writings is necessarily restricted to the post-exilic period, rather that while some material in the Writings has pre-exilic roots, the post-exilic period is associated with significant canonical development and that the Writings as a whole "provide a literary and theological perspective that can be centred in a particular period" regardless of the provenance of individual texts in the collection.<sup>61</sup> Like Seitz, Morgan sees that the ongoing literary development and eventual canonisation of the Writings took place in conversation with a pre-existing central canon of Torah and Prophets. The supposition that the Torah and Prophets formed the "core canon" in the Hebrew tradition prior to the stabilisation of the Writings is supported by the observation made by Ilan, who surveys the appearances of the terms *Torah*, *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim* in Rabbinic literature and concludes regarding the relationship between the three collections that "before the creation of the Hebrew Holy Scriptures as we know them today, already the *Torah* and the *Nevi'im* were closely related one to the other, but not to *Ketuvim*."<sup>62</sup> Taking all of this into account, the present study will work with this conclusion: that the final canonical form of the Song of Songs presupposes and builds upon a prior, stable collection of Law and Prophets.

This suggests parameters for relating the Song to other texts in the canon: the Law and Prophets can be considered to be assumed by the Song, and the latter expected to organically extend concepts established in the former. On this premise, this thesis is alert to literary features of the Song which might reveal the way it constructs its meaning with reference to history, theology and imagery contained in those two collections which constitute the "foundational grammar" of the Hebrew Bible. Since the literature review has recognised that recent interpretations have under-recognised potential links between the literary figures of Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song and in other texts in

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<sup>60</sup> Morgan, *Between Text and Community*, 2, 5; cf. Donn F. Morgan, "The Writings and Canon: Enduring Issues and Legacy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Donn F. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 466–68.

<sup>61</sup> Morgan, *Between Text and Community*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Tal Ilan, "The Term and Concept of TaNaKh," in *What Is Bible?*, ed. Karin Finsterbusch and Armin Lange, CBET (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 229.

the canon, the present study will focus on identifying inner-biblical allusions embodied by these two figures. As other strong allusions present themselves in the texts selected for close analysis, these will also be taken into account.

To avoid the folly of allowing associations between the Song and other biblical texts to spring from the interpreter's imagination without control, it is necessary to adopt some guidelines for assessing the legitimacy and strength of perceived allusions. To ensure the legitimacy of allusions identified (restraining them from arising from the free association of words and concepts), the perceived strength of the allusions will be informed by Leonard's eight principles for identifying inner-biblical allusions and six questions for investigating the direction of influence between texts.<sup>63</sup>

The understanding that the Writings presuppose the Law and Prophets informs the use of the term "inner-biblical allusion" for the vehicle by which this thesis will identify links between the Song and other texts in the canon. "Inner-biblical allusion" is here distinguished from "inner-biblical exegesis," in which the author explicitly comments on an earlier passage of Scripture, and from "intertextuality," which is concerned with identifying links but not with determining a dependent relationship between texts.<sup>64</sup> This thesis will not be claiming that the Song is attempting to exegete other passages, merely proposing that deliberate references exist between the Song and language used elsewhere in Scripture. As this will require making some educated assumptions about diachronic relationships between texts, as above, the term "inner-biblical allusion" is preferred to "intertextuality," which operates synchronically without reference to questions of direction of influence.<sup>65</sup>

While the foundational assumption that the Writings operate with reference to the Law and Prophets goes a long way towards establishing the presumed direction of influence between the Song and other texts, the approach of this thesis will not rely on that assumption alone but will be supported by further literary evidence. Uncontroversially, a majority of the allusions that are significant to the argument of this thesis are drawn from Deuteronomy and Kings, the priority of which is assumed by even the earliest proposed datings of the Song. Where the chronological relationship between the Song and other texts

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<sup>63</sup> Jeffery M. Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case," *JBL* 127.2 (2008): 241–65.

<sup>64</sup> Russell L. Meek, "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology," *Biblica* 95.1 (2014): 280–91.

<sup>65</sup> Meek, "Intertextuality."



is uncertain, literary evidence from the texts in question can suggest the direction of influence. Leonard's method for identifying and testing the legitimacy of inner-biblical allusions is helpful here, in particular two questions for establishing the direction of influence: *Is one text capable of producing another? And does one text show a general pattern of dependence on other texts?*<sup>66</sup> The frequency and variety of apparent allusions in the Song (which will be revealed in the course of this analysis) demonstrates such a pattern. While not conclusive, the content is strongly suggestive that it was composed in awareness of and with reference to a breadth of other texts that now appear in the Hebrew canon. Where the analysis proposes that the Song is alluding to texts where the relative date of composition is not settled it will do this in consideration of the likelihood that the Song alludes to, rather than is alluded to by, major canonical texts (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Psalms) and/or will present literary evidence that material in the Song continues a trajectory of development of language or concepts traceable through other books.

With these premises in place, the thesis will examine the literary significance of Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem both within the Song and with reference to other iterations of these figures in the Hebrew canon, to suggest new perspectives from which to interpret the Song of Songs. To test the veracity of the directions suggested by the conclusions regarding Solomon and the daughters, the preliminary conclusions will be applied to the exegesis of two significant passages from the Song: the adjuration repeated in 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4, and the climactic description of love in 8:6–7.

Since exegeting the Song in its entirety would exceed the scope of this thesis, these verses have been selected as exemplary excerpts with which to test the exegetical method. The rationale for selecting these passages will be presented in full as the thesis unfolds. Briefly, it will be demonstrated that the content of the Song is framed by the woman's addresses to the daughters of Jerusalem, and that the adjuration is differentiated from her other speeches as having special significance as an instruction regarding love. The description of love in 8:6–7, widely recognised as "the climax to the Canticle and the burden of its message" provides the rationale for this instruction.<sup>67</sup> Together, the adjurations and

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<sup>66</sup> Leonard, "Identifying," 258.

<sup>67</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 210.

Song 8:6–7 convey the didactic purpose of the Song, which is why they have been chosen as the exemplary passages for exegesis.

#### 1.4. Overview

The first stage of analysis will establish the significance of Solomon and of the daughters of Jerusalem as literary figures, with reference to their function within the Song and the associations they carry from the wider Hebrew canon. Chapter 2 will survey the material concerning Solomon throughout the Hebrew canon to identify which aspects of his persona are most significant to the Song of Songs, then will use this material to assess the options historically presented for interpreting the superscription in Song 1:1 and reach a conclusion regarding the nature of the relationship between Solomon and the Song. Chapter 3 will analyse the idiomatic use of “daughter(s)” throughout the canon, particularly the personification of the citizens and city of Jerusalem as daughter(s), as the basis for understanding the “daughters of Jerusalem” device in the Song of Songs. From this investigation, preliminary conclusions will be formed regarding potential new lines of interpretation suggested by the fresh understanding of the significance of these literary figures.

The second stage of analysis will apply the conclusions drawn from the above to the exegesis of significant passages from the Song: the repeated adjuration which expresses the Song’s didactic purpose regarding love (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), and the climactic description of love itself (8:6–7). The exegesis will focus on identifying inner-biblical allusions that hearken to the broader portrayal of Solomon in the canon, particularly those which are identified as having a significant overlap of thematic concern with the Song. Further, it will assess whether the exegetical conclusions generated by this approach have coherent applications when addressed to the “daughters of Jerusalem” according to the definition of their identity proposed in Chapter 3.

The tenability of this approach and the veracity of the conclusions it leads to will be upheld or denied by the degree of explanatory power the exegetical method displays. This will be evidenced by whether bringing Solomon and the posited role of the “daughters of Jerusalem” to bear on the text brings clarity to difficult material in the Song, either by more

thoroughly explaining points of interpretation that have been previously proposed, or leading to new, coherent conclusions that are supported by the text of the Song while relying on the interactions with Solomon and the understanding of the daughters of Jerusalem for their formation.

## Chapter 2 | Solomon

### 2.0. Introduction

Surveying the history of the Song's interpretation has identified the need to define and apply a method for determining which aspects of Solomon's persona should be allowed to bear most heavily on the interpretation of the Song. Defining the role of Solomon is crucial because the affiliation with Solomon is the first fact that the Song reveals about itself. The superscription—שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמֹה—frames the Song in terms of its relationship to Solomon. The name of Solomon is the starting point for interpretation, provided by the text itself. Solomon's name is the *only* context provided before the Song launches into its opening *in medias res*. He is the only properly named character in the Song, elevating his significance (as a point of connection for context) above the two main, anonymous characters.<sup>68</sup>

Since Solomon is the first point of context offered by the Song itself, the first step to interpreting the Song is to understand what the referent "Solomon" represents, how the referent relates to the Song, and how this relationship impacts the Song's meaning. These are the aims of this chapter.

In order to understand the literary context provided by the attachment of Solomon's name to the Song, this chapter will survey and analyse the figure of Solomon in the Hebrew Bible, drawing conclusions about what his name represents in that body of literature. A method will be defined for selecting key texts that are determined to have particular relevance to the concern of the Song of Songs, using criteria based on the presence of overlapping themes and language. In due course, the analysis will proceed to an assessment of Solomon's presence and characterisation within the Song itself.

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<sup>68</sup> The only other proper name that appears in the Song is that of David (4:4) but only with respect to "the tower of David"; David is not a *dramatis persona*. The other character who bears an appellation (if not a proper name) of significance for interpretation is the group addressed as the daughters of Jerusalem, who will be discussed in the next chapter.

## 2.1. The literary figure of Solomon in the Hebrew Bible

The name of Solomon is a concrete inner-biblical reference and its presence in the title of the Song invites the reader to use it to orient their reading of the material which follows. It is therefore crucial to define the referent “Solomon” and the meaning he bears as a figure in the Hebrew Bible (the wider literary setting in which the Song is presented), before discerning the nature of the relationship of this figure to the content of the Song of Songs.

The following survey will provide an overview of Solomon’s presence in the Hebrew Bible, with special attention given to key source material which suggests itself as being especially relevant to interpretation of the Song of Songs. The key texts have been selected with two considerations in mind.

The first consideration is that the Song of Songs engages with a particular persona when it refers to “Solomon.” While the Solomon that appears across Samuel-Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Psalms and Proverbs (and to a debatable extent, Ecclesiastes) is broadly recognisable as the *same* Solomon, the different milieus and intentions that informed each separate text have led to different elements of Solomon’s persona being emphasised. The composite profile of Solomon which emerges has many facets, some of which resonate significantly with the Solomon in the Song, and others which are of limited relevance to the Song. For example, Chronicles is almost exclusively preoccupied with Solomon’s role as temple-builder, a role which is not a significant component of his persona in the Song. This is not to say that the various pictures of Solomon in Scripture are contradictory or that any is more valid than any other in general, only that certain key texts with shared emphases will be more useful for informing the interpretation of Solomon’s character *within the Song*.

This relates to the second consideration, which is that the central theme of the Song of Songs is love (אַהֲבָה). This basic understanding is common to all interpretations of the Song throughout history, whether the interpreter believes the Song to be primarily concerned with divine or human love, and whether the Song is understood to be a single

poem or an anthology of poems on a common theme.<sup>69</sup> The Song depicts scenes from a romantic relationship punctuated by a repeated admonition from the woman to the daughters of Jerusalem regarding love (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), culminating in an abstract reflection on the nature of love (8:6–7).<sup>71</sup> This reflection is almost universally recognised, not only as the poetic climax of the Song, but as a summary statement which crystallises the nature of love that is described throughout, and carries the message of the Song.<sup>72</sup>

Taking the above into consideration, the key texts have been selected on the basis of two criteria:

1. the selection demonstrates overlapping themes, subject matter and/or vocabulary with the Song of Songs;
2. in particular, the content addresses the theme of love (אַהֲבָה) in relation to Solomon.

The body of material concerning Solomon is vast, and much of it will be of limited relevance to the Song of Songs. To ensure that the key texts are selected with an awareness of the fullness of Solomon's depiction in the canon, all the material concerning Solomon will be briefly summarised before the key texts are identified and examined more closely. Conclusions will be drawn from the material about Solomon (with particular attention to the key texts) regarding the core traits and theological themes the persona of Solomon represents in the literary scheme of the Hebrew bible.

### 2.1.1. Texts about the monarchy

Two versions of Solomon's biography appear in the Hebrew Bible, within the two accounts of the Israelite monarchy from its inauguration until the exile: Samuel-Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. The period of Solomon's reign is recorded in 1 Kgs 1–11 and 2 Chr 1–9. In

<sup>69</sup> Lyke, *Espouse*, xii, 65; Ilana Pardes, *The Song of Songs: A Biography*, LGRB (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.

<sup>71</sup> J.L. Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love in the Song of Songs*, Old Testament Studies 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 146–47 has articulated the way the admonitions to the daughters and the proverb in 8:6–7 work together to convey the Song's wisdom message regarding love. Similarly, Martin Ravndal Hauge, *Solomon the Lover and the Shape of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 10, 132 has compared the combination of narrative elements and admonishments in the Song to a technique used in Proverbs, where a story punctuated by direct addresses to the audience is used with didactic purpose. The significance of Song 2:7, 3:5, 8:4 and 8:6–7 to the message of the book will be explored in more depth in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

<sup>72</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 210; Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 168; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 196; Longman, *Song*, 209; Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 78.

Samuel-Kings, this is preceded by only a brief (albeit significant) account of Solomon's birth in 2 Sam 12:24–25. In the Chronicles account, extra genealogical and biographical details for Solomon appear in 1 Chr 3:5, 10; 6:10 [5:36], 32 [17]; 14:4 and 18:8; additionally, 1 Chr 22–29 contains a protracted account of David charging Solomon to build the temple and anointing him king. In both the Kings and Chronicles accounts, the name of Solomon continues to appear as a point of reference in narrative units concerning other kings, after his own biography has concluded. After David, Solomon is the king who receives by far the most attention in the biblical texts.<sup>73</sup> While Hezekiah and Josiah are praised on par with Solomon, Solomon's biography is approximately three times as long (in both accounts) as that of Hezekiah, the nearest contender.

The respective portrayals of Solomon in Samuel-Kings and in Chronicles reflect two very different historiographical intentions, which motivate two different approaches to the characterisation of Solomon within the respective texts.<sup>74</sup> This is not to say that either account is “more accurate” than the other; only that the historian(s) responsible for each text crafted the historical material into a narrative shape that would serve a particular instructional function for the needs of a particular audience in their place and time.<sup>75</sup> In the Samuel-Kings setting, in a text which seeks to present a theological explanation for the exile, Solomon is the exemplar Torah-violating king (the first in a long line), “an embodiment of the royal pretensions that eventually led to land loss and deportation.”<sup>76</sup> In Chronicles, to support the purpose of advocating for the restoration of temple and king, Solomon's most important role is that of temple-builder and the superintendent of Israel's golden era.<sup>77</sup> In

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<sup>73</sup> Isaac Kalimi, *Writing and Rewriting the Story of Solomon in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 19.

<sup>74</sup> The summary which follows is indebted to the exhaustive comparison of the accounts of Solomon in Samuel-Kings and Chronicles found in Kalimi, *Writing*.

<sup>75</sup> On the question of whether the reader should “believe” the Samuel-Kings or the Chronicles account, Amit responds “we should believe both of them,” on the understanding that the two narratives are motivated by two different authorial intentions. As Amit puts it, each author crafts their narrative to reflect “the world of the story for which he is responsible.” Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Yael Lotan (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 99.

<sup>76</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon of Human Achievement*, SPOT (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 160.

<sup>77</sup> Whether Chronicles is more interested in the restoration of a messianic king, or the reinstallation of the temple and priesthood, has divided scholarly opinion. Janzen's recent argument that the Chronicler navigated the interests of both pro-temple and pro-Davidic groups is compelling. Moreover, the “smoothing-out” of Solomon's portrayal is necessary for the historiographer's purpose whether Chronicles is understood as an apology primarily for the temple or for the Davidic monarchy (or, as Janzen suggests, for both). David Janzen, *Chronicles and the Politics of Davidic Restoration: A Quiet Revolution*, LHBOTS 655 (London: T & T Clark, 2017).

order to determine whether one portrayal or another better informs Solomon's role in the Song of Songs, the Solomonic material in both accounts will be briefly summarised and compared, before passages of key relevance are identified and analysed.

**Solomon's biography.** 1 Kings 3–11 and 2 Chr 1–9 cover basically the same material, with a few key differences of emphasis. 1 Kings, in seeking to explain the failure of the monarchy, praises Solomon for his good points but does not shy away from condemning his idolatry and linking it explicitly with the eventual split and fall of the kingdom. Chronicles emphasises Solomon's role as the temple-builder and divinely appointed king over a united Israel, omitting the unsavoury aspects of his kingship that were brought to the fore in 1 Kings.

1 Kings 1–2 recount various conflicts that took place in the lead-up to Solomon's ascension. David's son Adonijah makes a play for the throne (1 Kgs 1:5–10), Nathan and Bathsheba manoeuvre to have David name Solomon as king instead (1:11–53), David makes a deathbed request to Solomon to enact revenge on Joab and Shimei on David's behalf (2:1–12), and Solomon has Adonijah, Joab and Shimei killed, and Abiathar the priest removed, and thus establishes himself decisively as king (2:13–46). The language of "wisdom" appears in this account, prior to the well-known scene in which Yahweh endows Solomon with special wisdom at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3:5–15; 2 Chr 1:7–12). When David is setting Solomon on his old enemies, he euphemistically tells him to deal with Joab "according to your *wisdom*" (כְּחָכְמָתְךָ) (2:6); similarly, he says to Solomon of Shimei that "you are a *wise man* (אִישׁ חָכָם). You will know what you ought to do to him..." (1 Kgs 2:9). The mention of Solomon's "wisdom" in the sub-plot about carrying out David's deathbed revenge demonstrates that "wisdom" is not an unambiguously positive character trait in 1 Kings.<sup>78</sup> It is unclear whether there is a true distinction between the ruthless "wisdom" of Solomon in the earliest days of his reign and the Yahweh-fearing wisdom he acquires at Gibeon, leaving open the possibility that the former is not definitively superseded by the latter, but that it

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<sup>78</sup> For example, Brueggeman differentiates between "worldly wisdom" such as the type Solomon employs in 1 Kings 2:6, 9 and "true discernment" that is "oriented to Yahweh," indicating that "wisdom" has various uses in the Hebrew Bible depending on how the trait is deployed. Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, SHBC (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 51–52.



continues to manifest as worldly acumen in Solomon's pursuit of wealth and political power.<sup>79</sup>

In Chronicles, all of the material from 1 Kgs 1–2 is omitted, erasing any morally spurious activity that might detract from the legitimacy of Solomon's accessions, and any mentions of "wisdom" prior to the encounter with Yahweh at Gibeon with their potential to undermine Solomon's wisdom overall. The Chronicler further takes care to emphasise that Gibeon, a high place with potentially idolatrous associations (1 Kgs 3:4), is the home of Moses's tent of meeting and the bronze altar, so as to defend the orthodoxy of worshipping there (2 Chr 1:2–6).

In 1 Kings 3–11, Solomon reigns over an unmatched period in Israel's history, during which the temple is built (1 Kgs 6:1–38; 7:13–51) and dedicated to Yahweh (8:22–66), making concrete God's promise that a son of David would build a house for Yahweh, and that his kingdom would be established forever (2 Sam 7:13). In addition, under Solomon's reign the people reach new heights of material prosperity (1 Kgs 4:20) and Israel becomes powerful among the nations (5:1; 10:23–25). These successes, while great, are subtly undermined by uncomfortable details which foreshadow Solomon's fate: his acquisition of wealth and wives in direct contravention of the stipulations for kings in Deut 17:14–17 (a more detailed discussion of this pattern in 1 Kings 3–11 will follow below). The soaring height of the dedication of the temple and the apparent sealing of the Davidic covenant is matched by the depth to which Solomon plummets in 1 Kings 11: since he has disobeyed Yahweh by marrying foreign women and worshipping their gods, the kingdom will be torn from his descendants (11:9–13), in a devastating reversal of the expectation that David's line would rule forever.

The Chronicler is virtually silent on the issues of Solomon's marriages, and therefore on Solomon's accountability for the subsequent division of the kingdom, which is the punishment visited upon his descendants. 2 Chronicles 1–9 contains only incidental mentions of Pharaoh's daughter (2 Chr 8:11) and Solomon's wives (9:7). The material from 1 Kings 11 is excluded entirely, and the Chronicler moves abruptly from the visit of the Queen of Sheba and a final description of Solomon's wealth (2 Chr 9:1–28; cf. 1 Kgs 10) to a brief

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<sup>79</sup> For a fuller discussion of the "pre-wisdom wisdom" of Solomon and its continued manifestation in the narrative of 1 Kgs 3–11 see Steven Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 50.

announcement of Solomon's death (2 Chr 9:29–31). No mention is made of Solomon's spiritual infidelity and no connection is made between his wives and the rupture of the kingdom.

**Subsequent associations with Solomon's name.** In both Kings and Chronicles, Solomon's legacy is not confined to his own biography but permeates the stories of subsequent kings. Long after his death is recorded, he is still cited as the commissioner of the temple and the valuable artefacts therein (2 Kgs 24:13; 25:16; 2 Chr 12:9; 35:3), and as the paradigmatic recipient of the temple-bound promises of Yahweh (2 Kgs 21:7; 2 Chr 33:7). Chronicles additionally references him as an authority on proper worship (2 Chr 11:17, 35:4) and as the king whose reign represented the high point in Jerusalem's history (2 Chr 30:26).

Kings, on the other hand, also remembers Solomon as the one who formally introduced idol worship to Israel on account of his foreign wives (1 Kgs 11:1–8; 2 Kgs 23:13). The consequences play out immediately for his successors: Rehoboam loses most of the kingdom to Jeroboam (12:16–20), having ignored the wise counsel of advisers (12:6–8); subsequently Jeroboam sacrifices to golden calves (12:25–33); and Rehoboam loses Solomon's treasure to Egypt (14:25–26). The division of the kingdom is the direct consequence of Solomon's covenant infidelity (11:9–13), the folly and idolatry follow Solomon's own pattern of failing to heed Yahweh and turning to other gods, and the plundering by Egypt is an ironic reversal of Solomon's gain through alliance with Egypt in 1 Kings 3–11.

Solomon's legacy resonates not only throughout the reigns of his sons, but also ultimately in the failure of the monarchy in 2 Kgs 24–25. The most notable mention of his name is during Josiah's reforms, when Josiah tears down the high places Solomon had built for foreign abominations (23:13). Solomon's shrines are ranked alongside evils including houses of male cult prostitutes (23:7) and an altar for sacrificing children (23:10). In the view of 1 and 2 Kings, the inferior Solomon is a foil for the model king Josiah; where Solomon defied Deuteronomic directives, Josiah makes every effort to restore them. 2 Kgs 21:7 (during the abominable reign of Manasseh) and 24:13 and 25:16 (during the fall and captivity of Jerusalem) recall Solomon's association with the temple, emphasising the contrast between Israel in its glory days and the depths to which it has plummeted. Solomon remains a catchword for the success of the nation, but the books of 1–2 Kings

demonstrate that his brand of success is tenuous, and Israel's kings are unable to maintain the security of their nation. As the books of Kings explore the question of how and why Israel ended up in exile, the answer finds its origins in the poor choices made by Solomon, which continued to resonate through the reigns of his heirs. His significance as the heir to the Davidic covenant, and the builder of temple in partial fulfilment of 2 Sam 7, is equally important in Kings as Chronicles, but not purely for the purpose of glorifying the covenant and Solomon's role in it (as in Chronicles). In Kings, Solomon's role as the embodiment of God's promises to Israel and guardian of their corporate covenant is what makes his downfall so disastrous.

In Chronicles, similarly to Kings, Solomon's name appears throughout the narrative of his sons, Jeroboam and Rehoboam (2 Chr 10:2, 6; 11:3, 17; 12:9; 13:6, 7). A significant difference is in 2 Chr 11:17 (which has no parallel in 1 Kings), which adds Solomon's name to the traditional formula of "walking in the way of David" as a descriptor for fidelity to Yahweh: the priests, Levites and people who are devoted to God (during Rehoboam's reign) are said to walk in the way of David *and Solomon*, elevating Solomon's status as a spiritual model to equal his father.<sup>80</sup>

As in Kings, Solomon's name is reintroduced several times towards the close of the account of the monarchy in Chronicles, but the occurrences of Solomon's name in the final chapters of 2 Chronicles carry positive connotations: the joy of Solomon's reign is a high bar to which Hezekiah manages to return (2 Chr 30:26); in the account of Josiah, there is no mention of Solomon's idolatrous shrines, only his temple and his written decree (35:3–4). To serve the urgent purpose of Chronicles, the Chronicler both enlarges and reduces the persona of Solomon. Since the Chronicler is seeking to re-instil confidence in the Davidic monarchy and the temple cult, Solomon's reputation is perfected and he is endowed with an equal standing to David, to compensate for his less morally consistent presentation in Kings.<sup>81</sup>

The comparison of Samuel-Kings and Chronicles reveals that the respective authors employ two different approaches to the characterisation of Solomon, which convey two

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<sup>80</sup> A similar addition is made in 2 Chronicles 7:10: after the dedication of the temple, Solomon sends the people home glad for the good things Yahweh has done "לְדֹיֵד וְלִשְׁלֹמֹה וְלִישָׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ"; the parallel in 1 Kgs 8:66 is almost identical except that Solomon's name is not included.

<sup>81</sup> Roddy L. Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," *JBL* 92.4 (1973): 511.

different authorly attitudes towards him. The language employed by Yairah Amit in her introduction to biblical narrative is useful here. Amit applies E.M. Forster's method (originally developed for analysing characterisation in secular fiction), which categorises literary characters as either "flat" ("constructed around a single idea or quality") or "round" (more complex and capable of development); round characters may be more or less complex depending on their range of traits, nevertheless "when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round."<sup>82</sup> Amit further differentiates between "types" (having a "limited and stereotyped range of traits") and "characters" (more complex traits and observable development).<sup>83</sup> The Solomon of Chronicles more closely fits the profile of a flat character or type, being created to serve the purpose of that text as "a one-dimensional king who really had no interest beyond temple."<sup>84</sup> The Solomon of Samuel-Kings is a round character, embodying positive and negative character traits in tension, with his ultimate downfall not assured in the mind of the reader until it is confirmed by the decisive denouement of 1 Kings 11. Multiple analysts have observed that narrative episodes within 1 Kgs 1–11 employ a variety of literary techniques to create a nuanced perspective on Solomon, simultaneously presenting and subverting a superficially positive evaluation and inviting the reader to take a critical stance towards the king.<sup>85</sup> In this manner, the outlook of Kings embodies the tension that Alter observes characterises the biblical outlook generally, in which biblical authors employ a "composite artistry" to express the untidy moral reality of human creatures.<sup>86</sup> Chronicles is a text of a different nature, distinctive for reducing a character as significant and pervasive as Solomon to a single dimension, since the inner life of the character is subordinate to the

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<sup>82</sup> E.M. Forster, "Flat and Round Characters and 'Point of View' (1927)," in *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), 138.

<sup>83</sup> Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 71–72. It is acknowledged that any tool adopted from one literary discipline for use in another must be wielded with control. Amit's application of Forster's categories to Hebrew narrative can be emulated with the prudence articulated by Alter, who in his guide to biblical narrative notes that while "the characteristic procedures of biblical narrative differ noticeably from those of later Western fiction" still "the biblical conventions can be grasped by some process of cautious analogy with conventions more familiar to us." Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Revised and Updated. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 163.

<sup>84</sup> Brueggemann, *Solomon*, 179.

<sup>85</sup> Jerome T. Walsh, "The Characterization of Solomon in First Kings 1–5," *CBQ* 57 (1995): 471–93; Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 101–2; Michael Avioz, "The Characterization of Solomon in Solomon's Prayer (1 Kings 8)," *BN* 126 (2005): 19–28; Mary L. Conway, "The Wisest Might Err: A Re-Evaluation of Solomon's Character as Revealed by His Prayer for Wisdom in 1 Kings 3:1-15," *CATR* 1.2 (2012): 29–45.

<sup>86</sup> Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 192.

Chronicler's preoccupation with reinstalling public confidence in the house of David. This is not to dismiss the validity of the Chronicles narrative wholesale, rather to point out that its relevance for interpreting the Song of Songs is limited, if it is recognised that the Song and Kings share a more complex and critical perspective on Solomon (as will be elucidated in the analysis under 2.2.1. below) as well as an overlap of thematic concern.

The different postures that Kings and Chronicles take towards the matter of Solomon's marriages are of particular interest for a study of Solomon with respect to the Song of Songs. In 1 Kings 3–11, Solomon's foreign wives and the theme of אֶהְבָּה (the central theme of the Song of Songs) are crucial to the narrative, as will be demonstrated in the discussion of 1 Kings 3–11 below. The Kings account is interested in the personal spiritual consequences of Solomon's love affairs, but more than that, "Solomon's marriages constitute a banner reason why Jerusalem was defeated and the temple destroyed."<sup>87</sup> In contrast, the parallel account in Chronicles ignores Solomon's marriages and makes no reference to אֶהְבָּה, being preoccupied with presenting Solomon as the immaculate temple-builder, for which his wives (and certainly his associated misconduct) have no relevance: "as with David, the Chronicler has ignored almost everything except cultic concerns and Solomon's involvement in them."<sup>88</sup>

The presence of love and marriage as themes in 1 Kings 3–11 and in the Song, and their absence in 1 and 2 Chronicles, suggests that the Samuel-Kings account (particularly 1 Kings 3–11) is of primary relevance for the present study. This recognition is crucial to the interpretation of the Song because it helps to resolve the divergence in current scholarship regarding the role of Solomon in the Song. Some scholars bring a conception of Solomon as temple builder and positive messianic figure to their interpretation of the Song of Songs, while others emphasise that Solomon was a polygamist and an idolater; both conceptions are valid, but there is an evident need to justify which aspects of Solomon's persona are understood to be at play in the Song of Songs. The overlap of the centrality of אֶהְבָּה to both 1 Kings 3–11 and the Song assists the interpreter in recognising which depiction of Solomon is most relevant to the Song. Comparing the account of 1 Kings 3–11 with the

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<sup>87</sup> Longman, *Song*, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic," 511.

characterisation of Solomon in the Song will affirm that the Solomon of Samuel–Kings should be considered the primary referent for the Song of Songs.

i. Key text: 2 Samuel 12:24–25

Studies of King Solomon typically focus on the account of his reign in 1 Kings, beginning at 3:1. However, the account of Solomon’s birth in 2 Sam 12:24–25 contains a biographical detail which relates to the central theme of the Song of Songs.

<sup>24</sup>Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba and he went in to her and lay with her, and she gave birth to a son, and he called his name Solomon. And Yahweh **loved** him, <sup>25</sup>and sent (a message) by the hand of the prophet Nathan, so he called his name **Jedidiah**, on account of Yahweh. (2 Sam 12:24–25)<sup>89</sup>

וַיִּנְחֵם דָּוִד אֶת בִּתְשִׁבֶּעַ אִשְׁתּוֹ וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ  
וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שְׁלֹמֹה  
וַיְהִי וְאֵהָבּוּ וַיִּשְׁלַח בְּיַד נָתָן הַנָּבִיא וַיִּקְרָא  
אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יְדִידְיָהּ בְּעִבּוֹר יְהוָה

In the Samuel-Kings account, the name Yahweh gives to Solomon foreshadows the significance of love in Solomon’s life and highlights the tragedy of Solomon’s trajectory from being beloved by Yahweh (2 Sam 12:24–25) and loving Yahweh (1 Kgs 3:1), towards loving foreign women and gods (1 Kgs 11:1) and being punished by Yahweh because of this disloyalty in love (1 Kgs 11:9–11).

As the analysis of Solomon’s biography in 1 Kings (below) will reveal, the act of loving (expressed by the verb אָהַב) played a defining role in Solomon’s career as king. 2 Sam 12:24–25 reveals that the earliest exercise of love in Solomon’s life was the love displayed to him by Yahweh on the occasion of his birth. To be “beloved” by Yahweh is the defining characteristic of the newborn Solomon. This orders Solomon’s own significant acts of love (in 1 Kgs 3:1 and 11:1, discussed below) as acts that took place in response to Yahweh’s love.

The significance of love in Solomon’s biography is emphasised by the fact that the mention of love is the only embellishment to Solomon’s birth narrative. The only extraneous details beyond the bare fact of the birth are that Yahweh loved Solomon and that Nathan gave him a special name: יְדִידְיָהּ, literally “beloved of Yah”. The presence of these details

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<sup>89</sup> Translation my own, here and throughout.

alerts the reader to be sensitive to the appearance of אֶהְבָּה later in Solomon’s biography. As Weitzman points out, names in the Hebrew bible have a tendency to portend the bearer’s destiny, and the name God gives to Solomon (via Nathan) “anticipates Solomon’s future, the fateful role of love in his life—the love of God, and the love of women.”<sup>90</sup>

In the Song of Songs, the main male character is consistently addressed by the woman as דּוֹדִי (“my beloved”). The correspondence between this epithet and the name that God used for Solomon at his birth might suggest a literary correspondence between the male figure in the Song and Solomon, but for the fact that the text of the Song makes it clear (as will be argued below) that Solomon is not the same person as the woman’s beloved. Instead, the parallel between the two appellations lays bare the differentiation between Solomon and the beloved. Solomon’s designation as יְדִידִיָּה in 2 Sam 12:25, viewed in retrospect, is ironic. Though he was born “beloved of Yahweh”, the way he loved throughout his lifetime rendered him an outsider to the love celebrated in the Song of Songs, which positions him as the antithesis to the דּוֹדִי.

2 Sam 12:24–25 is the first verse to flag the significance of אֶהְבָּה in Solomon’s life, a theme that will continue throughout the narrative of 1 Kings. The establishment of this theme at the introduction to the biography of Solomon in Sam 12:24–1 Kgs 11:43 is the first clue that the Samuel-Kings account of Solomon should be used as the primary referent for the Solomon in the Song of Songs, of which אֶהְבָּה is the central theme. This is borne out when the significance of אֶהְבָּה is traced in the account of Solomon’s reign in 1 Kings 3–11.

ii. Key text: 1 Kings 3–11

The material in 1 Kings 3–11 demonstrates an overlap of subject interest with the Song of Songs. The central theme of the Song is love, אֶהְבָּה. This term and its cognate verb (אָהַב) have an important function in the account of Solomon’s reign in 1 Kings 3–11, which emphasises Solomon’s love for his foreign wives as the key contributing factor to his failure as king.

By the end of the account in 1 Kings 3–11, Solomon has fallen out of favour with Yahweh. The traditional perception of this portion of text has been that Solomon began his

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<sup>90</sup> Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 6–7.

reign faithfully and turned away from Yahweh in later life, with his portrayal in 1 Kings taking a negative turn at chapter 11.<sup>91</sup> However, this view has been challenged by analyses that demonstrate that while 1 Kgs 1–10 appears superficially to praise Solomon, the praise is undermined by various issues (particularly with reference to Deut 17:14–17) that reveal that the narrator is subversively critical of Solomon from the start.<sup>92</sup> Rather than being uniformly positive and then uniformly negative, the characterization of Solomon in 1 Kings 3–11 is more complex; the text both lauds his achievements and lays bare his faults, often in the same verse, and the critique of Solomon is not restricted to later chapters, but is evident from the beginning of 1 Kings 1. Although the narrator does not *explicitly* criticize Solomon until 1 Kings 11, the text includes foreshadowing throughout of the faults that will be finally exposed. One by one, Solomon defies the three prescriptions for Israelite kings given in Deut 17:14–17. This pattern of behaviour emerges early in the narrative of 1 Kings and continues until it culminates in Solomon’s ultimate preference for foreign wives and gods over wholehearted devotion to Yahweh.

Of the three prohibitions in Deuteronomy 17, the one that represents Solomon’s strongest display of defiance, with the sharpest consequences for the kingdom of Israel, is the command regarding the king’s wives:

And he shall not get many wives for himself, lest his heart turns away (Deut 17:17a)	וְלֹא יִרְבֶּה־לּוֹ נָשִׁים וְלֹא יָסוּר לְבָבוֹ
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The significance of Solomon’s wives in 1 Kings 3–11 is underlined by the fact that mention of his marriages and his אֵהָבָה form an inclusio in the narrative of Solomon’s reign:

Solomon made himself son-in-law to Pharaoh king of Egypt (3:1)	וַיִּתְחַתֵּן שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת־פָּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
Solomon loved Yahweh (3:4)	וַיֵּאָהֵב שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת־יְהוָה
King Solomon loved many foreign women and the daughter of Pharaoh... (11:1)	וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה אָהֵב נָשִׁים נְכָרִיּוֹת רַבּוֹת וְאֶת־בֵּת־פָּרְעֹה
...Solomon clung to them in love (11:3)	בְּחֶם דָּבַק שְׁלֹמֹה לְאֵהָבָהּ

<sup>91</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings*, REC (Philipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2011), 73.

<sup>92</sup> Walsh, “The Characterization of Solomon”; J. Daniel Hays, “Has the Narrator Come to Praise Solomon or to Bury Him? Narrative Subtlety in 1 Kings 1–11,” *JSOT* 28.2 (2003): 149–74; Ryken, *1 Kings*, 73–77.



While the text does not comment explicitly on the problem with Solomon's "many wives" until 11:1–8, that passage continues the narrative thread that first appears at 3:1, which introduces Solomon's reign by recording his notorious coupling with that paragon of foreign power, the pharaoh of Egypt.<sup>93</sup> On this foundation, Solomon's covenant loyalty deteriorates to the point that he clings to all his wives (including the first bride, Pharaoh's daughter) and their gods in love, over Yahweh (11:1–8). Solomon's marriages are a major point upon which the plot of 1 and 2 Kings turns, with consequences which resonate through the entire account of the monarchy in this version: Solomon's disobedience in the matter of marrying foreign wives and worshipping their gods is the reason for the division of the kingdom (1 Kgs 11:11–13), the first in a series of unfortunate events which culminates, ultimately, in Israel's captivity and exile.

Multiple wives are not banned arbitrarily; the justification given for the prohibition is that multiple marriages place the king's heart at risk of turning away from Yahweh.<sup>94</sup> 1 Kgs 11:3–4 twice repeats the fact that Solomon's wives did indeed turn away his heart, fulfilling the warning from Deut 17:17:

<sup>3</sup>He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines. And his wives turned his heart. <sup>4</sup>And in Solomon's old age, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not completely with Yahweh his God, like the heart of David his father.  
(1 Kgs 11:3–4)

וַיְהִי־לּוֹ נָשִׁים שְׂרוֹת שְׁבַע מֵאוֹת וּפְלִגְשִׁים  
שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּטּוּ נָשָׁיו אֶת־לִבּוֹ  
וַיְהִי לִעֵת זָקֵנָת שְׁלֹמֹה נָשָׂיו הִטּוּ אֶת־לִבָּבוֹ  
אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְלֹא־הָיָה לִבָּבוֹ שָׁלֵם  
עִם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו כְּלִבְבִּי דָוִיד אָבִיו

In the matter of his wives, Solomon defied a *general* instruction given to the people of Israel (1 Kgs 11:2 alludes to Exod 34:11–16 [cf. Deut 7:1–7] which lists the nations with which marriage is prohibited), the *specific* prohibition made for kings in Deut 17:17

<sup>93</sup> The verb חתן (3:1) denotes the action of making oneself the husband of a daughter, emphasising that Solomon's alliance was first and foremost with the bride's father, the ruler of Egypt. See HALOT, s. v. "חתן".

<sup>94</sup> 2 Sam 12:8 indicates that Yahweh gave the wives of David's enemies into his hands, demonstrating there are instances in which Yahweh condones a king having multiple wives (even if this is not the ideal). However, Solomon takes wives to excess, as he does wealth. In particular, it is problematic that he amasses wives from many nations, introducing him to the worship of many foreign gods and diluting his wholehearted devotion to Yahweh (analogous to the way that polygamy prohibits a person from being wholeheartedly devoted to a single wife).

concerning many wives, and a *personal* warning issued directly by Yahweh against worshipping other gods (1 Kgs 11:9–10; cf. 1 Kgs 9:6). It is clear that Solomon’s many marriages are to be understood as not merely a manifestation of arrogant apathy towards guarding his heart (though they are that), but as an active disobedience of Yahweh’s explicit command.

Solomon’s disobedience in the matter of his wives is shown to be the sharpest manifestation of a multifaceted pattern of disobedience, which is also apparent (albeit more subtly) in his disregard for the two other commands from Deut 17:14–17, regarding horses and gold:

Only he shall not get many horses for himself and not make the people return to Egypt in order to get many horses, for Yahweh said to you, “Do not return that way ever again.” (Deut 17:16)

רק לא ירבה־לֶן סוסים ולא ישיב את־הָעָם  
מצרי־מָה לְמַעַן הרבות סוס ויהיָה אָמַר לָכֶם  
לא תספון לשוב בְּדֶרֶךְ הַזֶּה עוֹד  
וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת־יְהוָה

1 Kgs 5:6 [4:26 Eng.] records that Solomon accumulated 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots and 12,000 horsemen. This fact is repeated later in the narrative, with the elaboration that he had 1400 chariots, and that both horses and chariots were imported from Egypt (10:26–29). As with wives, the prohibition against acquiring horses is not arbitrary; it is connected to the discontinuation of relationship with Egypt. Solomon’s willingness to import horses from Egypt is an expression of his apathy towards rejecting an interdependent relationship with that nation. He prefers to maintain secure ties with the ruler of Egypt rather than taking a stance of exclusive dependence on Yahweh.

And silver and gold he shall not amass in abundance (Deut 17:17b)

וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא יִרְבֶּה־לּוֹ מְאֹד

Solomon’s accumulation of wealth is described in detail in 1 Kgs 10, where “gold” is mentioned eleven times (10:14–19), and Solomon also accumulates silver, although “silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon” (10:21) and was “as common in Jerusalem as stone” (10:27). Again, these explicit connections to the Deut 17:17 prohibition are elaborations upon a theme which has appeared much earlier in Solomon’s narrative. 1 Kgs 4:20–5:8 also describes Solomon’s wealth in detail, not in terms of silver and gold, but in

terms of the flourishing of the people (4:20), the tribute sent by neighbouring kingdoms (5:1, 4), the abundance of food (5:2, 7–8), and the mass of horses and chariots (5:6).

Apart from the mention of horses (which is inherently pejorative, although 5:6 does not contain the reference to Egypt which comes in 10:28–29), none of the items in the description of abundance in 4:20–5:8 has specifically negative associations. The prosperity of Israel under Solomon’s reign can, from one perspective, be understood as the fulfilment of God’s promise to give Solomon “riches and honour” (1 Kgs 3:13). However, the return to the theme in 1 Kgs 10, this time with repeated references to the silver and gold prohibited by Deut 17:17, demonstrates that the comfortable abundance of 1 Kgs 4:1–5:8 has exploded into excessive, ostentatious wealth. Solomon’s desire surpasses Yahweh’s bountiful provision, driving Solomon to trade with Egypt and other nations to add to his ever-growing stockpile of riches. It is another manifestation of the perpetual problem in Solomon’s heart: his taste for the power and prosperity that can be won by making deals with non-Israelite kingdoms, leading his nation away from exclusive reliance on Yahweh.

The locus of Solomon’s problem in 1 Kings 3–11 is what Solomon loves; he begins by loving Yahweh and ends by loving foreign women and their gods. Solomon’s “love” (אַהֲבָה) draws his loyalty away from Yahweh and causes him to violate the covenant to which he is heir. The “love” that distracts Solomon’s heart in 1 Kings is specifically a romantic attachment to women, which is the type of love explored in the Song of Songs. This overlap of concern binds the Solomon of Kings more closely to the Solomon in the Song (by contrast, there is no mention of romantic אַהֲבָה in connection to Solomon in Chronicles). The significance of אַהֲבָה in both the Song and 1 Kings suggests that the biographical details in 1 Kings 3–11 regarding the object(s) of Solomon’s love hold superior relevance for the interpretation of a love song concerning Solomon.

### 2.1.2. Later history

Solomon’s name is featured in the temple rebuilding narrative in Ezra (2:55, 58) and Nehemiah (7:57, 60; 11:3; 12:45, 13:26). Multiple references are made to “the descendants of Solomon’s servants” (Ezra 2:55, 58; Neh 7:57, 60; 11:3), reinforcing the memory of Solomon as the original temple-builder, as does the statement that the singers and

gatekeepers at the new temple performed their duties “according to the command of David and of his son Solomon” (Neh 12:45). When Nehemiah rebukes the returned Israelites for intermarriage with foreign women, he cites Solomon and his marriages as a cautionary tale (Neh 13:26–27). The Ezra-Nehemiah treatment of Solomon holds in tension two aspects of Solomon’s legacy: that he oversaw the building of the first temple and also that, despite the fact that he was one of Israel’s greatest kings, “foreign women made even him to sin” (Neh 13:26).

i. Key text: Nehemiah 13:26

The book of Nehemiah records events that took place approximately 500 years after Solomon’s death, and contains evidence that a negative evaluation of Solomon had endured for centuries following his reign. The sin of the Israelites in Nehemiah is characterised in similar terms to the sin of Solomon in 1 Kings, indicating that Nehemiah is working with a multifaceted understanding of Solomon—recognising both his successes and failings—as reflected in the Samuel-Kings tradition. Additionally, the appeal to Solomon in Nehemiah 13:26 positions Solomon as the paradigmatic example of a perpetual Israelite problem.

In Nehemiah’s account of the rebuilding of the temple, references to Solomon are reminders that he oversaw the installation of the original temple. “The descendants of Solomon’s servants” are a key category of returnees from exile (Neh 7:57, 60; 11:3) and services performed at the temple are traced back to Solomon and David (12:45). The Israelites in Nehemiah’s day enact the rededication of the temple with reference to their heritage as descendants of Solomon, reinstalling his temple and his traditions.

The generation who builds the second temple also follows Solomon’s example in a second, more problematic manner: they intermarry with women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab (Neh 13:23). As a result, Nehemiah reports, their children “could not understand how to speak the Jewish language” (13:24). The Hebrew language distinguished and bound together the community of returnees from exile, and it was the language in which the Israelite religion was practised. “For a religion in which Scripture plays a central part, grasp of language is vital...when religion and national culture are also integrally related, as they were for Judaism at this time, a knowledge of the community’s language...was one of the

main factors that distinguished and sustained the community itself.”<sup>95</sup> Apathy towards preserving the traditional language among the new generation of Israelites was indicative of an apathy towards preserving Israelite distinctiveness from the communities around them. What is at stake is not purity for the sake of purity, but rather resisting cultural and religious assimilation for the sake of Yahweh’s covenant. The language itself “is not the problem but a symptom of a deeper concern about protecting ethnic identity. This difficulty is all the more pronounced in Nehemiah, where ethnic identity and religious identity appear to be very closely interrelated.”<sup>96</sup>

While the specifics differ in some respects, it is clear that the sin of Nehemiah’s generation follows in the footsteps of the earlier sin of Solomon and is symptomatic of the same disregard for maintaining a distinctive fidelity to Yahweh. Ammonites and Moabites are included in a long list of Solomon’s wives who are of “the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods”” (1 Kgs 11:1–2). Throughout 1 Kings Solomon reveals his inclination to pattern himself after foreign kings, rather than embodying a distinctively Israelite type of kingship: founding his career on a political alliance with Egypt, systematically disobeying the Deuteronomic directives for Israelite kings, worshipping foreign gods and building public places of worship for the gods preferred by his foreign wives (1 Kgs 11:5–8). As the builder of Yahweh’s temple and the heir to the Davidic covenant, Solomon is supposed to be the guardian of Yahweh’s promises to Israel, upon which their national spiritual identity is founded. Instead he displays an apathy towards maintaining spiritual integrity for himself or the people over whom he rules, leading to the split of the kingdom, the eventual exile of the inhabitants, and ultimately the situation in which the returnees from exile find themselves in the account of Nehemiah. They would not be returning from exile had not Israel’s kings, beginning with Solomon, failed so badly to maintain national fidelity to Yahweh.

This is why Solomon’s downfall is the paradigmatic example upon which Nehemiah draws when he sees Israel’s renewed national identity, established around the new temple, threatened by the marriages to foreign wives and the disintegration of the language of their

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<sup>95</sup> H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, WBC 16 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 397.

<sup>96</sup> Katherine E. Southwood, ““And They Could Not Understand Jewish Speech’: Language, Ethnicity and Nehemiah’s Inter-marriage Crisis,” *JTS* 62.1 (2011): 17.

heritage and religion. Nehemiah forcefully reminds the people: “Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin” (Neh 13:26).

This statement of Nehemiah’s contains allusions that indicate that it is drawing on a tradition of Solomon specifically as he is portrayed in Samuel-Kings. That Solomon was outstanding among kings and that he ruled over all Israel is a truism about Solomon reflected consistently throughout the Hebrew Bible; yet the other two details in Nehemiah’s statement reveal Nehemiah’s particular understanding of the persona of Solomon. That he was “loved by his God” (וְאֶהוּב לַאלֹהֵי הָיָה) is the headline of Solomon’s birth account in 2 Sam 12:24: “Yahweh loved him” (וַיְהִי הָאֱהוּבָה). That “foreign women (הַנָּשִׁים הַנִּכְרִיּוֹת) made even him to sin” accords with the report from 1 Kgs 11:1–11 that Solomon loved foreign women (נָשִׁים נִכְרִיּוֹת) and that he turned away his heart from Yahweh in favour of loving his wives and their gods (1 Kgs 11:3–4). The allusions to the first announcement (2 Sam 2:24) and the final assessment (1 Kgs 11) of Solomon in the Samuel-Kings account neatly span the entirety of Solomon’s biography in that text, suggesting that Nehemiah’s appeal to Solomon is constructed with a specific awareness of the written tradition in Samuel-Kings.

Nehemiah’s words encompass the superlative heights and the deepest lows of Solomon’s career as king, resonating with the complex portrayal of Solomon in Kings (as opposed to a one-dimensional figure of Solomon such as the Chronicler presents him).

Nehemiah 13:26 reveals the enduring understanding of Solomon in Nehemiah’s time in light of the Samuel-Kings tradition: Solomon is still remembered as the greatest king, yet his sin set a pattern to which his descendants are still tempted to succumb. Nehemiah’s words recall the significance of love (אַהֲבָה) in Solomon’s life: Yahweh’s love for Solomon (2 Sam 12:24), Solomon’s love for Yahweh (1 Kgs 3:1) and Solomon’s love for his foreign wives (1:11). Most emphatically, Nehemiah appeals to Solomon’s love for his foreign wives as the paradigmatic example of the reason to avoid the type of creeping sin which is happening many generations later, as Nehemiah’s generation intermarry and allow their distinctiveness as Yahweh’s people among the nations to begin to slip away. Nehemiah reminds the people that even the greatest king of Israel, beloved of Yahweh, was weakened by failing to maintain strict boundaries against foreign women and their foreign worship.

Nehemiah's assessment of Solomon is continuous with the portrayal of Solomon from 1 Kings as a mixed character who is remembered for his greatness, yet whose covenant infidelity ultimately precipitated the destruction of the kingdom and of the city and temple which Nehemiah has returned to rebuild.

### 2.1.3. Wisdom and Poetry

Outside of the historical books, in addition to the Song of Songs, Solomon's name is attached to Pss 72 and 127 and Prov 1–9, 10:1–22:16 and 25–29, and he is traditionally associated with the content of Ecclesiastes.<sup>97</sup> Based on their content, some of these texts suggest themselves as having more relevance to the interpretation of the Song of Songs than others. In the interest of completeness, a very brief summary of what each text contributes to the biblical portrayal of Solomon will be offered before the key relevant texts are examined in more detail.

The Solomonic psalms resonate with depictions of Solomon elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Psalm 72 accords well with the description of his reign from 1 Kings: prevailing peace (Ps 72:7 cf. 1 Kgs 5:4–5), an expansive area of dominion (Ps 72:8 cf. 1 Kgs 5:1), tribute and gold from foreign rulers (Ps 72:10, 15 cf. 1 Kgs 5:1, 10:2; the specific reference to “Sheba” in the Psalm accords with the visit of the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kgs 10:1–10), abundant grain (Ps 72:16 cf. 1 Kgs 5:2) and a flourishing population (Ps 72:16 cf. 1 Kgs 4:20).

However, there is some dissonance between the ideal king in Ps 72 and the actual Solomon in 1 Kings. From the evidence in his biography, Solomon could not particularly be said to deliver the needy, take pity on the weak and redeem lives from oppression (72:12–14). Solomon's wealth is described mainly in terms of the abundance at his royal table (Brueggemann points out that this abundance “happened on the backs of the villagers who had no access to the king's table”) and the impressive tribute he receives from other kings, never as a means for Solomon to champion the needy.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, he drafts forced labour

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<sup>97</sup> Albeit the understanding of the precise nature of the association has developed in recent scholarship; see discussion below.

<sup>98</sup> Brueggemann, *Solomon*, 137.

for his building projects, an act which recalls the type of oppression Israel suffered under Egypt.<sup>99</sup>

Psalm 72 pivots to affirm Yahweh, not the king, as the sole source of wondrous deeds. It is *his* glory that will fill the earth (Ps 72:18–19). While Solomon at his best acknowledges Yahweh’s supreme glory, his persistent problem in 1 Kings is his over-reliance on political strength and material prosperity, the furtherance of his own glory and renown, over wholehearted dependence on Yahweh as the true sovereign of Israel. Brueggemann understands that Psalm 72 offers a positive model of governance, while “the Solomon of the superscription represents a model for what could have been a royal possibility but in the event was not.”<sup>100</sup> Thus Psalm 72 subtly sustains the critique of Solomon present in 1 Kings 3–11.

In this vein, Psalm 127 presents two contrasting pictures: anxious labour, performed in vain (vv.1–2) and the blessing of children as a reward from Yahweh (vv.3–5). Read under the Solomonic ascription, the reference to building a house (127:1) has inevitable associations with Solomon’s famous endeavour to build two houses: Yahweh’s and his own. Solomon’s reign was apparently a period of frenetic activity in the kingdom, with the years-long temple building project involving tens of thousands of labourers, and the ongoing administration of a steady stream of tributes and trade. Yet the appropriate reward for Yahweh’s beloved (לִידִידוֹ), a certain allusion, in the context provided by the Solomonic ascription, to Solomon’s designation as Yahweh’s “beloved” at his birth in 2 Sam 12:24–25) is a restful sleep in reliance on Yahweh’s work, not his own. The threefold word for “vanity” (שְׁוֹאָה) is not the same word employed in the characteristic refrain in Ecclesiastes (הֶבֶל), but the content of Ps 127:1–2 resonates with Ecclesiastes’ disparagement of futile Solomonic endeavours. While verses 3–5 are wholly positive in the Psalm, even the theme of sons is fraught for Solomon, whose successors bore the consequence of his sins and walked in his unfortunate ways to the ultimate demise of his dynasty (according to the Samuel-Kings account, though the Chronicler is not as negative). As in Psalm 72, Psalm 127 describes an

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<sup>99</sup> The language used in 1 Kgs 5:27–30[13–16 Eng.] to recount Solomon’s drafting of a slave workforce (מֶסֶ) from Israel under the oversight of officers (שָׂרִ) is reminiscent of the way Israel laboured under slave masters (שִׂרְיָ מִסִּים) in Exod 1:11. Brueggemann notes that Solomon’s use of forced labour is ominous but allows that it is not certain whether the text intends to paint it as such—it depends on the reader’s assessment of the level of irony in 1 Kgs 3–11. Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 77–79.

<sup>100</sup> Brueggemann, *Solomon*, 219.



ideal; though it may not be explicitly intended to condemn Solomon, the Solomonic associations serve as a reminder of the ways Solomon fell short.

Psalms 72 and 127 are notable for their use of the superscription לְשִׁלְמֹה, which also prefixes the Song of Songs. The function of the superscription on the Song will be examined in detail under 2.2.2. It should be noted for now that the employment of the same device on the Solomonic psalms provides a precedent for the attribution being used to indicate a Solomonic association with texts that are subtly critical of aspects of Solomon's persona.

A critique of "Solomonic" behaviour is also present in Ecclesiastes. The author of Ecclesiastes is anonymous and the tradition of taking Qohelet to be a straightforward pseudonym for Solomon is no longer widely accepted.<sup>101</sup> A majority of scholars hold to the understanding that Qohelet incorporates a fictive "king" figure into his persona, which is a pastiche including elements of king and sage, and that particularly "Solomonic" traits are brought to the fore at points in Qohelet's exploration of the world.<sup>102</sup> Two passages pertinent to the portrayal of Solomon across the Hebrew canon are Eccl 1:12–2:11 and 7:25–26.

In 1:12–2:11, Qohelet takes on the mantle of a king in an account which resonates with the accounts of the life of Solomon in several respects: the building of extensive homes and gardens (Eccl 2:4–6 cf. 1 Kgs 7:1–12), the accumulation of slaves (Eccl 2:8 cf. 1 Kgs 9:15–22) and many concubines, (Eccl 2:8 cf. 1 Kgs 11:3) and the reception of gold, silver and "the treasure of kings and provinces" (Eccl 2:8 cf. 1 Kgs 5:1; 10:2, 11, 14, 22, 25). In his quest for meaning, the teacher ultimately finds this opulent Solomonic lifestyle to be meaningless (2:10–11). Placing this reflection in the mouth of a fictive Solomon-like figure intensifies the tension created in 1 Kings 3–11 between Solomon's wisdom and his actions. The perspective provided by Ecclesiastes positions Solomon either as self-aware about the futility of his

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<sup>101</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), 582.

<sup>102</sup> A common view is that Qohelet makes use of a kingly (Solomonic) persona in the early chapters of Ecclesiastes then discards it following 2:11; see James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 29; Tremper Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7; Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 26–27; Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPSBC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), x; Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O.C. Dean, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 39–40; Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, BCOTWP, ed. Tremper Longman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Recently Athas has argued that neither is the "kingly" element of Qohelet's pastiche persona exclusively Solomonic nor is its pervasiveness contained only to chapters 1–2. His analysis does recognise the presence of Solomonic traits, along with traits attributable to other Israelite and non-Israelite kings, in Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:11; Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 21–23.

pursuits and the misapplication of his wisdom, or as self-deluded, possessing great wisdom but failing to apply it to his own choices. It reinforces the critique from 1 Kings 3–11 and adds complexity to the persona of Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 7:24–25 refers briefly to a relevant theme that dominates portions of Proverbs (and will be detailed below in the discussion of Proverbs 1–9). This is the image of an ensnaring woman, portrayed in similar terms to the “adulteress” in Proverbs, who represents a path of folly:

<sup>25</sup>I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and reason, and to know the wickedness of stupidity and the folly of madness. <sup>26</sup>And my finding was more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands are shackles. The one who is good before God slips away from her, but the one who sins is taken by her.  
(Eccl 7:25–26)

סְבוֹתִי אָנִי וְלִבִּי לִדְעַת וְלַתּוֹר וּבִקֵּשׁ חֲכָמָה  
וְחִשְׁבּוֹן וְלִדְעַת רִשְׁע כָּסֶל וְהִסְכָּלוֹת הוֹלָלוֹת  
וּמוֹצָא אָנִי מֵר מִמָּוֶת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִיא  
מְצוּדִים וְחֲרָמִים לִבָּהּ אֲסוּרִים יְדֶיהָ טוֹב  
לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמְלֹט מִמָּוֶה וְחוֹטֵא יִלְכָּד בָּהּ

This passage resonates infelicitously with the image of Solomon in 1 Kings, who pursued wisdom but was captivated by literal women who derailed his wisdom and were the catalyst for his entanglement with the metaphorical woman of folly. (The observation in Eccl 7:28b—“one man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found”—may be an allusion to Solomon’s situation: “Solomon was the singularly wisest man in all Israel, but not one woman in his harem of a thousand wives and concubines was upright. Instead, they drew Solomon into idolatry.”)<sup>103</sup> The metaphorical female figure in Ecclesiastes 7 evidences a “continuum of ideas” from the personified women of wisdom and folly in Proverbs 1–9, a text that makes a significant contribution to the biblical portrayal of Solomon.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 159.

<sup>104</sup> The language of “continuum of ideas” comes from Katharine Dell, who argues that the object “which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found” in Eccl 7:28 alludes to Woman Wisdom, while the ensnaring woman of v.26 is “clearly a reference to Woman Folly in Prov 7.” Katharine J. Dell, *The Solomonian Corpus of “Wisdom” and Its Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 39.

i. Key text: Proverbs 1–9

Proverbs 1–9 has been selected as a key source text because the Hebrew Bible presents these chapters as a work of Solomonic wisdom, and the subject matter returns repeatedly to conduct in romantic love (as a metaphor for choosing a lifestyle of wisdom or folly). Proverbs and the Song of Songs share two literary attributes: a strong canonical association with Solomon and the presence of didactic statements regarding אֶהְבָּה. Whereas 1 Kings 3–11 records Solomon’s *actions* in love, Proverbs 1–9 contains *teaching* about love in his name. Proverbs 1–9 makes two major contributions to the biblical portrayal of Solomon with reference to love. Firstly, it reveals something about the nature of אֶהְבָּה and the significance of its object; secondly, it highlights an issue with Solomon’s choice of wives.

Proverbs 1–9 is dominated by two archetypal women: the female personifications of Wisdom and Folly. These women are used metaphorically to convey that just as a young man should be faithful to a suitable wife and reject the advances of a foreign woman, he should also wed himself to a life of wisdom rooted in fear of Yahweh (Prov 1:7, 2:5, 8:13, 9:10), and reject the temptation of turning aside to folly, which leads to death (2:18, 5:5, 7:27, 9:18).

The operation of אֶהְבָּה in Proverbs is revealing because the term appears in connection with both the woman wisdom and her negative counterpart, the female folly. The assumed audience, a young man, is encouraged to love wisdom (4:6), who promises to bless those who love her (8:17, 21). The term אֶהְבָּה is also used in a passage encouraging the young man to literally enjoy sexual love with his wife: “let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her אֶהְבָּה” (5:19). Evidently, אֶהְבָּה can be associated with positive outcomes in Proverbs. However, the young man is warned against אֶהְבָּה when it is offered by the female folly, who entices him: “Come, let us take our fill of lovemaking till morning, let us delight ourselves with אֶהְבָּה” (7:18). The promise of אֶהְבָּה on the lips of the adulteress—even if it should turn out to be a lie—is evidence that אֶהְבָּה can also present itself in dangerous places.

In Proverbs 1–9, אֶהְבָּה is not inherently wise or foolish: the object of the love is crucial to its outcome. The Proverbs demonstrate that the object of the young man’s אֶהְבָּה can potentially either be wisdom and his own wife, leading to a flourishing life, or folly in the

form of a foreign woman, leading to destruction and death. Both options are in play, and each has a different outcome, with a negative or positive outcome being dependent on the object of the אֶהְבָּה, not אֶהְבָּה itself. This resonates with the way love operates in the life of Solomon, who originally loved (and was loved by) Yahweh—the ideal object of אֶהְבָּה, for an Israelite king—but descended into dangerous love for his foreign wives, with disastrous consequences.

Reading Proverbs 1–9 alongside 1 Kings 3–11 reaffirms that Solomon’s love for foreign women defied biblical wisdom. Proverbs uses the same word for the female folly figure as is used in 1 Kings for Solomon’s wives: נָכְרִיָּה (Prov 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; cf. 1 Kgs 11:1). The implications of this correlation are unmistakable: Solomon’s conduct in love was foolish, according to the ideal presented in the Hebrew Bible. Though he was endowed with wisdom from God he did not metaphorically “marry wisdom” and remain faithful to her, as the young man of Proverbs is encouraged to do. Solomon’s fidelity to Yahweh, the source of wisdom, was compromised by his love for foreign women and gods.

The presentation of Proverbs 1–9 as a work of Solomon himself conveys that Solomon knew better than he acted in the matter of his wives. Solomon, as created in the canon, is a character who *teaches* wisely but *acts* foolishly. In Proverbs 1–9 he warns metaphorically against the foreign woman, who embodies the antithesis of a life of wisdom that is rooted in fear of Yahweh, yet in 1 Kings 3–11 he literally marries her many times over. There is a complete disparity between the teaching and the conduct. As Proverbs 1–9 implies that Solomon had the ability to discern wisdom from folly in the matter of wives, it reinforces his culpability in marrying foreign women. This culpability is already known from 1 Kgs 11:9–10, which reports that he defied two personal warnings from Yahweh (in addition to ignoring the general principle, expressed for example in Exod 34:16 and Deut 7:3–4, that Israelites were to avoid intermarriage with foreign nations). Thus Proverbs 1–9 contributes to a body of material in the Hebrew Bible that portrays Solomon as a king who not only erred gravely by marrying foreign women, but explicitly understood the nature of his error, and committed it knowingly.

#### 2.1.4. Summary and Conclusions Regarding Solomon's Persona in the Canon

King Solomon is a highly pervasive figure in the Hebrew Bible, whose biography is second in length only to his father David's and whose legacy endures long after his reign is complete. The significance of Solomon as a literary figure means that he should be taken seriously into account in any interpretation of the Song of Songs. The Hebrew Bible presents a composite picture of Solomon, with his one-dimensional portrayal in Chronicles differentiated from the more complex presentations found elsewhere in the canon. The task is to discern *how* the composite portrayal of Solomon in the canon integrates with the figure named in the Song. The overlapping significance of **אֶהְיֶה** in the Song of Songs and in the narrative of 1 Kings 3–11 (and its absence from the account of Solomon in 1 Chr 1–9) suggests that the portrayal of Solomon in 1 Kings provides the specific Solomonic background for the figure of Solomon in the Song of Songs.

Chronicles sets itself apart not only from the account in Kings, but from the impressions of Solomon that emerge in other biblical texts that take up a Samuel-Kings vision of Solomon. Nehemiah (13:26) alludes to details from the account in Samuel and Kings, while proverbs attributed to Solomon (in Proverbs 1–9) intersect with the concept of the “foreign woman” (**נִכְרִיָּה**) that plays such a pivotal role in Solomon's narrative in 1 Kings 3–11. These texts interact with the multifaceted, often critical portrayal of Solomon in Kings, whereas Chronicles flattens Solomon into a glorious temple-builder, ignoring the problematic aspects of his reign that complexified his persona in Kings.

In the primary account of Solomon in 1 Kgs 1–11 (and his introduction in 2 Sam 12:24–25), King Solomon is not a flat “good” or “evil” type; as noted above, he is a round character with complex achievements that are presented in such a way as to invite the reader to adopt a critical perspective. He is beloved by Yahweh and performs praiseworthy deeds including the building and dedication of the temple, the exercise of internationally-acclaimed wisdom, and the stewardship of the most prosperous period in Israel's history. However, he achieves all this in defiance of Deut 17:16–17, allying himself with Egypt and accumulating excessive wealth and wives, who turn his heart away from Yahweh.

The evidence from Neh 13:26 confirms that the complex characterisation of Solomon endured in the popular Israelite memory for many centuries after his death.

Solomon is remembered as a king greater than any other, beloved by God, yet even he was led into sin by foreign women, a negative example that still stands as a warning to God's people at the time of rebuilding Solomon's temple.

The enduring critique of Solomon (and his covenant-compromising choice of wives) is sustained in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. These books draw a strong metaphorical association between folly and foreign women, simultaneously demonstrating that Solomon comprehended this danger and that he defied his own wisdom in the pursuit of his ill-advised marriages.

In the Hebrew Bible, Solomon is a paradigmatic king of Israel who embodies a paradigmatic Israelite problem: the inclination to "marry folly" through alliances with foreign women, foreign nations and foreign gods, compromising an exclusive covenant relationship with Yahweh.

In Solomon's biography, this problem is intrinsically linked with the operation of אֱהָבָה: first Yahweh loves Solomon (2 Sam 12:25) and in response, Solomon loves Yahweh (1 Kgs 3:4), but in the arc of 1 Kings 3–11 Solomon's אֱהָבָה drifts away from Yahweh and becomes firmly focused on his wives. This love is the instrument of the erosion of Solomon's relationship with Yahweh and the catalyst for the rupture of the kingdom.

This awareness of the interaction between the figure of Solomon and the operation of אֱהָבָה will be key for interpreting the Song of Songs, which is named for Solomon and has אֱהָבָה as its central theme.

## 2.2. Solomon and the Song of Songs

All of the data above should be brought to bear on the interpretation of the Song of Songs, particularly when considering the relationship between the canonical figure of Solomon and the content of the Song. Describing the way the biblical figure of Solomon intersects with the content of the Song is not straightforward, and there are three interrelated aspects to consider:

**a) how Solomon's name functions in the superscription of the Song.** This question operates at a meta level, concerning how the figure of Solomon in the canon is related to the Song as a whole. Song 1:1 links the Song to Solomon using a prepositional phrase that is

grammatically ambiguous, raising the question: what precisely is the nature of the relationship between the Song of Songs and the biblical figure of Solomon? Although the superscription is the first piece of information the reader encounters and should certainly inform the reading of the Song, it is impossible to fully define the connection between Solomon and the Song until the reader understands the Solomon *within* the Song. This leads to the second issue, namely:

**b) how Solomon functions as a character within the Song** (if at all). This enquiry operates at an exegetical level, concerning how the figure of Solomon operates within the text of the Song itself. One of the longest-standing traditions regarding the Song is that Solomon is the central love interest. However, this view has been challenged and frequently discarded in modern interpretations. A range of views exist as to whether Solomon is physically present in the action of the Song, and if so, what type of role his character plays. It will be necessary to scrutinise the mentions of Solomon's name within the Song to establish the degree to which he is present and how his character functions. This is related to the question of:

**c) the ideal for love in the Song of Songs.** The Song presents an ideal for love, embodied in the relationship between the woman and her beloved. The definition of this ideal is a key piece of background information necessary to analyse whether Solomon is positioned as the ideal lover, and if not, how he relates to the Song's ideal for love.

Since a) relies to some extent on b), the function of Solomon within the Song will be explored first, which will necessarily incorporate a discussion of c), the Song's ideal for love as embodied by the beloved. This discussion will, in part, provide the basis for conclusions regarding the meaning of Solomon's name in the superscription of the Song. The following section will aim to answer the questions raised above and clearly establish Solomon's function in the Song of Songs in light of the Song's ideal for love.

### 2.2.1. The function of Solomon as a character in the Song of Songs

Historically there has been a divergence of views regarding the way Solomon operates as a character within the Song. The diversity of views is able to exist because of the opaque way in which the Song conveys information. Its poetic style is notable for being so

enigmatic as to appear deliberately, playfully ambiguous: “the poetry of the Song resists calculations and invites imagination.”<sup>105</sup> Many lines of the Song are open to multiple, even contradictory translations. For example, in 2:17 the woman exhorts her beloved with the words: עַד שִׁפּוֹחַ הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים סָב דְּמַה־לֶּךָ דּוֹדִי לְצַבִּי אוֹ לְעַפְרַי הָאֵילִים עַל־הָרֵי בְּתָר. In this verse, the prepositional phrase עַד שִׁפּוֹחַ הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים could be translated “until,” “when” or “while”. The breathing of the day and the fleeing of the shadows (עַד שִׁפּוֹחַ הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים) would most logically refer to daybreak, when shadows disappear, although the possibility has been raised that it could refer more generally to the movement of shadows across the land and thus mean nightfall. The verb סָב could indicate to “turn” away from the woman, or “turn” towards the woman. The “cleft mountains” (הָרֵי בְּתָר) connote separation, suggesting the beloved is to go far away from the woman (to the mountains), but they might also be suggestive of her cleavage, making the mountains a euphemism for the woman herself.<sup>106</sup> When all possibilities are considered, the verse most likely bears two meanings that are opposite in the details but complementary in what they convey: “when the day breaks, turn to where you came from and be on the mountains,” and euphemistically “until the day breaks, turn to me and enjoy my body.”

This verse is typical of the way that in the Song, “the reader [...] must reread the words two or three times in order to reveal the multilayered meanings,” prompting characterisation of the Song as a riddle (or composition of riddles).<sup>107</sup> In his analysis of the poetic devices employed in the Song, Hunt’s introductory assessment is that the readers “are not surprised at the layer upon layer of possible meanings with so many deliberate ambiguities folded into its texts,” and notes that, as with a Hebrew *mashal*, the context “must be filled in by the audience.”<sup>108</sup> Depending on how this context is defined, different readers might solve the riddles in different ways.

The issue of context is alive in the interpreter’s handling of the Song’s most dominant poetic feature, its use of metaphor.<sup>109</sup> The prevalence and ambiguity of metaphorical references in the Song creates potential for interpreters to quite naturally

<sup>105</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 144.

<sup>106</sup> For discussions of the various options for translation in 2:17 see Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 115–16; Longman, *Song*, 126; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 139.

<sup>107</sup> Yair Zakovitch, *The Song of Songs: Riddle of Riddles*, trans. Valerie Carr Zakovitch, LHBOTS 673 (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 34.

<sup>108</sup> Patrick Hunt, *Poetry in the Song of Songs: A Literary Analysis*, SBLit 96 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 2, 3.

<sup>109</sup> Dianne Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, BO, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), xiv.



impose the existence of metaphors and the identification of vehicles to align with their interpretative preconceptions. For example, there are three references to an unnamed “king” in the Song (1:4, 12; 7:5), which could potentially either refer to King Solomon, or be a metaphorical epithet for the woman’s anonymous lover. Since the references within the Song itself are ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations, the position taken on the role of Solomon (in these verses, and in the Song in general), has tended to reflect the interpreter’s preconceptions about Solomon and about the genre and purpose of the Song.

This is evident in a brief survey of interpretations of a short phrase from Song 1:4: “the king has brought me into his chambers” (הַבִּיאַנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו). A traditional Christian interpretation which regards the Song as an allegory about Christ and the Church (or the individual Christian), and King Solomon as a typological stand-in for King Jesus, will typically understand this verse to describe being drawn somehow into intimacy with Christ. Origen, the father of the Christian allegorical approach, understands that the literal meaning of 1:4 is about a king (Solomon) bringing his bride into his chamber, “but since the reference is either to the Church who comes to Christ, or to the soul that cleaves to the Word of God, how should we understand Christ’s chamber and the storehouse of the Word of God into which He brings the Church or the soul thus cleaving to him—you can take it either way—except as Christ’s own secret and mysterious mind?”<sup>110</sup>

By contrast, an interpreter who reads the Song as a drama of three characters—the woman, her beloved and the interloper Solomon—and thus has no interest in allegory nor in idealising Solomon as a type of Christ, can only take entry into the king’s chambers to mean a negative experience for the woman. This was “obvious” to Ginsburg, a prototypical proponent of the three-character view: “it was the king, she tells us, who brought her into his apartments, and thus separated her from her beloved, in whom, however, she still delights. That this is the import of this clause is obvious from the words and connexion [*sic*].”<sup>111</sup>

Yet a third meaning will be extracted by a contemporary interpreter who understands the Song to be literally, and only, about romantic love between two anonymous people, for whom Solomon is nothing more than “a symbol of legendary

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<sup>110</sup> Origen, *Commentary and Homilies*, 84.

<sup>111</sup> Ginsburg, *Song*, 132.

splendour that enhances and ennobles the two young lovers.”<sup>112</sup> Bloch and Bloch, for example, assert that “‘the king’ is to be understood as the Shulammite’s courtly epithet for her lover. It is by no means a reference to King Solomon as a rival for her love, as some have supposed...the king’s ‘chambers’ are best explained in terms of the lovers’ vocabulary of make-believe.”<sup>113</sup>

These three examples demonstrate the way that evidence from the text of the Song is corralled into the shape of the pre-established assumptions, which are the primary controls for interpretation. In full acknowledgement of this inevitability, I have been aiming to construct my controlling assumptions regarding Solomon very precisely from a profile of Solomon’s persona in the Hebrew canon, weighing which aspects of his portrayal should exert the most influence over interpretation of his characterisation in the Song based on points of resonance between the Song and other Solomonic texts in the canon. Taking into consideration the established understanding of Solomon’s persona as it pertains to the Song, I will aim to extract a preliminary meaning from key portions of text in the Song, then test whether the evidence from the Song itself accords with the parameters established from the canonical context, and vice versa. There are two main questions to be resolved regarding Solomon’s role in the Song: Firstly, is Solomon present as a character in the Song, or not? Secondly, if Solomon is present, is he the romantic hero of the Song (i.e., the “beloved”), or not?

#### i. The Presence of Solomon in the Song of Songs

Historically there are four basic views of Solomon’s role in the Song. The first is that he has an active presence in the Song as one of the two main characters. This is reflected in the traditional allegorical approach to the Song, wherein the two main characters at the literal level are Solomon and his bride. Depending on the religious underpinnings of the allegory, Solomon becomes representative either of Yahweh (in Jewish interpretations) or for Christ (in Christian interpretations). This understanding of Solomon in the Song is

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<sup>112</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 10.

<sup>113</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 138.

sustained in modern times by a handful of typological or allegorical interpreters, but it is no longer the dominant view.<sup>114</sup>

The second view is that the biblical persona of Solomon has an active presence in the Song, not as one of the two main characters, but as a third character who is an antagonist to the relationship at the heart of the Song. The recognition of Solomon and the beloved as two separate characters was popularised with the “dramatic approach” to the Song in the mid-nineteenth century, which read the Song as a dramatisation of an episode set in King Solomon’s history.<sup>115</sup> In the twentieth century, Waterman and Seerveld perpetuated versions of the dramatic interpretation; most recently, Athas also presents a three-character version of the Song in which Solomon is the antagonist, albeit using a different interpretative key than the classic three-character dramatic interpretations.<sup>116</sup>

The third view is that Solomon does not have an active presence in the Song nor does his persona have much bearing on its content. His name is invoked to add historical colour and endow the romance with associations of royal grandeur. This reflects a current trend of understanding the Song as amatory poetry about two anonymous figures—everyman and everywoman—in an idealised relationship, for whom the historical figure of Solomon has little relevance.<sup>117</sup>

A fourth view is that Solomon has a presence in the Song but is not directly involved with the two main characters; he is set up as a foil for the ideal love between the woman and her beloved. This is the position taken by some contemporary Christian commentators who agree that the Song is a poem about two anonymous human lovers, yet whose hermeneutic approach inclines them to trace intertextual connections with other texts in the Hebrew Bible and to emphasise parallels between the Solomon in the Song and the Solomon of 1 Kings 3–11 in particular.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Modern proponents include Campbell, “Song of David’s Son”; Hamilton, *Song*; Mitchell, *Song of Songs*.

<sup>115</sup> Ewald, *Salômonischen Schriften*; Ginsburg, *Song*.

<sup>116</sup> Waterman, *Song of Songs*; Seerveld, *The Greatest Song*; Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*.

<sup>117</sup> Current examples include Bloch and Bloch, *Song*; Bergant, *Song*; Exum, *Song*; Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs*, BST, ed. J.A. Motyer (Leicester: IVP, 1994); Longman, *Song*.

<sup>118</sup> Recent interpretations along these lines have included Iain M. Duguid, *Song of Songs*, REC, ed. Richard D. Philips and Philip Graham Ryken (Philipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2016); and O’Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*; Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 246 identifies his own approach as adopting the framework of the three-character drama, yet his interpretation is less contingent on imposing a strict plot than the classic dramatic interpretation, hovering somewhere between it and the approach which reads the Song as a poem primarily about the woman and her beloved with Solomon invoked as a foil to their ideal love.

The tenability of each possibility outlined above can be tested by whether it accords with the evidence from the *content* (data concerning Solomon within the Song) and from the *context* (data concerning Solomon from the wider Hebrew canon). The *context* regarding Solomon has been established above. It remains, then, to turn to evidence of Solomon's presence and behaviour within the Song.

Solomon's name is mentioned seven times throughout the course of the Song. The first is in the superscription in 1:1, the meaning of which will be dealt with separately below. In 1:5 the woman's darkness is compared to "the curtains of Solomon"; this use of the name could be dismissed as an incidental cultural reference, given that it does not refer to him personally nor imply his presence (no more than the tribes of Kedar, whose tents are used in a parallel simile in 1:5). However, the subsequent mentions of Solomon's name occur in two longer vignettes in which Solomon, the man, explicitly features (3:6–11; 8:11–12); these will be considered in more detail below.

The term "king" (מֶלֶךְ) also appears five times. In addition to 3:9 and 11, where Solomon is referred to by the title "King Solomon," there are three mentions of a "king" without a name attached (1:4, 12; 7:5). Depending on the interpreter's view of Solomon's role in the Song, these references could either be taken to be referring to Solomon or understood as metaphorical endearments for the beloved (if the beloved is not a king).

Song 3:6–11 is the first point at which Solomon is unambiguously referred to by his name and title in a clearly defined vignette. Similarly, Solomon is spoken of explicitly in 8:11–12. Every other reference to Solomon or a king is initially ambiguous and requires interpretative context to confirm its meaning. Therefore, in order to avoid over-reaching the evidence from the text, this study will use 3:6–11 and 8:11–12 as the starting points for determining how Solomon operates in the Song. These two passages have been selected on the basis that Solomon is explicitly named in both scenes, so that regardless of the confusion regarding his presence throughout the Song, there is concrete basis for analysing his function at least in these two short excerpts.

## ii. The Beloved as the Ideal Lover in the Song of Songs

In order to test whether Solomon and the beloved should be considered the same character or two different characters in the Song, it is necessary to establish a clear picture of how the beloved is characterised, which is related to how the Song affirms a particular incarnation of love (illustrated in the central relationship). Then it will be possible to compare 3:6–11 and 8:11–12 (which contain definite references to Solomon) to the material concerning the beloved, to ascertain whether Solomon is characterised in the same way as the beloved and whether his enactment of “love” matches the ideal embodied by the beloved in the Song.

The premise that the Song presents an aspirational “ideal” for love is often spoken as a truism but rarely justified. How does the reader know that the relationship in the Song is supposed to be “ideal”? The answer is related to the way the Song enacts its didactic purpose. The “poetic genius” of the Song, Exum claims, lies in the way that it *shows* the reader about love, “for our poet is too good a poet, too subtle and too sophisticated, to preach to us directly about love.”<sup>119</sup> Fox agrees that in ancient Near Eastern love poetry, the literary category he applies to the Song, “the poets reveal their views of love not by speaking about love in the abstract, but by portraying people in love.”<sup>120</sup> Duguid notes, in relation to the Song, the way biblical wisdom literature typically directs its readers as to what they should value: “the Bible does not merely teach truth through its commands and prohibitions, the ‘thou shalt and thou shalt not’ of the law; it also instructs us through whatever it celebrates and delights in,” and “to celebrate something is to instruct others about the things to which we ascribe value.”<sup>121</sup> The Song conveys what it values through the revealed experiences of the lovers, as they praise and celebrate one another and the love in which they find themselves.

The primary voice in the Song is the woman, and in her voice the Song celebrates the beloved. She views him as the superlative among men, declaring, “as an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the sons,” (Song 2:3). When the daughters of Jerusalem ask the woman, “What is your beloved more than another beloved?” she explains, “My beloved is dazzling and ruddy, standing out among a multitude,” (5:9–10). As

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<sup>119</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, “The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs,” in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs / Perspektiven Der Hoheliedauslegung*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn, BZAW 346 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 79.

<sup>120</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 295.

<sup>121</sup> Duguid, *The Song*, 43, 44.

an extension of celebrating the beloved, the Song celebrates the love between the beloved and the woman. He also idealises her: “like a lily among the thorns is my love among the daughters,” (2:2); “all of you is beautiful, my love, and there is no flaw in you” (4:7). The daughters of Jerusalem, looking on, celebrate their love—“we will rejoice and enjoy you; we will exult your love with wine,” (1:4)—and share the woman’s interest in the beloved: “where has your beloved gone, most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned that we may seek him with you?” (6:1). The voices in the Song of Songs reveal that the beloved, and the way he loves, are praiseworthy. The Song uses this technique to impress on the reader that the type of love it depicts is esteemed.

In addition to the delight the two lovers display in one another, their relationship is defined by three important characteristics: intimacy, mutuality and exclusivity. These are notable for the alternative perspective they offer on the Hebrew Bible’s material regarding marriage, which is largely preoccupied with the social aspects of marriage as a community structure: patriarchal family systems, protection of women, procreation, property and politics. The love in the Song, Keel points out, “simply has nothing to do with these things,” focusing instead on the embodied and emotional experiences of the individual lovers.<sup>122</sup>

**Intimacy.** When intimacy is spoken of in relation to the Song of Songs, the obvious associations are physical and sexual. The lovers betray an intimate familiarity with each other’s bodies, especially, but not exclusively in the *wasfs* (4:1–7; 5:10–16; 6:4–7; 7:2–8[1–7 Eng.]) in which she tenderly describes him from head to toe (5:10–16), and he praises her from feet to crown (7:2–8[1–7]). They know each other’s bodies completely, and they view them at close range. He speaks of her cheeks behind her veil (4:3; 6:7), of the back of her neck (1:10), and of her navel (7:3[2]); they delight in each other’s eyes (1:15; 4:1, 9; 5:12; 7:5[4]) and lips (4:3, 11; 5:13), all details which imply a close vantage point.<sup>123</sup> They speak not only of each other’s looks, but of tastes and smells: she says, “his cheeks are like beds of spices, heaps of aromatic plants” (5:13), and he that the “breath of your nose is like apples, your mouth like the best wine” (7:9–10[8–9]). The experience described in the Song is not that of lovers gazing upon one another from afar, but of two people close enough to

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<sup>122</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 31–32.

<sup>123</sup> Many commentators agree that the word translated “navel” in 7:3 is, if not an explicit euphemism for the vulva, at least “a subtle and tasteful allusion to the intimacies of sex,” Longman, *Song*, 195; see also Pope, *Song of Songs*, 617; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 182; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 234.

observe each other's faces, to smell each other's scents and taste each other's mouths. One of the refrains in the Song describes them closely entwined: "his left hand is under my head, and his right embraces me" (2:6; 8:3).

Their physical intimacy is enmeshed with their emotional intimacy. They address each other exclusively in terms of endearment, usually affixed with the first-person pronominal suffix of possession: to him, she is רַעִיָּה ("my companion"), יְפָתִי ("my beautiful one"), יוֹנָתִי ("my dove"), אָחֹתִי ("my sister"), תְּמִתִּי ("my perfect one"). She almost always refers to him as דּוֹדִי, "my beloved". Her secondary preferred endearment for him is שְׂאֵהָבָה נִפְשִׁי, "the one whom my soul loves" (1:7; 3:1–4) and to the daughters of Jerusalem she describes him as רַעִי, "my companion" (5:16). Their physical relationship is a component of their affectionate friendship; "although the Song of Songs clearly speaks about sexuality, its overarching theme is intimacy and its development within a loving relationship."<sup>124</sup>

**Mutuality.** For a text which is historically the product of a patriarchal culture, the Song is striking for the mutual enthusiasm with which the man and woman pursue one another, in a relationship with no evident imbalance of power. In the Song of Songs, "there is mutuality of the sexes, without male dominance, female subordination or stereotyping of either sex," and "the theme of alternating initiative of the lovers runs throughout the Song."<sup>125</sup> She persistently expresses her desire for him, beginning with יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנִּשְׁקוֹת פִּיהוּ ("let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!"; 1:2); she seeks him (3:1–3; 5:6) and when she finds him, "will not let him go" (3:4); she desires to bring him into her family home (3:4; 8:2); in the meantime she invites him, euphemistically, to "enter his garden" (4:16) and to come with her into the fields and vineyards, where she promises, שָׁם אֶתֶּן אֶת־דִּדִּי לָךְ ("there I will give you my love," with the connotation of "lovemaking" (7:12[13 Eng.])). When he uses imperatives towards her, they are words of invitation: "get up!" and "come!" (2:10; 13); "let me see your face, let me hear your voice," (2:14); "[come] with me!" (4:8). He never coerces or imposes himself upon the woman, only coaxes her, and it is clear from the way she speaks to him that she is glad to be coaxed. One couplet particularly captures their rhythm of mutual invitation and consent:

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<sup>124</sup> Fredericks and Estes, *Song*, 294.

<sup>125</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 208.

[She:]

Let my beloved enter his garden  
and eat its choicest fruits.

יבא דודי לגנו  
וְיֹאכַל פְּרִי מִגְדָּיו

[He:]

I entered my garden, my sister, bride,  
I gathered my myrrh with my spice,  
I ate my honeycomb with my honey,  
I drank my wine with my milk.  
(4:16b–5:1)

בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה  
אָרִיתִי מִזֵּי עֵם-בְּשָׁמִי  
אָכַלְתִּי יַעְרִי עֵם-דְּבָשִׁי  
שָׁתִיתִי יַיִן עִם-חֲלָבִי

The Song also makes use of parallel language to express the two lovers' equality in the relationship, when they exchange mirrored compliments such as:

[He:]

Look at you, beautiful, my love!  
Look at you, beautiful, your eyes are doves.

הִנֵּךְ יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי הִנֵּךְ יָפָה עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים  
הִנֵּךְ יָפָה עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים

[She:]

Look at you, handsome, my beloved,  
Truly delightful!  
(1:15–16)

הִנֵּךְ יָפָה דּוֹדִי  
אֵף נָעִים

And:

[He:]

Like a lily among the thorns  
is my love among the daughters.

כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין הַחֹרְתִים  
כֵּן רַעֲיָתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת

[She:]

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my  
beloved among the sons.  
(2:2–3)

כְּתַפּוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הַיָּעַר  
כֵּן דּוֹדִי בֵּין הַבָּנִים

That they exult each other using parallel terms emphasises that they hold each other in equal regard. Theirs is evidently not a relationship into which either party has entered reluctantly, under pressure from social, familial or commercial concerns, nor a relationship in which one party exerts physical or financial power over the other. It is a relationship of equal friends, driven by mutual desire.

**Exclusivity.** The lovers in the Song of Songs are uniquely devoted to one another. The woman asserts, “My beloved is mine, and I am his,” (2:16), and later “I am my beloved’s and he is mine” (6:3), underlining the exclusive nature of their affection for one another. The man and the woman love each other above all others. She calls him “the one my soul



loves” (1:7; 3:1–4) while he refers to her as “the most beautiful one among women” (1:8). That his attention is exclusively consumed by her is underscored by the fact that he never exchanges dialogue with the daughters of Jerusalem. When he does speak of other women, they are only as a foil for her superior desirability, such as in the verse previously mentioned when he calls her “a lily among the thorns” (2:2), and in a passage where he praises her as uniquely virtuous:

Sixty queens are they, eighty concubines  
and young women without number,  
One is she, my dove, my perfect one,  
One is she, to her mother  
Pure is she, to the one who bore her.  
(6:8–9)

ששים הָמָּה מְלָכוֹת וְשָׁמָנִים פִּילָגָשִׁים  
וְעַלְמוֹת אֵין מִסְפָּר  
אַחַת הִיא יְוֹנָתִי תְּמִתִּי  
אַחַת הִיא לְאִמָּהּ  
בָּרָה הִיא לְיוֹלְדָתָהּ

The most emphatic call to exclusive commitment comes in 8:6–7, the climactic point of the Song, where she exhorts him:

Set me as a seal upon your heart  
As a seal upon your arm  
For love is as strong as death  
Jealousy as unyielding as Sheol.  
(8:6)

שִׁימֵנִי כַחוֹתָם עַל־לִבְךָ  
כַחוֹתָם עַל־זְרוֹעֶךָ  
כִּי־עֲזָה כַמּוֹת אֱהָבָה  
קִשָּׁה כְּשֹׂאֵל קִנְאָה

The terms she uses here are very strong, even negative to modern ears, but “death” and “jealousy” do not detract from the beauty and rightness of the love between the woman and her beloved. Rather, death is “the default superlative for intense emotions” (cf. Judg 16:16; Jonah 4:9).<sup>126</sup> Here the strength of love is compared to that of death, whose strength lies in its inexorability, permanence and unassailability. קִנְאָה, “jealousy,” is descriptive of the way Yahweh loves his people; the cognate adjective קִנָּא is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only of God, and typically in the context of an exhortation to the Israelites to devote themselves exclusively to their “jealous” God (cf. Exod 34:14; Deut 4:14;

<sup>126</sup> Havilah Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely: A Thematic and Intertextual Reading of the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 206.

6:15). With this “jealousy” as the model, the קנאה in Song 8:6 is rightly understood as an expectation of exclusive commitment.<sup>127</sup>

While the relationship in the Song is characterised by exclusive devotion, it does not overlap exactly with the category of marriage as it is presented elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. That is not to say that the couple in the Song are unmarried, only that the text does not appear to be concerned with whether they are married (in an institutional sense) or not. The couple undergo no formal ceremony and the Song contains no reference to their shared household, or property, or offspring. “Never is this woman called wife, nor is she required to bear children.”<sup>128</sup> A transactional view of marriage and the Song’s alternative model for love collide in 8:8–12. The woman’s brothers discuss what to do with her when she is of marriageable age (8:8–9) and the woman subsequently rejects an attempt to sell her into Solomon’s harem, declaring that she will dispense her “vineyard” (a euphemism for her body and by extension, her whole person) on her own terms (8:11–12). As she exerts her agency over her own body and fate, she simultaneously rejects a model of marriage that conceives it as an economic transaction to benefit families, and particularly men (at the personal expense of women). If the Song is describing a marriage, it is “countercultural in that it view[s] marriage not as an economic contract or merely for the purpose of procreation,” but focuses primarily on the personal fulfilment of the couple.<sup>129</sup>

This, then is the ideal vision of love as presented in the Song: intimate, mutual, and exclusive, refuting a purely contractual notion of marriage which treats women as property, and celebrating instead the emotional and physical experience of two people in love.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> The exegetical process leading to these conclusions regarding 8:6 is laid out in full in Chapter 5.2. of this thesis.

<sup>128</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 162. The beloved does call the woman “bride” repeatedly in 4:8–5:1, but this is notably the only term of endearment he uses for her without a possessive pronominal suffix attached—that is, she is simply “bride,” never “my bride,” (contra most translations) raising the possibility that she is not intended for marriage to the beloved. Athas proposes that she is being prepared for a non-consensual marriage to Solomon. Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 304.

<sup>129</sup> Fredericks and Estes, *Song*, 294.

<sup>130</sup> In a new study, Andruska ventures that the unmarried status of the lovers is a genre marker shared not only (as previously recognised) with Egyptian love poetry but also with Akkadian erotic poetry. Andruska’s suggestion is that the generic norm permitted the violation of a social norm, allowing the inclusion of the Song in the Hebrew canon which overall domesticated sex within the setting of marriage. It is argued in the present thesis that the Song’s deliberate focus away from marriage is a feature of the way it undermines a patriarchal concept of marriage and presents the lovers’ idyllic mutuality and social freedom as an alternative. It is possible that adapting the convention of ANE love poetry served this purpose. J.L. Andruska, “Unmarried Lovers in the Song of Songs,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* (2021). Advanced online publication: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flab019>.

Having established the type of love the Song affirms, and the way it is embodied by the woman's beloved, it is possible to compare these ideals to the figure of Solomon as he operates in the Song and in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, to discern whether he and the beloved are one and the same. As mentioned above, the starting point for this analysis will be the two passages in the Song which explicitly mention Solomon by name: 3:6–11 and 8:11–12.

### iii. Solomon in Song 3:6–11

<sup>6</sup>What is this coming up from the wilderness?  
Like columns of smoke  
Myrrh and frankincense going up in smoke  
With all the powders of a merchant.

<sup>7</sup>Look! The palanquin of Solomon  
Sixty mighty men around it  
Of the mighty men of Israel.

<sup>8</sup>All of them holding a sword, learned in battle  
Each with his sword upon his thigh  
Against terror in the nights.

<sup>9</sup>King Solomon made a litter for himself  
Of the wood of Lebanon

<sup>10</sup>Its uprights made of silver  
Its back, gold

Its seat, purple  
Its interior fitted out with the love  
of the daughters of Jerusalem.

<sup>11</sup>Go out and look,  
Daughters of Zion,  
At King Solomon in the crown  
with which his mother crowned him  
On the day of his wedding  
And on the day of the gladness of his heart.  
(Song of Songs 3:6–11)

מי זאת עלה מן-מדבר  
כתימרות עשן  
מקטרת מור ולבונה  
מכל אבקת רוכל  
הנה מטתו שלשלמה  
ששים גברים סביב לה  
מגברי ישראל  
כלם אחזי חרב מלמדי מלחמה  
איש חרבו על-ירכו  
מפחד בלילות  
אפריון עשה לו המלך שלמה  
מעצי הלבנון  
עמודיו עשה כסף  
רפידתו זהב  
מרקבו ארגמן  
תוכו ריוף אהבה  
מבנות ירושלם  
צאניה וראניה  
בנות ציון  
במלך שלמה בעטרה  
שעטרה-לו אמו  
ביום חתנתו וביום  
שמחת לבו

This scene in 3:6–11, describing the approach of Solomon's carriage from the wilderness, marks the first time a character is explicitly called "Solomon" within the Song. The man himself is not described and the verses are mostly taken up with the details of his carriage, but in 3:11 the woman calls on the daughters to go and look at Solomon, confirming his actual presence and bringing the audience and the narrated world together in a moment of definite convergence.

For those that understand Solomon to be the main love interest in the Song, his presence here presents no difficulty; usually these verses are understood as an account of

the wedding of Solomon and the Shulammite, his bride.<sup>131</sup> For those who do not identify the woman's beloved as Solomon, the majority see the use of his name here as perpetuating a "royal fiction" wherein the woman and her beloved style each other hyperbolically as king and queen, to reflect the heights of their love.<sup>132</sup> Both understandings of "Solomon" in this scene assume continuity between the "Solomon" figure here and the beloved who has appeared up to this point.

However, an analysis of the figure of "Solomon" in 3:6–11 does not liken the beloved to Solomon, but rather contrasts the two figures (contra Fox and Murphy who both state that Solomon and the beloved are likened here, but offer scant supporting evidence).<sup>133</sup> This can be demonstrated by a comparison of 3:6–11 and a prior scene in 2:8–17, which describes the woman's beloved as he comes "leaping over the mountains" to her. The proximity of the scenes and the similarity in circumstances—of a man described approaching from afar—invites the comparison. A side-by-side analysis of the two scenes reveals little to indicate either that the beloved literally is Solomon, or that 3:6–11 describes the beloved in the guise of a king. Rather, the comparison draws out three aspects of contrast that are typical of a pattern of differentiated characterisation between Solomon and the beloved throughout the poem.

The first point of contrast is between the *remoteness* of Solomon in 3:6–11 and the *intimacy* with which the woman experiences her beloved throughout the poem, as exemplified in 2:8–17. Solomon's approach is heralded by clouds of obscuring smoke and impersonally exotic smells (בְּתִימְרוֹת עֵשֶׂן מִקְטָרֶת מֹזַר וּלְבוֹנָה מִכָּל אֲבָקֶת רוֹכֵל; 3:6), while the beloved's approach is indicated by his personal קוֹל, referring either to his voice or the noise of his approaching footfalls (2:8). Solomon is carried up from the desert in a vehicle (מִטָּתוֹ; 3:7), while the beloved runs and leaps on foot, ambulating towards his lover with all his own might (בָּא מְדִלֵּג עַל־הָהָרִים מִקַּפֵּץ עַל־הַגְּבָעוֹת; 2:8). Solomon is unseen, screened within his curtained bed, surrounded by a physical guardrail of sixty armed men (שֵׁשִׁים; 3:7). In 2:8–17 it is the woman who is screened by a wall, yet her beloved begs to see her face and hear her voice (הֲרֵאִינִי אֶת־מְרֹאֶיךָ הַשְׁמִיעֵנִי אֶת־קוֹלְךָ; 2:14),

<sup>131</sup> e.g. Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 759–60.

<sup>132</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 123; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 151–52; Exum, *Song*, 141; Longman, *Song*, 133; Hess, *Song*, 124.

<sup>133</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 123; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 152.

before they enter intimately into each other's personal space (דוֹדִי לִי וְאֲנִי לוֹ הָרַעָה בְּשׁוֹשְׁנִים) — having described her as a lily in 2:2, euphemistically he now “browses” among her “lilies” in 2:16).

The second point of contrast raised by Solomon's conduct is that he takes “love” by force in relationships of *unequal* power, whereas the central relationship between the woman and her beloved is one of *mutual* desire and consent. This is revealed by a comparison of the way the beloved woos the woman in 2:8–17 and the way Solomon comes “wooing” in 3:7–8. The beloved uses only his voice to coax the woman into his presence: וְאָמַר לִי קוֹמִי לָךְ רַעֲיָתִי יִפְתִּי וְלִבִּי־לָךְ (2:10; similarly 2:13). He begs her to reveal herself and join him (הִרְאִינִי אֶת־מְרָאֶיךָ הַשְׁמִיעִינִי אֶת־קוֹלְךָ; 2:14), but the choice is hers—his use of *hiphil* verbs in this verse implicitly positions the woman as the agent of the man's seeing and hearing, awarding her the power to give her consent. By contrast, Solomon is apparently ready to take his bride by force if necessary, being accompanied by an armed entourage (3:7–8). Provan assesses that “it is conquest that is implied by the military overtones of verses 7–8,” and, relatedly, observes that it is odd that King Solomon should need a guard against “terror in the nights” (3:8) while the woman has been bold enough to venture out in the night unchaperoned (3:1–5). This raises the suspicion that it is actually the terror of Solomon's captive harem on view; possibly “the guards are stationed as much to keep the women in as to keep intruders out.”<sup>134</sup> In any case, there is no dialogue between Solomon and the woman that would give an opportunity for him to request and her to consent to her participation, only the relentless approach of the king's elaborate conveyance and the small army that accompanies it.

The third major point of contrast is that Solomon is a *polygamist*, while the beloved is *exclusively* devoted to the woman. The scene between the lovers in 2:8–17 is summed up in a characteristic statement of exclusivity: “my beloved is mine and I am his” (2:16; cf. 2:3; 6:3; 7:11[10 Eng.]). By contrast, the mention of the daughters of Jerusalem in 3:10 in connection with the interior of Solomon's palanquin “emphasises the lack of intimacy in

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<sup>134</sup> Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 303. Provan's suggestion resonates with the actions of the city watchmen against the woman in Song 5:7, who are hostile towards a woman caught out of bed at night. It is arguable that Solomon's guards may continue the theme of male authorities seeking to subjugate the woman throughout the Song (see also her brothers at 1:6).

Solomon's bedroom."<sup>135</sup> The word choice in 3:7 supports the view that Solomon's bedroom is the subtext for the "palanquin" or "litter" that approaches from the wilderness: מִטָּה, the word used for Solomon's conveyance, is the ordinary Hebrew word for "bed" or "couch," a common article of furniture often found in a bedroom. The מִטָּה in this passage is essentially a mobile bed.<sup>136</sup> (Seerveld calls it "a portable love nest.")<sup>137</sup>

These points of differentiation between Solomon and the beloved in 3:6–11 are expressed with allusion to the account of Solomon in 1 Kings 3–11, reinforcing the critique that is made there of Solomon's excessive, self-indulgent wealth and his practice of polygamy. The description in Song 3:9–10, of the king overseeing the creation of a custom-built curtained couch of Lebanese timber, silver, gold and purple, reads like an offshoot of the detailed list of building materials and component parts in 1 Kgs 5–7, in which wood from Lebanon and gold feature heavily (1 Kgs 5:20[6 Eng.], 24[10]; 6:18, 20–22, 30–36; 7:2, 11–12). Bloch and Bloch note that the descriptions of Solomon's carriage in 3:7–8 and 9–10 employ "the word order typical of inventories," and that 1 Kgs 7:6–8 "is characterized by a similar word order."<sup>138</sup> In 1 Kings, the account of Solomon building the temple is interrupted by the building of Solomon's own dwelling and associated buildings, a project that had a much larger footprint and took six years longer—almost double the amount of time—than the temple for Yahweh (1 Kgs 6:37–38; cf. 7:1; and 6:2; cf. 7:2–8). The questionable indulgence of Solomon's palace, inserted into the account of the commendable construction of the temple, was a symptom of his general overabundance of material wealth. His self-indulgence and excess are recalled by the list of materials in Song 3:9–10.

The mention of timber from Lebanon (presumably cedar) in verse 9 also invokes the House of the Forest of Lebanon, which Solomon constructed to hold his treasures, and the cedar hall he built for his throne (1 Kgs 7:2, 7; 10:17–21). This supports the notion that Song 3:9–10, while ostensibly describing a litter, intends to point the reader towards contemplation of Solomon's house(s). The presence of timber from Lebanon recalls the lovers' bower of trees in 1:15–16, but the similarities end there. The lovers delight in "our

<sup>135</sup> Zakovitch, *Song*, 30; cf. Annette Schellenberg, "The Description of Solomon's Wedding: Song 3:6–11 as a Key to the Overall Understanding of the Song of Songs," *VT* 70 (2020): 180–81.

<sup>136</sup> G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, TOTC, ed. D.J. Wiseman (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 109; Longman, *Song*, 136; Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 302.

<sup>137</sup> Seerveld, *The Greatest Song*, 90.

<sup>138</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 161; based on this and other examples they argue that 3:7–11 "clearly calls to mind specific biblical texts," including parts of 1 Kgs 7, Eccl 2 and Esth 1.

couch” and “our house” (1:16–17), but Solomon made this palanquin “for *himself*” (לִּי, 3:9). Bloch and Bloch notice that this wording resonates with Eccl 2:4–8, in which Qohelet in his kingly guise recounts how he built, planted, and made things for himself—לִּי appears six times in the passage, which describes and ultimately dismisses Solomonic self-indulgence.<sup>139</sup> In the Song, Solomon’s bed is not the setting of mutual delight with an equal partner, but a showpiece for his self-indulgence.

The descriptors of the palanquin in verse 10 are reminiscent of the description of the royal pavilion of a foreign king, specifically that of Ahasuerus in Esther 1:6, which uses similar words for its pillars (עמוד) and pavement (רצפה) in Esth 1:6, cf. the cognate verb רָצַף in Song 3:10) and also features gold (זָהָב), silver (כֶּסֶף) and purple (אַרְגָּמָן). Fox notes this association and, understanding 3:6–11 to be about the beloved in “royal disguise,” interprets the connection positively: “her beloved’s presence makes their surroundings royal.”<sup>140</sup> However, given that Ahasuerus’s most notable features (for the purposes of the narrative in Esther) were his large harem and his oppression of the Jewish people, it is unlikely this is a favourable association. Imitating a foreign king does not reflect well on Solomon. When the Israelite people demand a king “like other nations” they implicitly reject Yahweh as their king (1 Sam 8:5–7), and when God does appoint a king, they are supposed to be distinctively Yahweh’s. The prohibitions in Deut 17:16–17 are intended to prevent the king from allying himself with foreign rulers or falling into worship of foreign gods, two matters in which Solomon failed pitifully. Additionally, Duguid argues that the parallel to the opulence of Ahasuerus’ palace highlights Solomon’s greed in that “these are, after all, Israel’s tax dollars at work. This is especially poignant when we remember that Solomon’s high taxation was explicitly mentioned among the political factors that led to the split in the kingdom under Solomon’s son Rehoboam.”<sup>141</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 164; while they do not claim direct dependency between the Song, Ecclesiastes and 1 Kings they see that “their generic similarity does suggest some kinship,” 161. c.f. Schellenberg, who notes that the mention that Solomon made the carriage “for himself” (לִּי) is unusual for a biblical description of building activities, and that the לִּי in Ecclesiastes 2:4–8 is the only comparable exception. Further, Schellenberg notes that the allusion to Solomon’s building projects in 1 Kings, one of which was a home for Pharaoh’s daughter, draws attention to the fact that Song 3:6–11 says nothing about Solomon’s bride on this his “wedding day,” bolstering the view that this passage criticises his egocentrism. Schellenberg, “The Description of Solomon’s Wedding,” 180.

<sup>140</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 123, 126.

<sup>141</sup> Duguid, *Song*.

In 3:10, the fourth material used in the construction of Solomon’s palanquin—“love”—breaks the expected pattern established by “silver,” “gold,” and “purple” (אַרְגָּמָן, indicating a red-purple dye used for luxurious fabrics and associated with royalty). The pattern leads the reader to expect another physical material such as leather, bronze or precious gems, then surprises with the abstract “love.” In pursuit of concreteness, Fox proposes emending אֶהְבָּה to either הֶבְנִים, “mahogany” or אֲבִנָּאִים, “stones,” while Keel understands “love” to mean a decorative element depicting scenes of lovemaking on the interior of the litter.<sup>142</sup> However, there is no reason to alter אֶהְבָּה or insist that it indicates a physical element of construction. Its subversive presence invites enquiry into the meaning of the metaphor.

אֶהְבָּה מִבָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם may be translated in a variety of ways, hingeing on the sense in which מִן is taken.<sup>143</sup> A majority of English translations opt to take the מִן with an instrumental sense indicating that the daughters of Jerusalem are (collectively) the agent of the verb רָצַף; e.g. “its interior was inlaid with love *by* the daughters of Jerusalem” (ESV). This option may give אֶהְבָּה an adverbial sense, describing the way in which the daughters performed the “inlaying”—that is, with love or “lovingly”—however, it remains grammatically ambiguous. Employing the instrumental sense of מִן, it is technically still possible to take “love” as a noun, i.e. the material with which the carriage was inlaid by the daughters. Since love is not literally a decorative material, the question would remain as to what אֶהְבָּה represents here. Another option for translating the מִן, using a more frequent sense of the preposition, is to take it as indicating the source or originator of the love, in which case it might best be rendered “the love *of* the daughters of Jerusalem.” Again, this necessarily indicates a metaphorical intention behind the collocation רָצַף אֶהְבָּה. Weighing the various options in view of the way that 3:6–11 adopts a satirical posture towards Solomon, it seems likely that תּוֹכּוֹ רָצוּף אֶהְבָּה מִבָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם constitutes a wordplay. Read straight-faced, it conveys that the interior of the carriage was inlaid *lovingly* by the

<sup>142</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 126; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 133–34.

<sup>143</sup> A handful of translators (including Fox, Murphy, cf. NIV) divorce “daughters of Jerusalem” from the words preceding and read it in parallel with “daughters of Zion” as a vocative attached to what follows (the command to “go out and look” in 3:11). However, this requires deleting the מִן altogether, which there is no compelling reason to do. The enigmatic wording of 3:10 appears deliberately subversive and suggestive of wordplay, inviting enquiry rather than emendation. Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 121, 127; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 148–50.



daughters of Jerusalem, as though they were devoted craftswomen. Taken another way, it indicates that the interior of Solomon's carriage was inlaid *with the love of* the daughters of Jerusalem. This ambiguity is typical of the way the poetry of the Song conveys dual meanings throughout, as in the example of 2:17 (which could mean "until the night falls, turn away and be on the mountains" or "until the day breaks, turn towards me and enjoy my body") examined above.

Every option requires clarifying what is meant by אֶהְבָּה in this context. The allusions noted so far point to 1 Kings 3–11 as the background for understanding the Solomon figure in Song 3:6–11. The comparison of Song 3:6–11 to 2:8–17 has made it abundantly clear that the אֶהְבָּה found in Solomon's "bed" is impersonal, non-consensual, and polyamorous, a poor facsimile of the loving relationship between the woman and her beloved which the Song holds up as its ideal. The אֶהְבָּה מִבְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם is best understood to indicate Solomon's amorous activities with his harem of conquered women, which besmirch the interior of his covered bed. The subversive presence of "love" disrupting the expected pattern of the list of decorative materials makes a dig at Solomon: "it is not that the daughters of Jerusalem were artisans who constructed a royal palanquin. Rather, the implication is that Solomon has bedded many women in this lavish litter."<sup>144</sup> Provan's summary of 3:6–11 minces no words: "the charioteer Solomon rides roughshod over the daughters of Jerusalem, on the road paved with sexual acts."<sup>145</sup>

Coming on the heels of this verse, the mention of Solomon's mother in verse 11 seems particularly tactless, given that historically the mother of Solomon was Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:1–12:25). "It is difficult for the informed biblical reader to encounter this text and not recall her history with David, although it is unlikely that David's notorious crimes are the point of this allusion."<sup>146</sup> David infamously desired and took Bathsheba in a relationship of unequal power without consent. The allusion reminds the reader that Solomon is a conqueror of women much like his father before him, although Solomon's number of conquests has far surpassed his father's.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 303.

<sup>145</sup> Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 303.

<sup>146</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 181.

<sup>147</sup> The fact that Solomon's "sixty" mighty men in Song 3:6-8 approximately doubles David's guard described in 2 Samuel is frequently observed in passing, but no explanation of its significance is ever offered. (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 152; Longman, *Song*, 136; Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 302; Garrett and House, *Song*, 179; Hess, *Song*, 119; Fredericks and Estes, *Song*, 342–43.) One possible way to read it is that 3:6-11 altogether

The mention of Solomon's "wedding day" in verse 11 has prompted some interpreters to characterise vv.6–11 as a wedding procession that is an occasion for celebration.<sup>148</sup> However, the content of verses 6–10 makes it clear that this passage is about conquest, not courtship.<sup>149</sup> Solomon is painted as a distant, coercive, polygamous "lover" whose description, replete with language that calls up his history in 1 Kings 3–11, recalls his splendour as a means of emphasising his self-indulgence rather than making him a figure of admiration. The first mention of a wedding in verse 11 reads more like an ironic concluding twist than the controlling premise of the passage. Having been primed to see the king as a self-indulgent polygamist, surrounded by a military entourage as he makes his ominous approach from the wilderness, the reader suddenly realises he is here to take a(nother) bride. The mention of a wedding brings the previous verses sharply into focus, but the previous verses do not read, at first, like a description of a wedding day. If this is Solomon's "wedding day," the reader is not allowed to forget that his bride will not be the first—or only—lover to occupy his chambers, and she will not be entering the type of intimate, consensual, exclusive relationship celebrated elsewhere in the Song.

#### iv. Solomon in Song 8:11–12

Apart from 3:6–11, the only other scene in which Solomon is explicitly present is in a short exchange in 8:11–12. This exchange alludes to Solomon's conduct with women in 1 Kings and confirms that his behaviour is the antithesis of ideal love as portrayed in the Song. The way Solomon relates to women in 8:11–12 is not intimate, it is not mutual, and it is not exclusive. As in 3:6–11, Solomon is portrayed as an impersonal lover who wields his power (in this case, in the form of money) in pursuit of polygamous relationships.

Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-Hamon  
He gave the vineyards to keepers.  
Each was to bring in for its fruit a thousand pieces of  
silver.  
My vineyard, which is *mine*, is before me

כָּרְם הָיָה לְשֹׁלֹמֹה בְּבַעַל הָמוֹן  
נָתַן אֶת־הַכָּרְם לְנֹטְרִים  
אִישׁ יָבִיא בְּפִרְיוֹ אֶלֶף כֶּסֶף  
כָּרְמִי שְׁלִי לִפְנֵי

paints a picture of Solomon who exceeds his father David in every way, from his opulence, to his entourage, to his ways with women.

<sup>148</sup> Gledhill, *Song*, 151; Garrett and House, *Song*, 182; Hess, *Song*, 123; Fredericks and Estes, *Song*, 341.

<sup>149</sup> Athas: "Solomon arrives as an enemy from the desert with armed soldiers ready to conquer. There is no accompanying description of the woman's joy." Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 303; cf. Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 300; Duguid, *Song*, 71.

The thousand is for you, Solomon  
And two hundred for the keepers of the fruit.  
(Song of Songs 8:11–12)

הָאֶלֶף לְךָ שְׁלֹמֹה  
וּמֵאֲתַיִם לְנֹתָרִים אֶת־פְּרִיָּו

בַּעַל הַמִּזְוֶה is an unknown location, most likely a literary invention, given that בַּעַל הַמִּזְוֶה could be translated as “owner” or “lord of a multitude” (cf. the Vulgate: *quae habet populos*) or “of abundance.”<sup>150</sup> Both meanings are fitting designations for Solomon, whose most notorious attributes after his wisdom were his wealth and his women—700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs 11:3). It is possible that the “thousand” in these verses (referring to silver) is a number deliberately chosen to allude to the total sum of Solomon’s female companions, linking this passage to the critique of Solomon’s harem arrangements from 1 Kings 3–11.<sup>151</sup>

“Vineyards” and associated imagery are “multivalent” in the Song, potentially representing literal vineyards in the poetic narrative as well as bearing metaphorical meaning.<sup>152</sup> The primary metaphorical connotation of the vineyard (and related images like vines, wine and fruits) in the Song is lovemaking and female sexuality (cf. 1:6, 2:15; 6:11; 7:10 [9 Eng.], 13[12]). So while historically Solomon might indeed have owned literal “vineyards” in abundance, the “vineyards” in 8:11 can also be understood as a thinly veiled reference to his harem. The woman’s own “vineyard” referred to in 1:6 and 8:12 has been variously understood to represent her independence and freedom (Garrett), her womanhood and specifically her sexuality (Bloch and Bloch) or more narrowly her genitals (Pope, O’Donnell).<sup>153</sup> In 8:12 when the woman speaks of her own “vineyard” she is referring to herself, and specifically that aspect of herself which is given or withheld in romantic, sexual relations.

The way Solomon stewards his vineyards, through the medium of paid keepers, is analogous to the lack of true intimacy in Solomon’s marriages. His impersonal distance from the object(s) of his “love”, already displayed in 3:6–11, is emphasised again here by the fact

<sup>150</sup> Longman and Murphy prefer “multitude” (of people) for הַמִּזְוֶה; Fox and Gordis take abundance to mean “wealth”; as do Bloch & Bloch, noting the phonetic similarity between הַמִּזְוֶה and הוֹן (verse 7) and conclude that “a parallel is thus suggested between the wealthy king...and the foolish man;” Longman, *Song*, 219; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 193; Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 174; Gordis, *Song*, 101; Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 219.

<sup>151</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 355; Duguid, *The Song*, 158; Longman, *Song*, 219; Zakovitch, *Song*, 23.

<sup>152</sup> Longman, *Song*, 98.

<sup>153</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 262; Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 141, 220; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 323–26; O’Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 130.

that he does not tend his “vineyards” himself but gives them into the care of keepers. Just as his armed guards stood between himself and the woman in 3:6–11, the keepers of the vineyard serve as his middlemen in 8:11–12. He is never seen to be personally involved with the women he conquers and keeps, nor depicted in scenes of intimacy. For “Solomon was the *Baal Hamon*, the lord of a mob. He owned a great many things and people but knew them only from a distance.”<sup>154</sup> The lack of intimacy in Solomon’s marriages is an inevitable consequence of treating his harem as “a commercial farming enterprise, rather than actually knowing and loving his wives intimately himself.”<sup>155</sup>

This Solomonic commercialisation of love is the crux of the issue in 8:11–12, displaying the impersonal, non-mutual, non-exclusive nature of the Solomonic model for “love.” Historically, Solomon’s large harem would have been a public display of his wealth and political standing. The Song’s use of the metaphor of profitable “vineyards” for Solomon’s women drives home the point that he treats his wives and concubines as chattels. This sustains the theme from the verses immediately preceding (8–10) wherein the woman’s brothers discuss how to ensure her (perceived) purity in order to see her safely married. (While some see their posture towards her as protective, their characterisation from 1:6 is hostile, so it seems right to understand their motivation in 8:8–10 as “self-serving rather than caring.”)<sup>156</sup> Observing the attitudes of the various men in 8:8–12, Provan summarises that “this stark reminder of the common realities of life for women in ancient Israel—owned by men and traded as possessions from one to the other in marriage—sets in sharp relief the love poetry of the whole Song,” which presents the relationship between the woman and her beloved as an alternative to the model of marriage which serves the powerful at the expense of the weak.<sup>157</sup> The theme of commercialisation points the reader back to the observation in 8:7, that “if a man offered all the wealth of his house for love, he

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<sup>154</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 263.

<sup>155</sup> Duguid, *The Song*, 158.

<sup>156</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 353; contra Fox and Longman, who both read the tone of 8:8–10 as “playful,” and the brothers as protective; Longman notes the hostility of the brothers in 1:6 but does not allow it to bear much on their characterisation here (Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 172; Longman, *Song*, 215); Bloch and Bloch note the “threatening siege metaphor” in the brothers’ promise to enclose their sister if she is promiscuous, and critique commentators who try to “play down the harshness” of the image (Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 216–17); Hess follows Walsh in seeing 8:8–10 as a satire of patriarchal marriage arrangements, arguing that the relationship in the Song “renders foolish all artificial contrivances to guarantee the honor of the family and particularly that of the brothers” (Hess, *Song*, 244; Carey Ellen Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000], 124).

<sup>157</sup> Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 371.

would be utterly despised.”<sup>158</sup> In 8:11–12, Solomon is revealed to share the characteristics of the despicable man who would attempt to trade love for wealth as though it were a material good.<sup>159</sup> The management of his “vineyards” in verse 11 is a metaphor for the way he stocks his harem with women to bolster his political connections and show off his personal prosperity.

Through the voice of the woman, the Song rejects this Solomonic model for “love” in 8:12. The woman tells Solomon to keep his silver, making it clear that her “vineyard” is not a commodity. Scholars wrestle with the precise meaning of the woman’s statement that Solomon should keep his thousand (pieces of silver), and the vineyard keepers two hundred. Athas proposes that Solomon’s harem was stocked by agents who sought women on his behalf, offering up to a thousand pieces of Solomon’s silver in exchange, of which a cut of two hundred was kept by the agent, or “vineyard keeper” (in this case, the rest of the profit would go to the woman’s brothers).<sup>160</sup> Others take it that she is rejecting Solomon’s model of love wholesale, ridiculing his prolific harem by comparison to “her own simple vineyard, and the freedom to give it to the man she chooses.”<sup>161</sup> Garrett takes her rejection to mean that “she would rather have personal control over her own vineyard than be in Solomon’s position, that is, be the absentee landlord over vast estates.”<sup>162</sup> Longman struggles to reconcile the mathematics of the silver, but ultimately concludes that “basically everyone can keep what is due to them, but Solomon should not think that he can buy her vineyard.”<sup>163</sup> Common to all of these interpretations, and many others, is the conclusion that the woman is asserting stewardship over her own body. Hers is the right to share it with her beloved, and it is not to be given over to men (like her brothers and Solomon) who would use it to serve their own purposes.

The Song as a whole affirms a sexual relationship between the woman and her beloved. “Keeping” her vineyard therefore must not equal total abstinence but rather

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<sup>158</sup> That 8:11-12 illustrates the reflection on love from 8:7 has also been noted by Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 218; Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 371; Longman agrees and additionally points out the resonance of 8:11-12 with 6:8-10, “which contrasts the singleness of love between a man and a woman against the plurality of a harem,” Longman, *Song*, 220.

<sup>159</sup> The link between the proverbial man in Song 8:7 and the figure of Solomon in 8:11-12 is discussed in depth in the exegesis of 8:6-7 in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

<sup>160</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 355.

<sup>161</sup> Duguid, *Song*, 159.

<sup>162</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 263.

<sup>163</sup> Longman, *Song*, 220.

means entering, without coercion, into the type of sexual relationship depicted in the Song. This relationship is intimate, mutual, and exclusive, in stark contrast to Solomon's detached, polygamous approach to "love." 8: 11–12 confirms that Solomon, in the view of the Song, is the antithesis of an ideal romantic partner; the way he conducts himself in love is despicable, and deliberately contrasted in the Song with the ideal behaviour embodied by the beloved.

v. Is Solomon the hero of the Song?

Previously I raised the four most commonly held options for the role of Solomon in the Song and suggested that their tenability could be tested by whether they accorded with the content (the portrayal of Solomon in the Song) and wider context (the persona of Solomon in the Hebrew canon). The four options were:

- a) that Solomon is the beloved,
- b) that Solomon and the beloved are two different people and Solomon has an antagonistic role in the Song,
- c) that Solomon does not have an active presence in the Song, nor does his persona have much bearing on the interpretation, and
- d) that Solomon's persona bears on the interpretation of the Song, but he is alluded to in order to create a literary foil for the main relationship rather than having an active role.

The above analysis of the content of the Song, in conversation with the context provided by Solomon's portrayal in 1 Kings 3–11 (and other relevant texts), has made it clear that Solomon and the beloved embody contrasting qualities and resist conflation. To view Solomon as the romantic hero of the Song accords neither with the relevant aspects of his persona in the canon (as defined above) nor with the content of the Song. In Song 3:6–11 and 8:11–12, the two passages in which a figure explicitly named Solomon appears, Solomon is characterised as one who amasses women for his own self-centred purposes, not for the mutual pleasure of two equal partners. This accords with the Solomon of 1 Kings 3–11, who marries an excess of women and acquires many more for his harem. It is clear that Solomon's conduct does not match the ideal embodied by the beloved in the Song, so option a) above is not sustainable.

Of those who recognise that it is impossible for Solomon to be the main love interest of the Song, some resolve the tension by minimising the role of Solomon in the Song. One way to do this is to understand that the beloved is not Solomon and nor does Solomon appear at all, but the woman occasionally imagines her beloved as a “king” (to account for the references to “Solomon” and “king”). However, this does not account for the marked contrast between the characterisation of Solomon in 3:6–11 and the beloved in the rest of the poem. Scholars who take this view deal with 3:6–11 and 8:11–12 in a variety of ways, often inconsistently. For example, Gledhill believes the Song has little to do with Solomon and explains 3:6–11 by speculating “the lovers are perhaps singing a snatch of a wedding song originally sung at one of Solomon’s own nuptials,” later, in 8:11–12, Solomon is a literary foil, “playing the archetypal role of any lecherous male.”<sup>164</sup> Hess, who takes the view that the woman styles her beloved as “her Solomon,” sees the references to King Solomon in 3:6–11 as “representing the images that the male and female possess in the eyes of one another,” yet in his analysis of 8:11–12 he sees that a contrast is created between the negative image of Solomon’s “vineyards” (his harem) and the true love of the central couple.<sup>165</sup> The analysis above reveals that Solomon’s characterisation in the Song is persistently negative and that his character functions similarly in both 3:6–11 and 8:11–12. Based on this it is necessary to admit that Solomon has a role within the poem that is separate to the beloved. Furthermore, the presence of Solomon’s name in the title of the Song makes it difficult to dismiss his significance to the Song.<sup>166</sup> For these reasons, option c) above is untenable.

Of those who recognise Solomon as a separate figure to the beloved, some deny that he has any meaningful presence as a character in the Song, reading 3:6–11 and 8:11–12 as poetic interpolations intended to highlight the ideal qualities of the beloved against the negative example of Solomon. Others see him as an adversary who is directly involved in the dramatic action of the poem. It is plausible that the Solomon of 1 Kings 3–11 could be the antagonist in a narrative which idealises a couple determined to resist Solomon’s twisted model of “love.” Exactly how he performs in the poem depends on the conclusions drawn from a more detailed examination of the whole poem, exceeding the scope of the limited

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<sup>164</sup> Gledhill, *Song*, 23, 150–51.

<sup>165</sup> Hess, *Song*, 124, 247.

<sup>166</sup> The precise meaning and significance of the superscription is examined below in 2.2.2.

analysis performed above. However, based on the analysis of 3:6–11 and 8:11–12 it can be said with confidence that king Solomon is *not* the beloved in the Song, that he has an adversarial presence and that he is characterised as the antithesis of the Song’s ideal for love.

## 2.2.2. The relationship between Solomon and the Song

The function of Solomon within the Song is one aspect of Solomon’s role as it pertains to the Song. The other aspect is communicated by the title of the Song: שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים. אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמֹה. It indicates a literary relationship between the canonical figure of Solomon and the Song of Songs as a whole.

The precise nature of the relationship is grammatically ambiguous. Of all the basic Hebrew prepositions, the לְ (which precedes Solomon’s name in the superscription) has the least specialised meaning, encompassing a very wide range of general relationships between two entities.<sup>167</sup> The most common type of function performed by the לְ is allative, i.e. “a very general expression of *direction towards* anything,” often (but not exclusively) to define a verbal action with regard to a noun.<sup>168</sup> Waltke and O’Connor elaborate on subsets of allative-type relationships including those between a noun and a dependent noun such as in Song 1:1. Of the many options presented (in a list which the authors admit is not exhaustive), the לְ in a “possessive phrase” appears to match most closely the grammatical function of the לְ in the Song’s superscription.<sup>169</sup> This conclusion accords with the fact that the phrase אֲשֶׁר לְ in particular is used in the Hebrew Bible to convey a genitive relationship, ranging from a straightforward expression of ownership, e.g. וְרַחֵל בָּאָה בְּאֶה עִם־הָצֹאן אֲשֶׁר לְאִבֶּיהָ, “Rachel came with her father’s sheep” (Gen 29:9), to a more abstract sense of belonging, such as in the phrase הַגִּבּוֹרִים אֲשֶׁר לְדָוִיד (“the mighty men of David,” 1 Chr 11:10). Gesenius specifically includes Song 1:1, alongside the examples above and several more, as an

<sup>167</sup> Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Revised English., SubBi 27 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), §133 d (458); Christo H.J. van der Merwe, Jackie Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, BLH 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), §39.11. (284).

<sup>168</sup> William Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. G.W. Collins and M.A. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898), §119s-r (400).

<sup>169</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §11.2.10f (209).



instance of the periphrastic expression of a genitive by way of *אֲשֶׁר*.<sup>170</sup> The *ל* alone is also used fluidly to express a range of genitive relationships. For example, the clause *וְלִנְעָמִי מִיָּדַע לִי אִשָּׁה*, “Naomi had a relative of her husband’s” (Ruth 2:1), employs the *ל* twice to convey a relationship of mutual belonging that is outside the scope of material ownership.<sup>171</sup> It seems best, therefore, to take the Song’s superscription as indicative of a type of genitive relationship between Solomon and the Song. Grammatically, the construction in the title of the Song is relatively straightforward; conceptually, it is more difficult. In Song 1:1 the genitive does not convey literal possession because it is not coherent to suggest that Solomon “owns” the Song. The sense of “belonging” conveyed by the prepositional phrase is more fluid. Exum speaks of a “Solomonic backdrop” which the title of the Song invites the reader to consider; “he casts his shadow over it.”<sup>172</sup> The manner in which his shadow is “cast” can be discerned by the characterisation of Solomon within the Song and the relevant aspects of Solomon’s persona from the wider canon.

The summary of Solomon’s portrayal in the Hebrew Bible has revealed that he is a multifaceted persona with iconic traits both positive and negative: his wisdom, his wealth, his love for foreign women and the formal introduction of idolatry to Israel, his status as the heir to the Davidic covenant, builder of the temple and steward of Israel’s golden age. Different interpretations assume a different relationship between Solomon and the Song depending on which aspects of this persona are given priority by the interpreter. For example, if Solomon’s role as a teacher of wisdom is assumed to be a primary aspect of his persona, the ascription in Song 1:1 might be taken as an indication of authorship, since Solomon was known for composing songs and proverbs (1 Kgs 5:12[4:32 Eng.]).<sup>173</sup> Alternatively, if Solomon’s reputation as a polygamist from 1 Kings 3–11 assumes supreme importance, interpreters are more likely to deny Solomonic authorship or minimise Solomon’s role as a character in the Song.<sup>174</sup> The lack of consensus over which aspect of

<sup>170</sup> Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, §129f.

<sup>171</sup> Several more similar examples are given in Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §11.2.10f (209–210).

<sup>172</sup> Exum, *Song*, 90.

<sup>173</sup> For example, Doug O’Donnell understands the Song of Songs to be “the very best of all of [Solomon’s] prolific songwriting labors,” and adds that regardless of the position taken on authorship, “you ought to hold the view that the Song is part of the wisdom corpus, based partly on its association with Solomon.” O’Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 23.

<sup>174</sup> For example, Longman provides a succinct argument against Solomonic authorship on the basis of Solomon’s dubious reputation in love from the Deuteronomistic historical tradition, and notes that Solomon is

Solomon's persona to allow to "cast its shadow" over the Song is doubtless why scholarship does not reflect a consensus on the meaning of Song 1:1.

To bring clarity, the present study has defined criteria for selecting key texts that suggests themselves as having most relevance to the interpretation of the Song of Songs. The analysis of Solomon's various depictions in the Hebrew canon alongside the content of the Song has revealed that the Solomon of Chronicles has limited relevance to the interpretation of the Song, since Chronicles displays a narrow concern for playing up Solomon's role as temple-builder to serve its purpose, flattening the more complex portrayal from the Samuel-Kings narrative. Synthesising the passages in which Solomon and the theme of אהבה intersect reveals that the prevailing associations between Solomon and "love" are Solomon's *failure* of wisdom in this area and the enduring consequences for the kingdom of Israel. This association, coupled with the negative characterisation of Solomon in Song 3:6–11 and 8:11–12, provides one element of control for interpreting the meaning of the superscription of Song 1:1.

It was noted above that there is no overriding scholarly consensus on the nature of the relationship indicated by the superscription to the Song. Several basic options for translating the ל in Song 1:1 currently stand. The four main alternatives acknowledged are:

- a) authorship (translated "by Solomon");
- b) dedication ("to or for Solomon");
- c) affinity ("of Solomon" or "Solomonic");
- d) subject ("about Solomon" or "concerning Solomon").<sup>175</sup>

While these options are not exhaustive of all the meanings it is possible for ל to convey, since they are the major ones identified in current scholarship these will be dealt with briefly before other possibilities are considered.

Based on the conclusions of this study so far, even leaving aside questions to do with dating the Song, taking the ל to indicate authorship (literal or pseudepigraphal) is problematic. Given the extreme negativity of Solomon's characterization within the Song, understanding Song as authored by him would necessitate that Solomon is extremely

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ridiculed in Song 8:11-12, concluding "it is doubtful that Solomon would characterize himself this way"; Longman, *Song*, 5–6.

<sup>175</sup> The range of possible meanings are categorised into these four options by Longman, *Song*, 3; c.f. Garrett and House, *Song*; O'Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 23.

derisive towards himself. A majority of scholars who recognise Solomon's poor reputation regarding love from 1 Kings 3–11 and his negative characterisation in the Song deny Solomonic authorship for this reason.<sup>176</sup> The tension is not insurmountable; one suggestion is that Solomon wrote the Song as an act of repentance in old age.<sup>177</sup> However, this is difficult to reconcile with the indications from 1 Kings 11 and from Neh 13:23–27 that the enduring evaluation of Solomon's conduct in love was negative. His major legacy in the public consciousness (at least at the time of the return from exile) was the devastating implication of his marriages for the kingdom of Israel. There is no evidence anywhere in the canon that Solomon repented publicly of his love for foreign women, by way of publishing the Song or otherwise, so the suggestion that Solomon authored the Song as an act of self-critique does not match his presentation in the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

To take the *š* as a dedication raises a similar tension. It is awkward for a work dedicated to Solomon to cast him in such an unfavourable light. No historical circumstances for such a composition and dedication are readily suggestible.<sup>178</sup> Hess offers the suggestion that the poem is dedicated by the woman to “her Solomon,” (an endearment for her beloved) but this relies on conflating the figure of Solomon and the beloved within the text, which is incompatible with the conclusions from the close analysis of 3:6–11 and 8:11–12.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, the content of the Song is not addressed to Solomon. The explicit addressees within the text are “the daughters of Jerusalem” (1:5; 2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 5:16; 8:4), whose identity will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. The Song presents itself as being composed for the benefit of an audience that does not include King Solomon (or anyone called by that name). For these reasons the rendering of the *š* as a dedication can be ruled out as unlikely.

The third option suggests that the *š* indicates an affinity with a corpus of Solomonic wisdom writings. For example, Childs takes the view that Song 1:1 is a non-literal ascription

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<sup>176</sup> Longman, *Song*, 5–6; Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 235; Duguid, *Song*, xix–xx; Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 250.

<sup>177</sup> For example, O'Donnell follows this view, attributed to the Jewish scholar Rashi, but he is in an extreme minority of contemporary scholars who still hold to Solomonic authorship. O'Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 23.

<sup>178</sup> Garrett mentions that there are possible historical analogies wherein a poet dedicated their work to a patron, but concludes that “unfortunately, we have no certain grounds for interpreting *לְשִׁלְמֹה* in this manner.” Garrett and House, *Song*, 124.

<sup>179</sup> Hess, *Song*, 39.

intended to set the Song “within the context of wisdom literature,” from which Hess later extrapolates that “the connection to Solomon places the book within a historical wisdom tradition of literature recognised by the church as possessing divine inspiration.”<sup>180</sup> Neither defines “wisdom literature,” nor provides a hypothesis for the date and circumstances of the ascription, nor presents any supporting evidence, so the origins of this position are difficult to trace. It reflects generalised, anachronistic assumptions regarding the existence of “wisdom literature” as a discrete biblical genre. Kynes has argued that the modern category of “wisdom literature” cannot be traced back to early Judaism or Christianity and is essentially a scholarly invention of the nineteenth century; even as vestigial evidence of such a category in ancient literature exists, its earlier manifestation was qualitatively different from the modern category. He also notes difficulties with the perceived correlation between Solomonic attribution and the genre category of “wisdom.”<sup>181</sup> The interpretation that Song 1:1 indicates a Solomonic affiliation also rests on an assumption about the apparent regard in which a Solomonic connection was held as a factor in the Song’s canonisation. The only recorded debate regarding the status of the Song of Songs is the rabbinic dispute in Mishnah *Yadayim* 3:5. In fact, it is barely a dispute: the Song’s defendant, Rabbi Akiva, responds to some rabbis who claim to have heard that the Song’s status is debated; Akiva insists that there is no question of this. Outside of m.*Yadayim* there is no evidence at all that the Song’s status was ever in question, and certainly none that it was canonised on the basis of an affiliation with Solomonic wisdom.<sup>182</sup> Rabbi Akiva makes no appeal to the Solomonic association as a justification for the holiness of the Song, asserting that the Song of Songs is the holiest of holy Scriptures apparently on the merit of its content. If the Solomonic ascription was relevant to the perceived holiness of the Song, it seems likely it would have been mentioned here.<sup>183</sup> There is no real basis for understanding that the legitimisation of the Song by an association with Solomon is the intention of the ascription in Song 1:1.

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<sup>180</sup> Childs, *Introduction*, 574; Hess, *Song*, 39.

<sup>181</sup> Will Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature”: The Birth, Death and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 72, 80, 82–98.

<sup>182</sup> John Barton, “The Canonicity of the Song of Songs,” in Hagedorn, *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, 5.

<sup>183</sup> Fox notes that “none of the Tannaim mention Solomonic authorship to justify canonization.” Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 250.

To translate לְשֹׁלֹמֹה as “concerning Solomon” has the advantage of conveying a relationship between Solomon and the Song in a generic way. The fact that the Song is related to Solomon—the *particular* Solomon who is known from 1 Kings 3–11 and the other portions of Scripture associated with Solomon and the theme of אֶהְבָּה—is a key component of its interpretive context, and to translate the preposition as “concerning” Solomon captures something of this relationship. However, this option also has shortcomings. While the Song is undoubtedly related to Solomon in some way, it must be acknowledged that it is not really *about* Solomon. The focus is far more on the woman and her beloved. The weight of meaning Solomon’s persona carries into the Song from the rest of the canon provides crucial background, and he plays an important role within the Song, but he is not one of the main characters.

None of the four dominant suggestions for the translation of לְ in Song 1:1 is a perfect expression of the way the preposition functions in relation to Solomon’s name. It is not supposed to be authored by him, dedicated to him, legitimised by an association with him, nor primarily about him. The most that can be said with confidence is that the Song is generally affiliated with the biblical figure of Solomon. Based on the evidence from the text of the Song, the affiliation is established by thematic connections and allusions to other Solomonic texts rather than Solomonic authorship or “wisdom” authentication. In other words, the Song is affiliated with Solomonic material: not necessarily material *written* by Solomon but material that *refers* to him. The best way to take the superscription is that it indicates that the Song belongs to Solomon’s story, with the corpus of biblical material that features the persona of king Solomon. Song 1:1 invites the reader to experience the Song in conversation with this material, and with particular attention to the aspect of Solomon’s persona that is most relevant to the subject matter in the Song: Solomon’s conduct in love, and its broader implications for Israel.

### 2.3. Conclusions of Chapter 2

The assessment of all the material regarding Solomon in the Hebrew Bible has led to the following conclusions about Solomon’s significance as a literary figure in the Hebrew

canon as it pertains to interpretation of the Song of Songs, and his characterisation in the Song itself.

Firstly, Solomon is one of the paradigmatic kings of Israel, with a pervasive presence in the Hebrew Bible. The impact of this well-established character on the meaning of the Song should not be minimised or dismissed. Rather, the presence of his name in the superscription and throughout the Song indicates that the Song should be read as a contributing piece of a larger collection of material concerning Solomon in the Hebrew bible.

Secondly, the pre-established character traits and associations which this “Solomon” carries into the Song are a mix of positive and negative, and the interpreter has the task of discerning which aspects of Solomon as a canonical figure are the most relevant to his function as a character in the Song of Songs. A synthesis of the biblical texts concerning Solomon and the theme of אֶהְבָּה confirm that the enduring association between Solomon and love in the Hebrew Bible is a negative one. Since אֶהְבָּה is a prevalent theme in 1 Kings 3–11, the Samuel-Kings account of Solomon is taken to be the version of Solomon’s biography that forms the most appropriate background to the Song of Songs. The emphasis in this account, on Solomon’s mishandling of אֶהְבָּה and its consequences for Israel, is bolstered by the enduring negative assessment revealed in Nehemiah 13:26 and by the analogy of the foreign woman as folly in Proverbs 1–9. This is the aspect of Solomon’s character with which the Song of Songs, a Song about romantic love, is primarily concerned.

This accords with the function Solomon performs within the Song, as the antithesis of the Song’s ideal for love. His characterisation in Song 3:6–11 and 8:11–12 differentiates him strongly from the character of the woman’s beloved. He is depicted (with allusion to his characterisation in 1 Kings 3–11) as distant, coercive and polygamous in contrast to the love between the woman and her beloved, which is intimate, mutual, and exclusive. In the final verses of the Song, Solomon’s model for “love” is explicitly rejected (8:12).

Identifying which aspects of Solomon’s persona from his portrayal in the canon have bearing on the Song provides a control for interpreting the relationship between Solomon and the Song as a whole, as indicated by Song 1:1. Allowing Solomon’s poor reputation in love and covenant fidelity to assume priority makes it unlikely that the superscription conveys authorship, dedication or an association with Solomonic wisdom, nor is Solomon the main character of the Song. The superscription indicates an affiliation with the corpus of

other texts associated with Solomon in the Hebrew Bible, suggesting that it should be read in conversation with these. The Song enriches and is enriched by interaction with the other Solomonic texts, particularly those that are identified as having an overlap of thematic concern with the Song.

This is the understanding of Solomon, and his role in the Song of Songs, that will be brought to bear on the exegesis of key passages from the Song in the latter chapters of this thesis.

## Chapter 3 | The Daughters of Jerusalem

### 3.0. Introduction

While Solomon is the only character in the Song who has a proper name, a second (collective) character is addressed by a consistent title: the “daughters of Jerusalem.” The daughters of Jerusalem suggest themselves as being significant to interpretation because the Song of the Songs is explicitly addressed to them. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the Song is framed by a dialogue between the woman and the daughters of Jerusalem. Within the frame of this dialogue, the woman relays the main content of the Song to the daughters, her audience. Surveying the history of the Song’s interpretation has revealed that very little attention has been given to the identity (fictional or historical) of this “audience.”

There are three reasons that the identity of the daughters of Jerusalem warrants further exploration. Firstly, it has been almost universally assumed that the Song invites the external audience to identify itself with the daughters of Jerusalem, sharing their perspective on the content of the Song. It follows that the identity of the daughters (fictional or historical) potentially has implications for the understood intention and reception of the Song.

Secondly, the daughters are defined by their association with Jerusalem (and in 3:11, they are addressed by the variant name “daughters of Zion”). Jerusalem and Zion bear weighty theological and cultural associations in the Hebrew canon, suggesting that the daughters are endowed with particular significance by a similar association. (Dismissing the significance of associations with “Jerusalem” is akin to dismissing the significance of associations with “Solomon.”)

Thirdly, the use of “daughter” and “daughters” to personify geographical locations and their inhabitants is an established idiom in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the prophetic literature. It is possible that inner-biblical connections with images of women associated with Jerusalem and Zion could provide a literary background for the intention of



the use of this idiom within the Song. Despite all these suggestive factors, the daughters in the Song have traditionally been treated as an isolated literary anomaly, as characterless, anonymous sounding-boards, with scholarly discussion emphasising their function as a literary device enabling the woman to speak.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the function and the identity of the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs. It will first survey the possibilities that have been proposed for their identity within the fiction of the Song, then explore their literary function as the woman's conversation-partner and the implications of this for the Song's didactic purpose.

The frame of reference will then expand to a survey of other "daughters" in association with Jerusalem and Zion throughout the Hebrew Bible. In order to inform the expectations of the phrase בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם in the Song of Songs, the idiomatic usages of בַּת and בָּנוֹת in conjunction with place names in the Hebrew canon will be surveyed, and the device of personifying Jerusalem as a woman (and/or her inhabitants as a group of women) will be brought to bear on the use of בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם and בָּנוֹת צִיּוֹן in the Song of Songs, in conversation with scholars who have discussed the possible correlation between the daughters in the Song and daughter-figures in the prophetic literature and Lamentations.

Finally, the conclusions of the previous chapter will be synthesised with the findings of this one. Preliminary observations will be made regarding the way the presence of Solomon in the Song may influence the understanding of the role of the daughters of Jerusalem, and potential implications of this for the interpretation of the Song of Songs.

### 3.1. The Daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs

After the woman and her beloved, the daughters of Jerusalem are the third major character in the Song of Songs. Their role is to speak to and be spoken to by the woman. The woman is continually in conversation both with the daughters and with her beloved, while the beloved never exchanges words nor apparently crosses paths with the daughters. The daughters do not have as much to say as the beloved, typically having only short, isolated lines compared to the beloved's back and forth exchanges with the woman and longer

monologues. However, the daughters speak or are spoken to frequently, indicating their constant presence.

The woman first addresses the daughters directly at 1:5; and speaks to them again at 2:7, 3:5, 3:11 (where they are called “daughters of Zion”), 5:8, 5:16 and 8:4.<sup>184</sup> While it is sometimes difficult to discern who is speaking in the Song, the daughters certainly address the woman at 5:9 and 6:1, asking her questions which she answers in 5:10–16 and 6:2–3 respectively. The daughters are also the most likely speakers at 1:4b, 1:11, 5:1c and 7:1 [6:13 Eng.]. The frequency of their speeches and of the woman’s addresses to them gives the impression that they are perpetually present on the “stage” of the Song. In this manner they have a more persistent presence than Solomon, who does not have a speaking role, and only appears in two isolated passages (3:6–11 and 8:11–12).

They even have a more persistent presence than the beloved, whose absence is emphasised at 3:1–5 and 5:2–8, and whose character is mediated to the audience entirely through the voice of the woman. The beloved speaks only to the woman. She speaks *to* him and *about* him to the daughters (5:2–6:1 is the clearest extended example of this). The beloved is confined to exist within the woman’s account of their relationship. His voice is expressed in quotation marks, as it were, via the woman (2:10–15, 5:2). On the other hand, the daughters speak in their own voice, never expressed through the medium of another.

The role of the daughters is analogous to a Greek chorus in some respects. They are apparently legion (according to their plural designation) but they speak with a single voice, and they adopt the vantage point of the external audience to the Song, occasionally commenting on the content of the poem (1:4, 11; 5:1). However, their role is more fluid than that of a chorus, occasionally slipping into participation in scenes. For example, in 3:11 and 5:8 the woman shifts abruptly from narrating a scene to addressing the daughters as though they are present with her, sharing her point of view. The two addresses at 3:11 and 5:8 are coherent as part of the poetic narrative unfolding in the verses around them. However, it is more typical for the dialogue between the woman and the daughters to take place externally to the main action of the Song, as a frame for its content. For example, the woman’s addresses to the daughters in 2:7, 3:5, 5:8 and 8:4 each take place at the

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<sup>184</sup> The “daughters of Zion” addressed in 3:11 are universally understood to be the same group addressed as the “daughters of Jerusalem” throughout the Song.

conclusion of a scene in which the daughters are not manifestly present. The woman's unexpected address to the daughters in these instances gives the impression that she is narrating the scenes to them. Unlike Solomon and the beloved, who only operate within the woman's account, the daughters interact with the woman internally and externally to the account.

The recurring tendency for the woman to "narrate" to the daughters, evident at multiple points throughout the Song, frames the entire poem as a conversation between the woman and the daughters of Jerusalem. The bulk of the Song's content is recounted by the woman to the daughters, who function as her audience.<sup>185</sup> Their conversation, which exists independently of the other characters in the Song, creates a literary frame for the content of the Song.

Three of the woman's addresses to the daughters have a special significance in the context of the way their conversation frames the Song. Verses 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 are composed to the same formula:<sup>186</sup>

I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,  
by the gazelles or does of the field,  
that you do not awaken and you do not stir up love  
until it pleases. (2:7)

השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלים  
בצבאות או באילות השדה  
אם-תעירו ואם-תעוררו את-האהבה  
עד שתחפץ

I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,  
by the gazelles or does of the field,  
that you do not awaken and you do not stir up love  
until it pleases. (3:5)

השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלים  
בצבאות או באילות השדה  
אם-תעירו ואם-תעוררו את-האהבה  
עד שתחפץ

I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,  
how could you awaken and how could you stir up love  
until it pleases? (8:4)

השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלים  
מה-תעירו ומה-תעוררו את-האהבה  
עד שתחפץ

2:7 and 3:5 are identical, while 8:4 is terser, deleting the circumlocutory phrase **בצבאות או באילות השדה** and using the interrogative **מה** rather than **אם**. These addresses, known as the "adjurations," stand out from the other remarks exchanged between the

<sup>185</sup> Rosalind Clarke, "Seeking Wisdom in the Song of Songs," in *Interpreting Old Testament Wisdom Literature*, ed. David G. Firth and Lindsay Wilson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2017), 103.

<sup>186</sup> The same formulaic address, "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem" appears in 5:8 but this verse is not grouped with the adjurations proper, for two reasons. Firstly, the rest of the verse deviates from the formula shared by 2:7; 3:5; 8:4. Secondly, the address in 5:8 contains a specific instruction to the daughters that is coherent in the immediate context of the scene, differentiating it in nature from the other adjurations, which contain a general instruction that is coherent in a broader sense than just the immediate context.

woman and the daughters because of their repetition and their distinct quality as admonitory instructions. These adjurations will be discussed in relation to the “conversational frame” of the Song under 3.1.2. Literary Function. Their meaning and special function will be analysed in Chapter 4.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) their perpetual presence with the woman, the daughters have rarely been examined as characters in their own right, having been understood almost exclusively as a literary device. They are a group character with a collective identity and no discernible individuals among them (to use Forster’s terminology, they are a “flat” character).<sup>187</sup> Unlike the woman and her beloved, some of whose characteristics are revealed through description (of each other) and self-description (of the woman), the daughters do not describe themselves, nor are they described by other characters or by an omniscient narrator. In this respect they are less visible than the two main characters. Their only descriptive feature is that they are “of Jerusalem,” the significance of which will be discussed below.

However, their lack of characterisation does not automatically equate to a lack of importance. They may be compared to the “son” who is the addressee of Proverbs 1–9: much like the daughters of Jerusalem, the son is “a character void,” and yet Brown argues that he may be the most central character throughout the book of Proverbs (next to Wisdom), since “without the son, neither the parent nor Wisdom would have anyone to address.”<sup>188</sup> Similarly, next to the woman, the daughters of Jerusalem are the most persistently present characters in the Song of Songs, providing the woman with an audience to whom to address the Song’s content. Moreover, they are not quite a “void” to the degree of the son in Proverbs, given that they do speak and have one significant descriptive trait, which previous commentators have largely overlooked: their association with Jerusalem. In the following sections I will summarise previous understandings of the identity of the daughters of Jerusalem and their function within the Song, before exploring the possibility that their literary identity could be informed by the idiomatic use of “daughters” and the symbolism of “Jerusalem” in other parts of the Hebrew canon.

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<sup>187</sup> Forster, “Flat and Round,” 138.

<sup>188</sup> William P. Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder: Character, Creation and Crisis in the Bible’s Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 45.

### 3.1.1. Who are the daughters of Jerusalem?

There is a dearth of commentary on the identity of the daughters in the Song, fictional or historical. Some interpretations make no comment *at all* on the daughters of Jerusalem as a character in the Song. In such cases, the daughters' presence as the woman's audience is taken for granted, but their characterisation, identity and function are never discussed.<sup>189</sup>

Most commonly, the daughters are viewed exclusively as a literary device. The significance and nuance of the way this device operates has typically received cursory attention at best. Bloch and Bloch call them "a group of women addressed by the Shulammite throughout the Song"; Nowell says perfunctorily that they are "a group who function like a chorus"; and Snaith says they are "just stage figures" who "exist only for the girl's convenience."<sup>190</sup> Gledhill says their identity is "uncertain," and concludes that they are "a literary fiction, a foil or sounding board for the thoughts and desires of the girl"; and Fox muses that "we must grant the possibility that they are a dramatic convention whose purpose entirely escapes us."<sup>191</sup>

Eschelbach notes that while the daughters' existence provides a means for the author of the Song to convey a message to the audience, "the history of interpretation of the Song seems to indicate that a vital purpose made explicit in the admonition to the maidens has not often been considered."<sup>192</sup> Recently, Hauge has given more sustained attention to the implications of the daughters-as-literary-device for the didactic impact of the Song, which will be discussed in the course of the following analysis.<sup>193</sup>

Some commentators endow the daughters with a semblance of characterisation. Three main options for the identity of the daughters within the Song have been suggested:

- i. they are women who dwell in Jerusalem;

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<sup>189</sup> E.g. Garrett and House, *Song*; Hamilton, *Song*; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*.

<sup>190</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 140; Irene Nowell, *Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther*, NCoBC, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 11; Raymond Jacques Tournay, *Word of God, Song of Love: New Insights on the Song of Songs* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999); John G. Snaith, *The Song of Songs*, NCBC (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993), 32.

<sup>191</sup> Gledhill, *Song*, 102; Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 303.

<sup>192</sup> Michael A. Eschelbach, "Song of Songs: Increasing Appreciation of and Restraint in Matters of Love," *AUSS* 42.2 (2004): 309.

<sup>193</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 132–40.

- ii. they are women of Solomon's harem;
- iii. they are unmarried friends of the woman.

These options will be briefly described below, and some preliminary observations offered, before the frame of reference for characterising the daughters is extended beyond the Song itself.

#### i. Inhabitants of Jerusalem?

The most popular option for the identity of the daughters of Jerusalem is that they are simply women who dwell in the city of Jerusalem. The broadest version of this interpretation is articulated by Exum, who refuses to speculate any further on the daughters' identity, insisting that "there is no compelling reason to think of them as a more select group, such as young, unmarried women," and that their title "appears simply to designate the female inhabitants of the city."<sup>194</sup>

However, Exum is in the minority in refusing the temptation to infer additional character details from the text. Most often, the daughters are characterised as sophisticated urbanites, in contrast to the country-dwelling main character. This understanding is derived from Song 1:5, the first time the woman addresses the daughters of Jerusalem, when she implores them not to stare at her sun-darkened skin (a result of her work in the vineyards). From this it has been extrapolated that the daughters of Jerusalem must be fair-skinned city-dwellers, unblemished by outdoor labour. Some interpreters infer further details about the respective women's physical beauty and levels of sophistication, which are not explicitly compared in the Song. Gordis, Landy, Bergant and Duguid all agree that the daughters of Jerusalem are generically "the sophisticated women of the capital" (Gordis) and most likely the woman's "social opposites" (Duguid).<sup>195</sup> Keel understands them to be a "stereotypical public," with the focus of the stereotype being that "these spoiled, idle and curious women of the capital city were said to be especially versed in matters of beauty and love (like the Parisiennes in nineteenth-century fiction)."<sup>196</sup> Hess supposes that the daughters' association

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<sup>194</sup> Exum, *Song*, 102–3, 150.

<sup>195</sup> Bergant, *Song*; Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983); Gordis, *Song*, 46; Duguid, *Song*, 84.

<sup>196</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 49.

with the capital makes them “the most beautiful women in the nation,” by contrast with whom the woman is even *more* beautiful.<sup>197</sup>

A few commentators extrapolate further that the daughters are disdainful towards the woman, because of her reluctance for them to look at her in 1:5. Falk calls them “an audience of hostile observers,” Brady interprets the girl as being “rather self-conscious in their presence,” and Golding invents that “they stare at her and twitter.”<sup>198</sup>

In general, interpretations which characterise the daughters by their status as city-dwellers are focused around assumptions about their presumed beauty and sophistication. That is, their character is based on an association with a *generic* city, giving no regard to the *specificity* of the city of Jerusalem. The significance of this location in the wider context of the Hebrew canon has been almost universally ignored.

This is mostly likely due to the fact that the Song has typically been interpreted in a kind of literary “bubble” due to the difficulty of discerning the historical circumstances of the Song’s original composition. Additionally, the anonymity of the main characters may suggest to interpreters that the secondary characters should also be treated as anonymous, and their identities not subjected to close examination. Still, there is arguably no more theologically and culturally loaded location than “Jerusalem” in the entire Hebrew Bible. That its symbolic value has had no bearing on the posited identity of the group named as its “daughters” is difficult to credit, yet very few interpreters have made any such connection.

## ii. Solomon’s Harem?

Of those interpreters who understand the daughters of Jerusalem to be city-dwelling women, some narrow this further and argue that the daughters specifically represent Solomon’s harem. The majority of those who hold this view read the Song as a three-character dramatic plot, wherein Solomon is the antagonist, and the daughters of Jerusalem as his harem represent the potential fate of the woman.

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<sup>197</sup> Hess, *Song*, 55.

<sup>198</sup> Falk, *Song*, 168; Gary Brady, *Heavenly Love: The Song of Songs Simply Explained* (Faverdale North: Evangelical Press, 2006), 49; Louis Golding, *The Song of Songs: Newly Interpreted and Rendered as a Masque* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1938), 20.

The early three-character interpretations of Ewald and Ginsburg characterise the daughters as ladies of Solomon's court, as do twentieth-century iterations including those of Waterman and Seerveld.<sup>199</sup> Waterman argues that בָּנוֹת is used technically in the Song to refer to Solomon's harem, based on the parallel between בָּנוֹת and מְלָכּוֹת וּפִלְגָּשִׁים ("queens and concubines") in 6:9.<sup>200</sup> Seerveld takes the "sixty queens, eighty concubines and young women without number" (6:8) to be referring to Solomon's harem, which he identifies as the same group addressed as the daughters of Jerusalem.<sup>201</sup> More recently, Provan has also taken the "daughters of Jerusalem" to be a collective title for the women of Solomon's harem. He understands all the women (including the main character) to be literally in Solomon's chambers in 1:2–4, "leading to the natural assumption that the particular "daughters" in mind are [the woman's] companions in the harem."<sup>202</sup>

Athas also understands the daughters to be Solomon's harem, being one of the few commentators to ground their understanding of the daughters specifically in the association with Jerusalem (not just a generic city). For Athas, this association suggests a corresponding association with Solomon, since Jerusalem is the royal capital. He notes that "Jerusalem" is personified elsewhere as a conquered woman (cf. "daughter of Jerusalem," Lam 2:13, 15) and argues that this reflects that the women themselves have been conquered by Solomon. Further, he sees that the inherent anonymity of the title "daughters of Jerusalem" reveals their plight as the women of Solomon, whose individual identities are "subsumed by their situation."<sup>203</sup>

The perceived attitude of the women to their situation in Solomon's harem depends on the interpreter. For Ginsburg the "court ladies" are co-conspirators with Solomon, eager to gain the woman's affections for the king and entice her to join them.<sup>204</sup> Seerveld similarly perceives that the daughters "attempt to get this wild flower from the Sharon plains turned into a cut flower court decoration as they themselves are."<sup>205</sup> He thus insists that the chorus is not just a stock figure, but an antagonist along with Solomon (yet, he acknowledges, their

<sup>199</sup> Ewald, *Salômonischen Schriften*; Ginsburg, *Song*; Waterman, *Song of Songs*; Seerveld, *The Greatest Song*.

<sup>200</sup> Waterman, *Song of Songs*, 75.

<sup>201</sup> Seerveld, *The Greatest Song*, 90.

<sup>202</sup> Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 266; Waterman also cites 1:2–4 as evidence that the "daughters" are Solomon's harem, but his suggestion that in those verses "the language they use is natural and appropriate only to members of a royal harem," is unsubstantiated; Waterman, *Song of Songs*, 8.

<sup>203</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 274–75.

<sup>204</sup> Ginsburg, *Song*, 143.

<sup>205</sup> Seerveld, *The Greatest Song*, 69.



portrayal reveals “the sad lot of their condition”).<sup>206</sup> Athas presents a more sympathetic view of the daughters, describing them as “conquered women who have fallen prey to the wiles of a womanizer who wields manifest power.”<sup>207</sup> For Athas, they represent the unfortunate fate that awaits the woman if Solomon is successful in capturing her for his harem.

Understanding the daughters of Jerusalem as Solomon’s harem focuses on the Song’s possible historic setting and gives due prominence to the role of Solomon in the literary landscape of the Song. It speaks to the darker undertones in the Song—Solomon’s portrayal as the antithesis of the ideal lover, and the unfortunate position of women who are subjected to participating in his version of “love”—which are often glossed over in interpretations that view the daughters as generic urban women.

However, the association with Solomon is not the only or indeed the most natural implication of the daughters’ identification with Jerusalem. 1 Kings 3–11, the background text that informs the portrayal of Solomon in the Song, emphasises that the issue with Solomon’s wives and concubines was that many of them were foreign. Designating these women as being “of Jerusalem” is therefore not the most natural way to name them, since the catalysing issue 1 Kings is that his wives were not wholly assimilated as citizens of Israel, instead drawing Solomon to worship their gods. It is possible that there are other associations with Jerusalem from the canon that should be taken into account when characterising the daughters in the Song. These possibilities will be explored further below.

### iii. Unmarried Women?

Whether the daughters are assumed to be generic sophisticated urbanites or the women of Solomon’s court, both of these interpretations assume that they are fully mature women, possibly with a higher social status than the central woman. By contrast, a third interpretation assumes that the daughters are *less* experienced in matters of love. This view is generated from the understanding that the adjuration (at 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4) is the woman’s way of bestowing advice on her unmarried friends.. O’Donnell sees the daughters

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<sup>206</sup> Seerveld, *The Greatest Song*, 69, 90.

<sup>207</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 285.

as young Israelite women “of marriageable age, whose bodies are ripe for sexual love (ages ten to fifteen), who desire marital intimacy but are still unmarried.” He reads the adjurations as the woman encouraging her young friends to refrain from sex until marriage.<sup>208</sup> Similarly, Sparks characterises the Song as “wisdom for young Jewish women”, and speaks of the daughters as nubile women who are warned not to stimulate sexual arousal before marriage.<sup>209</sup> Likewise Hamilton’s statements regarding the repeated adjuration reveals his assumption that the daughters are yet to be married; at 8:4 he believes the woman “communicates her conviction to the unmarried as one who has experience with marriage.”<sup>210</sup>

This characterisation of the daughters of Jerusalem relies on a particular understanding of the adjurations at 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4. When these statements are understood to be advice from a woman experienced in love, it is natural to understand their recipients as inexperienced women who are ready to participate in love. Casting the daughters as unmarried women also emphasises the “wisdom” quality of the Song and its resonance with Proverbs. Both of these aspects—the meaning of the adjuration and the potential sapiential nature of the Song—require further consideration in order to judge how the daughters of Jerusalem are best characterised.

The understood identity of the daughters has impacts for the dynamic between the daughters and the woman. If the daughters are the woman’s virgin friends, she may have a slightly higher social status than they do (if she is married) and is certainly positioned as the authority on love, bestowing wisdom upon her less-experienced friends. On the other hand, if they are members of Solomon’s harem, they are more experienced with the ways of the king (positioning the woman as more naïve in one sense), but likely less experienced with the type of love the Song presents as its ideal. As members of Solomon’s harem, the daughters might be supposed to be motivated to entice the woman into the harem, or they might be tragic examples of the fate she should try to avoid. If they are generic women who dwell in Jerusalem, there are multiple possibilities regarding their relationship dynamic with the woman, and the meaning of her adjurations to them. The significance of this dynamic to

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<sup>208</sup> O’Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 24, 60.

<sup>209</sup> Kenton L. Sparks, “The Song of Songs: Wisdom for Young Jewish Women,” *CBQ* 70.2 (2008): 284.

<sup>210</sup> Hamilton, *Song*, 60, 138.

the interpretation of the Song's meaning will unfold as we turn to consider literary function of the daughters in the Song of Songs.

### 3.1.2. Literary Function

The analysis above has revealed that, largely due to the lack of detail regarding the daughters in the Song, scholarship has focused on the daughters' literary function as dialogue partners for the woman. That is, their role has been defined exclusively in terms of their dynamic with the woman within the Song, with no reference to the significance of the terms "daughter" or "Jerusalem" in the wider scope of the Hebrew Bible.

The function of the daughters as a literary device has been described in three related ways:

- i. They are broadly understood to be a sounding board for the woman;
- ii. Some have recognised that this positions them as surrogates for the reader;
- iii. Further, the shared vantage point of the daughters and the reader has prompted some to articulate that the woman's addresses to the daughters constitute a didactic frame for the delivery of the Song's wisdom message.

Each of these positions will now be considered more closely.

#### i. Sounding-Board

Among those interpreters who do give some consideration to the literary function of the daughters, it is widely agreed that the daughters are a sounding-board for the woman. She addresses them frequently enough throughout the Song (2:7; 3:5, 11; 6:8, 10–16; 6:2; 8:4) to give the impression that they are perpetually present as her audience. Within the literary constraints of the poem, their existence provides a reason for her to speak aloud about her experience of love, without which the reader would not be privy to her thoughts.

The device of the daughters-as-audience enables short narrative portions of the poem to unfold as stories told by the woman. When the beloved is not present as her dialogue partner, scenes are instead conveyed to the reader through the woman recounting them to the daughters. Two clear examples of this are the sequences in 3:1–5 and 5:2–8,

wherein the woman describes how she searched for her beloved in the city at night. Both scenes conclude with her addressing the daughters (3:5; 5:8), indicating that she is narrating for their benefit.

In two other instances, the daughters ask the woman a question which provides a starting point for her to speak more about her beloved. The first occurrence is at 5:9, where the daughters ask the woman “What is your beloved, more than another beloved?” prompting her to speak the *wasf* of 5:10–16 (which she concludes with another address to the daughters, making it clear that 10–16 is spoken in reply to their question). Immediately, they question her a second time (6:1), asking where her beloved has gone, providing the impetus for further reflection about her beloved and a poetic segue into his presence (6:2–3).

For many interpreters, the literary function of the daughters begins and ends with their presence as a reason for the woman to speak. Gledhill describes them as “mute sounding boards who stimulate us to articulate our deeply-hidden emotions,” which is partially inaccurate, given that the daughters are not “mute,” but are most likely the speakers at 1:4b, 1:11, 5:1c and 7:1[6:13 Eng.], and certainly at 5:9 and 6:1.<sup>211</sup> Gledhill is not alone in reducing the daughters to a device enabling the woman to speak: Snaith insists that they are “just a convenient third party” who exist because “she has to air her thoughts and feelings to someone!”<sup>212</sup> Murphy characterises them “primarily as a foil for the woman’s own reflections,” who “are present solely to promote what the woman wishes to say.”<sup>213</sup> Fox’s comment epitomises the general scholarly dismissal of the daughters as bearers of meaning in their own right: “their main function is to be present to be spoken to.”<sup>214</sup>

The way that the daughters prompt the woman to articulate her inner thoughts is certainly an important element of their function in the poem, but the way it is expressed by the scholars above has limitations. To say that their entire *raison d’être* is to enable the woman to speak does not account for the fullness of how their presence shapes the external audience’s reception of the Song.

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<sup>211</sup> Gledhill, *Song*, 185.

<sup>212</sup> Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 32.

<sup>213</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 84–85.

<sup>214</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 110.

## ii. Surrogate Audience

Characterising the daughters as a “sounding board” is inadequate unless it is further articulated that the daughters’ function as an audience has implications for the external audience of the Song. Longman uses the term “surrogates” to describe the way the daughters of Jerusalem stand in for the reader of the Song, adding that “we too are to learn the same lesson” (as the daughters).<sup>215</sup> The “lesson” spoken of here is contained in the woman’s adjuration to the daughters in Song 2:7, repeated at 3:5 and 8:4. As Paulsell puts it, the daughters “[open] a space for us, the readers, within the poem” and as the woman speaks to the daughters—the audience within the poem—she speaks by extension to the audience *outside* the poem.<sup>216</sup> Athas agrees that the daughters “occupy a similar vantage point to us as readers,” and surmises that “as the woman directs her warning to them, then, it also flows to us.”<sup>217</sup> Again, Athas is referring specifically to the warning contained in the woman’s adjuration to the daughters at 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4.

These interpreters (and many others who assume, but do not explicitly state, a similar position) have instinctively picked up on the way the Song conveys instruction, through the daughters, ultimately to the external reader of the Song. Mitchell describes the way that the inclusion of choruses in poetry “enhances audience participation,” and that just as the daughters overhear all of the woman’s words, the Song intends for the readers to overhear them too, in the assumed role of the daughters, and “listen with them to the Song’s message.”<sup>218</sup> The woman’s experience, Walsh suggests, “becomes an educational one for herself and for the bystanders: the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom she addresses her insights, and the reader of the Song.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Longman, *Song*, 115.

<sup>216</sup> Harvey Cox and Stephanie Paulsell, *Lamentations and the Song of Songs* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 197, 212.

<sup>217</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 280.

<sup>218</sup> Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 184.

<sup>219</sup> Walsh, *Exquisite Desire*, 163.

### iii. Didactic Device

In the course of this discussion it has become apparent that it is relatively common for interpreters to infer a connection between the function of the daughters as the woman's audience, the woman's adjurations at 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4, and the didactic purpose of the Song for external readers. This connection is frequently assumed, yet most interpretations that rely on this assumption omit a detailed justification.

The technique of encouraging reader identification with the fictional audience for a didactic purpose is seen in the Proverbs which are addressed to בְּנִי ("my son") (1:8, 10 and throughout). The "son" stands in for the external audience—the reader or hearer who (along with the "son") receives the instruction of the "father" and learns from it. Brown has observed that the existence of the "son" character in Proverbs "assures that [the] instruction is heard loud and clear" by virtue of the way the audience is "coerced or compelled" to position themselves in the role of the son.<sup>220</sup> Several commentators have drawn analogous links between this dynamic in Proverbs and the dynamic in the Song. Munro proposes that "if Proverbs 1–9 warns young men against the advances of the foreign woman, the Song implicitly encourages the young women to be discerning in their response to the advances of young men."<sup>221</sup> Clarke argues that the "didactic framework" of the Song (the woman's ongoing conversation with the daughters of Jerusalem regarding the "dangers and joys of love") is evidence of a wisdom redaction, and that "this female instruction has a parallel with the male wisdom teaching in Proverbs 1–9, in which a father addresses his son about the dangers and joys of love."<sup>222</sup> Noting the correlation between Proverbs' addresses to a "son" and the Song's addresses to "daughters," O'Donnell suggests that if Proverbs is a "book for boys," the Song is "a book for girls."<sup>223</sup> On a similar basis, Mitchell suggests that "the Song may be the canonical counterpart to Proverbs."<sup>224</sup> These comments evidence a general recognition of kinship between the way the two books operate on the reader: the "son" compels the audience to heed the instruction of Proverbs, and the "daughters" compel the audience to heed the instruction of the Song.

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<sup>220</sup> Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder*, 45–46.

<sup>221</sup> Jill M. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron: The Imagery of the Song of Songs*, JSOTSup 203, 1995, 147.

<sup>222</sup> Clarke, "Seeking Wisdom," 103.

<sup>223</sup> O'Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 24.

<sup>224</sup> Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 181.

Recently, Hauge has presented an analysis of the Song of Songs that articulates this “kinship” and its significance more precisely. Hauge recognises the woman’s addresses to the daughters (1:5; 2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4) as key structural markers, of which 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 have a special function as admonitions indicated by their repetition, the formulaic urgent introduction (“I adjure you...”) and the significance of their theme. He notes that the addresses to the daughters are all preceded by short narrative passages (1:2–4; 2:4–6; 3:1–4; 5:2–7; 8:1–3), and argues that this construction of narrative concluded by admonishments is a literary technique established in Proverbs, wherein the passages on the Strange Woman are punctuated by admonishments addressed to an audience styled as “my son.”<sup>225</sup> In Proverbs and in the Song, Hauge argues, the narrative passages serve the admonishments which form the conclusion to each passage, indicating “that the main interest of the construction is the admonishment.” The use of this technique in the Song, Hauge concludes, emphasises the significance of the admonishments to the daughters and suggests that they are the main interest of the book as a whole.<sup>226</sup>

Additionally, Hauge notes the correspondence between these admonishments from the woman to the daughters and “the stereotyped image of the wisdom teacher in Proverbs 2–7 who admonishes the young man on the dangers of illicit sex.”<sup>227</sup> Hauge argues that the relationship of the woman in the Song to the daughters corresponds to the established literary trope of the sapiential instructor.

Hauge’s observations provide a compelling basis for understanding that the entire Song is framed by the woman’s relationship to the daughters as an instructor, and that her adjurations to them in 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 express the Song’s central teaching. Munro, to whom Hauge refers in his work, puts it like this: the woman’s “warnings” to the daughters of Jerusalem suggest “an educative purpose to the Song. The Song therefore is not simply a meditation on love for its own sake but a kind of *education sentimentale* addressed directly to the young women of the community.”<sup>228</sup>

Hauge’s analysis reveals the specific manner in which the literary function of the daughters serves the didactic purpose of the Song. It is widely recognised that they function

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<sup>225</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 132.

<sup>226</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 140.

<sup>227</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 10.

<sup>228</sup> Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 147.

as the woman's audience, occupying a vantage point which is shared by the external audience, so that the woman's words have the effect of being directed at the reader as they are addressed to the daughters. Hauge has articulated that the literary devices employed in the Song indicate that the woman relates to the daughters as a sapiential instructor in the established tradition of other biblical texts. On this understanding, the role of the "daughters" in the Song corresponds to the role of the "son" in the Proverbs: they function as a paradigmatic literary audience that stands in for the external audience receiving the text. Rather than saying that the daughters exist merely so the woman has somebody to *talk* to, it would be more meaningful to say that they exist as somebody to *listen* to the woman. Their presence as an audience provides a role with which the external audience can identify themselves in the Song, so that the external reader is positioned as the ultimate recipient of the woman's instruction.

Hauge's study represents the most extended exploration of the function of the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs. By and large, scholarly comments on the daughters have been brief (some scholars fail to offer any comment at all) and limit the daughter's role to that of a literary device enabling the woman to speak. It is evident that they function both as a sounding board and as a surrogate for the external audience to the Song, and that this has implications for the didactic impact of the Song. A proper understanding of the daughters of Jerusalem will incorporate all of these elements of their literary function.

Even the most nuanced analyses of the daughters' literary function (including Hauge's) have typically failed to make anything of the daughters' only identifying detail, "Jerusalem." At most they have been characterised as generically urban without reference to the specificity of Jerusalem. A handful of scholars have interacted very minimally with the possibility that the daughters of Jerusalem may be created in the tradition of female personifications of cities in the Hebrew Bible. It is to this possibility that we now turn.

### 3.2. Daughters of Jerusalem and Zion

The daughters of Jerusalem are called the "daughters of Zion" in Song 3:11. This is universally understood to be an address to the same group of women designated the



“daughters of Jerusalem.” Typically the phrase is understood to be a simple “poetic variant” of the usual “daughters of Jerusalem.”<sup>229</sup> Aesthetic reasons have been proposed for the use of the variant term: Provan suggests it avoids immediate repetition of “daughters of Jerusalem” from 3:10, and Noegel and Rendsburg point out that צִיּוֹן creates assonance with אֶפְרַיִם (3:9), צִיּוֹן (3:11) and יוֹנִים (4:1).<sup>230</sup>

Longman finds “daughters of Zion” to be a “suitable and expected alternate” to the usual term of address; as to why it would be “expected,” he offers that Zion is “the metaphorical centre or apex of Jerusalem, the location of the holy place, a metonymy for the city as a whole.”<sup>231</sup> Keel understands Zion to be a “somewhat solemn” synonym for Jerusalem, and Estes suggests that it is an “elevated” term, in accordance with his interpretation that 3:11 calls the “courtiers” to view the king.<sup>232</sup> Duguid points out that in the only other occurrences of “daughters of Zion” (Isa 3:16–17; 4:4) are “in contexts that are critical of these women as being proud and arrogant, as obsessed with their possessions as Solomon is with his own” (in 3:6–11), inferring the terminology has been chosen deliberately to resonate with the critique of Solomon that is evident throughout 3:6–11. On balance, it seems most likely that the term is varied to avoid repetition.

Numerous commentators have desired to place the בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם in verse 10 and the בָּנוֹת צִיּוֹן in verse 11 in poetic parallel, which requires a departure from the versification and an explanation for the preposition מִן attached to בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם. Pope proposes that the מ prefix be taken as an enclitic, emphatic מ attached to the preceding word, אֶהְבֶּה, a suggestion which has subsequently been taken up by Murphy and Garrett.<sup>233</sup> Fox suggests an alternative solution, which is to emend אֶהְבֶּה to either הוֹבְנִים (“ebony,” originally suggested by Graetz) or אֶבְנִים (“stones,” Gerleman).<sup>234</sup> This assumes that מ forms part of the word preceding בָּנוֹת, allowing for the double addresses to “daughters” to be placed in a chiasmic couplet:

<sup>229</sup> Hess, *Song*, 122.

<sup>230</sup> Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 305; Scott B. Noegel and Gary Rendsburg A., *Solomon’s Vineyard: Literary and Linguistic Studies in the Song of Songs*, AIL 1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 85.

<sup>231</sup> Longman, *Song*, 139.

<sup>232</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 136; Fredericks and Estes, *Song*, 144.

<sup>233</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 446; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 150; Garrett and House, *Song*, 181.

<sup>234</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 126, 127; Heinrich Graetz, *Schir Ha-Schirim Oder Das Salomonische Hohelied* (Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1871), 103; Gillis Gerleman, *Ruth, Das Hohelied*, BKAT 18 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1965), 139.

Daughters of Jerusalem, come out  
And look, daughters of Zion<sup>235</sup>

בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם צֵאנָה  
וּרְאִינָה בָנוֹת צִיּוֹן

Even Keel, who sees no reason to emend the אֶהְבֶּה, renders the couplet as above and concludes that “no one can adequately explain” the מ, though he ventures that it could indicate a plural form of “love” to be understood as either the “joys of love” or alternatively “scenes of love,” to indicate erotic scenes literally inlaid or painted on the inside of Solomon’s carriage.<sup>237</sup>

The impulse to emend the text seems typically to be prompted by the interpreter’s desire to place the two phrases following אֶהְבֶּה in parallel (and in some cases, the reluctance to admit the enigmatic phrase “inlaid with the love of the daughters of Jerusalem”), rather than any irreconcilable issue within the text itself.<sup>238</sup> Fox argues that “in Zechariah 9:9, בֵּית צִיּוֹן is parallel to בֵּית יְרוּשָׁלַם, suggesting that בָּנוֹת צִיּוֹן should be parallel with בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם here too, against the accents.”<sup>239</sup>

In fact, the same parallel is found not only in Zech 9:9, but also in Isa 37:22 (cf. 2 Kgs 19:21), Lam 2:13, Mic 4:8 and Zeph 3:14. While בֵּית צִיּוֹן appears often without בֵּית יְרוּשָׁלַם (Ps 9:14; Isa 1:8; 10:32; 16:1; 62:11; Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23; Lam 1:6; Mic 4:10, 13) בֵּית יְרוּשָׁלַם appears only once without בֵּית צִיּוֹן as its immediate counterpart (Lam 2:15). The terms appear in proximity when not in strict parallel, interchanging throughout Lamentations 2 (1, 4, 8, 10, 13, 15, 18). Additionally, in Isa 52:2 בֵּית צִיּוֹן is placed in parallel with יְרוּשָׁלַם.

Thus the assimilation of the “daughters of Jerusalem” with “daughters of Zion” in the Song reveals an association that may be significant in a wider canonical context. While the terms “Jerusalem” and “Zion” can bear different nuances (see discussion under 3.2.3. Associations of Jerusalem and Zion), they are used as equivalent terms and paired together in many instances throughout Scripture. The proximity of the phrases “daughters of

<sup>235</sup> This translation is also preferred by Exum (who points out that the REB and NRSV translations reflect a similar understanding of the text) and by Paulsell. Exum, *Song*, 139, 150; Cox and Paulsell, *Song*, 229.

<sup>237</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 134.

<sup>238</sup> Fox and Exum follow Graetz and Gerleman in emending אֶהְבֶּה in 3:10 to represent a more concrete material. Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 126–27; Exum, *Song*, 138–39.

<sup>239</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 127.

Jerusalem” and “daughters of Zion” in the Song strengthens the likelihood that the terminology in the Song is a deliberate allusion to an established pool of poetic images.<sup>240</sup>

This constitutes a warrant for examining the use of the terms “Jerusalem” and “Zion” elsewhere in the canon, particularly when used to construct the figure of a “daughter” or “daughters,” as possible background to the character of the daughters in the Song. This is significant for the didactic impact of the Song, because the assumed audience of the Song is positioned to share the vantage point of the “daughters.” If the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song are demonstrated to be a continuation of the metaphorical images of daughters elsewhere in the Hebrew canon, this brings a particularity to their character and a nuance to their positioning as recipients of the woman’s words, which the external audience is to share.

The following sections will examine this possibility and test its viability. Firstly, it is recognised that “daughter” and “daughters” idioms are widely used, not only with Jerusalem and Zion, but throughout the Hebrew Bible in association with other people groups and place names. In order to construct a broad understanding of the typical senses in which the terms בַּת and בָּנוֹת are employed, the usage of these across the Hebrew Bible will be surveyed first. Then the body of references specifically to the daughter(s) of Jerusalem and Zion will be examined more closely, to establish whether these figures bear specific associations that may have import for the interpretation of the Song.

Since the character of the daughters in the Song is relatively unexplored, there is very little scholarship with which to engage on this issue. However, a handful of commentators have made passing references to the possibility that the “daughters of Jerusalem” (or Zion) in the Song of Songs could be a continuation of the “daughter of Jerusalem” (or Zion) figure from Lamentations and the prophetic books. These treatments will be engaged with below, under 3.2.2.

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<sup>240</sup> According to two of Leonard’s principles for establishing the strength of evidence for an allusion: “shared phrases suggest a stronger connection than do individual shared terms” and “the accumulation of shared language suggests a stronger connection than does a single shared term or phrase.” Leonard, “Identifying,” 246.

### 3.2.1. Idiomatic Usage of “daughters” in the Hebrew Bible

At the outset of this analysis, it is important to acknowledge the distinction between the plural form “daughters (of)” (בָּנוֹת) and the singular “daughter (of),” (בֵּית) which can alternatively be translated “Daughter” (see discussion below). Broadly, “daughters of” usually refers to female inhabitants of a place or the females of a cultural group, whereas “daughter” is used as a personification of a city’s inhabitants collectively and/or of the city itself. While the idioms are similar they should not be interchanged without careful consideration. In order to assess whether the terms can be used synonymously or whether absolute differentiation is necessary, the nuances of the plural and singular forms of the idiomatic expression (בָּנוֹת versus בֵּית) will be described, to reveal the extent to which their meaning can overlap.

#### i. “Daughters of” (בָּנוֹת)

The references to בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם and בָּנוֹת צִיּוֹן discussed above are by no means the only instances of the use of the “daughters” device in the Hebrew Bible. בָּנוֹת appears frequently with other identifiers apart from יְרוּשָׁלַם and צִיּוֹן. The idiom is a very common way to refer to a group of women, being used with people group names (e.g. “daughters of the Canaanites,” Gen 24:3, 37) and place names (e.g. “daughters of Shiloh,” Judg 21:21). Its usage is not confined to one genre; the idiom appears in historical narrative, prophetic books and poetry.

The idiom is used in a few different ways. Sometimes, it indicates literal women: “the daughters of man,” Gen 6:2, 4; “the daughters of the Canaanites,” Gen 24:3, 37; “the daughters of the men of the city,” Gen 24:13; “the daughters of Moab,” Num 25:1; “the daughters of Israel,” Deut 23:17; Judg 11:40; “the daughters of the Philistines,” Judg 14:1–2; “the daughters of Shiloh,” Judg 21:21. As is evident from this survey, all instances of the most literal usage are in passages of historical narrative excepting Deut 23:17.

The “daughters” idiom is also commonly seen in prophetic and poetic texts, where its meaning is usually not restricted to indicating literal women: “daughters of the Philistines” and “daughters of the uncircumcised” and “daughters of Israel” (in David’s

lament), 1 Sam 1:20, 24; “daughters of Zion,” Isa 3:16–17; 4:4; “daughters of Moab,” Isa 16:2; “daughters of Rabbah,” Jer 49:3; “daughters of the Philistines,” Ezek 16:27, 57; “daughters of Syria,” Ezek 16:57; “daughters of (majestic) nations,” Ezek 32:16, 18; “daughters of Judah,” Ps 48:12[11 Eng.], 97:8, “daughters of my city,” Lam 3:51; “daughters of song,” Eccl 12:4. In these instances, the “daughters” are usually not a literal group of women, but a personification of an idea. For example, the “daughters of Zion” in Isa 3:16–17 embody a shameless attitude toward sin, upon which Yahweh is pronouncing judgement, but they are not meant to be a specific group of women from Zion. It is not that they are entirely ahistorical—they could be said to display an attitude and actions evident among a real historical people under judgement—but the “daughters of Zion” is not a discrete group of historical women from Zion (contrast, for example, the way that the “daughters of Shiloh” are actual young women from Shiloh who attended an annual dance in the vineyards in Judg 21:21).

While the “daughters of Zion” in Isa 3:16–18 and 4:4 are an excellent example of the way the “daughters” device can be used for personification, the level of detail in their characterisation (albeit still scant) is unusual compared to typical examples of idiomatic “daughters” in poetic passages. It is more typical for “daughters” to be a distillation of a single action or quality (e.g. “rejoicing,” 2 Sam 1:20 ; Ps 48:12[11]). A second point of differentiation between Isa 3:16–18 and other examples is that the Isaiah passage also lists other sectors of people who are condemned alongside the daughters, from mighty men to magicians (3:2–3), youths, elders and men (5–6), giving the sense that the whole population is being condemned systematically. However, it is more typical for idiomatic “daughters” to appear in isolation in prophecy and poetry.

This very often has the effect of indicating that the “daughters” are a synecdoche for the entire group of people associated with their identifier. The way this operates is very clear, for example, in David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Sam 1:19–27. David bemoans the idea of the “daughters of the Philistines” rejoicing at the deaths (v.20) and tells the “daughters of Israel” to weep over Saul (v.24). It is not that David’s lament is addressed exclusively to the women of Israel, or that only women from among the Philistines might rejoice at the fall of Saul, but that these groups of women are used poetically to illustrate the collective reactions of the two nations. This is true also, for example, of the calls for “daughters of Judah” to rejoice in Pss 48:12[11] and 97:3, and of

the fate of the “daughters of my city” in Lam 3:51. In each instance the “daughters” embody a corporate attribute of the whole people with which they are identified. The numerous other examples listed above all support that it is usual in Hebrew poetic texts for “daughters of” to function as a synecdoche for their whole people group.

Often, the “daughters” device is used to emphasise a particular cultural trait associated with that people group. For example, David’s lament in 2 Sam 1 employs the term “daughters of the uncircumcised” (בָּנוֹת הָעֵרְלִים) in parallel with “daughters of the Philistines” (1:20). This makes it clear that what David has in view is the Philistines’ lack of circumcision, symbolising their status as a nation outside of Yahweh’s covenant and their posture of hostility towards his people. Thus the “daughters” here distil a particular aspect of the cultural identity of the Philistines, not just their ethnicity or place of origin.

Of particular relevance to the effect of the idiom in the Song is when “daughters” is used to personify the cultural identity associated with a location. In Isa 16:2 “daughters of Moab” refers to residents of Moab, within the context of an extended passage in which Moab is referred to much like a character in its own right. This stylistic device conveys that the “daughters” can be understood both as the inhabitants of the geographical location of Moab and as the metaphorical offspring of the nation of Moab. To identify these women as “daughters” of that place indicates both that they originate from there and that they participate in the attributes, actions and fate visited upon that location. Similar examples are “daughters of Rabbah” (Jer 49:3), “daughters of my city” (Lam 3:51) and the various “daughters”—of Sodom, Samaria, Syria and the Philistines—in Ezek 16:53–58. These examples demonstrate that the “daughters” device is used to distil cultural identity when used in association with place names, not just people group names, which in any case are typically closely associated with each other.

The overlap between associations of place and culture is demonstrated emphatically in texts where a place is personified as a woman, and its inhabitants as her “daughters.” Describing the inhabitants as “daughters” of a personified place suggests that the characteristics borne out in the personification of that place are extended to its population, as daughters resemble their mother (“בְּאֵמָה בְּתָהּ,” Ezek 16:44–45). In Ezekiel, Sodom and her “daughters” share the same characteristics: “behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: *she and her daughters* had arrogance, excess of food and ease” (זָאוֹן שְׁבַעַת-לָחֶם )

וְשָׁלוֹת הַשָּׁקֶט הָיָה לָהּ וּלְבָנוֹתֶיהָ (16:49). Throughout Ezekiel 16, the behaviour of the personified cities is interchangeable with the behaviour of their inhabitants, or “daughters.” This is generally apparent and specifically confirmed by the statement (addressed to Judah) that “Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done” (16:48). The shared identity of the respective cities and their “daughters” is sustained throughout the rest of the passage:

<sup>53</sup>I will restore their fortunes, the fortune of **Sodom and her daughters**, and the fortune of **Samaria and her daughters**, and I will restore your own fortune in their midst, <sup>54</sup>that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, and be a consolation to them. <sup>55</sup>As for your sisters, **Sodom and her daughters** shall return to their former state, and **Samaria and her daughters** shall return to their former state, and **you and your daughters** shall return to your former state. <sup>56</sup>Was not your sister Sodom a byword in your mouth in the day of your exultation, <sup>57</sup>before your wickedness was uncovered? Now you have become a reproach for the **daughters of Syria** and all those around her, and for the **daughters of the Philistines**, those all around who despise you. <sup>58</sup>You bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations, declares Yahweh.  
(Ezek 16:53–58)

In these verses, the imagery is gendered female, but the referent is general; the “daughters” represent the populations of the various peoples and places with which they are associated. The fate of the city is the fate of the people who dwell in her. All of these examples demonstrate that across the survey of uses of the “daughter” idiom in poetic texts, the names of locations and people groups are virtually inseparable from cultural identity. Identifying a group as “daughters of” a location does not purely indicate residential status, but distils characteristics and cultural traits associated with that place into the figures of the “daughters.”

It was noted in an earlier section that one of the existing interpretations of the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs is that their appellation identifies them as residents of Jerusalem. This type of usage of the “daughters” idiom does exist, but it is usually seen in historiographical texts and to refer to a specific group of women whose identity is known in the context of the narrative. In poetic texts, it is more usual that בָּנוֹת is used as a synecdoche for the whole people group associated with that identification. Furthermore, it has been seen that when “daughters of Jerusalem” in the Song have been understood as “women who reside in Jerusalem,” the focus of this identification has usually been that they are generically “city-dwellers,” without reference to the specificity of

Jerusalem. However, when בָּנוֹת is used with a place name in poetic contexts, it is usually expected that the “daughters” of that place embody a particular cultural identity associated with the location.

This all suggests that a figurative use of בָּנוֹת is a strong possibility in the Song, and that “daughters of Jerusalem” most likely represents a wider, mixed group of people embodying a particular cultural identity associated with Jerusalem. Therefore, in order to understand the intent of the appellation “daughters of Jerusalem,” it is warranted to explore what specific connotations “Jerusalem” might hold in the context of the Song of Songs.

ii. “Daughter (of)” (בַּת)

Before the connotations of Jerusalem and Zion are explored, a second “daughter” idiom will be defined. It has been seen above that when a location is personified, the “daughters” of that location typically share the characteristics of that personification. A closely related device is that of personifying a place name with the singular “daughter.”

The idiomatic use of בַּת with place names is very common in the Hebrew Bible. Different understandings of this idiom have been proposed. One suggestion is that the idiom in the Hebrew Bible reflects an ancient Near Eastern concept whereby “a capital city was personified as a woman, and the inhabitants of that city collectively as her ‘daughter.’”<sup>241</sup> If the understanding that the personification applies to the city’s inhabitants (as opposed to the city itself) is strictly adopted, the בַּת in a phrase such as בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם would refer to the collective inhabitants of Jerusalem, rather than to the city itself. There is therefore potential for overlap of meaning between the expressions בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם and בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם, because both can be understood to refer to inhabitants of Jerusalem. Depending on the context, בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם might be understood as a more literal term for a select group of women from Jerusalem, where בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם would usually be understood to refer metaphorically to the entire population.

However, to say that the singular בַּת in expressions of personification refers always and only to the city’s inhabitants is probably an oversimplification. In her discussion “The

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<sup>241</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds., “Daughter,” *DBIm* (1998): 194.



Grammar of Bat X,” Adele Berlin argues that בַּת properly refers to the city itself: “while one could translate “Daughter of Zion” (in the sense of “City of Baltimore,” as Dobbs-Allsopp remarks), this translation can be misleading, since it is not Zion’s daughter who is being addressed (Zion has no daughter) but Zion herself, who is classified as a “daughter.”<sup>242</sup> Similarly, Fischer argues that בַּת צִיּוֹן should always be rendered as “Daughter Zion,” a proper name, rather than “daughter of Zion,” which would imply a separation between the city Zion and her “daughter.” Fischer insists that there should be a clear delineation between בָּנוֹת, which refers to a city’s inhabitants, and בַּת, which he says refers to the city itself. The implication of this for the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs is that, according to Fischer’s position, the “daughters” of the city of Jerusalem should *never* be conflated with Daughter Jerusalem, which is a personification of the city, not the people.<sup>243</sup>

Interpreting בַּת in construct with a place name requires a balance of exegetical and grammatical considerations. Fischer’s argument, while based on legitimate grammatical observations, is influenced heavily by his exegetical position that the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs should not be understood as a representation of God’s people, which he sees as a feature of allegorical interpretation (an approach he dismisses as inherently flawed). Fischer bases his argument regarding the meaning of בַּת and בָּנוֹת exclusively on the work of Magnar Kartveit, but Fischer’s conclusions do not follow inevitably from Kartveit’s. In his analysis of Hebrew construct phrases using “daughter” and “virgin,” Kartveit finds that while בַּת צִיּוֹן is familiarly translated “daughter of Zion” and understood to refer to the population of Israel, it is difficult to identify a strict grammatical category for such a translation and understanding of the construct phrase.<sup>244</sup> However, while Kartveit considers numerous options for describing the syntax of construct phrases using בַּת as the *nomen regens*, his study reaches no strict conclusions as to translation, and he acknowledges that there are multiple possible solutions that might be applied depending on the context. Nor does Kartveit make an absolute distinction between the personified city and her population, as Fischer does. Even if בַּת צִיּוֹן and בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם are best understood as appositional phrases and translated “Daughter Zion” and “Daughter Jerusalem” respectively, the personification

<sup>242</sup> Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 10.

<sup>243</sup> Stefan Fischer, “Who Are the Daughters of Jerusalem?,” in *The Song of Songs Afresh: Perspectives on a Biblical Love Poem*, ed. Stefan Fischer, HBM 82 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2019), 87.

<sup>244</sup> Magnar Kartveit, *Rejoice, Dear Zion!: Hebrew Construct Phrases with “Daughter” and “Virgin” As Nomen Regens*, BZAW 447 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 12, 14.

of a city does not apply to its bricks and mortar alone. The city (or place name) often functions as a metonymy for the people who dwell within it. Kartveit's final chapter reveals that the Hebrew Bible's various "daughter" phrases (including בֵּית יְרוּשָׁלַם and בֵּית צִיּוֹן) are employed to invoke a range of emotions in highly relational passages about Yahweh and his people.<sup>245</sup>

Therefore, while it is certainly valid to say that a personified city is not precisely interchangeable with the inhabitants of that city, it does not necessarily follow that the expressions "daughters of Jerusalem" and "Daughter Jerusalem" denote absolutely separable concepts. The city and its inhabitants are closely related, and often interchangeable. This is demonstrated, for example, by the use of the phrase בֵּית-עַמִּי ("daughter of my people," a singular personification of the people, just as בֵּית צִיּוֹן is a personification of the city), which often appears in close association with בֵּית and place names.<sup>246</sup> In Jeremiah 6, Jerusalem is called both בֵּית-צִיּוֹן (6:2, 23) and בֵּית-עַמִּי (6:26); in Lamentations the city and her people are addressed variously as בֵּית-צִיּוֹן (1:6; 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 13, 18; 4:22), בֵּית-יְהוּדָה (1:15; 2:2, 5), בֵּית יְרוּשָׁלַם (2:13, 15) and בֵּית-עַמִּי (2:11), and once with the plural expression, "all the daughters of my city" (כָּל בָּנוֹת עִירִי, 3:51). In this latter example, the respective functions of the בֵּית and בָּנוֹת phrases are similar. Other examples of constructions using the plural בָּנוֹת in close association with names or phrases for the whole city include Isa 4:4, where בָּנוֹת צִיּוֹן and יְרוּשָׁלַם, the people and the city, stand together ("the Lord shall wash away the filth of the *daughters of Zion*, and the blood of *Jerusalem*"), and Ps 48:12[11Eng.] and 97:8, which place "Zion" (הַר-צִיּוֹן in Ps 48:12[11]) in poetic parallel with the "daughters of Judah" (בָּנוֹת יְהוּדָה).

As demonstrated by these examples, there is a very close association between the city and the people who inhabit it, just as there is a natural conceptual association between "daughters" as a synecdoche for the entire population of a city, and "daughter" as a personification of the city. The attempted distinction between a city and its inhabitants seems artificial. A distinction is certainly possible, but not necessary in many instances. Perhaps the most that can be said is that the personification of a city includes other elements in addition to its inhabitants, such as its physical construction and its cultural

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<sup>245</sup> Kartveit, *Rejoice*, 179–84.

<sup>246</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 12.

associations. In this way a city personified is *bigger* than just her inhabitants, but it does not exclude them. It is best to understand בַּת with place names as a fluid device which can refer to either the city or her inhabitants, or both: “rather than press too hard on either the city or the people, it is best to allow individual texts to inform the meaning of the term. When assessed within the prophets, the title “Daughter Zion” is a polyvalent metaphor that is used in complementary but different ways, with emphasis falling sometimes upon the geographical locale of Zion and sometimes upon the inhabitants of Zion.”<sup>247</sup>

The above analysis has revealed that there is potential for overlap of meaning between the expressions בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם and בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם, since the latter can encompass the former. Moreover, it was concluded in the previous analysis of the idiomatic use of בְּנוֹת that the “daughters” of a place typically share the characteristics of that personified place. Therefore, based on the way construct expressions using “daughters” (plural) and “daughter” (singular) typically operate in the Hebrew Bible, there is a basis for relating the “daughters of Jerusalem” in the Song of Songs to the figure of Jerusalem personified as a daughter elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The extent to which this is appropriate must be determined by context and other exegetical concerns, and will be discussed further below.

In interpretations of the Song of Songs, it has been rare for the interpreter to be concerned with identifying the daughters of Jerusalem with reference to anything beyond the boundaries of the literary world of the Song. However, a few have investigated the possibility that the identification of the daughters in the Song could be related to the identification of “daughter” figures in the prophetic books and Lamentations. It is to these prior investigations that we now turn.

### 3.2.2. Previous Treatments of the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs

It is typical for interpretations of the Song of Songs to treat the phrase בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם as though it is entirely without parallel in the Hebrew Bible, giving little or no consideration to the idiomatic usage of בַּת and בְּנוֹת elsewhere in the canon. The plural בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם is unique to the Song, but the singular בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם appears in 2 Kgs 19:21 (cf. Isa 37:22); Lam 2:13, 15; Mic 4:8; Zeph 3:14 and Zech 9:9. Moreover, the identical phrase בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן from Song 3:11 is

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<sup>247</sup> H.A. Thomas, “Zion,” *DOTP* (2012): 912.

seen in Isa 3:16, 17 and 4:4, with the singular variant בַּת־צִיּוֹן appearing in 2 Kgs 19:21; Isa 1:8; 16:1; 37:22; 52:2; Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23; Mic 4:8, 10, 13; Zeph 3:14; Zech 2:14, 9:9; Ps 9:15; and Lam 1:6; 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 13, 18 and 4:22.

A handful of interpreters have briefly considered possible connections between the “daughter” figures in these verses and the daughters in the Song of Songs. Othmar Keel bases his characterisation of the daughters in the Song of Songs—as “spoiled, idle and curious”—on the “daughters of Zion” in Isa 3:16–17 (cf. Song 3:11), who are condemned for their “seductive glances” and “jingling ankle bracelets.”<sup>248</sup> For Keel, this connection informs the way he characterises the women who inhabit the city in the Song, but bears no grander national or theological significance for the meaning of the Song, and he does not elaborate upon it. In a similar manner, Barbiero characterises the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song as “urban and a little decadent” with reference to the daughters in Isa 3:16–24, but the link to Isaiah is noted only in passing and has no real bearing on the interpretation of the Song.<sup>249</sup>

Munro follows Keel in stating that the designation of women as “daughters” denotes first and foremost that they are inhabitants of a city, citing the “daughters of Shiloh” in Judg 21:21 (as Keel does), and making no further comment on the influence of the city over the perceived identity of its daughters. She is cautious to affirm Keel’s characterisation of the daughters in the Song from Isa 3:16–17; but based purely on the information from the Song, she sees them as “not only sceptical (5:9) but also rather stupid (6:1).” Ultimately, though she allows that Keel’s instinct to connect the daughters of the Song to Isa 3:16–7 and 4:4 might be correct, Munro makes nothing of it, treating the daughters of Jerusalem primarily as “a dramatic trait, a literary device which enables the woman to explore her feelings more fully.”<sup>250</sup>

Mitchell has offered an extended critique of the notion that the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song could be identified with female personifications of Jerusalem in the prophetic books. He calls Keel and Munro’s negative characterisation of the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs “unfair.” Instead, he argues that the “daughters of Jerusalem” in the Song must not be equated with “the same vain women condemned by the

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<sup>248</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 49.

<sup>249</sup> Gianni Barbiero, *Song of Songs: A Close Reading*, trans. Michael Tait, VTSup 144 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 60.

<sup>250</sup> Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 43.

prophets” because of the distinct form of the former’s address: the plural expression בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם is unique to the Song.<sup>251</sup> While it is true that בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם does not appear elsewhere, Mitchell does recognise that the “daughters of Jerusalem” in the Song also go by “daughters of Zion” in Song 3:11. While claiming that the Song’s daughters are differentiated from similar figures in the prophetic literature on the strength of their unique appellation, he offers no comment on the exact similarity of the form of address in Song 3:11 and Isa 3:16–17 and 4:4.

Mitchell’s second objection is that the Song lacks any criticism or judgement of the daughters, whereas the daughters in Isa 3:16–26 are condemned for their appearance and behaviour, disallowing any conflation between the two groups. However, he *does* see a correlation between the daughters in the Song and the parallel figures of the daughter of Jerusalem and daughter of Zion in Isa 37:22, Mic 4:8, Zeph 3:14 and Zech 9:9, due to the fact that he sees a harmony between the characterisation of the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song and the singular “daughter” figures in these prophetic passages.<sup>252</sup>

The basis of this harmony, according to Mitchell, is as follows. The phrase “daughters of Jerusalem” appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, but it does appear in Luke 23:28 (Θυγατέρες Ἰερουσαλήμ), as the term used by Jesus to address a group of women who are following him and weeping as he is being led away to be executed:

But turning to them Jesus said, “daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, “Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!” Then they will begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on us,” and to the hills, “Cover us.” For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?  
(Luke 23:28–31)

From this passage, Mitchell understands that the daughters of Jerusalem are not like the conceited women of Isaiah 3, because “the fact that they were mourning signifies their penitence.” Rather, the women in Luke 23 represent “all women—and indeed all believers—whose hearts have been made receptive to hear, believe and faithfully respond to God’s revelatory, salvific message to them.”<sup>253</sup> This is the main basis for Mitchell’s

<sup>251</sup> Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 189–90.

<sup>252</sup> Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 191.

<sup>253</sup> Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 190.

assertion that the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs correlate to the figures of the daughter of Jerusalem and daughter of Zion in Isa 37:22, Mic 4:8, Zeph 3:14 and Zech 9:9.

The major issue with the logic of this argument is that Mitchell's interpretation of the daughters of Jerusalem in Luke 23:28 as penitent believers who are ready to respond is not the only or indeed the most natural understanding of that scene. Alternatively, it has been concluded that the daughters stand for "the inhabitants of Jerusalem who reject Jesus and who thus face the danger of God's severe judgement!"<sup>254</sup> Jesus' words are dense with scriptural allusions that call up the terrible nature of the coming catastrophe that will fall on Jerusalem. Women who have no children will be better off than women who will see their children die, in a terrible twist on Isa 54:1, which promises restoration for barren women; people will beg the mountains to fall on them rather than have to face the wrath of God, in a direct quote from Hos 10:8. The response of the "daughters of Jerusalem" to Jesus' words is not recorded, so to describe them as "penitent" and "receptive," while not necessarily incorrect, is not entirely warranted, and moreover it is superfluous to the focus of the exchange, which is Jesus' proclamation of impending calamity.

A subordinate issue is that Mitchell draws selectively on prophetic passages (Isa 37:22, Mic 4:8, Zeph 3:14 and Zech 9:9) for the characterisation of the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs. In these passages the daughter of Jerusalem/daughter Zion figure is "a metaphorical personification of receptive Israel as salvation comes to her," which Mitchell says is coherent with the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song and in Luke.<sup>255</sup> This understanding of the metaphorical daughter of Zion and daughter of Jerusalem is not incorrect, but it is incomplete. The way Mitchell presents his argument suggests that the references he includes are exhaustive, but in fact he ignores other appearances of personified "daughter" figures which do not accord with the profile he is building. For example, in Jeremiah, the daughter of Zion is chided for dressing in scarlet, ornamenting herself with gold and painting her eyes in the face of judgement (4:30); God promises to destroy her (6:6) because of the iniquities of Judah and Jerusalem and their refusal to repent. In Lamentations 1–2 the plundered city of Jerusalem is personified twice as בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם and seven times as בַּת צִיּוֹן, as a defiled and grieving woman fully experiencing the

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<sup>254</sup> David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Luke," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 393.

<sup>255</sup> Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 191.

consequences of divine judgement. None of these references is mentioned in Mitchell's analysis.

There may indeed be a valid basis for including some instances of "daughter" personification and not others as referents for the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs (for example, it is argued in this thesis that Solomon of Chronicles has minimal relevance to the characterisation of Solomon in the Song), but Mitchell provides no reasoned justification for selecting some references and excluding others, beyond what he sees as the self-evident fact that the selected references resonate with his perception of the daughters of Jerusalem in Luke 23.

As noted above, Stefan Fischer has also objected to the notion that the daughters in the Song are related to the daughter figures in the prophets. Fischer insists that the daughters of Jerusalem are not a personification of the people of Yahweh and are not to be identified with the Daughter Jerusalem figure in the prophetic books, yet provides very little evidence in support of this statement.<sup>256</sup> The only basis for his objection is his view, discussed above, that the singular "Daughter Jerusalem" (or Zion) as a personification of the city should be separated from the plural "daughters of Jerusalem" (or Zion), which refers to the inhabitants of the city.<sup>257</sup> According to Fischer, this distinction disqualifies the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song from being identified with any personifications of Israel in the prophetic literature; Fischer allows only that the expression in Song 3:11 is similar to the "daughters of Zion" in Isa 3:16–17, who likewise (he says) represent only the literal inhabitants of the city. However, it has been argued above that the absolute distinction between a place and its inhabitants is artificial and unnecessary, if not impossible, to impose.

The ultimate source of Fischer's resistance seems to be that he sees the conflation of "daughters of Jerusalem" (or Zion) in the Song with "Daughter Jerusalem" (or Zion) in the prophetic literature as an indication of allegorical interpretation, and Fischer objects to allegory as a mode of interpretation for the Song.<sup>258</sup> He makes the excellent point that in traditional allegories, the Jewish or Christian audience is naturally expected to identify themselves with the woman, not the daughters, as the beloved is identified with Yahweh or

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<sup>256</sup> Fischer, "Who?," 87, 93.

<sup>257</sup> Fischer, "Who?," 86–87.

<sup>258</sup> Fischer, "Who?," 87.

Christ, implying that the additional notion of the daughters as an allegorical representation of Yahweh's people would be inconsistent and over-complicating.

However, the resistance to allowing the daughters to embody any type of possible allusion to a wider intended audience, beyond literal women who live in Jerusalem, is over-cautious. It is not necessary to allegorise the Song in order to admit that the daughters are positioned as a stand-in for an external audience, which might be broader than the specific audience of young females implied by the use of "daughters" as a figure for identification. The device operates in the same way that the Proverbs can be taken to contain wisdom applicable to a broader audience than young men, although the figure of identification for the audience is a "son." In fact, Fischer does argue that the daughters in the Song are figures of identification for the reader, enabling the reader to observe and participate from the vantage point of the daughters. To counteract any possibility of casting the daughters in an allegorical role, he permits only that they stand in for "the young women of society" to learn about love, just as the son in Proverbs served a similar function for young Israelite men.<sup>259</sup>

Athas is the only commentator for whom the daughters of Jerusalem are allowed to embody allusions to other parts of Scripture, with bearing on the interpretation of the Song, without forcing them into an allegorical role. Far from decrying any potential connection to prophetic "daughters," Athas opines that "it is likely that the Song carries some deliberate allusions to themes evident in prophetic literature," explaining that one of these allusions is embodied in the daughters of Jerusalem, who constitute a link with "Daughter Jerusalem" in Lamentations; thus they "allude to the personification of conquered Jerusalem, inviting us to consider notions of power, conquest and loss."<sup>260</sup> The resonance with the figure in Lamentations and the way Solomon is portrayed in the Song as a conqueror of women (3:6–11; 8:11–12) both support the notion that these themes are at work in the Song, without necessitating an allegorical role for the "daughters."

Mitchell, Fischer and Athas have been the only scholars to engage with the possibility that the identification of the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs may be informed by any literature outside of the fiction of the Song. They have each interacted with selected references to Jerusalem and Zion in Lamentations and the prophetic books, but

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<sup>259</sup> Fischer, "Who?," 77, 97.

<sup>260</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 250, 261.



none has exhaustively examined the full body of references to the daughter of Jerusalem and daughter(s) of Zion and the way these expressions develop throughout the prophets and writings.

The analysis of the idiomatic usage of בָּנוֹת and בֵּית, synthesised with the survey of precious scholarly treatments of the “daughters of Jerusalem,” has revealed: firstly, that the usual function of the בָּנוֹת idiom in poetic contexts provides a sound basis for suggesting that “daughters of Jerusalem” are representative of a wider, mixed group; secondly that there is warrant for looking to the personification of Jerusalem in other Hebrew texts to inform the cultural identity that is represented by the daughters in the Song; and finally that there has been no thorough scholarly exploration in this area, nor has there been any compelling argument presented that would invalidate this line of investigation.

There are therefore two lines of enquiry to pursue: a survey of the personification of Jerusalem (and Zion) in the Hebrew Bible to ascertain what aspects of cultural identity the daughters in the Song may be intended to embody, and a consideration of the possible ways in which the “daughters of Jerusalem” in the Song might function as representative of a wider group of people associated with Jerusalem.

### 3.2.3. Associations of Jerusalem and Zion

In seeking to ascertain the intent behind the appellation “daughters of Jerusalem,” there are two aspects to consider. The terms Jerusalem and Zion, when used generally as names for the capital city, both have persistent connotations in the Hebrew canon which can inform what it means for a group of people to be associated with these place names generally. Both Jerusalem and Zion are also personified as women throughout the canon. Since it is usual for the “daughters” of a personified city to bear “her” characteristics, there is potential for characteristics consistently apparent in personifications of Jerusalem and Zion to be brought to bear on the figures personified as “daughters” of these places in the Song of Songs. Where potential for this is seen, it will be applied with controls outlined below.

i. General Connotations of the names “Jerusalem” and “Zion”

Jerusalem and Zion are both used as names for the capital of Israel (later Judah). However, as the use of the terms develops throughout the prophetic books, Jerusalem and Zion sometimes reflect theological or political emphases particular to each name, even as they appear in parallel (e.g. Mic 4:8, Zeph 3:14; Zech 9:9).

The physical city of Jerusalem had a special significance in the imagination of Yahweh’s people, as the place where Yahweh’s promises were enshrined on earth. Jerusalem was to be the place where David’s dynasty would be eternally established, where a temple would be erected as a permanent meeting-place for Yahweh and his people, and where a descendant of David would be enthroned forever (2 Sam 7:12–16). The city enjoyed its high point, materially and spiritually, during the reign of David’s son Solomon, who built the temple (1 Kgs 6:1–38, 7:13–51). Thus, “as the plan of redemption unfolded in the Bible, Jerusalem became a leading symbol of Israel’s belief that God ruled over the earth and that he had established David and his sons as his human vice-regents. As such, Jerusalem became the image of Israel’s grand imperial hopes.”<sup>261</sup> When the city was ransacked by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. and the citizens scattered, this hope was dashed, and when return from exile became possible several decades later, restoring Jerusalem was the first priority of the returnees (Neh 2:3–5, 6:15–16). Thus, the hope of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple became synonymous with the hope of re-establishing the nation. The hope enshrined in Jerusalem remains distinctly “imperial,” though the city has not returned to its former glory nor has a king been re-enthroned by the close of the Hebrew Bible. To associate a person with Jerusalem is to orient them towards the throne and temple of the house of David, and to place them in the narrative of that dynasty’s installation, failure and the hope for re-establishment.

“Zion” was originally the name of the citadel captured by David in 2 Sam 5:6–9, and came to be used as a metaphorical term for the city of Jerusalem, evoking the physical capital, the temple and the Davidic dynasty, as the name “Jerusalem” did. “Zion” also carries extra nuances, depending on the context in which it is employed. Zion is Yahweh’s own stronghold, the place where he dwells and will be present with his people eternally (Ps

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<sup>261</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds., “Jerusalem,” *DBIm* (1998): 436.

48:1–2; 132:13–14, Zech 8:3). Metaphorically, Zion is the eschatological centre to which Yahweh’s scattered people will flock (e.g. Jer 31:10–12; 50:4–5; where the faithful remnant will find salvation (Isa 4:2–4; 35:10; Joel 2:32; Mic 4:7); and from where the law of Yahweh will flow out and draw in nations (Isa 2:2–3; cf. Mic 4:1–2). For the people who dwell in it, Zion has positive or negative associations depending on the context: by turns they are an unfaithful people under judgement (Isa 3:16–17; Jer 9:19, Mic 3:9–12) or, in other passages, the purified remnant restored to the holy city (Isa 4:2–4, Joel 2:32, Mic 4:6–7). To associate a person with Zion is implicitly to position them in relation to Yahweh, who dwells there, and to place them in the eschatological narrative of destruction and restoration—whether Zion is the site of a person’s judgement or place of eternal blessing.

“Jerusalem” and “Zion” are among the most theologically significant images in the whole of the Hebrew Bible, looming so large in the Israelite imagination that they frequently functioned as metonyms for the whole nation, emphasising the orientation of that nation around the temple in Jerusalem, the throne of a Davidic king and the presence of Yahweh himself. Just as the name of Solomon is too well-known to warrant minimising his role in the Song, the connotations of Jerusalem are too grand to warrant reducing the “daughters of Jerusalem” to a generic group of anonymous women.

## ii. Personifications of Jerusalem and Zion

It has been noted above that when a city is personified as a woman, and its inhabitants as her daughters, the “daughters” typically imitate the characteristics of the “mother.” The city of Jerusalem is not personified in the Song, so there is nothing upon which to draw directly in the immediate context. However, observable consistencies regarding the way Jerusalem and Zion are personified elsewhere in the Hebrew canon may help to inform what is intended by the epithet “daughters of Jerusalem” in the Song. Personifications from elsewhere in the canon should not be applied to the daughters in the Song without justification. Similarities of theme and context between the Song and other passages with personified cities and daughters might suggest where it is appropriate to

draw on established imagery from the Hebrew canon for the characterisation of the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song.

When Jerusalem is personified as a woman, the term *בֵּית יְרוּשָׁלַם* occurs far less frequently than *בֵּית צִיּוֹן*. The figure of “Daughter Jerusalem” is found only in Lamentations (2:13, 15), Micah (4:8), Zephaniah (3:14) and Zechariah (9:9). In Lamentations the figure of *בֵּית יְרוּשָׁלַם* is associated particularly with Jerusalem’s conquest and the subsequent devastation of her people; the city is personified as a woman grieving her defilement and asking the question, “How did this happen?”<sup>262</sup> Here she embodies the material consequences of the disintegration of the Davidic dynasty, a city-as-woman abandoned and unprotected by kings or God. However, in the Book of the Twelve, the daughter of Jerusalem expresses the hope of future restoration, particularly focused around the re-installation of a king for Israel. God will re-establish his reign and restore kingship (*מִמְלָכֶת*) to the daughter of Jerusalem (Mic 4:1–8); rebellion and judgement (the kind that is immediate in Lamentations) will be reversed (Zephaniah 3) and Yahweh, the King of Israel (*מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל*), will be among his people (3:15); Israel’s enemies will be destroyed (Zech 9:1–8) and they will witness the approach of their coming king (*מֶלֶכְךָ*, “your king” in 9:9). In these passages, Daughter Jerusalem’s orientation towards the hope of the re-installation of a king accords with the emphasis of the theme of Davidic kingship in relation to the term “Jerusalem” generally.

The figure of *בֵּית צִיּוֹן* appears frequently throughout the Prophets and Writings (Isa 1:8; 10:32; 16:1; 37:22 [cf. 2 Kgs 19:21]; 52:2; 62:11; Jer 4:31; 6:2; 6:23; Mic 1:13; 4:8, Ps 9:14; Song 3:11; Lam 1:6; 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 13, 18; 4:22). Isaiah’s personification of Zion is the broadest in scope, foreshadowing that she will be left judged and besieged (1:8), and coming finally to a vision of when she will be restored and free, reversing the earlier image (52:1–2; 62:11). In Isaiah, the “daughters of Zion” (her citizens) are portrayed as wantonly sinful (3:16–17; 4:4) which brings judgement upon the city as a whole. The personifications of Zion in Jeremiah, Lamentations and the Book of the Twelve each pick up one element of the grand sweep of Isaiah. Jeremiah paints her as an unprotected woman in anguish, exposed to the destruction that is coming upon her (4:31; 6:2; 6:23). Lamentations displays her as a woman in the aftermath of this attack, utterly bereft. Micah, Zephaniah and Zech

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<sup>262</sup> Lyke, *Espouse*, 31–32.

look to her revival (Mic 4:8, 10, 13) and finally her redemption and joyful anticipation of the return of her king (Zeph 3:14; Zech 2:10; 9:9). The multifacetedness of the personification of Zion across the canon accords with the way that the prophets also switch between conceiving of the location Zion as the historical city inhabited by rebellious people afflicted by judgement, and the future, glorious sanctuary of the holy remnant. Zion—the city and the woman—is the place where both Yahweh’s rejection and Yahweh’s protection are embodied; where the infidelity of Yahweh’s people plays out, and where their restoration to relationship with him will occur.

Two more clusters of personification must be included for a complete picture of the connotations borne by personified “Jerusalem.” Both of these clusters are associated with the motif of promiscuity and adultery that is used to characterise Israel’s posture towards Yahweh throughout the prophetic literature. The relationship between Yahweh and Israel is explicitly characterised as a marriage for the first time in Hosea, and the metaphor is developed in Jeremiah, Nahum and Ezekiel.<sup>263</sup> In these texts, Israel’s apostasy is conceived of as marital infidelity and sexual promiscuity. These themes also colour two sustained personifications of Jerusalem, in Lamentations and Ezekiel.

The first is the full picture that emerges in Lamentations when all the various names for Jerusalem are taken into account (not restricted to Daughter Zion and Daughter Jerusalem). This creates one of the most sustained personifications of the city in the Hebrew Bible. In Lamentations she is a defiled woman, embodying the devastation of Jerusalem’s citizens at the Babylonian invasion and the destruction of the temple. The personified city is named variously as “Daughter Zion” (בַּת צִיּוֹן, 1:6, 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 13, 18, 4:22), “Daughter Judah” (בַּת יְהוּדָה, 1:15, 2:2, 5), “Daughter Jerusalem” (בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם, 2:13, 15), or “daughter of my people” (בַּת עַמִּי, 2:11, 3:48, 4:3, 6, 10); in one instance, the people themselves are referred to as “all the daughters of my city” (בָּנוֹת עִירִי כֻּלָּן, 3:51). The city is characterised as a woman punished for her promiscuity: there is no one to console her among all her lovers (1:2), who have deceived her (1:19; in both verses the word “lover” is derived from אָהַב, the same root for “love” employed by the Song in its adjurations to the daughters); her nakedness has been seen (1:8) and her skirts are unclean (1:9). This uncleanness “may be a result of her allowing illicit entry on the one hand or, on the other, it may be the result of

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<sup>263</sup> Lyke, *Espouse*, xii–xiii.

foreigners forced entry and resulting defilement. In either case, the temple now seems to be understood as the woman who has been penetrated and defiled. Jerusalem and the temple have been raped.”<sup>264</sup>

The second group of relevant references is found in Ezekiel 16 and 23, which contain two clusters of “daughter” imagery in which Jerusalem is characterised as a faithless wife, and her apostasy as adultery and whoring. In Ezekiel 16, Jerusalem is married to Yahweh (16:8–41), becomes adulterous (16:32) and plays the whore with many nations (16:15–34). In this passage, the “daughter” idiom is applied both to Jerusalem and to her inhabitants; the city is called “the daughter of her mother” (16:45), and her citizens, in turn, are her “daughters,” who have participated in the disgrace and will share in the fate of the city they inhabit (16:53–58). In Ezekiel 23, Jerusalem and Samaria are personified as two daughters of one mother (23:2), with Jerusalem’s “lust” and “whoring” with other nations outdoing Samaria’s (23:11–21). Hosea also picks up this language: it is said that Israel’s daughters “play the whore” (Hos 4:13, 14) just as Israel herself plays the whore (4:15).

It is evident from all of the data above that the personification of Israel’s capital city across the Hebrew Bible is multivalent, encompassing virgin daughter, wife and whore. At times she is a young marriageable woman, “in need of the protection that comes with a husband.”<sup>265</sup> She is Yahweh’s wife, yet she turns from him and makes herself promiscuous with other gods. She brings judgement upon herself and is left vulnerable to destruction. She is redeemed, cleansed and beautified, and she rejoices at the coming of her king. As “daughters” share the fate of her mother city, Jerusalem’s citizens share in her devastation and her joy, her sin, her judgement and her restoration. The personification device embodies different facets of the way Yahweh and the nation relate to each other at different points in the historical and eschatological narrative.

When it comes to discerning what aspects of the “mother-city” the “daughters of Jerusalem” might be supposed to reflect in the Song of Songs, an obvious difficulty presents itself. It has been noted that historically a major barrier to interpreting the Song of Songs in relation to other texts in the Hebrew Bible is that there is no consensus on the provenance of the Song. The Song does not explicitly announce whether it is intended to be linked with

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<sup>264</sup> Lyke, *Espouse*, 34.

<sup>265</sup> Thomas, “Zion,” 912.

a particular point in the journey of Jerusalem described above: its establishment as the site of the Davidic throne and temple, its capture and destruction, re-construction and faltering attempts at restoration, or its future, anticipated final redemption. However, the Song does contain some literary clues which may inform the way the reader views the women in the Song, in light of the way Jerusalem and its citizens are typically personified as women across the breadth of the canon. These clues will be identified and applied in the course of the following discussion, which will explore two options for how the daughters of Jerusalem may function as representatives of a wider group in the Song of Songs.

### 3.3. Who do the Daughters of Jerusalem Represent?

The suggestion that the daughters of Jerusalem might function as representatives of a wider audience is not a radical one. In fact, it is the position tacitly held by the vast majority of interpreters of the Song, whether they articulate it or not. As it has been seen, it is commonly assumed that the woman's statements to the daughters are supposed to be received by the external audience to the Song, too, so the daughters inherently function as the audience's representatives. This discussion is merely seeking to clarify how the literary audience is styled and what implications this may have for the external audience as they identify themselves with this literary audience.

One possibility, that is already extant in the literature, is that the "daughters of Jerusalem" are supposed to stand in for all young Jewish women. Kenton Sparks has written an explicit argument for this position, but it is also implicit in the comments of Mitchell, O'Donnell and others already cited who suggest that the Song is a feminine counterpart to Proverbs, containing wisdom for young women as Proverbs is aimed at young men.<sup>266</sup> This also accords with the view that the "daughters of Jerusalem," in the fiction of the poem, are a group of young unmarried women receiving the advice of the central woman in the poem.

To precisely articulate the way the idiom "daughters of Jerusalem" would operate in this case: the fictional "daughters" would represent a wider female population, not a mixed gender group, i.e. the "daughters" of the city, to the exclusion of the "sons." "Jerusalem" on

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<sup>266</sup> Sparks, "Wisdom for Young Jewish Women"; Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 181; O'Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 24.

this understanding would function as a metonymy for the nation of Israel as a whole, and so the “daughters of Jerusalem” would include all Israelite women regardless of whether they actually reside in Jerusalem. This sense of בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם would be appropriate to the type of usage of the בָּנוֹת idiom seen in poetic literature, as opposed to the more strictly literal use of the expression which is typical in historical narrative. Metaphorically, the meaning could extend organically to include all young women who worship Yahweh as God and regard the Song of Songs as divine wisdom—all female “citizens” of Jerusalem and Zion.

A particular quality of the Song which suggests that its intended audience is young *women* in particular (as opposed to a more general mixed group of Jerusalemites) is what Munro terms its “feminine bias.” The Song is expressed in a female voice, relating events from her point of view and giving the audience access to her inner thoughts and feelings.<sup>267</sup> As Sparks puts it, the Song is “focalised through female eyes.”<sup>268</sup> It is also dominated by female figures, even to the extent that there are seven references to “mothers” (1:6; 3:4, 11; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5) while the woman lacks a father figure; and apart from her beloved, all the male figures in the Song are characterised negatively. The woman’s brothers put her to work in anger (1:6) and attempt to control her body (8:8–9); the city watchmen beat and defile her (5:7); even the beloved’s friends, the shepherds, represent discomfort for the woman (1:7). Solomon, as has been demonstrated, is the antithesis of the beloved and the most aggressive antagonist in the Song. The Song of Songs is a conversation between women about men, most of whom are not viewed as allies or protectors, but rather as obstacles and threats. This “feminine” quality of the Song suggests that it has special relevance for a female audience, rather than a mixed one. The undeniably female focus of the instruction is a strong point in favour of the idea that the daughters of Jerusalem are supposed to stand in for young Jewish women (as opposed to men and women).

A second possibility for identifying the daughters of Jerusalem is as a poetic representation of the whole population of Jerusalem. This would accord with the demonstrated use of בָּנוֹת with nation and place names in poetic and prophetic texts in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. בָּנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל and בָּנוֹת פְּלִשְׁתִּים in 2 Sam 1:20, 24; שִׁמְרוֹן וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ, סֹדֶם וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ in Ezek 16:53–58), wherein the “daughters” are a synecdoche for

<sup>267</sup> Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 146–47.

<sup>268</sup> Sparks, “Wisdom for Young Jewish Women,” 294.



the whole people group with which they are associated. It would also accord with the device of characterising citizens of a personified city as her “daughters,” who reflect her characteristics and share her fate. In this view the understanding of the “daughters” would be informed by the picture of personified Jerusalem in the canon more broadly, and the persistent associations of the names “Jerusalem” and “Zion.” While “daughters of Jerusalem” would broadly indicate people associated with Jerusalem (i.e. Israelites), the deliberate resonance with similar phrasing in other texts which personify the citizens of Jerusalem as her “daughters” would invite applying particular emphases of the name “Jerusalem” to the figures in the Song.

The particularity of the phrasing “daughters of Jerusalem,” a style of address which is not unique to the Song, is strongly suggestive that the appellation is deliberately invoking an established literary tradition, not just plucking an expression from the air to refer to Jewish women. Although the chorus character in the Song of Songs has traditionally been treated as an isolated figure created to serve the fiction of the Song, the Song does not invent the device of referring to a group as “daughters of Jerusalem.” In employing this particular title for its chorus, the Song taps into the broader literary tradition of using gendered imagery to represent the city of Jerusalem and her citizens.

This implies a stronger resonance between the Song of Songs and prophetic texts than has been explicitly acknowledged in most interpretations. However, much like the assumption that the daughters of Jerusalem represent a wider audience outside the fiction of the Song, the assumption that the Song’s meaning is informed by motifs from the prophetic literature is evident in interpretations of the Song of Songs from the earliest times. Jewish interpretation of the Song was traditionally allegorical, casting the woman as Israel and her beloved as Yahweh, which relied on the metaphorical understanding that Yahweh and Israel were husband and wife. This marital image for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is explicitly assumed for the first time in Hosea, and developed in Jeremiah, Nahum and Ezekiel.<sup>269</sup> In these texts, Israel’s apostasy is conceived of as marital infidelity and sexual promiscuity; the Song of Songs has been understood to depict a redemption of the broken marriage between Yahweh and his people. The resonance between the Song and the metaphor of a marital relationship in the prophets has been

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<sup>269</sup> Lyke, *Espouse*, xii–xiii.

almost universally assumed; if this is accepted, then it is also possible to accept another point of literary resonance between the Song and the prophetic literature, in the form of the motif of the daughter(s) of Jerusalem (and Zion).

An obvious objection to this possibility is that allegorical approaches to interpreting the Song have been acknowledged to be highly problematic, yet to understand the daughters of Jerusalem as a stand-in for the whole nation seems to enter allegorical territory. (This was Fischer's objection to casting the daughters of Jerusalem as representatives of Yahweh's people, above.) However, it is possible to read multiple layers of meaning without resorting to allegory, and to acknowledge the use of metaphor where it is on display. Moreover, one of the main objections to allegory as an interpretative category is that by and large it is performed without controls, or at least without controls that are discernibly suggested by the text of the Song itself. However, the term "daughters of Jerusalem" provides its own controls: it employs a known idiom, the use of which is well-established in prophetic texts that style Israel's capital as a woman in a relationship with Yahweh, and so it is safe—literarily and theologically—to venture that the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song stand in for the people of Israel, as daughters of the city do in so many other texts.

There is some compelling evidence in favour of both positions: that the daughters of Jerusalem could stand in either for all women of Jerusalem or all citizens. The uniquely feminine bias of the Song is a strong point in favour of the notion that the Song has a particular message for a female audience, and that the daughters stand in for all women. The feminine perspective of the Song is so emphatic as to demand justification. However, the convention of personifying the population of Jerusalem, male and female, as her "daughters" is so well-established in other Hebrew texts, and the phrase "daughters of Jerusalem" accords so well with the standard use of this idiom in poetry and prophecy, that it is difficult to justify dismissing this as the background to the idiom in the Song.

There is another factor which may bring harmony to the two likely meanings of "daughters of Jerusalem" and solve the conundrum. The survey of various texts related to Solomon, "daughter" personifications and the themes of love, marriage and adultery have cumulatively revealed the existence of parallel metaphors for Israel's relationship with Yahweh, one with a "feminine bias" (to borrow Munro's expression), the other with a "masculine bias." The masculine metaphor operates in Proverbs, wherein the audience is

styled as a young man. The metaphor of choosing between two relationships, a marriage to Lady Wisdom or an adulterous relationship with Lady Folly, is used for comparing a life rooted in the fear of Yahweh that leads to blessing or a life that turns away from God and leads to cursedness and death. Throughout the prophetic literature, a feminine metaphor expresses a similar reality. Israel and her people are metaphorically married to Yahweh, their husband, yet they turn from him in adulterous relationships with the gods of other nations. Apostasy is conceived of as infidelity and multiplicity of worship as sexual promiscuity. In the Song of Songs, the audience is styled as a group of young women, using the “daughter” device that is common to many prophetic texts that speak of Yahweh’s relationship to Israel using the marriage/adultery motifs. This is a clue that the feminine version of the metaphor is being used in the Song of Songs.

Recognising the potential for this feminine metaphor to operate in the Song allows the daughters of Jerusalem to be coherently understood as young Jewish women on one level, and all citizens of Jerusalem at another level. This dynamic is already seen at play in Proverbs. At one level, its advice is distinctly masculine and contains real instructions about choosing a wife, avoiding adultery, and conducting oneself wisely as a married man. Simultaneously it employs the image of marriage as a metaphor for “choosing wisdom,” that is, living a life rooted in the fear of Yahweh. This advice is not exclusive to young men, but is applicable to all individuals that follow Yahweh, and indeed corporately to the nation of Israel. The picture of a wise life that applies to all people is imaginatively depicted in the exemplary life of a young man.

In a similar manner, it is possible that the Song of Songs could speak of sex and love on a practical level with a feminine perspective, while alluding to spiritual implications of these practicalities, using metaphors and motifs that are seen elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. As the external audience is invited to identify themselves with the “daughters,” they are invited to identify themselves with young women under the instruction of a more experienced women in matters of love, simultaneously recognising that the daughters of Jerusalem are citizens of a city that is metaphorically in a love-relationship with Yahweh. Thus the daughters’ conduct in love includes their individual scope of concern and simultaneously becomes a corporate matter, a metaphor for the way the citizens of Jerusalem conduct themselves in their relationship with Yahweh, their rightful husband. This last suggestion is based purely on the most natural understanding of “daughters of

Jerusalem” based on the idiomatic usage of בָּנוֹת throughout the canon, taking into account the precedent set by Proverbs wherein an audience styled as distinctly masculine acts as a surrogate for a nation of men and women. It remains to be seen whether this understanding of the daughters of Jerusalem is borne out by the exegesis of key passages from the Song of Songs in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

### 3.4. Women, Jerusalem and Solomon

The suggestions above must finally be considered in relation to the conclusions of the previous chapter of this thesis. A preliminary conclusion of that chapter was that the identity of Solomon, the paradigmatic Israelite king (as known from other parts of the Hebrew Bible) should be allowed to impact the meaning of the Song. Specifically, it was concluded that the title of the Song indicates that it should be read in conversation with other texts from the corpus of Solomonic material, and that the portrayal of Solomon of Samuel-Kings (which is also the referent for the mention of Solomon in Neh 13:26) has the most relevance to the figure of Solomon in the Song. It remains to ask how the association with this Solomon shapes the reader’s perception of the surrogate audience, the daughters of Jerusalem.

It was noted above that the associations with Jerusalem (and Zion) and the characteristics of the personified capital city can vary depending on the state of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel being expressed in a given text. It was seen, for example, that in Lamentations (2:13; 15) Jerusalem is a deserted, violated woman, to express the aftermath of the capture of the city and the exile of its citizens, but in Zephaniah 3:14 and Zechariah 9:9 she rejoices at being restored to her king, an anticipation of the eschatological redemption of faithful Israelites. Since there is no consensus regarding the dating of the Song or the circumstances of its composition, it is very difficult to ascertain who the assumed external audience, for whom the daughters of Jerusalem were supposed to act as surrogates, might have been at the time of the Song’s creation. However, the literary figure of Solomon bears specific associations when it comes to the city of Jerusalem.

The name of King Solomon recalls Jerusalem in its glory days; the citizens of Solomon’s Jerusalem enjoyed the most lavish peak in its history. This peak was utterly

reversed by the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., which was a divine punishment for the pattern of sin perpetuated by the kings of Israel and Judah—a pattern set by Solomon. The negative characterisation of Solomon in 3:6–11 and 8:11–12 recalls his shortcomings that sparked the monarchy’s descent into schism, covenant disobedience and ultimate fall to foreign powers. Solomon’s city would be captured by foreign rivals, Solomon’s temple destroyed, and the citizens of Jerusalem scattered into exile. If, as Lyke pictures her, the Lamenting Daughter Jerusalem cries, *“How could it be that the temple was destroyed, Jerusalem sacked, and the literati and political elite exiled?”* the answer can be traced back, at least in part, to Solomon’s love for foreign wives and his worship of their foreign gods, the first link in the chain of disappointing reigns that led to these devastating consequences.<sup>270</sup> The spectre of Solomon’s conduct in love looming over the Song, and its associated consequences for Jerusalem, inclines the reader to understand “Jerusalem” in the Song as a signifier of royal hope that will inevitably be crushed.

The Song’s association with Solomon strengthens the view that the daughters of Jerusalem represent all citizens of Jerusalem, not only the young women. Insofar as the Song contains practical instructions with a feminine application (in the same way that Proverbs has a masculine application), the relationship between the woman and her beloved is held up as the ideal example of romantic love to pursue, while King Solomon embodies the type of love that young women should avoid: “love” that is non-intimate, non-mutual, and non-exclusive. In this manner the figure of Solomon serves the didactic purpose of teaching young women about love. However, if the full extent of the Song’s purpose is to offer practical wisdom to young women, the use of Solomon as the antithesis of love beggars justification. There is a precedent for using archetypal characters like the women of Wisdom and Folly in Proverbs, or a generic male figure like the anonymous beloved in the Song itself. The fact that the ideal lover is unnamed while his negative counterpart is styled after one of the greatest kings of Israel awards more emphasis to the foil than to the hero of the Song. The inclusion of the paradigmatic Israelite king as a character suggests there is a broader theological politic at work in the Song, which in turn strengthens the suggestion that the daughters of Jerusalem encompass a broader spectrum of the citizens of Jerusalem than just its young women.

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<sup>270</sup> Lyke, *Espouse*, 31.

The personification of the Song's audience as young female citizens of Jerusalem allows the personal and corporate dimensions of wisdom and love to converge. The audience of the Song is invited to identify with a group of young women receiving instructions about love, who are named using a mode of address frequently used for the nation personified as daughters of the city Jerusalem. The woman's advice to the daughters is properly received, in all its complexity, when the reader understands that she is specifically adjuring the daughters to be wary of a love like Solomon's—a love that was not only impersonal, coercive, and polygamous, but that led the kingdom collectively into idolatry and covenant infidelity. Her words are coherent as wisdom to a feminine audience as Proverbs is coherent to a masculine audience, but readers of either sex can overhear the universal wisdom principles embedded in either text. The urgency of wisdom in personal relationships is reinforced by the presence of Solomon, the first heir to the Davidic covenant and the paradigmatic example to avoid. It is the example invoked by Nehemiah, berating the returning Jews for choosing wives from among the surrounding foreigners: "Did not Solomon King of Israel sin on account of such women?" (Neh 13:26). The Song is another text in the body of texts associated with Solomon highlighting the reality that personal misconduct in love can have spiritual consequences for the wider community.

### 3.5. Conclusions of Chapter 3

The daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs have traditionally been understood in terms that are restricted to their immediate literary function in the poem, with little regard for their possible identity as characters in their own right. The assumption that the daughters of Jerusalem (as the woman's audience) share the perspective of the external audience of the Song has been widely adopted. It has been demonstrated that this shared perspective allows the Song to exercise a didactic purpose on its audience: as the woman adjures the daughters regarding love, the adjuration is received by the external audience. In this manner, the function of the "daughters" in the Song of Songs is analogous to the role of "my son" in Proverbs 1–9.

Though the daughters are addressed as "daughters of Jerusalem" and "daughters of Zion," little attention has previously been given to the literary background to this phrasing

found in the frequent use of “daughter” idioms and the persistent connotations of Jerusalem and Zion (and the metaphorical women associated with them) in the Hebrew canon. Taking into account the pre-existing idiom and the significant theological and cultural weight of the names Jerusalem and Zion, it is likely that the “daughters of Jerusalem” in the Song call up more complex associations than has previously been recognised.

A survey of the occurrences of idiomatic expressions employing בָּנוֹת (“daughters of”) and בַּת (“Daughter”) has revealed that it is usual in poetic texts for בָּנוֹת to function as a synecdoche for the whole people group with which the daughters are identified, and that in passages where a city or nation is personified as a woman (often styled “Daughter”) it is typical for her citizens (“daughters”) to imitate her characteristics and participate in her fate. Usually, the “daughters of” a place embody cultural associations of that location. Additionally, “Jerusalem” and “Zion” are often used as synecdoches for the whole nation, with the situation of the capital city expressing the fate of all Yahweh’s people, its spiritual citizens. The use of “Jerusalem” and “Zion” as the definitive identifiers for the young women in the Song suggests that their function extends beyond that of a sounding board for the main character and operates with reference to wider canonical associations with the capital city.

The personification of the nation’s capital and her citizens as women in relationship with Yahweh, and the way that apostasy and idolatry are characterised as adultery and promiscuity, is a feminine counterpart to the masculine metaphor that operates in Proverbs. In Proverbs, the audience is invited to identify with a male figure who is instructed to metaphorically marry wisdom and flee adultery with the foreign woman. In the Song, the audience is invited to identify with a female figure styled after the personifications of Israel, who is married to Yahweh but depicted as unfaithful, promiscuous, violated, and ultimately redeemed.

The presence of Solomon as the antithesis of the ideal lover supports the idea that the concern of the Song extends beyond the personal conduct of young women in love and operates with reference to a broader theological politic. Solomon provides a point of connection between the Song of Songs and the unfolding trajectory of the history of Yahweh’s people in the Hebrew Bible, in connection with key theological themes, creating a focus for the associations of Jerusalem and Zion in the Song. Solomon, the builder of the temple and the king of golden-age Jerusalem, was infamous for his dealings with foreign

women that were synonymous with covenant infidelity, leading to the defilement of the temple and the destruction of the royal capital. The female personifications of Jerusalem and her citizens in the prophetic books and Lamentations express this historical reality as marital infidelity and sexual promiscuity, leading to Jerusalem's depiction as a defiled woman. The juxtaposition between Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem, as the only named characters in the Song of Songs, suggests a theological focus for the content of the Song and its adjuration to the audience not to stir up love.

As noted above, since the adjuration at 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 is the woman's key message to the daughters, it is important to test whether it is comprehensible as an adjuration to the population of Jerusalem, in order to discern whether it is plausible to uphold the suggestion that the daughters are representative of the whole community. In the following chapters, the conclusions above will be tested through exegesis of the adjuration repeated at 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4, and of the Song's climatic description of love in 8:6–7.



## Chapter 4 | Exegesis of The Adjuration (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)

### 4.0. Introduction

In the previous chapters it was noted that there has been a tendency in scholarship for the Song of Songs to be interpreted in relative isolation from the rest of the Hebrew canon, due to the anonymity of the main characters, the challenge of discerning authorship or date of composition with certainty, and the lack of literary resemblance to other books in the Hebrew Bible, making it difficult to categorise or contextualise the Song among them.

As an alternative, an inner-biblical approach to contextualisation was suggested, and it was proposed that since Solomon is a highly significant literary figure in the Hebrew Bible, the Song should be read in concert with the larger body of canonical material concerning Solomon, with particular attention to key texts that demonstrate an overlap of concern with the Song of Songs. Analysis of these texts and Solomon's characterisation within the Song led to the conclusion that Solomon is symbolic of "love" that is antithetical to the Song's ideal and which led, in Israel's history, to the public worship of foreign gods and the downfall of the kingdom.

Further, it was noted that the daughters of Jerusalem are usually understood as surrogates for the external audience of the Song, and that the woman's posture towards the daughters can be understood as that of a sapiential instructor, operating with a dynamic analogous to the framing device of the "father" and "son" in Proverbs. The idiomatic use of בָּנוֹת in the Hebrew canon was analysed, leading to the conclusion that it is usual in poetic texts for בָּנוֹת to function as a synecdoche for a wider, mixed population, and that it is likely in the Song that בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם represents the people culturally affiliated with Jerusalem, i.e. those belonging to the nation of Israel under Yahweh as their God. This supports the possibility that the Song of Songs contains a wisdom teaching that applies at a corporate level and is related to spirituality, not just at a personal level exclusively related to sexuality.

To test these conclusions, selected passages of the Song of Songs will be exegeted with a focus on identifying inner-biblical allusions that hearken to the broader portrayal of

Solomon in the canon, then exploring whether the resulting conclusions have coherent applications when addressed to the nation of Israel corporately. The tenability of this approach and the veracity of the conclusions it leads to will be upheld or denied by the degree of explanatory power the exegetical method displays. This will be evidenced by whether bringing Solomon and the posited role of the “daughters of Jerusalem” to bear on the text brings clarity to the selected passages from the Song, either by more thoroughly explaining points of interpretation that have been previously proposed, or leading to new, coherent conclusions that are supported by the text of the Song while relying on the interactions with Solomon and the understanding of the daughters of Jerusalem for their formation.

Since exegeting the Song in its entirety would exceed the scope of this thesis, it has been necessary to select exemplary verses with which to test the exegetical method. In the previous chapter it was argued that the Song is framed by the woman’s addresses to the daughters of Jerusalem, and that the didactic intent of the Song is expressed in her instruction to them. In particular, the addresses to the daughters at 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 differentiate themselves from her other comments to the daughters as having special significance. These verses contain a repeated adjuration which is related to the Song’s climactic description of love in 8:6–7; together the adjurations and 8:6–7 convey the Song’s didactic purpose. The latter will be exegeted in the following chapter; the present chapter is concerned with the adjurations to the daughters.

In the most comprehensive and most recent survey of the interpretations that have been proposed, Andruska confirms that the meaning of the adjuration is far from settled, synthesising the body of scholarly opinion into ten options.<sup>271</sup> Taking into account the preliminary conclusions of the present study, these options will be explored in relation to the influence of the canonical figure of Solomon and his role as the antithesis of love in the Song, and with regard to the proposal that the adjuration can be understood as an address to the nation of Israel. The analysis will be seeking to discover whether these interactions support an existing interpretation of the adjuration or suggest a new interpretation that is grounded in the wording of the adjuration and its immediate context in the Song, bolstered

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<sup>271</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 44–45.

by the interaction with the canonical figure of Solomon and the understanding of the daughters of Jerusalem as a surrogate for Israel.

#### 4.1. Background to the Adjurations

##### 4.1.1. Placement and Significance

The literary effect of the presence of the daughters of Jerusalem was discussed in the preceding chapter. There it was concluded that the woman's addresses to the daughters function as a literary frame, wherein the content of the Song is presented within a meta-dialogue between the woman and the daughters of Jerusalem. It was also indicated that this frame supports the Song's didactic intent, by positioning the reader to share the perspective of the daughters, who are the recipients of the Song's teaching. Among the woman's numerous addresses to the daughters, one recurring line suggests itself as having particular didactic significance:

I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem  
By the gazelles or does of the field  
That you do not awaken and you do not stir up love  
until it pleases.

השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם  
בצבאות או באילות השדה  
אם-תעירו ואם-תעוררו את-האהבה  
עד שתחפץ

The above refrain, referred to as the “adjuration,” appears three times, at 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 (the wording varies slightly on the last occurrence). Several qualities distinguish the adjuration from the other addresses to the daughters: its formulaic construction as an oath, its reference to the theme of love, which links it to the highpoint of the Song in 8:6–7, and its placement at climactic points in the Song.

The adjuration is constructed according to an established formula for the swearing of oaths in Biblical Hebrew, which will be elaborated upon below under 4.1.2. The use of the standard verb for swearing (שָׁבַע) and the invocation of a third party to guarantee the oath make the adjuration stand out from the surrounding content. At each occurrence, the woman switches from poetically recounting her experience of love to addressing her audience directly, seeking to secure an oath from them, in terms that are usually used for

making a socially and legally binding agreement. The abrupt alteration of tone and intent draws attention to the content and vital purpose of the adjurations.

The urgent purpose of the adjurations is also indicated by the fact that these lines are addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem, who are surrogates for the external audience to the Song. The woman speaks through the daughters to the real-world recipients of the book. This elevates the adjurations above the fiction of the rest of the poem, making them stand out as real instructions. The woman does make other addresses to the daughters (1:5, 3:11, 5:8) which are more specific and only coherent in their immediate literary context, as part of the retelling of the love story (e.g., “do not stare at me because I am dark,” 1:5; “tell him I am sick with love,” 5:8). The thrice-repeated adjuration has a general, timeless quality that transcends its immediate context, distinguishing it from the other addresses which have no coherence as generic didactic statements. The adjuration stands as a broader instruction that may be applied beyond the constraints of the poetic world of the Song.

This is partly indicated by its main concern, which is the theme of love, and the relationship of the content of the adjurations to the content of 8:6–7 (which will be exegeted in the following chapter). Briefly, 8:6–7 contains a conclusive reflection on the nature of love, which is universally recognised as the literary and theological highpoint of the Song. It has been recognised that a particular relationship exists between this final reflection and the adjurations throughout the Song. When the adjurations speak of “love” they refer to the love that is displayed in the Song and crystallised in 8:6–7, and so conversely the description of love in 8:6–7 provides part of the rationale for the adjurations.

The relationship is suggested by the similarities of tone and content in the verses in question. Dell argues that the adjuration shares the quality of 8:6b–7 of being an “abstract reflection” on love.<sup>272</sup> Garrett notes a resonance between the warning tone of 8:6–7 and the woman’s tone of warning in the adjurations.<sup>273</sup> Likewise Munro understands the reflection on the power of love in 8:6–7 to reinforce the instruction that has been offered in the adjurations.<sup>274</sup> Exum observes that the both the adjurations and 8:6–7 “personify” love by conceiving of it as having a will of its own, and argues that “the affirmation of love’s

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<sup>272</sup> Katharine J. Dell, “Does the Song of Songs Have Any Connections to Wisdom?,” in Hagedorn, *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, 15.

<sup>273</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 257.

<sup>274</sup> Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 47–48.

power [in 8:6–7] thus sheds light on the meaning of the oath the woman places upon the women of Jerusalem.”<sup>275</sup> Similarly, Andruska reads 8:6–7 specifically as the rationale for the exhortation to not stir up love; she proposes that the adjuration is necessary because of what 8:6–7 teaches about love.<sup>276</sup>

A second indicator of the relationship between the adjuration and 8:6–7 is the presence of a definite article on the word for “love.” Uniquely in the Hebrew Bible, love is referred to as *הָאַהֲבָה* in Song 2:7, 3:5, 8:4 and 8:7. Some scholars read no significance into the article, taking it to be not unusual on an abstract noun.<sup>277</sup> Given the likelihood that the definite article originated from a demonstrative particle and that it retains a weak demonstrative function in some Biblical Hebrew expressions, it is likely that the article here has a deictic function, pointing to the type of love that is described in the Song.<sup>278</sup> In any case, the unexpected article in both the adjuration and Song 8:7 is a literary flag alerting the reader to the probability that the same “love” is the topic of both statements.<sup>279</sup>

The placement of the adjuration in relation to the surrounding content endows it with special emphasis. While there is no significant consensus on the structure of the Song, the addresses to the daughters are recognised as structural markers in many interpretations, and broadly “most scholars agree that the adjuration refrain marks the conclusion of a poetic unit.”<sup>280</sup> In particular, each occurrence of the adjuration comes closely on the heels of what Murphy cautiously refers to as “some expression of union between the two persons.”<sup>281</sup> Gault agrees that “each occurrence of the refrain falls at the conclusion of a passionate scene” while Eschelbach understands that the Song is broadly divided into sections beginning with pursuit and ending with consummation or fulfilment of love, and “in all three instances the stanza [i.e. the adjuration] concludes a section immediately following the consummation.”<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Exum, *Song*, 249.

<sup>276</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 78.

<sup>277</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 133.

<sup>278</sup> For the demonstrative origin and force of the article see Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, §126 (424); Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar*, §137f (475); For a full discussion of the development of the article see also Aaron D. Rubin, *Studies in Semitic Grammaticalization*, HSS 57 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 60–90.

<sup>279</sup> The force of the article on *הָאַהֲבָה* in the adjurations and 8:6–7 will be discussed more completely under the exegesis of 8:6–7.

<sup>280</sup> Brian P. Gault, “An Admonition Against ‘Rousing Love’: The Meaning of the Enigmatic Refrain in Song of Songs,” *BBR* 20.2 (2010): 177.

<sup>281</sup> Roland E. Murphy, “Structure of the Canticle of Canticles,” *CBQ* 11.4 (1949): 387.

<sup>282</sup> Gault, “Admonition,” 177; Eschelbach, “Song,” 313.

While these observations are based on analyses of whole textual units preceding the adjuration refrain, they are demonstrable from a comparison even of the single verses immediately before each occurrence. The first occurrence of the adjuration at 2:7 is part of a double refrain, which runs:

His left (hand) is under my head  
His right embraces me!  
I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem  
By the gazelles or does of the field  
That you do not awaken and you do not stir up love  
until it pleases.  
(Song 2:6–7)

שְׁמָאלוֹ תַּחַת לְרֹאשִׁי  
וְיָמִינוֹ תַּחְבֵּקֵנִי  
הַשְּׁבַעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם  
בְּצִבְאוֹת אוֹ בְּאִילֹת הַשָּׂדֶה  
אִם־תִּעִירוּ וְאִם־תַּעֲזִירוּ אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה  
עַד שֶׁתַּחַפֵּץ

The second occurrence of the adjuration is immediately preceded by the woman taking hold of her beloved and leading him into her mother's home, an obvious metaphor for familial intimacy overlaid with innuendo around the act of conception:

Scarcely had I passed them  
Before I found the one my soul loves  
I took hold of him and would not let go of him  
Until I brought him into the house of my mother,  
Into the chamber of the one who conceived me.  
I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem  
By the gazelles or does of the field  
That you do not awaken and you do not stir up love  
until it pleases.  
(Song 3:4–5)

כַּמַּעַט שֶׁעָבַרְתִּי מֵהֶם  
עַד שֶׁמָּצֵאתִי אֶת שְׁאֲהָבָה נַפְשִׁי  
אֶחָזְקוֹ וְלֹא אֶרְפוֹנוּ  
עַד־שֶׁהֵבִיאתִיו אֶל־בֵּית אִמִּי  
וְאֶל־חֲדָר הוֹרְתִי  
הַשְּׁבַעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם  
בְּצִבְאוֹת אוֹ בְּאִילֹת הַשָּׂדֶה  
אִם־תִּעִירוּ וְאִם־תַּעֲזִירוּ אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה  
עַד שֶׁתַּחַפֵּץ

The third occurrence of the adjuration is preceded by a parallel reference to bringing the beloved into the mother's home, followed by the same double refrain employed in 2:6–7:

I would lead you, I would bring you  
Into the house of my mother, she who taught me  
I would give you spiced wine to drink,  
The juice of my pomegranate.  
His left (hand) is under my head  
His right embraces me!  
I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem  
How could you awaken and how could you stir up love  
until it pleases?  
(Song 8:2–4)

אֶנְהַגִּיד אֲבִיָּאָד  
אֶל־בֵּית אִמִּי תִלְמִדִי  
אֶשְׁקֶד מִיַּיִן הָרֶקֶחַ  
מֵעֵסִיס רִמְנִי  
שְׁמָאלוֹ תַּחַת לְרֹאשִׁי  
וְיָמִינוֹ תַּחְבֵּקֵנִי  
הַשְּׁבַעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם  
מִה־תִּעִירוּ וְמִה־תַּעֲזִירוּ אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה  
עַד שֶׁתַּחַפֵּץ

The repetition of the introductory material used for both previous occurrences of the adjuration has an intensifying effect, compounded by the terse rewording of the adjuration itself and the fact that this final occurrence introduces the climactic reflection in 8:6–7, the high point of the entire Song.<sup>283</sup> The positioning of the adjuration, each time at the conclusion of a major poetic unit and closely following a description of intimacy or consummation between the lovers “places it in a climactic position rather than in a developmental one.”<sup>284</sup> Eschelbach has argued that the placement of the adjuration at the climax of three major poetic units, along with its repetition and its content, points to its significance as a vehicle for the Song’s didactic purpose. Together these factors suggest “that the admonition is real and intended as an integral purpose of the Song.”<sup>285</sup>

#### 4.1.2. Structure of the Adjuration

The wording of 2:7 and 3:5, which is identical, will be used as the basis for the structure explicated here (there is a slight variation to the wording at 8:4, discussed under 4.1.3. below). In its first two repetitions, the adjuration takes the form of a promissory oath consisting of two parts. The first part is the authenticating element: a verb of swearing, with the invocation of a sacred entity to guarantee the oath. The second part is the content of the oath itself: the thing the swearer is promising to do or not do. This two-part construction is a standard way to formulate oaths in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>286</sup>

##### Part 1: Authenticating Element

I adjure you (“make you swear”)	<i>Verb of swearing</i>	הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם
Daughters of Jerusalem	<i>Oath-taker</i>	בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם
By gazelles or does of the field	<i>Entity invoked as guarantor of the oath</i>	בְּעֵבְאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילֹת הַשָּׂדֶה

<sup>283</sup> Both the wording of 8:4 and the content of 8:6-7 will be discussed later in the present analysis.

<sup>284</sup> Eschelbach, “Song,” 312–13.

<sup>285</sup> Eschelbach, “Song,” 313.

<sup>286</sup> Blane Conklin, *Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew*, LSAWS 5 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), §1.3. (6-7).

## Part 2: Content of the Oath

That you do not awaken (“if you awaken”) and that you do not stir up (“if you stir up”) love until it pleases

*Content of the oath  
introduced by conditional  
particle*

אִם-תִּעֲרֹר וְאִם-תִּעְזְרֶנּוּ אֶת-הָאֲהָבָה  
עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ

The adjuration to the daughters of Jerusalem is introduced by the verb for swearing, שָׁבַע, which is commonly used in the Hebrew Bible to relate the swearing of oaths in narrative and to make oaths and adjurations in dialogue.<sup>287</sup> There are numerous examples of שָׁבַע in the *hiphil* used for when a person puts another person on oath (as here in the Song) including Gen 24:3; 50:5–6, 25; Exod 13:19; Josh 2:17, 20; 1 Sam 20:17; 1 Kgs 2:42; 22:16; Ezra 10:5; Neh 5:12; 13:25 and 2 Chr 18:15; 36:13. Using this verb, the adjuration in the Song is formulated according to a manner that is well-established in the Hebrew Bible. The implications of this will be discussed below in the exegesis, as will the second component of the authenticating element, the guarantor (the gazelles and does of the field).

In the second part of the oath in Song 2:7 and 3:5, the content is introduced with a conditional particle, “if,” without an apodosis to resolve it. Literally, the oath can be translated “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or does of the field, if you awaken and if you stir up love before it is willing...[apodosis elided].” In his exhaustive study of oaths in the Hebrew Bible, Conklin notes that ellipsis of this type is common, either due to truncation of familiar formulas over time, or to avoid explicitly discussing the consequences of breaking an oath and potentially invoking taboo (perhaps religious or profane) language.<sup>288</sup> For example, the English colloquialism “so help me” leaves out the name of the one being called upon to help (God). It is possible a physical gesture could accompany the oath to replace the explicit verbal apodosis, or that it was simply elided and the hearer expected to understand. In a formula such as the one employed in the Song, in the absence of a consequence to fulfil the condition introduced by אִם, the protasis is usually translated as a negative imperative: simply, “do not.”

<sup>287</sup> Conklin, *Oath Formulas*, §2.3. (18-22).

<sup>288</sup> Conklin, *Oath Formulas*, §1.3. (4).



The employment of a standard oath-making formula indicates the seriousness of the woman's charge to the daughters of Jerusalem. The significance of the specific vocabulary used in the oath will be discussed as it arises below.

#### 4.1.3. Variation in Song 8:4

Song 8:4 repeats the adjuration from 2:7 and 3:5 with two alterations to the wording. The first is the omission of the portion of the oath invoking a guarantor (בְּעֵבְרוֹתָי אִין בְּאֵילֵי הַשָּׁדֶה). The second is that the content of the oath is introduced by the interrogative particle מָה instead of the conditional particle אִם.

Pope considers that the excision of the guarantor of the oath (the gazelles and does of the field) "is appropriate to the change from adjuration to prohibition, since there is no place in the prohibition for reference to the objects by which an adjuration is made."<sup>289</sup> However, to describe this iteration of the adjuration as a prohibition is an oversimplification. מָה does function as a negation elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible; Bloch and Bloch identify 1 Kgs 12:16 ("What portion do we have in David?") and Job 31:1 ("How then could I gaze at a virgin?") as examples.<sup>290</sup> However, the negatory sense in such instances (as in Song 8:4) is effected by way of a rhetorical question where the expected answer is negative; for example, to "What portion do we have in David?" the expected answer is "None." While this device results in negation, such rhetorical questions are not properly characterised as simple prohibitions, wherein the expected formula would be to express the prohibited action as a volitive verb with a particle of negation.

The omission of the guarantor portion of the oath results in a terseness which conveys a heightened sense of urgency. The woman does not trouble to introduce the oath with its entire formula, which has been repeated twice already, but cuts straight to the crucial content. Similarly, the deviation from the conventional formula of using אִם as an introductory particle draws special attention to the content of the oath. Employing the interrogative particle מָה instead intensifies the rhetorical force. In 8:4 the woman's

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<sup>289</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 661.

<sup>290</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 211. Bloch and Bloch also include Prov 31:2, but it has been excluded here as it is not a particularly fitting example. The rhetorical question in Prov 31:2 functions differently than those in 1 Kgs 12:16 and Job 31:1, so its inclusion muddies the analysis.

exhortation to the daughters is best translated “how could you?” or even “why would you?” (awaken and stir up love before it pleases).

The difference between the former and latter wordings of the adjuration is not best characterised as a shift from adjuration to prohibition, but as an increase in the intensity of the adjuration. Both the omission of the guarantor and the employment of *מָה* instead of *אֵם* contribute to the urgency of the final adjuration. In 2:7 and 3:5 the seriousness of the oath is indicated by the woman’s use of an established oath formula and her circumlocutionary invocation of Yahweh of Hosts, God Almighty (as will be discussed below). In 8:4 the truncated formula and the unexpected transformation of the oath into a rhetorical demand emphasise the importance of the content and the pressing need for the daughters to commit themselves to it.

## 4.2. Exegetical Analysis

### 4.2.1. “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and does of the field”

As noted above, the adjuration is introduced by the standard verb for swearing, used in the *hiphil* to put another person on oath. The employment of this verb indicates that “the refrain is weightier than advice.”<sup>291</sup> Conklin notes that usually, “the explicit use of a verb of swearing in the appropriate context puts the oath-taker in a legally binding state, subject to the penalties and sanctions for breaking an oath,” but in the context of the Song it is not clear that there is a legal commitment on view.<sup>292</sup> Nevertheless, that the woman would have the daughters “swear” indicates the seriousness of the oath she is placing upon them. An adjuration is not a suggestion or even a request; it is tantamount to a command, bound by a promise, with the expectation of negative consequences if the oath is broken. As Walsh insists of the adjuration in the Song, “it is not optional. We and the daughters of Jerusalem are not meant to take it or leave it.”<sup>293</sup>

The seriousness of the adjuration is upheld by the invocation of a third party to guarantee the oath. The act of swearing may typically be authenticated by invoking a

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<sup>291</sup> Walsh, *Exquisite Desire*, 180.

<sup>292</sup> Conklin, *Oath Formulas*, §2.3 (18).

<sup>293</sup> Walsh, *Exquisite Desire*, 180.

precious or sacred entity, such as a god or the life of a loved one. In the Hebrew Bible, the most common entity invoked to guarantee an intention is *חַי־יְהוָה*, “the life of Yahweh” (e.g. 1 Sam 19:6; 1 Kgs 1:29; Job 27:2–4); Yahweh himself uses *חַי־אֲנִי* to authenticate his promises by his own existence (e.g. Num 14:21; Isa 49:18; Ezek 5:11), since there is nothing higher or more precious than God by which God himself can swear. The practice of non-Israelite nations swearing by their own deities is acknowledged in Jeremiah when Yahweh promises to adopt foreigners into the nation of Israel if they change their ways and learn “to swear by my name...even as they taught my people to swear by Baal” (Jer 12:16).

Since an oath is authenticated by the weightiness of the entity to which the swearer appeals, it requires that the thing invoked has a certain value. The fact that in Song 2:7 and 3:5 the woman calls on the daughters of Jerusalem to guarantee their oath by “gazelles and does of the field” has puzzled interpreters, due to the fact that it is not immediately clear what attributes gazelles and does might have that qualify them (i.e. make them precious or sacred enough) to guarantee an oath.

A number of solutions have been proposed. Steinmann summarises the various suggestions that were current at the time of his writing under three categories, which are adopted here.<sup>294</sup> The first category of suggestion covers those based on the assertion that it is appropriate, in the pastoral setting of the Song, for objects or animals in the immediate natural environment to be invoked as witnesses to the oath. This takes seriously that oaths require authentication by an appeal to another party. However, the selection of gazelles and does appears arbitrary and their qualifications for authenticating an oath are not explained. Steinmann points out that oaths in the Hebrew Bible always call on something superior to attest them, usually a deity, but in a few cases a superior human (e.g., the life of Pharaoh in Gen 42:15; the life of Eli the high priest in 1 Sam 1:26) and as noted above, God swears by himself since he has no superior. “In biblical terms, it is difficult, if not impossible to construe gazelles and does as superior to any human.”<sup>295</sup>

The second category of suggestions includes those that attribute symbolic significance to the gazelles and does in the context of the Song. For example, the creatures have been taken to represent the woman’s beauty and virility; the freedom of wild gazelles

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<sup>294</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann, “Gazelles, Does and Flames: (De)Limiting Love in Song of Songs,” *JESOT* 2.1 (2013): 28–29.

<sup>295</sup> Steinmann, “Gazelles,” 28.

and does to be left undisturbed (as the adjuration warns against disturbing love); or the natural rhythm of mating seasons, symbolising that humans should wait for God's timing in matters of love.<sup>296</sup> This category of interpretations suffers from the opposite issue to the first; that is, it finds a meaning for the gazelles and does in the context of the Song, but attenuates their role as authenticators for the oath in favour of emphasising the representation of some motif related to the themes of the poem. This type of interpretation does not explain why gazelles and does are qualified to authenticate the oath, since it does not endow them with value or superiority compared to the humans who swear by them. The significance of the oath *as an oath* is diminished.

The third category of suggestions are those that, by understanding the gazelles and does as a symbol for a superior entity, take into account the "frequent and even expected calling upon God as witness to an oath," making this type of solution the most preferable.<sup>297</sup> Some interpreters have understood "gazelles and does" as stand-ins for pagan deities; for example, Keel proposes that gazelles and does are associated with the goddess of love, citing art from Syrian, Ugaritic and Egyptian traditions that depict love goddesses alongside deer and goats, arguing that "one does not swear by the deity itself but by its attributes—in this case, by the shy, agile creatures of the wild, who are potent with love."<sup>298</sup> One issue this raises is the complex question of the Song's composition and how a text that invokes a pagan goddess could plausibly have come to be canonised as Hebrew Scripture. Regardless, this question is made redundant by the second issue, which is that an explanation that accounts for the presence of gazelles and does alone does not account for the strangeness of the specific wording used—they are not merely gazelles and does, but gazelles and does *of the field*. Given that the adjectival construction *הַשָּׂדֶה* is usually used in the Hebrew Bible to denote wild animals (as opposed to domestic), and occasionally to differentiate between earthbound creatures and birds of the sky, it is tautological to describe gazelles and does as being "of the field"—they are never domesticated, nor do they fly. The "nonsensical" inclusion of *הַשָּׂדֶה* should therefore be regarded as an "important textual clue."<sup>299</sup> A

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<sup>296</sup> Steinmann, "Gazelles," 27.

<sup>297</sup> Steinmann, "Gazelles," 29.

<sup>298</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 94.

<sup>299</sup> Steinmann, "Gazelles," 32.

satisfactory interpretation must rely on the specific sound patterns of the entire phrase, **בַּעֲבֹאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילֹת הַשָּׂדֶה**.

A majority of scholars now follow the suggestion originally proposed by Gordis, who recognised **בַּעֲבֹאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילֹת הַשָּׂדֶה** (“by the gazelles or does of the field”) as a circumlocutive way of invoking the name of God.<sup>300</sup> **עֲבָאוֹת** (the feminine plural of “gazelle”) is identical to the word for hosts in the expression “Yahweh of Hosts” (**יְהוָה עֲבָאוֹת**, which appears 259 times in the Hebrew Bible), and **אֵילֵי הַשָּׂדֶה** is phonetically similar to **אֵל שַׁדַּי**, “God Almighty” (Gen 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 48:3; Exod 6:3; Ezek 10:5). To hear **בַּעֲבֹאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילֹת הַשָּׂדֶה** as an invocation of the Israelite God accounts for the insertion of **הַשָּׂדֶה** to provide the pattern of sounds required to complete the circumlocutive phrase. This solution takes seriously the nature of the introduction to the adjuration as the authenticating element of an oath and the need for a superior entity to guarantee the content, conforming to the way that “most oaths held the expectation that God would be invoked as a witness.”<sup>301</sup> It also eliminates the problem of accounting for the invocation of a non-Israelite goddess of love in a text that has been canonised as sacred in the Hebrew tradition, and the quest for an elusive *Sitz im Leben* that would explain such an invocation. For these reasons, the preferred understanding of the phrase **בַּעֲבֹאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילֹת הַשָּׂדֶה** is that it stands in for the authenticating entity, “by the hosts and by God Almighty.”

The woman appeals to the daughters of Jerusalem to swear to her by the God of Israel. Specifically, the circumlocution invokes “Yahweh of Hosts,” a title associated with the worship of Yahweh at Jerusalem and with the Ark of the Covenant, an association which strengthens and is strengthened by the hypothesis that the daughters of Jerusalem stand in for a population of citizens culturally associated with the capital.<sup>302</sup> The circumlocution further invokes God Almighty,” the ancient name by which he revealed himself to Abraham,

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<sup>300</sup> Gordis, *Song*, 27–28; see also for e.g. Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 110; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 133; Longman, *Song*, 116; Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 685; Exum, *Song*, 119.

<sup>301</sup> Steinmann, “Gazelles,” 32.

<sup>302</sup> The title “Yahweh of Hosts” appears first in association with Shiloh, the major centre for worship before the temple was built at Jerusalem (1 Sam 1:3, 11) and with the presence of the Ark there (4:4). When David brings the Ark to Jerusalem an explicit association is made between the name “Yahweh of Hosts” and the Ark (2 Sam 6:2), then David blesses the people in this name to seal the Ark’s move to Jerusalem and the establishment of a new site of worship (6:18). The title is also used throughout the inauguration of the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam 17 (7:8, 26, 27). The three occurrences of the term in Chronicles are associated with David taking Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 11:9) and with the Davidic promises (1 Chronicles 17:7, 24).

Isaac, and Jacob, patriarchs of the Israelite faith (Exod 6:3). The two titles together encompass patriarchal and Davidic associations, allowing the authoritative weight of the lengthy history of Israelite faith (and Yahweh's faithfulness) to stand behind the adjuration in the Song. That the adjuration warrants the invocation of this God in these terms to guarantee it alerts the reader to the vital importance of the oath.

#### 4.2.2. "That you do not awaken and you do not stir up Love until it pleases"

The content of the oath, crucially important as it presents itself to be, is enigmatic. As recently as 2010, Gault surmised that "while there is general agreement that these verses [2:7; 3:5; 8:4] are vitally important to both the arrangement and meaning of the Song, widespread debate still exists over the function of the refrain within the book's literary structure as well as its intended meaning."<sup>303</sup> The woman's exhortation that the daughters "do not awaken and do not stir up love until it pleases" gives rise to several questions: What does it mean to awaken and stir up love? What specifically does the Song mean by *הַאֲהִבָּה*, "love"? What are the conditions indicated by *עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ* ("until it pleases"), that is, what does it mean for love to be "pleased," and how does one know when this occurs? The following exegesis will seek to provide answers to these questions.

##### i. What it means to not awaken or stir up Love

Andruska's comprehensive survey of previous interpretations of the adjuration confirms that the meaning of the refrain is far from settled. Her analysis synthesises the body of scholarly opinion into ten options (building on the eight proposed by Gault).<sup>304</sup> According to Andruska's exhaustive summary, it has been proposed that the adjuration could mean:

- 1) not to allow Solomon and his court ladies to draw the woman's affection away from her shepherd lover;
- 2) not to force love but let it develop naturally like the woman and Solomon did;

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<sup>303</sup> Gault, "Admonition," 162.

<sup>304</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 44–45.

- 3) not to arouse love with artificial stimulants but allow it to develop naturally;
- 4) the man cautions the daughters not to incite “love” until it desires in the sense of “until it naturally stiffens physically”;
- 5) not to disturb the lovers’ lovemaking until they are finished;
- 6) not to awaken one of the lovers until he/she pleases;
- 7) not to become sexually active until the proper time, which is marriage;
- 8) not to awaken love until ready for its powerful and negative effects;
- 9) one cannot awaken love or force it prematurely since love has a will of its own and shows up when it desires as an irresistible and overwhelming force; or
- 10) not to rush love prematurely but allow it to blossom naturally as it did for the lovers in the Song.”<sup>305</sup>

Andruska’s own suggestion (which I will refer to as option 11) is that it means “do not arouse or awaken love until the type of love depicted in the Song is present.”<sup>306</sup>

Momentarily leaving aside the interpreters’ presuppositions regarding which characters are involved in the adjuration and how their roles function in the Song, the eleven suggestions above can be grouped according to how each understands the sense of the verb עור (“awaken”/“stir up”), what is indicated by האֶהֱבָה (“love”) and the meaning of the phrase עַד שֶׁתִּהְיֶה פֶּנִּי (“until it pleases”), as follows:

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<sup>305</sup> The wording used in this list is taken verbatim from Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 44–58; in the footnotes for each option in the table I have included a mix of Andruska’s sources and my own.

<sup>306</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 59–60.

עור	האִהְבָּה	עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ	
[do not] Awaken	Being “in love”	With the wrong person (Solomon)	Option 1 <sup>307</sup>
		Until it happens naturally	Option 2, <sup>308</sup> 10 <sup>309</sup>
		Until you are ready for love’s power	Option 8 <sup>310</sup>
		Until love shows up – it’s futile to try	Option 9 <sup>311</sup>
		Until the type of love depicted in the Song is present	Option 11 (Andruska)
	Sexual arousal	Until it happens naturally	Option 3, <sup>312</sup> 4 <sup>313</sup>
	The lover (sleeping)	Until they are ready	Option 6 <sup>314</sup>
	Sexual activity	Until marriage	Option 7 <sup>315</sup>
[do not] Disturb (interrupt)	Sexual activity	While it is happening OR Until the lovers are satisfied	Option 5 <sup>316</sup>

The first question to resolve is the meaning of עור. Organising the options as above shows that by far the most common understanding of עור is that it means to awaken

<sup>307</sup> Ginsburg, *Song*; Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*; Provan is, as Andruska notes, another modern proponent of the three-character drama, but he also notes that “because of the devastating and overpowering results of love, [the daughters] should ensure that it is awakened only when the timing and circumstances are right,” demonstrating some resonance with option 8. Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 286.

<sup>308</sup> Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 286; Jack S. Deere, “Song of Songs,” *BKC* (1985): 1015.

<sup>309</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 137; Longman agrees that the “right time” for love is when it blossoms naturally, but relates the reason for the warning to the powerful, potentially negative effects of love, an idea he credits to Schwab (option 8); Longman, *Song*, 60–61, 115–16; Bloch and Bloch understand the adjuration to refer to erotic arousal but rather than applying the timing to marriage (cf. option 7) they speak of a “proper time of ripening”; Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 152.

<sup>310</sup> Longman, *Song*, 60–61, 115–16; Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 286–87; George M. Schwab, *The Song of Songs’ Cautionary Message Concerning Human Love*, SBLit 41 (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

<sup>311</sup> Exum, *Song*, 118–19.

<sup>312</sup> Andruska attributes this option to Pope. However, Pope more precisely claims that the woman does call for aphrodisiacs (367) but that they should not be applied until love “is willing” (366). See Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 48–49; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 366–68.

<sup>313</sup> Daniel Grossberg, “Sexual Desire: Abstract and Concrete,” *HS* 22 (1981): 59–60.

<sup>314</sup> A. Robert and R. Tournay, *Le Cantique Des Cantiques: Traduction et Commentaire*, EBib (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1963), 108.



something previously dormant. A minority take it to mean the opposite, that is interrupting and stopping something that is in progress. The second question to address is the specific meaning of אֶהְבָּה. Four options have been proposed: the emotional state of being in love, sexual arousal, sexual activity or one of the lovers themselves. Thirdly, by far the most contentious part of the adjuration is the meaning of עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ. This will be explored last, in view of the conclusions made regarding עוֹר and אֶהְבָּה, as well as the preliminary conclusions of this study regarding the significance of Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem.

The plainest meaning of עוֹר is to “awaken” or “rouse,” that is, to activate or excite something that was previously dormant. In the Hebrew Bible it is used to describe inciting people or nations to battle (e.g. Isa 13:17; Jer 6:22; 50:9, 41, Ezek 23:22), and also, for example, to speak of starting up the music of instruments (Ps 57:9[8 Eng.]; 108:3[2]), or waking from sleep (Zech 4:1; Ps 73:20). The broad sense of activating something dormant can be coherently applied to the rousing of love, whether “love” is understood as an emotional state, sexual arousal, or lovemaking, and this is the sense that has been adopted by a majority of interpreters of the Song.

An alternative nuance for עוֹר has been proposed. Gordis, while admitting that תַּעֲרִירוֹ and תַּעֲוִירוֹ most naturally mean “rouse, stir up love,” argued that it was unlikely that the Song warned against stirring up love since “the context implies that she is already experiencing passionate love in all its fullness,” and instead the verbs were best translated “disturb, i.e. interfere with love.”<sup>317</sup> He translated the whole instruction: “disturb not, nor interrupt our love, until it be satiated.”<sup>318</sup>

The problem with Gordis’ suggestion is that there is no evidence for this definition of עוֹר falling within its usual semantic range. In addition to the uses cited above, it is used of stirring up a strong emotion (Isa 42:13; Ps 78:38; 2 Chr 21:16), wielding a weapon (2 Sam 23:18; Isa 10:26; Zech 13:7; 1 Chr 11:11, 20), (of God) stirring up somebody’s spirit (Jer 51:11; Hag 1:14; Ezra 1:1, 5; 1 Chr 5:26; 36:22), or used to call a person into action (Judg 5:12; Isa 51:9, 17; 52:1; Joel 4:7[3:7]; Job 17:8). In the Psalms it is used imperatively to exhort God to stir himself to act on behalf of his people (Ps 7:7[6]; 35:23; 44:24; 59:5). It

<sup>315</sup> Gledhill, *Song*, 129; Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 355–56; Garrett and House, *Song*, 154–55; Fredericks and Estes, *Song*, 323–24; O’Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 47, 60–61; Duguid, *Song*, 31.

<sup>316</sup> Gordis, *Song*, 82; Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 109–10; Gault, “Admonition.”

<sup>317</sup> Gordis, *Song*, 82.

<sup>318</sup> Gordis, *Song*, 51.

describes the stirring of a tempest (Jer 24:32), Leviathan (Job 3:8; Job 41:2[10]) and even Sheol (Isa 14:9), the futility of inciting an idol to action (Hab 2:19) and the impossibility of waking from death (Job 14:12). Pope summarises: “The state of inactivity from which one is aroused need not be sleep; actually sleep is rarely mentioned[...]The activities to which one is aroused are usually those that require extra effort, especially strenuous endeavours like war, work, and love.”<sup>319</sup>

עור appears two additional times in the Song outside of the adjuration, both times with the sense of rousing something dormant: in 5:2, as the woman dreams, her body sleeps but her heart is “awake” (עָרָה); in 8:5 עור appears with a sexual connotation, as the woman describes how she “aroused” her beloved under the apple tree. Evidently, the verb is applied fluidly in a wide variety of contexts, but it exclusively has the sense of activating something dormant and never carries the opposite sense, of stopping something active (as would be the sense of disturbing a couple making love). “Disturb” is only an appropriate translation of עור insofar as it carries the sense of disturbing something inactive into action, e.g., waking somebody from sleep.<sup>320</sup>

In support of Gordis, Gault argues that “poets often stretch a term’s semantic range in figurative language” and that Gordis’ translation is acceptable as “figurative language consistent with the poet’s metaphoric depiction of sexual activity.”<sup>321</sup> This argument is difficult to disprove, but its substance is not particularly decisive; the possibility of poetic imagery cannot be excluded, but nor is there any compelling evidence within the Song or elsewhere for the suggested use of עור. Furthermore, Gordis’ deviation from the usual sense of עור is motivated by his objection that it makes no sense for the woman to warn against stirring up love, since she is clearly already experiencing it. This unnecessarily conflates her experience of love with that of the daughters of Jerusalem. If the woman has already stirred up love within herself, that does not disallow her from admonishing the daughters not to do the same in their own situations. It therefore does not seem necessary to deviate from the usual sense of עור, nor is there substantial enough evidence to warrant doing so. Based on

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<sup>319</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 386.

<sup>320</sup> For further refutations of the translation of עור as “disturb” see Exum, *Song*, 118; Garrett and House, *Song*, 152.

<sup>321</sup> Brian P. Gault, “A ‘Do Not Disturb’ Sign? Reexamining the Adjuration Refrain in Song of Songs,” *JSOT* 36.1 (2011): 102; Gault, “Admonition,” 180–81.

the use of עור in other Hebrew texts including the Song, it is best to understand it within the usual range of “rousing something inactive.”

ii. “Love”

Various options for interpreting the adjuration as a whole, and the phrase עד שתִּהְפֹּךְ, have relied on different understandings of what is meant by אֶהְבָּה, “love.” Since love is universal to all cultures, interpreters may fall into the trap of assuming a universally shared understanding of “love” and proceeding on the basis of their own generalisation, skipping the step of examining exactly what love means in the context of the adjuration and the Song. Broadly, views regarding the meaning of “love” in the adjuration fall into two camps: it is taken to refer either to sexual activity (under the discussion of which I will also include sexual arousal), or to the vaguely-defined state of “being in love.”

An outlying suggestion will be dealt with first, namely that הָאֶהְבָּה in the adjuration refers to one of the lovers themselves. Robert and Tournay argue that the verb הִפִּיךְ assumes a subject capable of will, and that הָאֶהְבָּה in the adjuration must be a case of *abstractum pro concreto* wherein “love” refers to a person, taken to be the woman (they posit that the same occurs at Song 7:7[6]).<sup>322</sup> However, Robert and Tournay’s objection that הִפִּיךְ demands an animate subject has proved no obstacle to the vast majority of commentators, who understand the subject to be the abstract concept of love. Their translation of the verse (“n’éveillez pas, ne réveillez pas la bien-aimée, avant l’heure de son bon plaisir!”) makes little sense in the immediate context of the poem, which is neither primarily concerned with her sleeping nor gives any hint as to why it would be a problem to wake her prematurely.<sup>323</sup> From context, a warning not to disturb the woman from sleep is not intelligible as the key didactic statement of the Song. Instead, it relies heavily on Robert and Tournay’s allegorical approach to interpretation, which reads the woman as a symbol for Israel, and on the parallels they divine on this basis between Song 2:7 (and 3:5; 8:4) and Isa 51:17 and 52:1.

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<sup>322</sup> Robert and Tournay, *Cantique*, 108.

<sup>323</sup> There is a reference in 5:2 to the woman being asleep (and dreaming) but this is not in proximity to any occurrences of the adjuration, so the brief instance of her sleeping appears unrelated to the warning. To use the scene in 5:2-8 as justification that the repeated adjuration is a warning to her beloved not to wake her would require an unwarranted and unprecedented centering of this passage as the context for deciphering the didactic message of the Song overall.

Moreover, reading the adjuration this way requires that the man is the speaker who warns against waking up the woman. (Besides the fact that Tournay and Robert explicitly assign the roles this way in their discussion of 2:7, the feminine verb תחפץ implies a feminine subject, an indication against the speaker being the woman warning against waking up the man.)<sup>324</sup> This is problematic because the Song is otherwise framed as a conversation between the woman and the daughters. I agree with Andruska that it is highly unlikely the man is the speaker of 2:7 on the basis that “this would require a discontinuity in speaker from the woman who speaks in the surrounding verses” and that “nowhere else in the Song does the man interact with the women of Jerusalem.”<sup>325</sup>

Given all of the above, there is little warrant for understanding אֶהְבָּה as referring to a person. The preferred option is to understand it as meaning, straightforwardly, “love.” However, as noted above, there are two main views regarding what is meant by “love” in this context: either sexual “love” (i.e., the act of making love) or the emotional state of “being in love.”

It is understandable that many interpreters have opted for the former, given the erotic overtones of the Song; the ideal love relationship depicted is undoubtedly a sexual one. (While a variety of views exist as to whether the romance in the Song is consummated, the overt presence of sexual attraction is universally recognised.) Among the interpretations that take the אֶהְבָּה in the adjuration as sexual, some restrict the meaning to refer specifically to physical arousal (options 3 and 4 above). Usually, אֶהְבָּה is the general word for affection from a person towards another person or thing and has neither exclusively romantic nor sexual connotations, nor is its use usually as narrow as referring to physical arousal. This meaning cannot be ruled out based on typical usage alone, but it is not precedented. Perhaps the closest extant use of אֶהְבָּה is when it occasionally describes the sexual *desire* of one person for another, such as Amnon’s lust for Tamar in 2 Sam 13, but this is not an exact match for the concept of physical sexual *arousal* required by the interpretative options that understand the adjuration as warning against the use of aphrodisiacs (option 3) or of inciting physical love before the man’s member has stiffened (option 4). Moreover, there is nothing else in the Song to indicate that “artificial” arousal is

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<sup>324</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 53.

<sup>325</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 53.

a topic of significance. Andruska critiques Pope's argument that the woman calling for aphrodisiacs (as he understands "raisin-cakes" and "apples") in 2:5 is evidence that similar stimulants are on view in 2:7, because the contradiction between calling for them in one breath and warning against them in the next makes Pope's interpretation of 2:7 untenable. Similarly, there is little to support the view that the adjuration warns against inciting love artificially before the man's arousal awakens naturally, because the text never speaks in terms of the categories of "natural" or "artificial." Additionally, when Grossberg argues for this view he assumes that the man is the speaker in 2:7 (speaking to the daughters of male physical arousal), the grammatical difficulty of which has already been noted.<sup>326</sup>

The other option for understanding אֶהְבָּה in the realm of sexual love is that it refers to lovemaking. As noted above, אֶהְבָּה is a generic word for affection and rarely, if ever means "making love." There are two possible exceptions in Proverbs. Proverbs 5:19 uses אֶהְבָּה of physical love for one's wife: "let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be intoxicated always in her love." Proverbs 7:18 recounts an invitation of the adulteress to the young man to spend the night in her bed: "let us take our fill of love (דִּדִּים) til morning; let us delight ourselves with love (אֶהְבָּה)." Here אֶהְבָּה is placed in parallel with דִּדִּים, another word for "love" that more often refers to physical love, and in the plural (as it is in Prov 7:18) might appropriately be rendered "caresses" (cf. Song 1:2, 4; 4:10). A third possible exception is in Jer 2:33, which describes Israel as seeking אֶהְבָּה in the context of berating her for infidelity to Yahweh; in the immediate context, Jeremiah uses the metaphor of "whoring" for the people forsaking Yahweh and worshipping foreign gods (2:20; 3:1–11). These passages provide a precedent for אֶהְבָּה referring to the act of making love.

However, "lovemaking" is not the usual connotation of אֶהְבָּה, which is used much more often as a generic term for "love." While it is apparent from the examples above that "lovemaking" can fall within the semantic range of אֶהְבָּה, these occasional instances are decided on the basis of significant evidence in the immediate context. Therefore, understanding אֶהְבָּה as sexual activity in Song 2:7 (3:5; 8:4) should only be accepted if warranted by the immediate literary context. When the immediate literary context of the adjuration (i.e. the content of the Song) is examined, it becomes apparent that אֶהְבָּה in the Song includes lovemaking, but is not limited to the physical act.

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<sup>326</sup> Grossberg, "Sexual Desire," 59; Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 49.

While it is common for interpreters to understand אֶהְבָּה in the adjuration to be referring specifically to sexual activity, those who hold this position typically arrive at this conclusion from their interpretation of עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ to mean something along the lines of “until the time is right,” and the presupposition that the “right time” for “love” is marriage, leading to the conclusion that the adjuration warns against pre-marital sexual activity.<sup>327</sup> This view is based on assumptions about sex and marriage imported from elsewhere in Hebrew and Christian Scripture rather than on the immediate context of the adjuration. Though the presupposition that marriage is the biblically affirmed context for sex is legitimate, the conclusion that this is the main concern of the adjuration is assumed and not reached with direct appeal to the content of the Song of Songs.<sup>328</sup> For example, Garrett paraphrases the adjuration to fit the assumption, without specific justification from the text: “Her appeal is that they not awaken the passions of love until those passions are ready...Put another way, she is telling them to avoid sexual experience until the proper time.”<sup>329</sup> This presumes that love in the adjuration refers to “sexual experience,” and that “the exhortation can only mean that they should avoid promiscuity and save their virginity for marriage,” although the woman never speaks of promiscuity or virginity.<sup>330</sup> Similarly, Duguid states that the song “clearly affirms the necessity and wisdom of delaying sexual activity,” without presenting any clear evidence from the Song to this effect, and in spite of the fact that the couple in the Song demonstrate no interest in delaying their sexual relationship. He dismisses the body of scholars who suggest that the Song affirms love and sex without reference to the social convention of marriage, by insisting that they miss “what is as obvious as an elephant in broad daylight: that for all their eagerness to reach the consummation of their relationship, there are significant obstacles along the road. It is possible to stir up love too soon. There are little foxes that could harm their budding romance. Sometimes true love has to wait. What are they waiting for? Marriage, of course!”<sup>331</sup> This does not engage with other possibilities that have been proposed for the

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<sup>327</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 154–55; Fredericks and Estes, *Song*, 323–24; O’Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 60–61; Duguid, *The Song*, 45–47.

<sup>328</sup> Gault, “Admonition,” 175: “the real issue is how proponents of this view justify the leap to marriage. While abstinence outside of marriage could certainly be defended from a biblical theology of sexuality...is there support for this view inside the Song?”

<sup>329</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 154.

<sup>330</sup> The only people who display any concern for promiscuity and virginity are the woman’s brothers in 8:8-9, which will be discussed below.

<sup>331</sup> Duguid, *The Song*, 155.

“obstacles” he lists, nor the fact that some of the same evidence has been used to make the point that the couple have *not* waited for marriage (see below); the entire argument is based on a presupposition Duguid sees as “obvious,” but which is not necessarily so. Hess presents a more tempered view, acknowledging that while Israelite and later Christian readers may presume marriage as a precondition for sex, this is never made explicit in the Song, which indicates only that “the full appreciation of the joys of physical love can happen only when love comes at the appropriate time with the partner that love chooses.”<sup>332</sup> Hess interprets this, for Christians, as meaning that sex should wait for marriage, but he helpfully separates this application from what is explicitly stated in the Song.

There are three challenges to the assumptions which underlie the interpretation that the adjuration warns against sex before marriage. Firstly, the Song does not appear to be concerned with marriage in a conventional sense. Although it is traditional to assume that the Song depicts a marital relationship, there are many instances in which the couple in the Song do not behave like a married couple: the woman is apparently still under the control of her brothers (1:6; 8:8–10), her beloved peeps through her window to speak to her (2:9), at night she dreams of him knocking at her door (5:2) and goes out into the streets to seek him (3:1–4; 5:6–7), and she wishes that she were able to show him affection openly in public (8:1). None of this makes sense if the couple is married or even formally betrothed.<sup>333</sup> The couple are not depicted as having a shared home: she speaks of bringing him to her mother’s house (3:4; 8:2) and of making love to him in the countryside (1:16–17; 7:12–13[11–12 Eng.]). Their closest brush with marriage is that the woman is called “bride”—not wife—and even then she is “a bride,” not “my bride.” Uniquely among all the terms of endearment in the Song, “bride” is the only word that the beloved uses for the woman without the first-person possessive pronoun, which is suggestive that while she may be styled as *a* bride, she is not necessarily *his* bride.<sup>334</sup> The fact that the couple does not seem to be married does not rule out the probability that the Song presupposes that marriage is the appropriate context for sexual activity. Indeed, it is difficult to find a scholar who disagrees that marriage is the prescribed context for sexual love in the Bible, a truism which

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<sup>332</sup> Hess, *Song*, 83.

<sup>333</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 231; Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 5.

<sup>334</sup> One option, proposed by Athas, is that she is being prepared for marriage to Solomon, and the beloved’s use of the term “bride” is poignant: “Though she is rightly his bride, she has become Solomon’s trophy.” Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 304.

is affirmed even by those who believe that the couple in the Song is *not* married.<sup>335</sup> The point is that the relationship in the Song flourishes without reference to the marital status of the couple or the conventional category of marriage, beyond the fact that context clues suggest they are unmarried. Tribble, Keel and Bloch have all noted independently that the Song makes no reference to the patriarchal family, the obligation to bear children or any other issues related to the Old Testament concept of marriage.<sup>336</sup> Rather, “love for the sake of love is its message.”<sup>337</sup> The Song’s lack of interest in marriage diminishes the likelihood that the purpose of the adjuration, the Song’s key didactic statement, is to do with the timing of sexual activity in relation to the formality of marriage.

A related challenge is that the Song is not primarily concerned with affirming chastity. Its main interest is what happens to the couple *after* they have begun their relationship, with no reference to whether they were chaste before: “the Song’s lyrics repeatedly depict the satisfaction of passion rather than its restraint.”<sup>338</sup> Indications that they are not able to be together fully and openly (e.g. 3:1–4; 5:2–8; 8:1) are portrayed as unwelcome obstacles to the relationship as it should be. The qualities that are affirmed in the ideal relationship are not to do with delaying its beginning, but with entering it wholeheartedly, perpetuating its commitment, and preserving its exclusivity. Fox sees that “the Song does assume a sexual ethic, but the sexual virtue cherished is not chastity. It is fidelity: unquestioned devotion to one’s lover.”<sup>339</sup> Andruska, who follows Fox in seeing that the lovers in the Song do not appear to be married and that “the Song may not have been written to extol the virtues of chastity or marriage” believes nevertheless that their relationship is both monogamous and exclusive, and that the pursuit of relationships characterised by exclusivity and fidelity is the central concern of the Song.<sup>340</sup> The only people in the Song who demonstrate any concern for the woman’s chastity (or lack of it) are her brothers (8:8–9), which suggests that her chastity is peripheral to the main concern of the Song. The brothers are presented as hostile towards the woman and to the main

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<sup>335</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 12; Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 258.

<sup>336</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 162; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 32; Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 14.

<sup>337</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 162; Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 14: “eros is its own reward.”; cf. Brenner, *Song*, 27: “the love relationship and its consummation is viewed as an end in itself: marriage is not necessarily the ultimate objective.”

<sup>338</sup> Gault, “Reexamining,” 95.

<sup>339</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 315.

<sup>340</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 76.



perspective of the Song as expressed through her eyes, so their possessive stance towards her virginity supports that this issue is superfluous to the concern of the Song rather than in alignment with it. Their concern for preserving her virginity (or the appearance of it) reflects that female virginity in Israelite culture was tied to the social position of the *paterfamilias* and that “a marriageable daughter’s virginity is more than a marker of sexual activity; it is a commodity.”<sup>341</sup> Such a commodification of love as embodied by the brothers and by Solomon is positioned as the antithesis of the Song’s ideal for love. Athas, who believes the couple in the Song take the dramatic step of sleeping together before marriage on the chance that this will allow the woman to marry her beloved instead of being forced into marriage with Solomon, takes her assertion that she has been a “wall” (sexually chaste) in 8:10 to mean that although she has transgressed her brothers’ concept of chastity, “she has been chaste toward [her beloved], for she belongs to him.”<sup>342</sup> Again, it is nowhere suggested that the Song endorses a casual sexual relationship, rather that the issue of sexual activity before marriage is not its primary concern. The supremacy of the love experienced by the woman and her beloved is not shown to lie in the fact that they waited to experience it fully, but in the fact that it is passionately exclusive, in contrast to the polygamy of Solomon. On this understanding, is not that marriage is the precondition for love but rather that the type of love experienced by the woman and her beloved should be the precondition for marriage.

The third challenge is that the adjuration is not necessarily about timing. The grammatical possibilities for the meaning of the prepositional phrase עַד פֶּשַׁע will be discussed in more detail below. For now, it is noted that the adjuration may be understood to be about the quality of love, not just its timing. Furthermore, if the adjuration *is* about timing, that timing is understood by many to be associated with the natural development of love, not with the event of marriage. Athas argues that the Song sees the formality of “marriage” without mutual love and consent as an anathema, and that the adjuration is about the fact that true love (such as that between the woman and her beloved) “should be left to awaken

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<sup>341</sup> Kimberly D. Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 31. Russaw demonstrates that the virginity of a daughter (or in this case a sister, since the woman in the Song apparently has no living father) “is important because challenges to it disrupt patriarchal structures that ascribe prestige vis-à-vis a man’s ability to preserve and enhance those things assigned to him[...]the idea that daughters were supposed to enter marriage as virgins aligns with enhancing the social position of the male head of household” (11).

<sup>342</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 353.

when it sees fit,” because “such a love cannot truly be compelled.”<sup>343</sup> Similarly Keel, who notes that the Song has “nothing to do” with Old Testament expectations of marriage, understands of the adjuration that “the solemn commitment asked of the daughters of Jerusalem draws their attention to the inviolability and sanctity of this relationship, one that should be left to develop according to its own rules.”<sup>344</sup> Bloch and Bloch speak of a “proper time of ripening” for everything, including love, and they take the view that the couple is unmarried, so it follows that the “proper timing” is not dictated by a wedding in their interpretation.<sup>345</sup> Mitchell provides an example of a conservative Christian scholar who assumes that the couple in the Song is married, but not that the adjuration refers to the timing of marriage; he sees that the adjuration may be universally applicable whether the hearer is married or single, “whether they are unmarried virgins (in which case they should wait until marriage to “arouse the Love”), or whether they are married (in which case they should not “arouse the Love” apart from conjugal pleasures with their husbands.)”<sup>346</sup> The latter option acknowledges that the adjuration may be about *whom* to engage in this type of love with, as much as about *when*. Understanding that the adjuration may be applicable to married people allows that waiting for marriage is not its only application, even for those who hold the traditional view that the Song is concerned with affirming chastity outside of marriage.

Based on the material in the Song itself, the lovers’ relationship evidently flourishes independently of the social construct of marriage, the focus of the Song’s affirmation of love has little to do with chastity, and the concern of the adjuration is not conclusively restricted to timing and the formal event of marriage. To construe the Song as an elaborately-illustrated instruction about refraining from sex until marriage does not accord with its content. For an interpretation that understands אֶהְבֶּךָ as sexual activity to be tenable, it should be independently supported by the immediate context in the Song and not rely on the presupposition that the Song of Songs depicts a marriage and that its primary concern is to preserve the chastity of unmarried women.

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<sup>343</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 281.

<sup>344</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 32, 89.

<sup>345</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *Song*, 152.

<sup>346</sup> Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 186.

Examining the immediate context of the adjuration reveals that it is overly simplistic to reduce the relationship in the Song to its physical component (just as it is overly simplistic to reduce infidelity, as in the examples above from Proverbs 7 and Jeremiah 2 for instance, to the act of sex alone). As argued in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the characteristics that are lauded of the ideal love in the Song are its mutuality, intimacy and exclusivity, all qualities that can be applied to the sexual aspect of a relationship, but which also all reveal the intensity of the lovers' respect and affection for one another as they are expressed in the Song. This "love" extends beyond the physical. "The basis of love in the Song is not a vague genital lust but great admiration of the beloved partner."<sup>347</sup> Its depth is revealed in the terms of endearment the lovers use for one another throughout the Song, their declarations of singular devotion (2:16; 6:3; 8:6) and her longing to acknowledge the relationship publicly and bring him into her family home (8:1–2). The context provided by the Song of Songs does not warrant limiting the meaning of אֶהְבֶּה in the adjuration to the physical aspect of a love relationship, since the interaction between the lovers in the Song is not limited to making love. For this reason, it is preferable to take the אֶהְבֶּה in Song 2:7 (3:5; 8:4) as referring to the state of "being in love," acknowledging that this love has a sexual component, but that "love" encompasses more than sex.

If אֶהְבֶּה refers more generally to romantic "love," what precisely is this love like? The task of the interpreter is not to rely on personal preconceptions about "love" but seek to understand how the Song conceptualises it. Andruska's interpretation of the adjuration is the best-developed in this regard, stating that the meaning of "love" in the adjuration should be understood as "the type of love depicted in the Song," which is described based on observations from the text.<sup>348</sup> While I do not concur with all of Andruska's conclusions, her approach provides a sound model for examining what is meant by "love" in the context of the Song. Andruska argues that the "love" referred to in the adjuration is the love on display throughout the Song, and that the climactic description of love in 8:6–7 provides the justification for the warning about love in the adjurations.<sup>349</sup> Therefore, the descriptions of love in the Song itself should be the primary source material for understanding what the adjuration means by "love." This understanding can be supplemented by depictions of אֶהְבֶּה

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<sup>347</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 31.

<sup>348</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 59–78.

<sup>349</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 60–61.

elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, especially in texts which are suggested, by association with Solomon, to have the most relevance to the understanding of love in the Song (e.g. 1 Kings 3–11 and Proverbs 1–9).

The nature of love in the Song has already been described in Chapter 2. The evidence examined thus far has shown that ideal love in the Song occurs in the context of an intimate, mutually balanced, exclusive relationship. The lovers enjoy love for its own sake, engaging in their romance without explicit reference to the institution of marriage or associated concerns like property, virginity or procreation. Their love has a sexual element, but the relationship is not reduced to sex alone, also encompassing emotional intimacy and the lovers' delight in each other's company.

It has also been demonstrated that a second type of "love" functions in the Song as a foil to the primary love relationship. The depiction of Solomon in the Song presents an alternative model for love which is remote, unequal, and polygamous, hearkening to the way Solomon practised love in 1 Kings 3–11. These conclusions have so far been drawn from Song 3:6–11; 8:11–12; 2:7; 3:5; and 8:4. A significant passage which remains to be closely examined is the climactic statement about love and its nature in 8:6–7, which will be analysed in the following chapter, in order to round out the Song's conception of love.

The information about אֶהְבָּה gathered from the Song itself can be checked against depictions of romantic love elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the passages which have been identified as key source material concerning אֶהְבָּה and Solomon. Analysis of this material reveals that אֶהְבָּה, when it pertains to romantic love between a man and a woman, is associated with negative outcomes more often than not. This challenges a common unspoken assumption that "love" is inherently good. According to the Hebrew Bible, results which unfold from a particular instance of אֶהְבָּה depend on *how* the love is enacted and *what* a person loves.

As previously identified, the most pertinent example (to the Song) in the biblical narrative of the potential negative consequences of אֶהְבָּה is in the biography of Solomon, which is bookended by two applications of Solomon's love: his love for Yahweh (1 Kgs 3:3) and his love for foreign women (and, by extension, their gods; 11:1–2). This pair of statements demonstrates that אֶהְבָּה can equally be directed at a worthy object, like Yahweh, or a dangerous one, like foreign women and their idols. It has been seen that

Proverbs 1–9 also displays the dichotomy between loving something excellent (wisdom and the wife of one’s youth), leading to positive outcomes, and loving something dangerous (folly and the temptation to adultery), leading to negative consequences. The promise of אֶהְבָּה on the lips of the adulteress (Prov 7:18) is evidence that “love” can be applied to dangerous objects, with disastrous outcomes.

These observations are supported by other narrative passages outside of 1 Kings, in which there are several examples of אֶהְבָּה leading to terrible consequences. Shechem the Hivite “loves” Dinah, sleeps with her by force and humiliates her (Gen 34:1–2); in retribution for their sister’s defilement, Dinah’s brothers kill Shechem and all his male kin and plunder their city (34:25–29). Similar themes exist in the story of Amnon and Tamar: Amnon “loves” Tamar and rapes her, leaving her utterly bereft; as soon as Amnon’s lust is satisfied his love turns to hate (2 Sam 13:1–19). Tamar’s brother Absalom hates Amnon in consequence and eventually has him killed (13:32). In another well-known story, Samson sets his sights on Delilah, who pretends to return his love and uses her knowledge of him to give him into the hands of the Philistines, in exchange for payment in silver (Judg 16:4–22). In a final example, King Rehoboam loves his second wife more than his first and favours her son, directly contravening a directive in Deut 21:15–21, as a precursor to his complete abandonment of the law of the LORD (2 Chr 11:18–12:1).<sup>350</sup> Such stories, Hauge argues, “show that the poet [of the Song] did not invent the idea of love as an overwhelming and fateful power, and that he was not the first to give literary shape to such feelings.”<sup>351</sup>

In all of the stories just mentioned, אֶהְבָּה fails to embody the qualities of the ideal in the Song. In at least three cases, the power imbalance is tipped equally in favour of the man due to his physical power or his status (Shechem and Dinah, Amnon and Tamar, Rehoboam and his wives). In the case of Samson and Delilah, while Delilah’s feelings for Samson are not stated, her willingness to sell him to the Philistines for 1100 pieces of silver suggests that his love for her is not mutually reciprocated (Judg 16:5–6). Nor do any of the interactions take place in the context of a committed, exclusive relationship like the one upheld as the ideal in the Song.

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<sup>350</sup> The instances cited represent every example of אֶהְבָּה pertaining to romantic/sexual love in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>351</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 9.

The frequency and gravity of these stories outweighs the few examples where אֶהְבָּה leads to a functional union. None of the “happy” marriages and resulting families recorded in the Hebrew Bible are unmarred by interpersonal conflict (see Isaac and Rebekah, Gen 24:25:19–26:11; Jacob and Rachel (and Leah), Gen 29:16–35; David and Michal, 1 Sam 18:20–28; 2 Sam 6:16–23). The only instance where אֶהְבָּה explicitly functions in service of a positive outcome is in the book of Esther, where the king’s love for Esther above the other women in his harem puts Esther in a position to exert her influence for the good of her people. (Of course, the outcome is less positive for the ousted Queen Vashti.) However, in this latter example the relationship is neither exclusive nor equally balanced, nor does it depict genuine love for its own sake, without external agendas, as the lovers enjoy in the Song. In fact, the ideal love depicted in the Song is unmatched anywhere else in the Hebrew canon. In this sense, Rabbi Akiva’s estimation of the Song as the “holy of holies” is apt. The account of love in the Song rises above the Hebrew Bible’s disturbing stories of rape and exploitation, and even the pedestrian accounts of genuine love (with all its imperfections), to exist in a sublime realm of its own.

The full picture of love in the Song will be complete with the exegesis of 8:6–7 in the following chapter. The Song holds back this piece of the puzzle until near the end of the poem, and the adjurations to the daughters are all made before the final word on love is given. Accordingly, the exegesis of the adjuration will move forward with the data gathered so far about אֶהְבָּה, with the expectation that the subsequent exegesis of 8:6–7 will further enrich and clarify the conclusions of the present chapter. For now, the pertinent conclusion is that there are two competing examples of love in the Song, the ideal of the two lovers and the antithesis embodied by Solomon, and that this dichotomy accords with the presence of positive and negative examples of אֶהְבָּה throughout the Hebrew canon.

### iii. “Until it pleases”

The concept of “love being pleased” is the most cryptic notion in the entire refrain, and as evidenced by the table above, the meaning of the phrase עַד שֶׁתִּהְפֹּךְ is by far the most contested portion of the adjuration. So far we have established three prior conclusions that impact the interpretation of this verse:

1. עור means “waking something that was previously dormant.”
2. אֶהְבָּה in the present context refers to a state of being in love, of which a sexual relationship is one facet.
3. אֶהְבָּה in the Song is defined by the depiction of love in the Song and the explicit statements about love in 8:6–7.

The different options for translating עַד שֶׁתִּהְפֹּךְ will be tested against these three conclusions to discern the best way to understand the phrase in the context of the Song’s adjuration.

The simplest literal translation of עַד שֶׁתִּהְפֹּךְ is “until it pleases.” The preposition עַד can express a limit of space (“as far as”), time (“until, before”) or degree (“as much as, to the extent that”).<sup>352</sup> The combination of עַד with the relative pronoun שֶׁ occurs only ten times in the Hebrew Bible, eight of them in the Song, so the sample data is limited (Judg 5:7; Ps 123:2; Song 1:12; 2:7, 17; 3:4 [*bis*], 5; 4:6; 8:4). In Judg 5:7, Ps 123:2, Song 2:17 and 3:4 it is straightforwardly rendered “until.” It is usually also translated “until” in 2:17 and 4:6—“until the day breaks, and the shadows flee”—although the phrasing of the latter in Hebrew is ambiguous and it is possible to render עַד שֶׁ as “when” or “while” and retain a coherent meaning.<sup>353</sup> There is one place where it is universally understood to have a durative meaning, in Song 1:12: “*while* the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance.”<sup>354</sup> In this verse the presence of a stative verb in the temporal clause indicates that the עַד שֶׁ is durative (the temporal clause עַד־שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ בַּמִּסְבּוֹ is verbless in Hebrew, necessitating the insertion of the verb “to be” in English).<sup>355</sup> The compound pronoun is also found in Rabbinic literature, where the term demonstrates no significant evolution from its usage in the Hebrew Bible; it is used routinely to mean “until,” but also to mean “while” or

<sup>352</sup> BDB, s. v. “עַד” III.

<sup>353</sup> Longman, *Song*, 126 discusses the different options for understanding 2:17 and 4:6. Rudolph, an outlier, translates עַד שֶׁיִּפְנוּ הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים as “wenn der Tag veratmet, und die Schatten sich längen,” with his rendering of עַד שֶׁ as “wenn” rather than “bis” reflecting his understanding that the rest of the verse refers to the onset of evening, against the most common interpretation. Wilhelm Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth, Das Hohe Lied, Die Klagelieder*, KAT Band XVII 1-3 (Stuttgart: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1962), 135.

<sup>354</sup> Gault provides a helpful summary of the various occurrences of עַד שֶׁ in the Hebrew Bible and identifies Song 1:12 as the only occurrence with an unambiguously durative meaning. Gault, “Admonition,” 179.

<sup>355</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp defines “states” (situations conveyed by stative verbs, categorically differentiated from events and activities conveyed by action verbs) as durative. F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Biblical Hebrew Statives and Situation Aspect,” *JSS* 45.2 (2000): 28.

“to the extent that.”<sup>356</sup> In Song 2:7 (3:5, 8:4) there is nothing grammatically in favour of one translation over another, so the meaning in the adjuration must be discerned from context.

It has been suggested that *עַד שֶׁ*- has a durative meaning in the adjuration in the Song, as it does in Song 1:12.<sup>357</sup> This suggestion is only coherent if *עוֹר* is translated as “disturb” and *אַהֲבָה* as “lovemaking”: “do not disturb the lovemaking while it is pleased” (i.e. while the lovers are experiencing delight).<sup>358</sup> It has been demonstrated above that “disturb” has little support as a translation for *עוֹר*, and while *אַהֲבָה* can refer to lovemaking in some contexts, the context of the Song suggests that something more than sex is on view. When *עוֹר* and *אַהֲבָה* are understood in accordance with the conclusions reached above, as “waking from dormancy” and “being in love” respectively, a durative understanding of *עַד שֶׁ*- is difficult to sustain. The ideal love in the Song is positioned as a positive and desirable thing; it is not coherent to suggest that it should not be stirred up “while” it is pleased.

For similar reasons, nor does it make sense to warn that love should not be stirred up “to the extent that” it is pleased. As Gordis rightly notes, the woman is evidently “already experiencing passionate love in all its fullness.”<sup>359</sup> She has stirred up love as much as it desires. Walsh suggests that she might be warning the daughters against following in her footsteps, since it is too late for her to follow her own advice; however, this is predicated on Walsh’s interpretation that the lovers do not experience union in the Song, and therefore the woman’s experience of desire is “unsated” and regrettable.<sup>360</sup> Contrary to this, it has already been demonstrated that the lovers do experience a love that is intimate, mutual, and exclusive, and that the Song affirms this experience. Therefore, the woman is not warning categorically against “stirring up love” as much as it wants or as long as it desires; she has done just that and her experience of love is positive. The only option consistent with the content of the Song is that she is warning against awakening love in some circumstances, but not all.

Therefore, when the different definitions of *עַד שֶׁ*- are tested against the conclusions already made, the most coherent option is “until.” This is the sense of *עַד שֶׁ*- adopted by a

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<sup>356</sup> Miguel Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, trans. John Elwolde (Leiden: Brill, 1999), §27.II.3 (205-206), §27.III.10.A-C (208).

<sup>357</sup> Gault, “Admonition,” 179–80, following the suggestion of David Teitelbaum credited in Gordis, *Song*, 82.

<sup>358</sup> Gordis, *Song*; Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*; Gault, “Admonition.”

<sup>359</sup> Gordis, *Song*, 82.

<sup>360</sup> Walsh, *Exquisite Desire*, 180.



majority of commentators who take the view that the adjuration is warning against awakening love as depicted in the Song, except in the right circumstances. While opinions differ as to the specifics of the circumstances the woman has in mind, most agree that the daughters are supposed to refrain from arousing love until the situation is right (see options 1, 2, 8, 9, 10 and 11 above). While a temporal preposition is employed, the issue is not necessarily one primarily of time, but of circumstance (of which timing is a component, since the imperative is to wait until the right circumstances are in place). “Don’t stir up love *until* it pleases” conveys the expectation that the right circumstances do exist and are likely to present themselves. The daughters of Jerusalem are not cautioned against love as a rule, but they are advised to be discerning.

The next interpretive question to be resolved is what exactly it means for love to be “pleased.” נָפַח has two basic senses: experiencing pleasure (e.g. Prov 5:19) or enacting will (e.g. 1 Kgs 9:1). The translation “please” has been chosen because it captures something of both senses: the sense of enjoying something (being pleased by it) and the sense of wanting or willing something (being pleased to do it). The use of the verb with an inanimate subject, “love,” is difficult. “How can love, an abstract concept or emotion, desire anything?”<sup>361</sup>

The answer to this question lies in the use of personification in Song 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4, the presence of which has been noted in passing by several scholars, but the significance of which has been neglected.<sup>362</sup> This may be due to a scarcity of scholarship on the use of personification in the Hebrew Bible, and the impossibility of defining a single literary purpose for its employment. It is only possible to observe the effect of different types of personification in the Hebrew Bible, and compare the personification of love in the Song to other similar examples.

This discussion will use the definition of personification established for biblical studies by Dodson, namely “the attribution of human characteristics to any inanimate object, abstract concept or impersonal being,” which he further clarifies is typically effected by verbs “most commonly employed to describe the action of a person.”<sup>363</sup> This definition

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<sup>361</sup> Hess, *Song*, 82.

<sup>362</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 387; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 137; Exum, *Song*, 118–19.

<sup>363</sup> Joseph R. Dodson, *The “Powers” of Personification: Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche 161 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 30, 40; Prior to Dodson only Röhser had offered a definition of personification with reference to biblical studies. Dodson adapts Röhser’s “konkrete Gegenstände; Naturkräfte oder; Abstraktnomina[...]mit Prädikaten kombiniert sind die normalerweise nur Lebewesen zukommen.”

reveals a spectrum of types of personifications (in the Bible and other literature): as simple as isolated instances of attributing human actions to inanimate things (e.g. “the trees of the field shall clap their hands”) or as complex as sustained personifications of abstract concepts as human characters (e.g. Lady Wisdom in Proverbs). It is the former type of personification that appears in the adjuration. Specifically, the adjuration employs what Eder, in her study of personification of abstract concepts in the Psalms, calls “verb personification,” (e.g., “the hills are dancing”) as opposed to personification by way of nouns (“time is a healer”) or adjectives (“jealous trees”).<sup>364</sup> “Verb personification” is Eder’s term for the device Dodson describes as: “the attribution of human traits to an inanimate object, abstract idea or impersonal being which is used with action verbs most commonly employed to describe the action of a person.”<sup>365</sup>

Verb personification is very commonly used with elements of nature (e.g. Isa 44:23; 59:12; Ps 65:13–14[12–13 Eng.]; 96:11–12; 98:8; 148:3–4, 7–9; Job 38:7). In her investigation of the purpose of personifying nature in the Psalms, Marlow concludes that “the personification of the natural elements seems an important part of their function of affirming YHWH’s supremacy and highlights their unique place in the created world over which he rules.”<sup>366</sup> No equivalent conclusion has been offered regarding the purpose of verb personification with other categories of entity, such as inanimate objects (e.g., Ps 24:7); places (e.g., Isa 52:9; Ps 29:6; 89:13[12]) and abstract terms, the latter being the most relevant to the discussion of the Song, since “love” is an abstract term. One analysis of the personification of abstract terms does exist: Eder analyses the personification of four terms in Ps 85:11 (steadfast love, truth, justice and peace), and concludes that the results of verb personifications of abstract terms depend on the context and the rhetorical style of the personification.<sup>367</sup>

My own synthesis of all the examples of verb personification of abstract concepts listed by Eder has yielded the following conclusions. In the Psalms, personification of

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Günter Röhser, *Metaphorik Und Personifikation Der Sünde*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2 25 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987), 134.

<sup>364</sup> Sigrid Eder, “Do Justice and Peace Really Kiss Each Other? Personifications in the Psalter and an Exemplary Analysis of Ps 85:11,” *VT* 67.3 (2017): 390.

<sup>365</sup> Dodson, *The “Powers,”* 40.

<sup>366</sup> Hilary Marlow, “The Hills Are Alive! The Personification of Nature in the Psalter,” in *Leshon Limmudim: Essays on the Language and Literature of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of A.A. Macintosh*, ed. David A. Baer, LHBOTS 593 (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 203.

<sup>367</sup> Eder, “Do Justice,” 402.

abstract terms occurs with concepts that are readily identified as positive (e.g., steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, peace) or negative (e.g., evils, iniquities, shame, dishonour) in the view of the Hebrew Bible. Positive concepts are associated with Yahweh and commonly personified as going out before him (Ps 85:13; 89:14) and preserving or supporting his people (25:21; 40:12). Negative concepts are always personified as acting on humans by surrounding, overwhelming or covering the face of the afflicted person (40:13; 44:16; 69:8).

Only in Ps 85:11–14 are abstract concepts personified as acting independently without an object, or in interaction only with each other (not with Yahweh or humans): steadfast love and faithfulness “meet,” righteousness and peace “kiss,” faithfulness “springs up” from the ground, and righteousness “looks down” from the heavens. The summary effect in this psalm is that “the various social entities of justice, peace, steadfast love and truth come together in a dynamic process” depicting “a time of restoration for the people of Israel in a new place.”<sup>368</sup> There is an inevitability and a *shalom* to the way that these four virtues, often attributed to Yahweh, function in the service of Yahweh’s positive agenda. In this example as in all instances cited, the measure by which the effects of the personification are assessed is set in accordance with God’s own moral law. When concepts are endowed with human actions to make them more relatable to humans, they behave in relation to Yahweh as humans are expected to behave in Yahweh’s universe, whether for good or bad. Personified positive concepts bring praise to Yahweh and work in favour of his people while negative concepts are associated with the consequences of sin or the absence of Yahweh’s presence, and work against the afflicted. As with the personification of natural elements, the personification of abstract concepts typically affirms the supremacy of Yahweh and the goodness of the moral order he has ordained.

The difficulty with comparing the personification of אֱהָבָה to the above examples is that love, as has already been noted, is not an unambiguously positive or negative concept in the Hebrew Bible. The duality of love’s nature is apparent in the wording of the adjuration: the daughters are warned *not* to awaken love (implying it is something negative) *until it pleases* (implying there are circumstances wherein it is positive). In the context provided by the Song, there are two types of love: the prominent example of the love

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<sup>368</sup> Eder, “Do Justice,” 400, 402.

between the woman and her beloved, and the counterexample of Solomon, which lurks in the background. In a manner analogous to the way that Yahweh's law and order provide the moral compass for interpreting personifications in the Psalms, the woman is the arbiter of what is good in the Song. As noted in a previous chapter, the Song celebrates the qualities of the beloved and the woman's experience of his love by employing her voice as the poem's primary speaker and displaying the world from her perspective. Based on these contextual clues, the inevitable conclusion is that when loved is "pleased," which is a positive action, it bears the characteristics of the exemplary love between the woman and her beloved.

Based on the conclusions reached about the meanings of עֵוֶר and אֶהְבֶּה in the adjuration so far, the remaining options are those that understand the first part of the adjuration to mean "do not arouse the state of being in love." Several options have been proposed for the meaning of the second part, "until it pleases." The viability of each of these may now be assessed in view of the above conclusion regarding the personification of love, and in consideration of the two types of love on display in the Song.

The options that remain are: that love should not be stirred up "with the wrong person (i.e., Solomon)" (option 1 above), "until you are ready for love's power" (option 8), "until love shows up—it's futile to try" (options 2, 10) or "until the type of love depicted in the Song is present" (option 11). The latter immediately presents itself as according closely with the conclusion above that when love is "pleased" this refers to love that reflects the characteristics of the Song's ideal. However, the other options will be weighed briefly in turn before this final option is considered.

The option that understands "until [love] pleases" to mean "until you are ready for love's power" (option 8) does not clearly differentiate between the two models of love in the Song, positive and negative. "The Song makes the reader consider the negative side of love, the side that enfeebles, drives one forward against one's better judgement, that can leave one penniless and scorned."<sup>369</sup> Such is Schwab's interpretation of the Song's depiction of love, as something that is desirable yet potentially dangerous. A merit of this perspective is that it acknowledges that there are potentially negative consequences to love. However, this view does not differentiate precisely between the positive example of love (between

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<sup>369</sup> Schwab, *The Song of Song's Cautionary Message*, 195.

the woman and her beloved) and the negative (embodied by Solomon). This view emphasises the overwhelming *intensity* of love, whether positive or negative, at the expense of drawing out the specifically negative aspects of “love” associated with Solomon’s model, and the characteristics of ideal love that are most lauded in the voice of the woman: its intimacy, mutuality and exclusivity, that are brought out in strong contrast to Solomon. This view falls short of capturing the message of the adjuration with reference to the two, clearly differentiated, types of love in the Song. Additionally, the understanding that the adjuration warns about the readiness of a person rather than the quality of the love itself does not precisely accord with the way the personification of love has been shown to operate. Love being “pleased” is to do with the characteristics of the love and whether it reflects the ideal of love in the Song, not to do with the readiness of the people involved for any type of love. For these reasons this option is not the best articulation of the warning contained in the adjuration.

Two of the remaining options capture an element of the positive model of love in the Song but fall short of encapsulating its fullness and acknowledging its negative counterpart in Solomon’s “love.” Those scholars who take “until [love] pleases” to mean “until attraction blossoms naturally” have identified a key component of ideal love. It is based on mutual desire, grounded in the shared pleasure of the couple in each other’s company as a polemic to patriarchal marriage customs that positioned women as property. The intimate and equal relationship of the couple is contrasted with Solomon’s impersonal, coercive posture towards the women he treated as commodities. However, the natural and genuine blossoming of mutual love is not the only focus of the adjuration, nor the only thing that qualifies love as “pleasing.” A fully-realised notion of what it means for love to be pleased in the Song will account for all the qualities of the couple’s ideal love—including, crucially, its exclusivity—and for the presence of Solomon and all that he represents in the realm of love.

A similar critique is made of the position that the adjuration warns against the futile attempt to contrive a genuine state of being in love, because this can only happen of its own accord when love chooses. While the spontaneity and overwhelming reality of falling in love is present in the relationship between the central couple, to focus only on this element of

love does not account for the particularity of Solomon's association with the Song or the spectrum of qualities affirmed in the central relationship.<sup>370</sup>

The final two remaining options share the merit that they differentiate between the positive and negative examples of love in the Song: one says "do not stir up love with the wrong person, i.e., Solomon" (option 1) and the other, "do not stir up love until the type of love on display in the Song is present" (option 11). They each reflect a proper understanding of a type of love that is either to be avoided (Solomon's) or pursued (the love between the woman and her beloved), in accordance with the details of these depictions of these types of love in the Song.

Option 1 stresses the particularity of Solomon's role in the Song, understanding him to be the negative example of love to avoid. Andruska attributes this option to proponents of the "love triangle" dramatic interpretation (Ginsburg and Provan), which she does not see as a valid interpretative approach to the Song, and so she dismisses it on this basis.<sup>371</sup> However, it has been clearly demonstrated that Solomon is positioned as the antithesis of love in the Song of Songs. It is not necessary to adopt every element of the specific interpretation of Ginsburg and his contemporaries who interpreted the Song dramatically, or of the modern proponents of a three-character interpretation of the Song (such as Provan and Athas) in order to see that the type of love to be avoided in the Song is clearly represented by the character of Solomon.

Andruska's own position (option 11) emphasises pursuing the type of love embodied by the beloved. Her understanding that the daughters should refrain from stirring up love until they recognise the potential for the type of love depicted in the Song accords well with the evidence from the Song. However, Andruska's interpretation under-recognises the significance of the negative role of Solomon in the Song to its message overall. I elaborate upon Andruska's conclusion by clarifying that "the type of love depicted in the Song" that the daughters are to wait for is indeed the type of love experienced by the woman with her beloved, and that a second type of "love" is also acknowledged in the Song, revealed in the Song's depiction of Solomon and the larger narrative of 1 Kings 3–11 to which it alludes. The

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<sup>370</sup> Moreover, I am inclined to agree with Andruska's observation that "it makes little sense for the woman to warn her audience not to arouse love if they cannot do so anyway. It makes even less sense for her to place them under oath not to do so, to underscore this 'profundity.'" Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 58.

<sup>371</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 45–46.

Song depicts two types of love, a positive and a negative example, and the adjuration exhorts the daughters to seek the former and avoid the latter: do not stir up love (avoid Solomon's example) until it is pleased (when love reflects the ideal in the Song).

Understanding the adjuration this way, with regard to the previous conclusions about the significance of Solomon, leads to new conclusions about the significance of the adjuration and what it means for love to be pleased.

#### 4.3. The Adjuration and Solomon

One of the stated aims of this chapter is to test the degree of explanatory power offered by the preliminary conclusions about Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem when brought to bear on the exegesis of the selected passages. In a previous chapter it was argued that Song 1:1 suggests that the body of Solomonic material in the Hebrew Bible provides the literary context within which to interpret the content of the Song. For this to be supported, the conclusions of the exegesis must be strengthened by the presence and function of Solomon in the Song and in the wider canon. With specific regard to the adjuration, the most satisfying explanation of its meaning will be one that appeals not only to the experience of the woman and the description of love in Song 8:6–7, but also to the model of love represented by Solomon in Song 3:6–11, 8:11–12, supported by material concerning Solomon and love elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

The exegesis has so far revealed that the repeated adjuration is the key didactic statement of the Song, which employs a standard oath-making formula and invokes Yahweh by circumlocution to emphasise its seriousness. It refers to the type of love depicted in the Song and adjures the daughters not to awaken it outside of certain circumstances. One thing that the exegesis has so far failed to account for, and which has been given surprisingly little attention by the majority of commentators, is the rationale behind the woman's instruction to the daughters. That is, *why* should the daughters of Jerusalem not awaken love until it pleases, and what will happen if they do? Few have pursued an answer to this question with reference to the presence of Solomon in the Song. The significance of his persona in the Hebrew canon and the way it functions in the Song of Songs suggests a

new understanding of the reason for the woman's adjuration to the daughters, that is, *why* they should not stir up love.

Previously, scholars that do seek to rationalise the adjuration have typically focused on the individual's experience of love, whether it will be positive or negative. Some commentators assume a positive motivation for refraining from stirring up love until the right circumstances manifest; they focus on what will happen if the daughters *do* keep the oath. For example, Murphy concludes that love should not be rushed because it can only be truly enjoyed when it is truly present.<sup>372</sup> Longman displays a similar concern with his explanation that "the verse is a warning of the woman to other women who may look on the relationship and want to experience something similar; she is, in essence, telling them not to force it."<sup>373</sup> Interpreters who understand the adjuration to be about waiting for love to be fully experienced in marriage speak of the joys of delayed gratification, the security of marriage and the "full appreciation of the joys of physical love" that can only be experienced in that context.<sup>374</sup> The focus on a positive motivation is not unreasonable, given that the dominant example of love in the Song is a positive one, but a purely positive motivation does not match the urgency of the adjuration nor the negative terms in which it is expressed. The woman does not say "if you wait for love, it will be worth it." She says, "swear that you will *not* stir up love!" The rhetorical strength and formula of the oath demands a more satisfying explanation than that love is more enjoyable in the right circumstances. In fact, as has been noted above, while it is standard to translate an oath introduced by a conditional particle as a negative statement, the literal translation is a conditional statement with its (negative) consequences elided. This naturally invites the reader to fill the blank with the implied negative consequences.

Some scholars do cite a negative motivation for the adjuration, that is, they focus on the outcome if the daughters *do not* keep the oath. This is usually done via an appeal to the woman's heightened emotional state throughout the Song (including, but not limited to, her "lovesickness" in Song 2:5) and to the description of love's power in 8:6–7. Schwab has argued in depth that the Song of Songs is primarily a warning about the potential negative

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<sup>372</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 137.

<sup>373</sup> Longman, *Song*, 115.

<sup>374</sup> Hess, *Song*, 83; cf. Gledhill, *Song*, 130; O'Donnell, *Invitation to Intimacy*, 61–62.



power of love.<sup>375</sup> Additionally, numerous others before and after Schwab have similarly concluded that the daughters are urged to be cautious because of the “the devastating and overpowering results of love,” to try to avoid potential “pain and heartbreak,” or to make sure they are prepared for love’s “rigors, both physical and emotional.”<sup>376</sup> “So wonderful and so terrible an experience is it, warns the woman of the Song, that they should not be tempted to court love aforetime.”<sup>377</sup>

These interpretations take a sound approach by appealing to the content of the Song, and particularly to the description of love in 8:6–7. They assume that the consequences of mishandling love constitute a negative motivation for the adjuration, an assumption which accords well with the form and force of the adjuration itself. However, even this type of explanation fails to adequately account for the presence of Solomon in the Song, and the attachment of his name to its title. If the overwhelming power of love was the only reason for refraining from stirring it up, the presence of Solomon and his antithetical model of love would be superfluous to the didactic purpose of the Song. However, when Solomon’s presence is brought to bear on the adjuration, it offers insight into the questions raised by the exegesis: his model of “love” explains why the daughters should not stir up love in the wrong circumstances and the kind of potential consequences that are at stake.

Solomon provides an example of what it looks like when love is “not pleased.” While much has been written about the Song’s portrayal of ideal love, much less attention has been given to the type of love the daughters are supposed to avoid. That is, few have elaborated on what it means for love to be “not pleased.” Since the focus of the adjuration is on *not* waking up love when it is *not* pleased, it is important to identify the circumstances in which love should not be aroused, in order to avoid it. It was concluded above that the Song contains two types of love, the positive example of the woman with her beloved and the negative example of Solomon. The former model of love is the ideal, demonstrating the type of love the daughters should wait for. The latter model is the antithetical example of love that the daughters should avoid—the type of love that should *not* be awakened and stirred up. Solomon’s presence in the Song provides a specific example of what it looks like for love to be “not pleased.” He models a “love” that is warped by unequal power dynamics,

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<sup>375</sup> Schwab, *The Song of Song’s Cautionary Message*.

<sup>376</sup> Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 286; Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 61; Longman, *Song*, 116.

<sup>377</sup> Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 47.

tainted by competing affections, and diminished by the absence of genuine intimacy. Within the Song, Solomon embodies the opposite qualities to the ideal and exemplifies the type of love that the daughters should not awaken.

However, as was noted in a previous chapter, these negative qualities could be embodied by any archetypal villain (in a similar way that Proverbs employs the archetypal women of Wisdom and Folly). The beloved is anonymous, so the choice to use a known biblical figure as his counterpoint appears deliberate. The inclusion of a specific, extremely significant figure such as Solomon suggests interactions with other related biblical texts. By using King Solomon as the antithesis of love (rather than an anonymous fictional archetype), the Song draws attention to an aspect of love that is highlighted in 1 Kings 3–11 and in Proverbs 1–9: the connection between romantic activity and spiritual infidelity. Solomon—who is far more relatable as a national symbol than as a domestic figure—is a paradigmatic Israelite king who embodies the paradigmatic Israelite problem of “marrying folly” through alliances with foreign women, foreign nations and foreign gods.

Very few interpreters have identified this as the specific nature of the problem with Solomon in the Song. Seerveld writes briefly that “the Song’s critique of Solomon goes beyond the man’s ostentation, inflated wealth and too many women. It challenges in a most fundamental way what was a persistent national problem for the Israelites in Canaan, and one that Solomon sorely aggravated by satisfying his imported wives,” that is, the worship of foreign idols, which Solomon introduced to Israel.<sup>378</sup> Eschelbach has also noted in passing that “the OT provides a number of examples of occasions when it would have been wise not to have stirred up or awakened love because it could not be (and was not) pleasing. Love of many foreign women was expressly the downfall of Solomon himself (1 Kgs 11:1–2).”<sup>379</sup> Although Eschelbach does not elaborate on this, a later comment reveals that he assumes that the teaching of the Song is related to intermarriage and religious fidelity. For passages in the Hebrew Bible that “parallel the message of the Song” he lists: Ps 106:34–39, which recounts how God’s people sinned by intermixing with the nations; Prov 5:15–20, which cautions against adultery with “strangers” (v.17) and the “foreign woman” (v.20); and Mal 2:10–16, which draws a parallel between marital faithlessness and profaning the covenant

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<sup>378</sup> Seerveld, *The Greatest Song*, 74.

<sup>379</sup> Eschelbach, “Song,” 314.

by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.<sup>380</sup> Athas is the only scholar to offer a developed version of a similar view of Solomon's problem with love, acknowledging that his womanizing led to his worship of foreign gods, violating the national covenant and catalysing the split of the kingdom and its eventual disintegration.<sup>381</sup> Athas departs from other interpreters in that he identifies the crisis of the Antiochene Persecution as the particular historical context into which the Song speaks, and Solomon as representative of external hostile forces, but the interpretation is informed by the same exegetical conviction: that Solomon's approach to "love" represents not just a violation of the proper marital covenant but a threat to Israel's national covenant with Yahweh.<sup>382</sup> All of these examples resonate with the aspect of Solomon's character with which the Song is most concerned: his romantic love for foreign women, which resulted not only in his own heart turning away from Yahweh, but in the formal introduction of idol worship to Israel.

Apart from the three contributions above, Solomon's significance for the rationale behind the adjuration has gone largely unrecognised. However, the conclusions of this thesis regarding the relationship between Solomon and the Song, and his function within the Song, provide a specific and satisfying rationale for the woman's adjuration to the daughters. Within the Song, Solomon is the antithesis of ideal love, exemplifying the type of love the daughters are to avoid. It was noted above that the Song focuses its concern not on chastity, in the sense of waiting until marriage to have sex, but rather extols fidelity, commitment and exclusivity.<sup>383</sup> This is bolstered by Solomon's presence in the Song as the antithesis of love. That is, the problem with Solomon's love is not that he engages in sexual activity outside of marriage but that his practice of "marriage" is a travesty—a polygamous, coercive, transactional anathema that flies in the face of marriage as it should be. When the consequences of Solomon's marriages in 1 Kings 3–11 are considered, the virtues of exclusivity and commitment celebrated by the Song take on urgent relevance. Solomon's "love" is a cautionary tale that demonstrates the potential consequences of awakening love outside of the right circumstances and participating in a model of love that does not reflect the exclusivity upheld by the woman and her beloved. Solomon's love for many foreign

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<sup>380</sup> Eschelbach, "Song," 319.

<sup>381</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 269.

<sup>382</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 250–52, 261–62.

<sup>383</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 315; Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 75–77.

wives led to the worship of many foreign idols and the eventual disintegration of the nation. His marital polygamy was mirrored by his religious “polygamy”; his desecration of the proper boundaries of the marital covenant was intertwined with his violation of the national religious covenant. The presence of Solomon in the Song extends the implications of individual love beyond the personal, to have consequences for communities and covenant relationship with Yahweh. The persistence of the issue of intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible, which Solomon represents, justifies the urgency of the woman’s adjuration not to stir up love unless the circumstances are right.

#### 4.4. The Adjuration and the daughters of Jerusalem

In the previous chapter it was suggested that the daughters of Jerusalem have a more significant literary role than has previously been recognised. A survey of the Hebrew Bible found that בָּנוֹת (“daughters of”) and בֵּית (“daughter of” or “Daughter”) are commonly used to personify whole populations (not just young women), with an emphasis on the cultural identity associated with the location to which the population belongs. It was also noted that “Jerusalem” and “Zion” have special significance and are often used as synecdoches for the whole nation of Israel, with all of Yahweh’s people conceived of as “citizens” of the capital city. As such, it was argued that the daughters of Jerusalem, who have been universally recognised as surrogates for the external audience of the Song, could represent the people of Israel generally. It was concluded that in order to uphold this suggestion it would be necessary to test whether the adjuration (as the core teaching statement of the Song) could be comprehensible as a didactic message addressed not only to young Jewish women but to Yahweh’s people generally, the figurative citizens of Jerusalem.

If the Song of Songs is understood, as it typically is in contemporary interpretations, as a celebration of romantic love with a focus on the experience of the individuals involved, there is little to compel the reader to understand the daughters of Jerusalem as anything other than representative young women receiving personal guidance in matters of love. However, the Song’s relationship to Solomon deepens and broadens the scope of the Song’s teaching about love beyond the emotional and personal, raising implications that are

spiritual and corporate. This supports the suggestion that the daughters as the woman's audience have a broader, more nationally significant literary identity than a group of young women who serve no purpose outside the fiction of the poem (as they have traditionally been understood).

The implications raised by Solomon's presence in the Song strengthen the conclusions that have already been made regarding the role and function of the daughters of Jerusalem. As the presence of Solomon raises the issue of intermarriage, this in turn raises the question of why the Song addresses itself to the "daughters" of Jerusalem, if the daughters are indeed literally women. In ancient Israelite society, women would have had limited choice and agency regarding marriage and the circumstances in which they had opportunities to "stir up love." The language in biblical passages that decry intermarriage explicitly reflects that the "daughters" both of Israel and of foreign nations were considered passive in these transactions: "You shall not intermarry with them, *giving your daughters* to their sons or *taking their daughters* for your sons" (Deut 7:3; cf. Exod 34:16, Ezra 9:12; Neh 10:30). When the returnees from exile are rebuked by Ezra and Nehemiah for intermarrying with local foreigners, it is the men who are held culpable: Ezra (10:18–44) lists the names of the men who married foreign women (cf. 9:2) and Nehemiah (13:23–27) speaks exclusively of Israelite men marrying foreign women, being silent as to whether Israelite women also married foreign men.

However, it has also been seen that the prophetic literature typically employs a feminine metaphor for the violation of the covenant: collectively, Israel is personified as an unfaithful wife and her consorting with multiple foreign gods as sexual promiscuity. This interacts with the device wherein the inhabitants of a city are depicted as her "daughters" and their behaviour reflects that of the mother-city. An awareness of this feminine metaphor brings coherence to the way the Song addresses "daughters" as though they are the agents of love. While historiographical passages such as those cited above confirm that literal "daughters" were relatively powerless in the transacting of marriage arrangements, being given and taken by men, "daughters" are invigorated with agency in the prophetic metaphor. Female promiscuity is a metaphor for Israel's infidelity to Yahweh and "polyamorous" worship of foreign gods. Warnings against this type of behaviour are not exclusive to either gender, but relevant to the whole Israelite community.

This affirms the earlier observation of the way the wisdom teaching of the Song and Proverbs operate on their respective audiences in similar ways, albeit Proverbs is expressed with a masculine metaphor (to a “son”) and the Song with a feminine metaphor (to “daughters”). Both books have possible practical applications for young men or young women in matters of love, sex, and marriage, but in both cases the advice about romance is also a vehicle for another, grander layer of meaning. Proverbs warns against “adultery” and wandering from the path of wisdom; the Song exhorts the readers to reflect the exclusively devoted commitment of the central couple, rejecting the example of polygamy and promiscuity—both literal and spiritual—displayed by Solomon.

The Song does not address its audience generically as בָּנוֹת; they bear more specific associations than the generic “my son” of Proverbs. Nor is בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם the default or the only way in the Hebrew Bible to address the people of Israel using the “daughter” idiom: elsewhere they are variously called daughters of Zion (Isa 3:16–17; 4:4), daughters of Judah (Ps 48:12[11 Eng.]; 97:8) or daughters of Israel (2 Sam 1:24). The choice to use “daughters of Jerusalem” as the primary form of address in the Song shapes their collective identity with certain emphases.

The associations with Jerusalem are complex, particularly when juxtaposed with the figure of Solomon. Under Solomon’s reign, with the construction of Solomon’s temple, Jerusalem’s citizens almost realised the promise of peace and prosperity under a Davidic king. Yet Solomon’s idolatry (for which “love” was the catalyst) fractured the nation’s relationship with God, which eventually degenerated to the point of the destruction of the temple and the exile of Jerusalem’s residents. At the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, when the Hebrews were seeking to re-establish themselves as a nation under God distinct from the peoples they had lived among during the exile, the issue of Jewish identity—what it meant to be a citizen, literally or figuratively, of Jerusalem—was acute. For the people of Jerusalem, their shared identity was bound up in their special covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Assimilation with the nations around them threatened not only their culture, but their religious identity and the exclusivity of their worship.

The issue of Jewish identity intersects with the theme of love in Neh 13:23–27 (the immediate context for Neh 13:26, which was identified in Chapter 2 as one of the key texts regarding Solomon and אֶהְבָּה). This passage recounts Nehemiah’s rebuke to the men of Judah, returnees to Jerusalem from the exile, who have married women of Ashdod,

Ammon, and Moab with the result that their children do not speak the Jewish language. The issue at stake is not the language itself but the relationship between language and their ethnic and religious identity.<sup>384</sup> That the new generation do not understand the language of their antecedents, in which the Jewish Scriptures are preserved and Jewish worship conducted, poses a threat to their distinctive identity as Yahweh's people and their devotion to him as their only God. Nehemiah cites the way that Solomon was led into spiritual infidelity by his foreign wives, equating marriage to foreign women with being unfaithful to God (Neh 13:27). This passage reflects the enduring reality that individual acts of love and marriage have far-reaching implications for the community of Israel, not just for the individual, justifying that the Song's message concerning love is appropriate for a corporate audience identified by their affiliation with Jerusalem, not just for individuals.

The compromise of the men of Judah is taken so seriously that Nehemiah makes the men swear an oath by God (וְאִשְׁבָּעִים בַּאֱלֹהִים, Neh 13:25) that they will discontinue the practice of intermarriage. In a similar account in Ezra 10, Ezra causes the leaders of the priests and Levites and all of the people to swear an oath that they will put aside their foreign wives (Ezra 10:5).<sup>385</sup> Both passages employ the same verb of swearing (שָׁבַע, *hiphil*) used by the woman in the Song to put the daughters on oath. To recognize this is not to attempt to establish a direct line of influence between Ezra-Nehemiah and the Song, only to demonstrate that the seriousness of the woman's adjuration to the daughters is comparable to that expressed by Ezra and Nehemiah at times of acute corporate crisis, with specific reference to the issues of marriage and covenant loyalty.

The issue of Jewish identity enriches the terminology the woman chooses to authenticate the oath she calls on the daughters of Jerusalem to swear. When בְּצִבּוֹת אֵו בְּאֵילֹת הַשָּׂדֶה is understood as a circumlocution for God, the woman is appealing to the people of Jerusalem—a city fated by Solomon's actions to become a throne for foreign powers, its temple to Yahweh defiled in deference to foreign gods—to swear to her by the God of Israel, the one true God. He is “Yahweh of Hosts,” commander of armies able to

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<sup>384</sup> Southwood, ““And They Could Not,”” 17.

<sup>385</sup> To underline the connection between intermarriage and compromised identity, Ezra 10:8 records that the men who did not present themselves at the assembly (and by implication, repent and separate from their foreign wives) would have their property forfeited and be excluded from the congregation, indicating that those who were not wholeheartedly devoted to Yahweh were excluded from holding any part of Yahweh's land or participating in community worship.

prevail against the military might of foreign nations. He is “God Almighty,” the name by which he revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, patriarchs of the Israelite faith (Exod 6:3). It is this God that the woman invokes to guarantee the oath made by the daughters of *Jerusalem*—the seat of God’s king on earth and the site of God’s presence with them in the temple.

All of the data above supports a reading that understands the daughters to be representatives of the whole people of Israel. The adjuration urges caution in matters of love, not purely due to individual consequences, but in view of corporate consequences such as those that resulted from the unwise love of Solomon, and which persisted as an issue for Yahweh’s people even at the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The presence of Solomon as a paradigmatic representative of Israel’s kings is appropriately matched by the presence of the daughters as a personification of Israel’s people. The woman of the Song implores them, in the name of the God to whom they owe covenantal loyalty, to not awaken love in the wrong circumstances. The people of Jerusalem are adjured to avoid the negative example of Solomon, who is held up in the Hebrew Bible as the paradigm of covenant infidelity precipitated by the wrong kind of love.

#### 4.5. Conclusions of Chapter 4

The aims of this chapter were to exegete the repeated adjuration found in Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4 and to assess the degree of explanatory power offered by the preliminary conclusions regarding Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem.

It was found that the adjuration should not be characterised as “advice” but as a serious command which calls on the God of Israel to bind it, with an urgency that intensifies in the truncated repeat in 8:4. Various interpretations of the meaning of the adjuration were assessed, and it was concluded that the woman adjures the daughters of Jerusalem to refrain from awakening love outside of the right circumstances. Following Andruska, “love” was understood as “the type of love present in the Song,” and it was added that there are actually two types of love present in the Song: the ideal love of the woman and her beloved and the antithetical love of Solomon. Since the right circumstances for awakening love are represented by the personification of love as being “pleased,” it was concluded that this can



only mean that love should be awakened when it is modelled on the Song's ideal, and should be avoided when it follows the pattern of love embodied by Solomon.

These exegetical conclusions were tested by interaction with the conclusions already made regarding Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem. It was found that while previous interpretations have failed to offer a strong rationale for the woman's adjuration to the daughters, the presence of Solomon in the Song provides a specific and satisfying reason for the daughters to exercise caution in love. Within the Song, Solomon exemplifies the qualities of love that is "not pleased." When the Song's connection to the larger body of material concerning Solomon and love in the Hebrew canon is considered, Solomon's biography in 1 Kings 3–11 demonstrates the potential negative consequences of love that is awakened outside of the right circumstances.

These conclusions strengthen and are strengthened by the suggestion that the daughters of Jerusalem represent the people of Israel. If the Song is purely concerned with individual experiences of love, there is little to compel the conclusion that the daughters are anything but individual women. However, the presence of Solomon highlights the connection between sexual love and spiritual fidelity and underlines the reality that individual love can have corporate consequences. Swearing a collective oath against awakening love in the wrong circumstances is an appropriate response to the threat of compromised identity and covenant infidelity, as evidenced in Ezra 10:5 and Neh 13:25. The adjuration is therefore comprehensible as an address to the community of Israel about the persistent problem of intermarriage and the failure of God's people to love Yahweh with their whole hearts.

The exegetical conclusions that have been made based on the adjuration are incomplete without taking into consideration the final exhortation and the conclusive description of love found in Song 8:6–7. Together, the adjurations and 8:6–7 crystallise the Song's message regarding love. The exegesis of 8:6–7 and the synthesis of these conclusions with the interpretation of the adjuration will be the concern of the final chapter.

## Chapter 5 | Exegesis of Song 8:6–7

### 5.0. Introduction

The exegesis in this chapter will be conducted using the same inner-biblical approach as the analysis in the previous chapter. When the preliminary conclusions of this thesis are brought to bear on the exegesis of Song 8:6–7, several exegetical controls are suggested, as follows:

Firstly, as will be detailed below, there has been a tendency in recent scholarship to interpret the imagery in 8:6–7 with reference to extra-biblical mythological and religious narratives from the ancient Near East. In keeping with an inner-biblical approach to exegesis, the present analysis will use the Hebrew Bible as the primary source of reference material for the key images and concepts that appear in the selected verses, where corresponding imagery exists. The strength of perceived inner-biblical allusions will be justified by the exactness and degree of shared language and literary context between Song 8:6–7 and other biblical texts.

Secondly, in keeping with the conclusions of Chapter 2 regarding the significance of Solomon in the Song, the exegesis will be alert to language and themes which resonate with the biography of Solomon in 1 Kings 3–11 and other key Solomonic texts previously identified. Where shared language and context indicate a probable overlap of concern between Song 8:6–7 and material from other Solomonic texts, the analysis will explore how the awareness of Solomon impacts the understanding of the material in 8:6–7, particularly where previously unrecognised exegetical possibilities are exposed.

Thirdly, in keeping with the conclusions of Chapter 3 regarding the role of the daughters of Jerusalem as representatives of Israel, the exegesis will be alert to possible corporate applications for the community of Israel. The tenability of the proposal that “daughters of Jerusalem” represent “people of Israel” will be tested by whether the exegetical conclusions from 8:6–7 present clear applications for the whole community of

Israel, not just young women, on matters that transcend personal romantic conduct and display a corporate concern with respect to religious practice and identity.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the adjurations and Song 8:6–7 were selected for exegesis because together they convey the didactic message of the Song. Accordingly, the exegetical conclusions regarding 8:6–7 will be synthesised with the previous conclusions regarding the adjuration, to move towards a proposal regarding the message of the Song of Songs as a whole.

As with the analysis of the previous chapter, the veracity of these exegetical controls and the tenability of the conclusions to which they lead will be assessed by the degree of explanatory power they provide. At every point the exegesis will seek to demonstrate how the exegetical considerations listed above bring clarity to the interpretation of 8:6–7 and explain whether these considerations support existing interpretations of the Song, suggest new perspectives and/or resolve previously identified exegetical issues. Finally the analysis will seek to integrate the exegesis of the adjurations and Song 8:6–7 with the previous conclusions regarding the significance of Solomon and the role of the daughters of Jerusalem, to suggest conclusions regarding the didactic purpose of the Song of Songs.

### 5.1. Background to Song 8:6–7

As indicated earlier in this thesis, 8:6–7 has been selected as a key passage for exegesis because it contains the Song’s climactic reflection on love, and because the adjurations and 8:6–7 together form the Song’s didactic frame. The content of 8:6–7 completes the Song’s instruction regarding love.

8:6–7 is universally recognised as the highpoint of the Song of Songs. Sadgrove insists that whichever interpretative approach is taken to the Song of Songs, “a climax is quite clearly reached with the famous utterance of 8:6–7.”<sup>386</sup> Longman characterises these verses as “the most memorable and intense of the entire book,” while Exum calls them “the climax of the poem and its *raison d’être*.”<sup>387</sup> The distinctive vocabulary, the shift of tone to an urgent imperative and the universal quality of the reflection all mark these lines out for

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<sup>386</sup> M. Sadgrove, “The Song of Songs as Wisdom Literature,” *StudBib 1* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 245.

<sup>387</sup> Longman, *Song*, 209; Exum, *Song*, 245; cf. Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 78.

particular attention. The heightened tone of the poetry in these verses reflects the heightened purpose for their content.

8:6–7 is distinctive for its choice of vocabulary, which departs from the vocabulary of the rest of the Song. While most of the poetry to this point draws from a pool of idyllic pastoral metaphors, interspersed with less frequent urban and military imagery, the cluster of images in these verses is unprecedented in its cataclysmic quality. “Scarcely one word of this passage occurs elsewhere in the Song: the new forces—death, Sheol, fire, God—give the Song a different dimension.”<sup>388</sup> Several of these key words have particular significance which will be explored in the exegesis below.

In addition to distinguishing these verses aesthetically, the “magnificent imagery and urgent style” indicate a heightened purpose for 8:6–7.<sup>389</sup> Dharamraj imaginatively describes the change of literary tone as the woman “unexpectedly trading her gauzy veil (4:3) for the gear of a sage.”<sup>390</sup> The heightened purpose of 8:6–7 is related to the way 8:6–7 interacts with the adjurations in 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 and how these four sets of verses together form a didactic frame for the content of the Song. In addition to the special tone and vocabulary that are unique to Song 8:6–7, several distinguishing qualities are shared with the adjurations, indicating that together they form a literary frame for the content of the Song.

Firstly, the adjurations and 8:6–7 share a specific thematic concern. All three occurrences of the adjuration and 8:6–7 speak of *הָאַהֲבָה*, the only places in the Hebrew Bible in which the definite article is attached to “love.” The appearance of the stylised *הָאַהֲבָה* in the adjurations and in 8:6–7 flags that the same “love” is on view in these key verses throughout the Song.

Secondly, while the rest of the Song sketches a particular relationship between one man and one woman, the adjurations and 8:6b–7 take a step back from this relationship to speak about the phenomenon of love in general. Sadgrove recognises 8:6b–7 as “the only place in the Song where any attempt is made to probe the meaning of the love that is its theme,” characterising these lines as a *mashal*, “meditating on and universalizing all that has gone before.”<sup>391</sup> Similarly Fox recognises that 8:6–7 extrapolates from the lovers’

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<sup>388</sup> Landy, *Paradoxes*, 121.

<sup>389</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 117.

<sup>390</sup> Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely*, 200.

<sup>391</sup> Sadgrove, “The Song,” 245.

experiences depicted in the rest of the poem to draw a general conclusion about love itself.<sup>392</sup> It has already been demonstrated that the adjurations, in a similar manner, offer a general instruction regarding love, that is broadly applicable outside of the fictional setting of the poem. Hauge highlights the correspondence between the abstract character of 8:6–7 and the adjurations, concluding that both are sapiential reflections.<sup>393</sup>

Thirdly, both the adjurations and 8:6–7 address themselves in such a way as to invite identification from a wider external audience. In the same way that the adjurations are distinct from the woman's other addresses to the daughters, which only make sense within the fiction of the poem, 8:6–7 has a heightened quality which differentiates it from the woman's other addresses to her beloved. She speaks to him imperatively at several other points, e.g., "draw me after you" (1:4); "tell me...where you pasture your flock" (1:7); "come, my beloved, let us go out to the field" (7:12[11 Eng]). These imperatives only have meaning within the immediate fiction of the Song. 8:6a has a more universal quality due to the universal nature of the reflection which follows.

It has already been described how the daughters of Jerusalem act as surrogate figures for the external audience to the Song, and how the adjurations mark themselves out as instruction that is relevant not only to the character of the "daughters" in the immediate fictional context, but which transcends this context and presents itself as universal advice. This dynamic is also seen at work in 8:6–7, wherein the woman's words, ostensibly addressed to her beloved, penetrate the fourth wall to address themselves to the external audience to the Song. The beloved becomes a literary vehicle through which the *mashal* of 6b–7 addresses itself to a general audience.

Existing interpretations of 8:6–7 (which typically take these verses as a universal reflection on love for a wider audience) reveal that this dynamic is commonly assumed, but the mechanics of this have rarely been articulated in the terms presented here. Landy suggests that in 8:6–7 the Song speaks "through its own voice and not through its personae" and that in these verses it speaks a message to "the world" directly, while Fischer has ventured that 8:6–7 is addressed "directly to the reader."<sup>394</sup> It is more accurate, however, to

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<sup>392</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 168; cf. Longman, *Song*, 206, "It is the only place in the Song that really steps back and reflects on the nature of love itself."

<sup>393</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 84–85.

<sup>394</sup> Landy, *Paradoxes*, 121; Fischer, "Who?," 98.

say not that Song 8:6–7 speaks directly to the reader but that the *mashal* quality of these verses alerts the reader that here they are to identify themselves with the beloved, just as the adjurations induce the audience to identify with the daughters of Jerusalem, and as Proverbs invites identification with “my son.” (The implications of the beloved acting as the vehicle for audience identification in 8:6–7, where this role has thus far been carried by the daughters, will be discussed under 5.4.)

In addition to sharing the distinct literary qualities noted above, which mark them out from the content of the rest of the Song, the adjurations and 8:6–7 together form a coherent didactic message of which 8:6–7 is the culmination. The adjurations intensify progressively throughout the Song: 2:7 concludes a positive interaction between the lovers, 3:5 concludes a more distressing scene of separation, and 8:4 varies the wording to convey heightened urgency (from אִם־תִּעֲרֹר, “if you awaken” to מַה־תִּעֲרֹר, “how could you awaken?”). The gathering momentum of the adjurations builds towards the fever pitch of 8:6–7, which contains the most intense language in the Song.

8:6–7 represents not only a culmination of emotional intensity, but the final piece of information which completes the instruction contained in the adjurations. Andruska has articulated that the description in 8:6–7 provides the rationale for the instruction in the adjurations: “the ‘do not awaken’ refrains advise against arousing love before the type of love pictured in the Song is present because of what the *mashal*, or proverb, in 8:6–7 teaches.”<sup>395</sup> Building on Andruska’s point, it can be said specifically that the *imperative* in 8:6a continues the warning tone of the adjurations and the *description* in 8:6b–7 provides the rationale for the imperatives in the adjuration and in 8:6a. Together the adjurations and 8:6a warn the audience to “not stir up love until it pleases” and to “set [one’s lover] as a seal upon [one’s] heart.” The climactic reflection on the nature of love in 8:6b–7 provides the reason for these impassioned instructions.

#### 5.1.1. Immediate Literary Context

There are so many possible ways to demarcate the structure of the Song that it seems almost arbitrary to attempt to locate 8:6–7 within the wider structure of the text.

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<sup>395</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 78.

However, there is a degree of consensus (at least among those who read the Song as a single poem, rather than an anthology) that the final section in the poem runs from 8:5–14, and this is the view adopted here.<sup>396</sup> This view is underpinned by the recognition of several literary markers.

Firstly, 8:5 begins immediately after the final occurrence of the adjuration addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem (8:4). The repeated adjuration is a refrain which divides the Song into four large sections.<sup>397</sup> While there are arguably smaller units to be defined within each large section, the adjuration can be taken as the most basic structural marker in the Song.<sup>398</sup> The penultimate section is therefore closed by the final adjuration in 8:4, with a new section beginning at 8:5.

Secondly, 8:5 begins with the interrogative phrase *מִי זֶאת*, a phrase which has twice been employed previously in the Song to mark the beginning of new scenes (at 3:6, which is also the start of a major new section following the adjuration in 3:5; and at 6:10). As in the previous instances, *מִי זֶאת* alerts the reader to the introduction of a new perspective, marking a new literary unit.

Thirdly, the apparently disparate parts of 8:5–14 are held together by the theme of love between the woman and her beloved, which reaches a fever pitch of intensity in 8:6–7. Dharamraj argues that the thematic coherence is supported by a literary *inclusio* which marks out this final section: “it opens with “her beloved” (8:5a; *דִּוְדָהּ*) and finishes off with “my beloved” (8:14; *דִּוְדִי*).”<sup>399</sup>

Although 8:6–7 is recognised as part of a literary unit beginning at 8:5, verses 6–7 are held as distinct from 8:5 in this analysis. While it is recognised that 8:5b–7 apparently contains a continuous address from woman to her beloved, it is very common for 8:6–7 to be singled out as a separate literary unit with a special function, and this is the approach taken here.<sup>400</sup> So distinctive is the content of 8:6–7 from what surrounds it, “whatever

<sup>396</sup> Cf. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 190–200; Gledhill, *Song*, 218–45; Hess, *Song*, 233–51; Barbiero, *Song*, 435–503; Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely*, 199–224.

<sup>397</sup> Seerveld, *The Greatest Song*, 87.

<sup>398</sup> There is a broad consensus that the adjurations mark the ends of poetic units, regardless of other discrepancies in structure. Cf. Gault, “Admonition,” 177.

<sup>399</sup> Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely*, 199.

<sup>400</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 196–98; Gledhill, *Song*, 50–64; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 270–76; Schwab, *The Song of Song’s Cautionary Message*, 50–64; Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 113–22; Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely*, 203–11; Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 78–87; Hans-Peter Mathys, “Solomon’s Song 8:6–7: The Power of Love—How to Express It by a Coalition of Myth and Grammar,” in Fischer, *The Song of Songs Afresh*, 126–47; Pieter

approach one adopts to the Song, Cant 8:6–7 stands out as a pivotal interpretative element.”<sup>401</sup> In 8:6, the woman’s voice shifts abruptly into the imperative, and this change is accompanied by a shift in scope described above, from observations that are specific to the relationship between herself and her beloved within the landscape of the poem (“under the apple tree I awakened you...”; 8:5b) towards a broader reflection on the concept of love (“love is as strong as death...”; 6b). The pivot from specific to general is effected during 8:6a, wherein the audience is positioned to identify with the beloved, and the fourth wall penetrated as the woman speaks through the address to her beloved to the external recipient of the Song. The shift into the imperative in 8:6a also marks the continuation of the “meta-instruction” begun in the adjurations, for which 8:6b–7 constitutes the rationale. For these reasons 8:6–7 will be demarcated as a separate unit from 8:5 in this analysis.

The section immediately following 8:6–7, from 8:8 until the end of the Song, contains three exchanges. The first (8:8–10) is between the woman and her brothers: the woman’s brothers discuss what to do with her and how to protect (at least the appearance of) her chastity, following which she rebuffs their attempt to control her body. The second (8:11–12) describes Solomon’s “vineyards” (a metaphor for his harem) and the woman’s assertion of agency over her own “vineyard.” In the third exchange (8:13–14) the woman’s beloved calls to her, expressing his desire to hear her voice; he is the only male figure who invites the woman to speak, and she answers him in the closing line of the Song. In response to the Song’s conclusive teaching about love in 8:6–7, the controlling, commercialising approaches of the woman’s brothers and Solomon are contrasted for the final time with the mutual, intimate and exclusive love that exists between the woman and her beloved.

### 5.1.2. Structure

There is no universal convention for marking up the structure of verses 8:6–7; each scholar has their own preference for dividing the verses and a unique system for numbering the divisions. I have adapted Mathys’ approach to defining the structure of 8:6–7, dividing

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van der Zwan, “Song of Songs 8.6-7: Death-Wish or Belief in Survival of Death?,” in Fischer, *The Song of Songs Afresh*, 167–87.

<sup>401</sup> Schwab, *The Song of Song’s Cautionary Message*, 61; Keel describes it as “complete in itself (in both form and content).” Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 270.



the passage into a list of statements.<sup>402</sup> I depart from Mathys at the point where he reads *רְשָׁפֶיהָ רְשָׁפֵי אֵשׁ* (“its flashes are flashes of fire”) and *שְׁלֵה־בְתִיָּהּ* (“an all-consuming inferno”) as two separate statements; his analysis therefore results in six statements, where I only define five, as follows:

- |       |  |  |
|-------|--|--|
| 1. 6a | Set me as a seal upon your heart,<br>as a seal upon your arm                                   | שִׁמְנִי כְּחֹתֶם עַל-לִבְךָ<br>כְּחֹתֶם עַל-זְרֹעֶךָ                              |
| 2. 6b | For love is as strong as death,<br>jealousy as unyielding as Sheol                             | כִּי-עֲזָה כַּמּוֹת אֱהָבָה<br>קִשָּׁה כַּשְּׂאוֹל קִנְאָה                         |
| 3. 6c | Its flashes are flashes of fire<br>an all-consuming inferno.                                   | רְשָׁפֶיהָ רְשָׁפֵי אֵשׁ<br>שְׁלֵה־בְתִיָּהּ                                       |
| 4. 7a | Many waters are not able to quench Love<br>Nor rivers to overwhelm it.                         | מִיַּם רַבִּים לֹא יוּכְלוּ לְכַבּוֹת אֶת-הָאֱהָבָה<br>וְנָהָרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּהָ |
| 5. 7b | If a man would offer all the wealth of his<br>house for Love, he would be utterly<br>despised. | אִם-יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת-כָּל-הֹוֶן בֵּיתוֹ בְּאֱהָבָה<br>בוֹז יְבוֹזוּ לוֹ            |

There are several possible ways to group these statements, and scholarship reflects no consensus. Regardless of the final configuration that is preferred, some structural features must be highlighted for their bearing on interpretation.

The first is the conjunction *כִּי* which introduces the description of love in 6b–7a. The usual understanding, which is adopted in this analysis, is that *כִּי* here functions as a subordinating conjunction introducing information that provides the reason for the imperative in 6a.<sup>403</sup> There is no compelling reason to take the *כִּי* as asseverative, as Murphy does (as an outlying example, and without providing any justification).<sup>404</sup> However, even if *כִּי* is taken as indicating an affirmative (“indeed”) rather than explicitly causal (“because”)

<sup>402</sup> Mathys, “Song 8:6-7,” 127.

<sup>403</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 169: “this clause [for love is as strong as death] motivates the preceding demand that her lover bind her to him as tightly and permanently as a seal”; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 270 reads 8:6-7 as “a petition with a rationale”; Longman, *Song*, 210 understands the material introduced by *כִּי* as the “motive” for the woman’s demand; Exum, “Poetic Genius,” 245 argues that the particle “explains the reason” for the woman’s petition in 8:6a. Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 115: the causal “for” (*kî*) links the description of Love and Death in 8.6aß to the woman’s plea.”

<sup>404</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 191; there is no explanation offered for this reading of *כִּי*; Exum, *Song*, 245 argues against Murphy.

relationship between 6a and what follows, the juxtaposition of material suggests that 6b–7b elucidates the imperative in 6a. This is supported by the recognition that “love” in the abstract is the topic of both 8:6–7 and the adjurations, from which it follows that the abstract description of “love” in 6b–7a explains the motive for the instruction regarding “love” in the adjurations, and by virtue of close proximity also rationalises the imperative in 8:6a. When the adjurations and 8:6–7 are properly understood as the didactic frame for the Song, the information about love in 8:6b–7b affirms and explains the Song’s instruction, regardless of whether the כִּי is explicitly translated “for/because” or whether it is more subtly left untranslated.

Longman thus sees 6b as providing the “motive” for 6a and Exum similarly argues that 6b provides the “reason for wearing the seal and its significance.”<sup>405</sup> Keel takes a broader view, defining all of 6a–7a as “a petition with a rationale.”<sup>406</sup> It is best, at minimum, to keep statements 2–3 (6b–c) together, since the pronominal suffix on רִשְׁפִּיהָ in 6c refers anaphorically to the אֶהְבֶּהָ in 6b. Furthermore 6c and 7a are linked by the strong antithetical parallel between the concepts of “fire” and “water” and the renewed reference to אֶהְבֶּהָ, suggesting a continuation that runs through 6b–7a.

Keeping statements 2–4 together, there are broadly two ways to construe the shape of the entire strophe. The first option is to group statements 2–4 with statement 1, since the former is seen as providing the rationale for the latter, leaving statement 5 to stand alone. This pattern may be described as AA’BB’C:

1. (A) Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm
2. (A’) For love is as strong as death,  
jealousy as unyielding as Sheol
3. (B) Its flashes are flashes of fire  
an all-consuming inferno.
4. (B’) Many waters are not able to quench Love  
Nor rivers to overwhelm it.
5. (C) If a man would offer all the wealth of his house for Love, he would be utterly despised.

<sup>405</sup> Longman, *Song*, 210; Exum, *Song*, 245.

<sup>406</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 270.

While statements 1–4 are all linked, it may be specified that statement 2 provides the immediate rationale for statement 1 (with the call to fidelity in statement 1 corresponding with the strength of love in statement 2) while statements 3 and 4 provide broader elaboration (with the images of fire and water corresponding to one another). This arrangement separates statement 5 from the rest of the description of love, giving it the rhetorical effect of an isolated aphorism rather than an extension of the description in the lines preceding. Keel sees this statement as “complete in itself” and “only loosely related to what precedes it,” however he goes on to interpret it with respect to the preceding verses, finding its meaning in the comparison of love to death and concluding that both of these forces defy manipulation by money.<sup>407</sup> Longman also connects statement 5 to the description of love preceding, seeing that love is pitted first against the power of death, then the mighty waters, and finally wealth.<sup>408</sup> The presence of the definite article on אֶהְבֶּהּ in this final statement (which, as has been noted, is unique in the Hebrew Bible to this strophe and to the adjurations) is a strong indicator that statement 5 should be grouped with the preceding and understood as continuous with the description of the love (הָאֶהְבֶּהּ) in statements 2–4, rather than described as an “anticlimactic” (as Pope would have it) and largely independent aphorism.<sup>409</sup>

Therefore, it seems best to group all five statements together in order to include statement 5 more closely. This suggests an alternative structure in which the specific description of love’s attributes in statements 2–4 is framed by the imperative in statement 1 and the final reflection on the nature of love in statement 5. This can be described chiastically with an ABXB’A’ pattern:

1. (A) Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm
2. (B) For love is as strong as death,  
jealousy as unyielding as Sheol
3. (X) Its flashes are flashes of fire  
an all-consuming inferno.

<sup>407</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 270, 276.

<sup>408</sup> Longman, *Song*, 214.

<sup>409</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 676.

4. (B') Many waters are not able to quench Love  
Nor rivers to overwhelm it.
5. (A') If a man would offer all the wealth of his house for Love he would be utterly despised.

Arranging the verses this way produces two effects. Firstly, it emphasises that at the heart of the description of love is the most intense expression of its power in the passage and indeed in the entire Song. Statements 2 and 4 (B and B') are seen to correlate to one another with their parallel descriptions of the indestructability of love: the qualities of being "strong as death" and "unyielding as Sheol" correspond to the idea that love cannot be quenched by water or overwhelmed by rivers. The parallel between the elements of fire and water in statements 3 and 4 also binds them to one another, and both statements together refer anaphorically to the אֶהְבָּה in statement 2, supporting the conceptualisation of these three statements as a unit elaborating on the description of love. This centres statement 3 (X), the comparison of love to fire, the superlative particle of which invokes Yahweh: רִשְׁפֶּיהָ רִשְׁפֵי אֵשׁ שְׁלֵהֶבְתִּיהָ. It will be demonstrated in the analysis below that significant instances of shared language with other passages in the Hebrew Bible confirm that vv.6b–7a have in view a love that shares the characteristics of divine love. Therefore it is fitting that the superlative statement expressed with subtle allusion to Yahweh's name is positioned as the peak of these verses, and indeed of the entire Song.

The second effect is that the description of love's attributes is framed by two human expressions of love: the woman's call for her beloved to set her as a seal upon his heart and arm in statement 1, versus the despicable man who would attempt to buy love in statement 5. On this understanding A and A' correspond antithetically. Hauge conceives of these two realities as a "radical juxtaposition" wherein "the absurdity of the one is the normality of the other."<sup>410</sup> As will be explicated in the analysis below, statement 1 (A) describes a love that displays the characteristics of intimacy, mutuality and exclusivity; the Song's ideal for love. By contrast, statement 5 (A') points to Solomon, the epitome of impersonal, coercive, polygamous "love" that is antithetical to the Song's ideal.

Although the exegetical conclusions of this analysis are slightly different to that of Hauge's, they accord with his observation regarding the framing of love's description by the

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<sup>410</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 131.

two different examples of love, that “the shape of vv.6–7 as a whole underlines the poet’s concern.”<sup>411</sup> 6a and 7b frame the reflection on love in terms of its expression in human relationships (the woman and the beloved versus the “love” of Solomon; cf. “set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm” versus “If a man would offer all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly despised”), but at the heart of the strophe is a love like Yahweh’s. Thus the shape of the text evokes the shape of the metaphor that operates here and throughout the Song: divine love is couched in a story of human love; the covenant commitment between Yahweh and his people is revealed in the undying devotion of the lovers to each other.

## 5.2. Exegetical Analysis

There is a perception that the Song of Songs “does not contain many allusions to other biblical texts, compared to other books of the Old Testament.”<sup>412</sup> This perception is reflected in the common use by contemporary interpreters of extra-biblical ancient Near Eastern art, literature and legends to interpret the heightened imagery in Song 8:6–7.<sup>413</sup> It is apparent that the example of Pope, in his highly influential 1977 commentary on the Song, has been taken up by subsequent interpreters who accepted that the meanings of symbols such as love, death, fire and water were best extrapolated from extra-biblical sources, rather than sought within the Hebrew canon itself.<sup>414</sup> Hence, as will be noted in the analysis that follows, interpreters have often turned to Egyptian, Canaanite or Ugaritic mythologies when probing the meaning of the elemental imagery in the climax of the Song of Songs.

Contrary to the assumption that 8:6–7 contains more allusions to extra-biblical imagery than to other texts in the Hebrew canon, an exegesis of these verses that is alert to inner-biblical allusions finds that 8:6–7 constitutes an extremely tightly-packed cluster of images which are abundantly evident elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and have well-

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<sup>411</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 131.

<sup>412</sup> Mathys, “Song 8:6-7,” 131.

<sup>413</sup> The definitive examples in modern scholarship, which have been highly influential on subsequent interpretations, are Pope, *Song of Songs*; and Keel, *The Song of Songs*.

<sup>414</sup> For example, the suggestion that the comparison of “love” to “death” in Song 8:6 is an allusion to the Ugaritic myth of Baal and Mot, popularised in Pope, *Song of Songs*, 668; has been taken up by Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 274; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 196–97; Longman, *Song*, 210; Gledhill, *Song*, 232.

established symbolic value within this canon. These images will be detailed in the verse-by-verse analysis below.

It has so far been established that the Song of Songs contains two contrasting depictions of love: the ideal love between the woman and her beloved and the antithesis of the ideal embodied by Solomon. It has also been argued that the adjurations and 8:6–7 contain the Song’s instruction regarding love. The exegesis of 8:6–7 will demonstrate that these two verses crystallise the Song’s depiction of love into a terse, intense summary. The summary is introduced by a formula which heralds that this is the most crucial teaching of the entire Song. Both the ideal and its antithesis, already familiar from the rest of the Song, are present in these verses, but an additional layer is introduced by way of the key words the poet employs to describe love. The vocabulary invokes the divine-human relationship in its description of love, reflective of the closely-knit interaction between sexuality and spirituality that is a dominant theme in key Solomonic texts including 1 Kings 3–11 and Proverbs 1–9.

Following the verse-by-verse analysis, conclusions will be drawn regarding the exegetical implications of the Song’s interaction with the persona of Solomon in the rest of the Hebrew canon, and with the proposal that the daughters of Jerusalem represent the people of Israel as the external audience to the Song.

#### 5.2.1. 6a. “Set me as a seal...”

Set me as a seal upon your heart  
As a seal upon your arm

שִׁמְנִי כְחוֹתָם עַל־לִבֶּךָ  
כְחוֹתָם עַל־זְרוֹעֶךָ

The language used in this opening line of the Song’s core statement about love has two effects. Firstly, the woman’s exhortation to her beloved evokes the qualities of intimacy, mutuality and exclusivity which are held up as the ideal for love in the Song. As 8:6–7 progresses through its crystallisation of the depiction of love in the Song, it will conclude by depicting the antithesis of love, but it begins by displaying love’s ideal. Secondly, the words imitate a pattern employed in Deuteronomy (6:4–9; 11:18) in passages of fundamental significance, later adopted in Proverbs (3:3; 6:20–21; 7:1–3) to endow its

teaching with the same weight of authority. The use of similar language here heralds that the lines to follow will contain the banner teaching of the Song.

Before specific inner-biblical allusions are explored, it can be seen that the general image of the “seal” is an apt one to convey intimacy and exclusivity. Several interpretations have been offered regarding the metaphorical intent of the seal, and what it means to set a person upon your heart and arm. A commonality between the various conclusions is that they all point to the closeness and commitment of the couple in the Song. The genius of the metaphor is that it conveys multiple aspects of this idea.

In the ancient Near East seals were bound up with identity, as unique to the bearer as a signature is today. In the Hebrew Bible, Tamar retains Judah’s seal and later uses it to identify him as the man who impregnated her (Gen 38:18, 25); Jezebel sends letters ostensibly from her husband and stamps them with his seal (1 Kgs 21:8). On this understanding of the significance of the seal, some have concluded that when the woman in the Song speaks of being “like a seal” to her beloved she expresses a desire to be “as intimately bound up with his identity, as his seal might be.”<sup>415</sup>

A related concept is that the seal could be used to authenticate ownership of the object imprinted with its mark, so the image could be expressing the woman’s desire to possess her beloved. Hauge suggests that “the legal implications could even imply a commitment to marriage.”<sup>416</sup> The image is used to convey God’s possession of his people: in Hag 2:23, Yahweh declares he will make Zerubbabel like a “seal” (חֶתֶם as in Song 8:6, sometimes translated “signet ring”) to express that Zerubbabel is set aside as Yahweh’s chosen. A similar image is used in Jer 22:24, albeit negatively (Yahweh declares his willingness to cast off Coniah although he had been עַל־יָד יְמִינִי —“a signet ring upon my right hand”).

Then there is the simple fact that a seal would be perpetually carried about one’s person. Exum points out that the locations of “heart” and “arm” named in Song 8:6a potentially correspond with where a cylinder or stamp seal would often be worn, mounted on a necklace, bracelet or ring.<sup>417</sup> The concept of the seal, which would typically be worn or

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<sup>415</sup> Exum, *Song*, 250; similarly Andruska understands that the woman “identifies herself with the very core of his being,” Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 79.

<sup>416</sup> Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 65; Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 114.

<sup>417</sup> Exum, *Song*, 250.

carried closely to the body, intimates a constant physical presence. Hauge draws a parallel between the image of the seal resting on the heart and the likening of the beloved to a sachet of myrrh between the woman's breasts in Song 1:13. Both verses convey physical intimacy and an artefact of a lover's presence when the couple are absent from one another.<sup>418</sup>

In all of the respects above, the metaphor of the woman as a seal—whether she is imagined to be worn on the man's person or used to make an imprint on his heart—is an apt one for conveying the intimacy and exclusivity of their love.

Additionally, the mutuality of their relationship is affirmed by the fact that the imperative in Song 8:6a is spoken from the woman to the man, as opposed to the other way around. Garrett observes that in a culture where adultery was treated as a much more heinous offence for a wife than a husband, both the Song and Proverbs are countercultural in that they exhort the *man* to be faithful.<sup>419</sup> Dharamraj confirms that “in a social environment in which exclusive rights were a male prerogative[...]it is highly counter-cultural that the woman, with her talk of seals on sundry body parts, should demand full reciprocation of her love.”<sup>420</sup> The woman's exhortation, using the multifaceted metaphor of the seal, expresses the Song's highest ideals for love: intimacy and exclusive commitment with the equal desire and participation of both parties. This accords with one of the conclusions from the exegesis of the adjurations above, that the highest virtue extolled by the Song is fidelity. Its most urgent concern is not to caution people to restrain themselves before entering a relationship, but to insist that once entered, a relationship of the kind depicted in the Song should be lifelong and exclusive.

The call to “set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm” employs a linguistic pattern that is familiar from elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The significance of the woman's call cannot be fully realised without an awareness of the other biblical passages to which Song 8:6a alludes. Initially, similar language is encountered in the elaboration upon the *Shema Israel* in Deut 6:<sup>421</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Hear, Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One.<sup>5</sup>You shall love Yahweh your God with

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

<sup>418</sup> Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 115–16.

<sup>419</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 257.

<sup>420</sup> Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely*, 211.

<sup>421</sup> Gianni Barbiero, “The Literal Interpretation of the Song of Songs: Taking Song 8:5-7 as the Starting Point,” in Schellenberg and Schweinhorst-Schönberger, *Interpreting the Song of Songs*, 174.



all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.<sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be **on your heart**.<sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and speak them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. <sup>8</sup>You shall **bind them as a sign upon your hand**, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup>And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ  
וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ  
הַיּוֹם עַל-לִבְּךָ וְשִׁנְנָתָם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ  
בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבִלְכֻתְךָ בְּדֶרֶךְךָ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ  
וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ  
וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוֹזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבִשְׁעֶיךָ

The charge is repeated in a condensed form in Deut 11:18:

You shall set these words of mine **upon your heart** and upon your soul, and **bind them as a sign upon your hand**, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

וְשִׁמַּתָּם אֶת-דְּבָרֵי אֵלֹהִים עַל-לִבְבְּכֶם  
וְעַל-נַפְשְׁכֶם וּקְשַׁרְתָּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת  
עַל-יָדְכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם

In Proverbs, the words from Deuteronomy are developed into a formula which becomes a motif, introducing three separate passages of teaching throughout Proverbs 1–9:

Let steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you not;  
**Bind them around your neck;**  
**write them on the tablet of your heart.**  
(Prov 3:3)

חֶסֶד וְאֱמֻנָה אֲלֵי-עֵזְבֶךָ  
קְשֶׁרֶם עַל-גְּרוֹגְרוֹתֶיךָ  
כְּתֹבָם עַל-לִוְחַ לִבְּךָ

My son, keep your father's commandment,  
And do not forsake your mother's teaching;  
**Bind them on your heart always,**  
**Tie them around your neck.**  
(6:20–21)

נֹצֵר בְּנֵי מִצְוֹת אָבִיךָ  
וְאַל-תִּטַּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ  
קְשֶׁרֶם עַל-לִבְּךָ תָּמִיד  
עֲנֹדָם עַל-גְּרוֹגְרוֹתֶיךָ

My son, keep my words  
and treasure up my commandments with you;  
Keep my commandments and live;  
Keep my teaching as the apple of your eye.  
**Bind them on your fingers;**  
**Write them on the tablet of your heart.**  
(7:1–3)

בְּנֵי שְׁמַר אִמְרֵי  
וּמִצְוֹתֵי תִצְפֹּן אִתְּךָ  
שְׁמַר מִצְוֹתֵי יְהוָה  
וְתוֹרָתִי כְּאִישׁוֹן עֵינֶיךָ  
קְשֶׁרֶם עַל-אֶצְבָּעֶיךָ  
כְּתֹבָם עַל-לִוְחַ לִבְּךָ

It is widely recognised that the language of the motif in Proverbs originates in Deuteronomy 6 and 11.<sup>422</sup> Murphy notes that this provides an “important orientation

<sup>422</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, WBC 22 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 38; John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary* (Fearn, Ross-Shire: Mentor, 2006), 146; Tremper Longman, *Proverbs*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 132, 177; Bernd U. Schipper, “‘Teach Them Diligently to Your Son!’: The Book

because now the parental teaching is presented in the same light as the fundamental Yahwistic document of Deuteronomy."<sup>423</sup> By virtue of the presence of the same language, the same orientation can be applied to Song 8:6–7. While the woman is exhorting the man regarding her own self, and so her meaning is not a straightforward parallel to the similarly worded exhortations in Deuteronomy and Proverbs, the pattern of her words is significant to the Hebrew ear. The formula alerts the listener that the words to follow will bear special weight as theological instruction.

The familiar pattern indicates that these verses in the Song are bound by the same thread that links Proverbs to the fundamental teaching of Deuteronomy. This link suggests that the content and contexts of the passages in Deuteronomy and Proverbs are useful to inform the interpretation of Song 8:6–7. The relevant passages from the former two books have two aspects in common. In both cases, keeping the instruction of the respective books is held out as a means of keeping faith with Yahweh. Additionally, the theme of fidelity to Yahweh is closely associated, in proximity to the selected verses in both books, with conduct related to love, sex and marriage.

In Deuteronomy, the object of Moses's exhortation to Israel—the thing the Israelites are to bind upon themselves—is his own words, which convey commands received from God. In the wider context of the book, Moses's words encompass the decalogue recently declared in 5:6–21 and the statutes and rules expressed generally throughout Deuteronomy. In the immediate context of the exhortation, Moses has just bound Israel to "love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (6:5). This is the pinnacle of the Law, from which all rules and statutes flow. In close proximity to the exhortation here and in its condensed repetition in 11:18, as a component of loving Yahweh wholeheartedly, Moses warns the Israelites to take care not to worship other gods once they enter the land (6:10–15; 11:16–17). The temptation to worship foreign gods is linked to living among foreign people (6:14), and specifically to intermarrying with them (7:1–4). The Israelites are instructed to remember God's laws daily in order to love

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of Proverbs and Deuteronomy," in *Reading Proverbs Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, LHBOTS 629 (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 27–28.

<sup>423</sup> Murphy, *Proverbs*, 40; cf. Schipper, "Teach Them Diligently!," 28: "the parental instruction [in Proverbs] should be taken like the divine Torah to determine the whole course of life."

him completely, and to resist the temptation to worship other gods, which will include refusing to intermarry with the peoples around them.

In Proverbs, the three passages which employ the same linguistic pattern express their objects slightly differently. However, each iteration serves the overarching goal of the father's teaching, which is common to all three passages: to encourage the son to live a wise life by walking in faithfulness to Yahweh. In the first instance (Prov 3:3), the "son" is commanded to bind "steadfast love and faithfulness" (חֶסֶד וְאֱמֻנָה) to himself.<sup>424</sup> The phrase is identical with the words of Yahweh's self-definition in Exod 34:6 and can be taken as a metonymy for God himself. This is supported by the context of Prov 3:1–12, which expresses the path of wisdom in terms of living under the lordship of Yahweh, calling the audience to "trust in the LORD with all your heart" (3:5), "in all your ways acknowledge him" (3:6) and to "fear the LORD" (3:7).

In the two subsequent appearances of the motif (6:20–21 and 7:1–3), the thing to be held close is parental teaching. As has already been noted, the adoption of language from Deuteronomy orients the recipient of the parental teaching in Proverbs to hear it with the same authority awarded to Moses's teaching of the law. In these latter two passages from Proverbs, the specific reason for attending to the teaching is to avoid the "foreign woman" (נָכְרִיָּה; 6:24; 7:5). נָכְרִיָּה is sometimes translated "adulteress" in Proverbs (ESV renders it thus in 5:20; 6:24; 23:27 and 27:13; NIV has "wayward wife" in 23:27) because as in 6:20–35 and 7:1–27, the passages following the two instances of the similar introductory formula, consorting with the foreign woman is associated with committing adultery. Proverbs 6:20–35 explicitly warns against adultery; in 7:1–27, although it is not clear whether the young man is himself married, the reference to the woman's husband in 7:19 confirms that she is another man's wife.

The material regarding marriage and adultery in Proverbs operates at both a literal and metaphorical level. On a literal level, pursuing marital harmony and remaining sexually faithful are characteristics of a flourishing life lived in fear of Yahweh and obedience to his laws. To use Prov 6:20–35 as an example, Schipper demonstrates that this passage contains specific allusions to the decalogue in Deuteronomy 5: 6:25–29 refers to "coveting one's

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<sup>424</sup> While the verb for "bind" in Prov 3:3, 6:21 and 7:3 (קָשַׁר) is a different word to that used for "set" in Song 8:6 (שָׁם), there is semantic overlap in the general sense of placing something on parts of the body.

neighbour's wife," vv.30–31 to "stealing" and v.32 to "committing adultery."<sup>425</sup> This is illustrative of the way Proverbs operates with reference to established codes of Israelite ethics: the proverbial advice regarding marriage and adultery contains practical applications of the law. It additionally operates at a metaphorical level, in accordance with the grand metaphor at work in Proverbs: succumbing to the foreign woman represents abandoning the path of wisdom, and the fear of Yahweh in which it is rooted (Prov 9:10); conversely "fidelity to one's bride is equated with fidelity to Wisdom."<sup>426</sup> Marital fidelity is both a way to express obedience to Yahweh and a metaphor for remaining faithful to Yahweh himself. Steinmann draws the practical and the metaphorical together thus: "Unfaithfulness seldom manifests itself in only one aspect of life...By urging restraint in the face of sexual temptation, [Proverbs] is also urging restraint from idolatry and unfaithfulness to Wisdom, hypostasized as God himself."<sup>427</sup> The metaphor is particularly apt, and the practical advice of particular value, given the marriage-related issue that persists throughout the Hebrew Bible: despite Moses's early warning in Deuteronomy, Israel continually intermarries with non-Israelite nations and worships their idols.

These are the background contexts to which the reader is alerted by the appearance of the familiar linguistic formula in Song 8:6a. The deliberate phrasing in the Song reveals the rich theological heritage that stands behind the woman's exhortation to her beloved. She imitates a pattern of language used to introduce the paradigmatic teaching in Deuteronomy 6, and adopted as a motif in Proverbs 1–9. Thus the call in Song 8:6a to individual romantic fidelity is expressed with unmistakeable allusion to key teachings about other types of fidelity: corporate fidelity to Yahweh in the land (Deuteronomy), and personal fidelity to the path of Wisdom (Proverbs). Both types of fidelity to which the woman alludes involve avoiding the temptation of the "foreign woman," literally or metaphorically. The references call up the enmeshed relationship between sexual conduct and spiritual flourishing which is referred to in Deuteronomy, prominently displayed in Proverbs, and is a central issue in Solomon's biography in 1 Kings 3–11.

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<sup>425</sup> Schipper, "Teach Them Diligently!," 25–26.

<sup>426</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 257.

<sup>427</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann, *Proverbs*, Concordia (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2009), 182.

### 5.2.2. 6b–7a. “For love is as strong as death...”

For love is as strong as death  
 Jealousy as unyielding as Sheol  
 Its flashes are flashes of fire  
 A consuming inferno  
 Many waters are not able to quench Love  
 Nor rivers to engulf it

כִּי־עֲזָה כַּמּוֹת אֱהָבָה  
 קָשָׁה כְּשִׂאוֹל קִנְיָאָה  
 רְשָׁפֶיהָ רְשָׁפֵי אֵשׁ  
 שֹׁלֵהֶבְתִּיהָ  
 מִיַּם רַבִּים לֹא יוּכְלוּ לִכְבּוֹת אֶת־הָאֱהָבָה  
 וְנָהָרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּהָ

6b–7a contains the superlative description of love in the Song. As discussed above, the causal conjunction **כִּי** indicates that the statements following provide the rationale for the woman’s imperative in the preceding couplet.<sup>428</sup> That is, the reason that she implores her beloved to set her upon himself like a seal (in 6a) is because of what will be revealed about the nature of love (in 6b–7a).

So far in the Song, the readers have been privy to a particular love relationship, between the woman and her beloved, but now the referent moves from particular to general.<sup>429</sup> Fox observes that she speaks of “love”—not “my love” or “our love”—because, he supposes, “love’s power is universal.”<sup>430</sup> Unlike 6a and 7b, which resonate with verses from Proverbs 1–9, 6b–7a describes love without any linguistic evidence for an allusion to any of the key texts concerning Solomon. Rather, these lines are populated with a cluster of metaphorical images that are familiar from multiple other places in the Hebrew Bible, where the imagery is used for Yahweh’s love, jealousy, judgement, and salvation. The chosen language widens the scope of reference beyond the lovers in the Song and beyond the predicament of Solomon. As befits the superlative nature of the content, these lines burst out of the frame of reference that underpins the lines preceding and following it, an effect which is amplified by the way the *masnal* quality of these lines positions the reader as the direct recipient of the woman’s words. The scope shifts abruptly from a specific romance to a general reflection on love, and the scope of the images correspondingly expands beyond the domestic and pastoral scenes that have been the setting for the Song so far, making use instead of the most extreme, elemental images in the Hebrew imagination: death, fire and water.

<sup>428</sup> Following Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 169; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 270; Longman, *Song*, 210; Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 115; Exum, *Song*, 245.

<sup>429</sup> Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely*, 205.

<sup>430</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 169.

Scholarly opinions are mixed as to the meaning of the assertion that “love is as strong as death.” A popular approach in modern interpretations of Song 8:6–7 is to draw on mythological images of deities associated with the elements named in these verses. Using these mythical associations as the primary background against which this passage is read, it has been suggested that “love is as strong as death” indicates a battle between love and death (which are either conceived of as universal cosmic forces or personified as specific deities) in which love is the final victor. For example, Longman understands the Song to be setting itself against the Ugaritic myth wherein Mot (Death) defeats Baal (Fertility). By contrast, he says, the desire of the lovers in the Song to hold onto one another “will surpass even the power of the grave.”<sup>431</sup> Longman does not specify how this will work, except to say that the woman’s love is “irresistible, resolute and unshakable.”<sup>432</sup> Keel understands the Song to accord with, rather than resist, ancient Near Eastern mythologies, citing both the Ugaritic legend and Egyptian myths in which procreation overcomes death.<sup>433</sup> Exum understands love and death more abstractly, understanding the Song as an “act of resistance” to the inevitability of death, immortalising “not the love of two individuals, for the Song’s lovers stand for all lovers, but the enduring vision of desire they embody.”<sup>434</sup>

An issue with the dominant understanding that love will prevail *over* death is that there is nothing in the text to indicate that either love or death is more powerful than the other (Longman’s translation, “stronger than death is love,” is not supported by the preposition *כִּי* which indicates likeness or accordance; to indicate a relationship of superiority, a *יָדָה* would be expected).<sup>435</sup> Rather, the poetry *equates* love with death and jealousy with Sheol; “in the equation, love-and-jealousy are a match for Death-and-Sheol.”<sup>436</sup> Nor is there anything to suggest a confrontation between love and death; “love in this text is not in *a battle with death* but *is compared to* death...there is no indication here of love gaining a “victory” over death.”<sup>437</sup> The tendency to conceive of the two powers as being at war with each other appears to spring from the natural preconception that “love” has positive connotations while “death” is negative. In actuality, as has been demonstrated

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<sup>431</sup> Longman, *Song*, 212.

<sup>432</sup> Longman, *Song*, 210.

<sup>433</sup> Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 274.

<sup>434</sup> Exum, *Song*, 251.

<sup>435</sup> Longman, *Song*, 207.

<sup>436</sup> Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely*, 206.

<sup>437</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 255; see also Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 197; Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 82.

earlier in this thesis, the Hebrew Bible conceives of אֶהְבָּה as either positive or negative depending on its object and outcomes, and the Song itself showcases both ideal love and its antithesis. Therefore it does not accord with the text to hold the blanket assumption that love is universally “good” while death is “bad.” The placement of אֶהְבָּה and מָוֶת in parallel could indicate that they are either analogous or antithetical to one another, but there is nothing to signal that they are engaged in a competition. The grammar expresses a comparison: the strength and immutability of love is conveyed by likening it to death, which embodies those qualities in the highest order.

The recognition that “death” is invoked for comparison, to affirm the strength of love, supports the probability that the use of “death” here is idiomatic. It is likely that “death” and “Sheol” in this verse are not intended to be understood as material threats to love, but rather are present to express a superlative. In other words, the sense of the couplet is that *love is superlatively strong; jealousy is superlatively unyielding*. Such usage of the terms “death” and “Sheol” is attested in the Hebrew Bible. D. Winton Thomas surveys the use of מָוֶת and related words to express a superlative in Hebrew and identifies examples in Judg 16:16 (“his soul was vexed to death”); 2 Kgs 20:1 (“Hezekiah was sick to [the point of] death”—he did not actually die, so the expression conveys that he was “very sick”) and Jonah 4:9 (“I am angry enough to die,” lit. “as far as death”).<sup>438</sup> Thomas proposes that the phrase in Song 6b should be translated, not “love is strong as death,” but “love is extremely strong.”<sup>439</sup> Similarly, Waltke and O’Connor list the use of מָוֶת or שָׁאֵל among the standard expressions of the superlative and offer Song 8:6 as an example of this.<sup>440</sup> Additionally, Brin argues that “death” and “Sheol” function as superlatives in Song 8:6, paralleled by the superlative “Yah” in שְׁלֵהֶבֶתָּהּ.<sup>441</sup> The particle הָ will be discussed in more detail below, but Brin’s suggestion is noted for now insofar as it supports a superlative usage of “death” and “Sheol” in this verse.

There is no need to look to extra-biblical mythological imagery to probe the meaning of the notion that love and jealousy are superlatively strong. Rather, these concepts are explicated by the allusions contained in the lines following, which employ language to which

<sup>438</sup> D. Winton Thomas, “A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew,” VT 3.3 (1953): 219–20.

<sup>439</sup> Thomas, “Unusual Ways,” 221.

<sup>440</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §14.5c (269).

<sup>441</sup> Gershon Brin, “The Superlative in the Hebrew Bible: Additional Cases,” VT 42.1 (1992): 116.

the Hebrew ear is attuned from the repetitive use of certain words in connection with key themes in the Hebrew Bible.

The first of these key theme words is קִנְיָה, “jealousy,” which stands in parallel to אֶהְבָּה. While “passion” (Pope) or “ardor” (Murphy) have been suggested as translations in Song 8:6, it is important to note that קִנְיָה does not describe a general fervour but conveys a particular emotion of possessiveness.<sup>442</sup> This is the emotion directed at a third party that threatens rights of ownership or relationship. It can also be used “to indicate the feelings of a person who, though not one of the two principal parties to the relationship, chooses to share the jealousy of the first party” (e.g., Num 25:13; 1 Kgs 19:10, 14).<sup>443</sup> Longman notes that in the Hebrew Bible, this is affirmed as “a proper type of jealousy,” appropriate for protecting the exclusivity of two types of relationship: the divine-human relationship and the marriage relationship.<sup>444</sup>

This “proper jealousy” is a key component of Yahweh’s character. He is the exemplar of righteous jealousy. An emphatic majority of the instances of קִנְיָה in the Hebrew Bible refer to Yahweh’s character, making God himself the most common object of association with קִנְיָה (Num 25:11; Deut 29:19[20 Eng.]; Isa 9:6; 26:11, 37:32; 42:13; 59:17; 63:15; Ezek 5:13; 16:42; 23:25; 35:5–6; 38:19; Zeph 1:18; 3:8; Zech 1:14; 8:2; Ps 79:5). The cognate adjective to קִנְיָה, קִנְיָ / קִנְיָה (“jealous”) is used only of Yahweh. As Moses prepares the people to enter the land, he declares Yahweh to be a jealous God (Deut 4:24; 6:15); in Joshua’s final speech before his death, he warns the assembly with the same claim (Josh 24:19); the prophecy of Nahum is introduced by the words, “A jealous and avenging God is Yahweh” (Nah 1:2). Yahweh himself uses the word “jealous” self-descriptively (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9) and even owns it as his name (Exod 34:14). “Jealousy” is a byword for Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible.

While Yahweh’s character is the dominant association called up by the word “jealousy,” there are a few references to jealousy as it pertains to human relationships that are worth noting for their possible value to the interpretation of Song 8:6. Firstly, proper jealousy for Yahweh’s exclusive right to his people is occasionally expressed by a human (2 Kgs 10:16; Ps 69:9[10 Eng.]; 119:139). These instances represent a situation wherein a

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<sup>442</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 669; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 191.

<sup>443</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 169.

<sup>444</sup> Longman, *Song*, 211.



human is the party who chooses to share the jealousy of one of the two principal players in a relationship (i.e., Yahweh's jealousy in the relationship with his people), as described above. Secondly, there are two brief passages discussing the issue of marital jealousy. Numbers 5:11–31 outlines a formal process for a husband who “is jealous” (verb, קִנָּא) to investigate a wife he suspects of adultery. Proverbs 6:34 also speaks of marital jealousy, in the context of a cautionary passage against taking another person's wife: the would-be adulterer is warned that “jealousy” (קִנְיָה) will drive a wronged husband to fury and revenge. Numbers and Proverbs acknowledge the reality of marital jealousy without particularly lauding it. Its negative outcomes for the adulterous parties are accepted as a necessary component of a marital relationship which is premised on exclusivity.

When “jealousy” as a human emotion independent of the marital context is mentioned in the writings, it is portrayed negatively. In Job and Proverbs, jealousy is one of the characteristics associated with the archetypal “fool” and the path of “folly” that is the antithesis to a life of wisdom rooted in the fear of Yahweh. Job 5:2 declares that “vexation kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple,” and Prov 14:30, in a long series of antithetical parallels that illustrate the respective paths of wisdom and folly, that “a tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but jealousy makes the bones rot.” Ecclesiastes 4:4 cites jealousy of one's neighbour as the main motivation for human endeavours, dismissing this (as the teacher dismisses most things) as “vanity.” These references convey that jealousy is not a desirable characteristic for humans. It is affirmed only when a person expresses jealousy in relation to God and his exclusive right to his people, but otherwise jealousy is a component of folly and leads to dire consequences.

Thus, as with אֶהְבֶּה, קִנָּא is not inherently good or bad in the Hebrew Bible but is viewed positively or negatively depending on its object. The difficulty of assessing the “jealousy” in Song 8:6 on this basis is that the reason for jealousy in the Song is not explicit. Nor is it explicit whether the woman is speaking of her own jealousy or her beloved's (or both), or of jealousy in general. Regarding the first possibility, there is no third party who presents as a likely candidate for provoking the woman to jealousy.<sup>445</sup> The woman finds it unsurprising (and apparently unthreatening) that other women should admire her beloved (Song 1:3–4) while the beloved hardly even acknowledges other women except as foils for

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<sup>445</sup> Exum, “Poetic Genius,” 252; cf. Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 170.

his lover's superior beauty (2:2; 6:8–9). Regarding the possibility that the woman speaks of her beloved's jealousy, it is odd—though not impossible—that she should call her beloved to fidelity due to *his* jealousy, rather than her own. Regardless, nowhere in the poem is the beloved depicted as jealous nor is there any obvious reason for him to be so, since the woman repeatedly declares and demonstrates her devotion to him. While some interpreters see Solomon as an antagonistic character who would separate the lovers, there is no indication that his presence is the catalyst for the mention of jealousy in 8:6–7.

Fox and Exum have both puzzled over the sudden reference to קִנְיָה in the Song without an obvious third party to provoke it. Both observe rightly that there is no suggestion that the woman harbours any jealousy towards other parties. Fox can conclude only that the potential interfering party must be “society conceived generally.”<sup>446</sup> Exum disagrees, arguing that there are no real threats to the devotion of the lovers in the poem nor any sense of insecurity in their relationship, and that “moreover, she speaks here not about any jealousy of her own but about jealous love in general.”<sup>447</sup> Exum supposes this general reflection, in light of the perceived comparison between love and death, to mean that “love's ultimate rival is mortality.”<sup>448</sup> This overstates the significance of “death,” which (as it has been demonstrated) is more likely invoked as a superlative than as a concept with discrete substance; the notion that love and death are rivals lacks compelling evidence from the text. The strength of Exum's observation is the conclusion that the woman refers to jealousy as a general concept, which accords with the abstract nature of the “love” in 8:6–7 (with which “jealousy” is placed in parallel). However, a meaningful explanation of jealousy as an abstract notion, and its contribution to the general sapiential reflection on love in Song 8:6–7, has not been offered.

A previously unexplored possibility exists: since there is no indication in the Song that romantic jealousy is an issue in the central relationship, it is possible that the woman is alluding to the other type of “proper jealousy” affirmed by the Hebrew Bible—the jealousy of God for his people, or of a person who takes God's part in this righteous jealousy. The possibility that it is divine love and jealousy which is primary, if not exclusively on view in

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<sup>446</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 170.

<sup>447</sup> Exum, *Song*, 252.

<sup>448</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 170; Exum, *Song*, 253.

Song 8:6b–7a may be assessed by the explanatory power of the other key terms in the cluster of allusions in these lines.

The second set of key terms, after jealousy, are those in which love is compared to fire. רָשַׁף (“flame” or “flash”) occurs only rarely in the Hebrew Bible, and is hardly translated the same way twice: usually as either “plague” or “burning heat” in Deut 34:24; “pestilence” or “burning coals” in Hab 3:5; רָשַׁף־יִקְשֶׁת as “flaming”, “flashing” or “fiery” arrows in Ps 76:4; רָשַׁפִּים as “thunderbolts” or “lightning bolts” in Ps 78:48 and “sparks” in Job 5:7. The term is cognate with the name of the Canaanite god Resheph, who is associated with arrows that bring pestilence and plague.<sup>449</sup> This association informs translations of רָשַׁף־אֵשׁ that attempt to convey the fire as having volitional movement, such as “darts of fire” (Fox), “shafts of fire” (Murphy), “flaming arrows” (Keel) or even “thunderbolts” (May).<sup>450</sup> Numerous interpreters recognise that while רָשַׁף in the Song need not be taken as a literal reference to the god Resheph, the mythology in which the word is rooted contributes to the intensity of the description of the fire in the Song.<sup>451</sup> In every occurrence of רָשַׁף in the Hebrew Bible except for Job 5:7, the term refers to an outpouring of God’s wrath. Likewise the noun שְׁלֵהָבֶת, which appears in a superlative form in Song 8:6 (and only elsewhere in Job 15:20 and Ezek 21:3), “is metaphorical for divine wrath. The word is never used in the Bible for literal fire; rather, it connotes jealous anger.”<sup>452</sup> In consideration of this, Garrett insists of Song 8:6 that “it is the fire of wrath, not the fire of compassion, that is in view here.”<sup>453</sup>

The subsequent mention of water (which will be discussed in more detail below) indicates that this fire is unquenchable. Although it is “love” which is said to be unquenchable by many waters and rivers in 7a (not fire), this is a clear extension of the fire imagery, since the ability to be doused by water is a quality concretely embodied by fire. (“If

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<sup>449</sup> John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 198.

<sup>450</sup> Fox, *Egyptian Love Songs*, 167; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 190; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 270; Herbert G. May, “Some Cosmic Connotations of Mayim Rabbîm, ‘Many Waters,’” *JBL* 74.1 (1955): 18.

<sup>451</sup> In his monograph on Resheph, Fulco identifies the occurrence in Song 8:6 as a common noun, demythologised, yet with unmistakeable roots in mythology that enrich the image: “One can, for example, say in English that someone has been shot by the arrows of Cupid, where ‘Cupid’ conjures up a more nuanced image than, say ‘infatuation.’” William S.J. Fulco, *The Canaanite God Rešep*, AOS 8 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1976), 60; cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 670; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 191; Day, *Yahweh*, 204–5; Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 349.

<sup>452</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 255.

<sup>453</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 255.

love is fire, its natural enemy is water.”)<sup>454</sup> This invulnerability is metaphorically applied to “love” to affirm its superlative strength and relentlessness already mentioned in 8:6a. Love is like a fire that resists being put out. The metaphor of a flame that will not be quenched is an established image for God’s wrath poured out, appearing in Isaiah (1:31; 34:10; 66:24), Jeremiah (4:4; 7:20; 17:27; 21:12) Ezek (21:3–4) and Amos (5:6). These instances represent all the uses of the verb “quench” (כָּבַד) with reference to fire in the Hebrew bible, evidencing that the concept of an “unquenchable fire” is an image exclusively associated with divine judgement. Additionally, Huldah’s prophecy recorded in 2 Kgs 22:17 (cf. 2 Chr 34:25) conveys the threat of God’s “wrath” being kindled and not quenched, upholding the analogy of fire to represent divine wrath.

The mention of fire (אֵשׁ) in proximity to jealousy (קִנְיָה) supports a sequence of deliberate allusions to the language of Deuteronomy, following on from the imitation of the pattern of the Shema in Song 8:6a. Fire and jealousy together call up a classic statement of Yahweh’s character: “Yahweh your god is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (אֵשׁ אֹכֶלֶת הוּא אֱלֹהִים; Deut 4:24), which appears in the context of an extended passage warning the Israelites against idolatry. Deut 32:21–22 describes God’s jealousy for his people, the consequence of which is that “a fire is kindled by [his] anger”; Barry Webb notes that the vocabulary of קִנְיָה, אֵשׁ and שָׂאוֹל is common to this passage and Song 8:6.<sup>455</sup> Fire and jealousy also appear together in texts subsequent to Deuteronomy: in Ps 79:5 the psalmist asks if Yahweh’s jealousy will burn like fire, and a similar image appears twice in Zephaniah, which threatens that the whole earth will be consumed in the fire of Yahweh’s jealousy (בָּאֵשׁ קִנְיָתוֹ, Zeph 1:18; 3:8). Jealousy and fire constitute an image pairing that is classically associated in the Hebrew Bible with Yahweh.

A possible allusion to Yahweh’s name is found in the particle שְׁלֵהֶבְתִּיהָ on יָהּ. Its presence has been the topic of much debate as to whether this word constitutes the Song’s only reference to Yahweh.<sup>456</sup> Affixing God’s name to a thing is an established way to express the superlative in Hebrew. While the use of יָהּ in this manner is less common than אֱלֹהִים or

<sup>454</sup> Roland E. Murphy, “Dance and Death in the Song of Songs,” in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford: Four Quarters, 1987), 119.

<sup>455</sup> Webb credits Richard Gibson for this insight. Barry G. Webb, “The Song of Songs: A Love Poem and as Holy Scripture,” *RTR* 49.3 (1990): 98.

<sup>456</sup> Exum, *Song*, 253–54 provides a concise overview of the discussion.

אֱלֹהִים, it is attested outside of Song 8:6 (e.g., מְאֹפְלִיָּה, “deep darkness,” Jer 2:31; מַעֲלִילֵי־יָהּ, “mighty deeds,” Ps 77:12).<sup>457</sup> While it is most likely the יָהּ here serves a superlative function, the choice to express it this way is apt both as a subtle allusion to Yahweh, appropriate to the oblique (yet unmistakeable) manner in which these lines expand to encompass divine love and jealousy, and for the wordplay it creates on the sound of בֵּית יָהּ, noted by Athas: “the Hebrew ear cannot help but detect a surreptitious allusion to the “house of Yahweh” within it [שְׁלֵהֲבֵתִיָּה].”<sup>458</sup> The choice to express the concept of an intense fire by embellishing the noun שְׁלֵהֲבֵת with the particle יָהּ, rather than a different type of superlative, supports the notion that the vocabulary of Song 8:6b–7a is deliberately selected to invoke characteristic descriptions of Yahweh.

The final key image in these lines is “water.” As with love, death and fire, there is a tendency for scholars to derive the meaning of this image from ancient Near Eastern mythology. This is legitimate to the extent that the Hebrew Bible uses “water” as a metaphorical image for chaotic powers which Yahweh subdues, an image which is not exclusive to the Israelite religion but which has parallels in Canaanite, Babylonian and Ugaritic mythologies.<sup>459</sup> The general metaphor of water for chaos, and its multiple manifestations in various ancient Near Eastern traditions, is well-established. However, some scholars have conceived of the “waters” and “rivers” in Song 8:7 with particularities that are unwarranted by the evidence in the Song. Keel and Pope follow Tromp in insisting that the many waters in Song 8:7 refer specifically to the netherworld, alluding to the reference to “death” in 8:6–7, but it has already been demonstrated that love and death are likened to one another, not placed in opposition, and that “death” functions as a superlative, not as a force in itself.<sup>460</sup> Longman suggests that the imagery in Song 8:7 intended to evoke the Ugaritic myth of Baal versus Yam (sea) and its Mesopotamian counterpart, the conflict between Marduk (god of order) and Tiamat (goddess of waters) in

<sup>457</sup> The Masoretes did not add a *mappiq* to the final ה in מְאֹפְלִיָּה (Jer 2:31), but this is irrelevant in a consonantal text. See HALOT, s. v. “יָהּ and יָהֹ.” BDB notes that Gesenius glosses it as מְאֹפְלִיָּה; see BDB s.v. “מְאֹפְלִיָּה.”

<sup>458</sup> Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song*, 350.

<sup>459</sup> The treatment of the term “many waters” in the Hebrew Bible and its links to water imagery and mythology in other ANE traditions which has informed much subsequent commentary on Song 8:7 is May, “Some Cosmic Connotations.”

<sup>460</sup> Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*, BibOr 21 (Rome: E Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1969), 64; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 673; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 276; contra Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 192 who sees that “this view unnecessarily restricts the sense of the metaphor.”

the minds of ancient readers.<sup>461</sup> While these related ancient Near Eastern narratives enrich the broader literary background to the Song, the specific connotations of the images in Song 8:7 may be sought in the more immediate literary context, which is the Hebrew canon.

Before clarity is sought by analysing the import of מַיִם רַבִּים and נְהָרוֹת in the Hebrew Bible, it is noted that the “water” metaphor has two purposes. In addition to representing a threatening power, it operates simply with reference to the fire. Garrett points out rightly that “the contrast between fire and water is so obvious that one hardly need look to mythological images of the waters of primordial chaos for an explanation of this line.”<sup>462</sup> The image of the water functions first as a continuation of the description of the superlative fire in 6c, emphasising the unquenchable nature of the latter.

When the metaphor is probed more deeply, it is found that there are abundant points of reference for the image of “waters” to be found within the Hebrew canon. Since “water” is quite a generic image, care must be taken to identify passages which resonate with the image in the Song, based on exactness of shared terminology and on context. The phrase מַיִם רַבִּים appears relatively frequently and conveys a variety of meanings, literal and poetic. Three narrative passages may be dismissed for their lack of relevance here: Num 20:11; Jer 41:12 and 2 Chr 32:4. In these instances the term simply means “a large amount of water,” and has no special significance. In Ezekiel the motif of מַיִם רַבִּים is used most frequently for abundance and a source of life (Ezek 17:5, 8; 31:7, 15; 32:13, and cf. similar usage in Jer 51:13); however, these are enclosed by two references to “the sound of many waters” to describe the terrifying noise that accompanies visions of God (Ezek 1:24; 43:2). In an analogous manner, enemy nations “roar” like מַיִם רַבִּים in Isa 17:13; in this passage, as in Hab 3:15 and Pss 29:3, 32:6 and 93:4, God is far mightier than the “many waters.” This last cluster of references employs the sense of מַיִם רַבִּים that is used in Song 8:7, where the many waters represent an antagonistic power that threatens to overwhelm. The background provided by the Hebrew Bible reveals that water is significant as a metaphor for elemental and chaotic power in the Bible as it is more broadly in ancient Near Eastern mythologies, but in the Hebrew canon it is specifically called up with reference to the Hebrew God’s ability to subdue it. In the Song, אֶהְבֶּה and קִנְיָא are able to withstand the

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<sup>461</sup> Longman, *Song*, 214.

<sup>462</sup> Garrett and House, *Song*, 255. Similarly Murphy notes that the simple contrast with fire is one of the purposes of the water metaphor in Song 8:7. Murphy, “Dance and Death,” 119.

might of the waters, a comparison that is analogous to Yahweh's power over the waters in the other references just cited.

נְהָרוֹת (rivers) is also used as a metaphor for antagonistic forces in a similar manner מִיִּם רְבִיִּים. Pope credits Robert for noting that the term is used “of the hostile powers Egypt and Babylon in announcements of the delivery of captivity and of judgements of Yahweh in general” (e.g., Jer 46:7–8; Ezek 32:2; Isa 43:2; 47:2).<sup>463</sup> Pope dismisses these references as having minimal relevance to his own conclusion that Song 8:6–7 is speaking of the power of love to withstand death. נְהָרוֹת represents for Pope “the floods of the netherworld,” a representation which appears elsewhere (in the Hebrew Bible) only in Jonah 2:4. However, there is no warrant for dismissing what Robert has identified: a referent for נְהָרוֹת which accords well with the cluster of references cited above for מִיִּם רְבִיִּים. The two terms together convey a threatening entity, of the type which is often associated in the Hebrew Bible with enemy nations, and over which Yahweh is depicted as having superior power. This understanding supports the notion that Song 8:6b–7a describes love and jealousy in terms which are usually associated with Yahweh's character and actions.

A final passage bears mentioning due to the degree of overlap of accumulated terms (recognised by Robert and by Mathys), and the context related to אֶהְבֶּה.<sup>464</sup> In Isaiah 43:2, the shared language with Song 8:6–7 is highlighted in bold:

Because when you pass through the **waters**,  
I will be with you  
And through the **rivers**, they will not **engulf** you.  
When you walk through **fire**,  
it will not scorch you,  
And **flame** will not consume you.  
(Isa 43:2)

כִּי־תַעֲבֹר בַּמִּיִּם  
אֲתִדְּאֶנִּי  
וּבְנְהָרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטָפוּךָ  
כִּי־תֵלֵךְ בְּמוֹ־אֵשׁ  
לֹא תִכְוֶה  
וְלֹא־תִבְהַל תִּבְעַר־בָּךְ

In the same text, Yahweh tells his people they are “precious and honoured in my sight, and I love (אֶהְבֶּה) you,” which provides the reason for his protecting them (Isa 43:4). In the other passages cited above which speak of Yahweh subduing “mighty waters” and “rivers,” the focus is on Yahweh's hostility towards these enemy powers. Isaiah 43:2 speaks from a different perspective on the presence of enemies, which is the posture Yahweh

<sup>463</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 674.

<sup>464</sup> Robert cited in Pope, *Song of Songs*, 674; Mathys, “Song 8:6-7,” 131; Longman also notes the similarity of the water imagery in Isaiah 43:2 to Song 8:7, albeit only in passing; Longman, *Song*, 214.

assumes in relation to his people when threats are present. While he is belligerent towards enemies, he is tender towards his people. Isaiah 43:1–4 reveals that Yahweh’s combative actions towards antagonistic nations are motivated by fiercely protective love for his own. This sheds light on the characterisation in Song 8:7a of love as something that can withstand being overcome by many waters and rivers, typically used to represent chaotic powers or enemy nations in the Hebrew Bible. Commentators have tended to understand this as a generic description of the strength of the lovers’ devotion to each other, but the employment of the water imagery, which is seen elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, calls up Yahweh’s devotion to his people in times of crisis. Observing the way love prevails over chaotic elements in 8:6–7, Tromp remarks that “the partition here between Love and God is extremely thin indeed.”<sup>465</sup> It is *God’s* love that is powerful enough to offer protection from enemies, to withstand many waters like an unquenchable fire. This insight is further evidence that 8:6b–7a purposefully assembles a series of established biblical images which point the audience beyond the immediate situation of the lovers and model the ultimate meditation on “love” in the Song after the love and jealousy that Yahweh has for the nation of Israel.

Love as described by Song 8:6b–7a has two faces: on the one hand, exclusive love cannot exist without jealousy, which consumes the unfaithful like fire (6c); on the other hand, love has the power to protect against hostile powers and against the consuming fire itself (7a). Without pressing too hard on an allegorical model that the text does not suggest, it is impossible not to notice that the sequence of inner-biblical allusions in 8:6a–7b presents a progression through ideal love (6:a–bα), to jealousy (6bβ), to judgement (6c), even to salvation (7a). Thus Song 8:6a–7a reflects the fullness of divine love. Jealousy and judgement (as well as protection and salvation) are attributes of Yahweh’s love and necessary implications of the exclusivity of the relationship between God and Israel.

### 5.2.3. 7b. “If a man would give all the wealth of his house...”

If a man would give all the wealth of his house  
for love, he would be utterly despised

אִם־יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת־כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ  
בְּאַהֲבָה בּוֹז יִבּוֹז לוֹ

<sup>465</sup> Nicolas J. Tromp, “Wisdom and the Canticle. Ct., 8, 6c-7b: Text, Character, Message and Import,” in *La Sagesse de l’Ancien Testament*, 2nd ed. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 94.



Following the superlative quality of the preceding lines, 8:7b is regarded by Pope as an anti-climax, while Keel regards it as “only loosely related to what precedes it.”<sup>466</sup> However, as argued above, it is best to understand this final line as a continuation of the description of הָאֵהָבָה in 6a–7a and an antithetical correspondent to the image of fidelity and intimacy in 6a. 8:7b is a fitting conclusion to the verses immediately preceding, as well as constituting part of the Song’s portrayal of Solomon. The first clue to this is found a few verses later in Song 8:11–12, which metaphorically depicts Solomon commodifying “love,” confirming that offering money in exchange for love (as in 8:7b) is a “Solomonic” behaviour. This weaves 8:7b into the portrayal of Solomon in the Song, which is the antithesis to the ideal displayed in 8:6a. A second clue is an allusion to Prov 6:31, which contains the only other appearance in the Hebrew Bible of the idiom כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ. While Prov 6:31 refers to a subsequent penalty for adultery, not a prior payment in exchange for “love,” analysis will reveal that Prov 6:20–35 illustrates that it is impossible to assign a monetary value to love, supporting the understanding that to offer money in exchange for it (as in Song 8:7b) completely misunderstands the nature of love. Love is secured not by purchase, but by the type of commitment on view in 8:6a. Thus while the woman’s call in 8:6a embodies the Song’s ideal for love, the proverbial despised man in 8:7b embodies the opposite to the ideal, completing 8:6–7 as a crystallisation of the entire depiction of love, both the ideal and its antithesis, in the Song as a whole.

The first clue to the meaning of 8:7b is the link with 8:11–12. 8:7b portrays the act of offering wealth in exchange for love as an anathema: the man who tries it would be utterly despised. 8:11–12 imagines Solomon’s harem as a metaphorical vineyard, which he manages—not personally, but by proxy through keepers—as a commercial enterprise. The Song explicitly rejects this model through the voice of the woman, who declares that Solomon can keep his money, since her “vineyard” (her body, as an agent of physical and emotional love) is not for purchase. The plain message of 8:7b is that money can’t buy love, but its fullest meaning is realised when the reader arrives at 8:11–12, and the proverbial man from 8:7b takes concrete shape in Solomon. He is the man who deserves to be despised, in the view of the Song. Prior to 8:6–7 Solomon has been established as the

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<sup>466</sup> Pope, *Song of Songs*, 676; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 270.

antithesis to love's ideal in the poem, so when 8:7b is revealed to refer to a behaviour which is specifically identified as "Solomonic" a few verses later, this confirms that 8:7b is a direct inversion of the ideal in 8:6a. 8:7b forms part of Solomon's portrayal, and Solomon is the antithesis of true love in the Song, the negative counterpoint to the ideal on view in 8:6–7a.

The link between 8:11–12 and 8:7b adds layers of meaning to 8:7b. Firstly, the recognition that Solomon is a concrete example of the behaviour in 8:7b makes explicit something that has been implicit throughout the Song: Solomon's behaviour in love makes him worthy of being despised. Secondly, the phrase *כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ* carries particular weight when the image is associated with Solomon. Solomon was not only rich; he was reportedly the richest king on earth (1 Kgs 10:23).

To imply that all the wealth of *Solomon's* house is not an appropriate price for love has two implications. The first is to contribute to the disparagement of Solomon by driving home the point that his material wealth is of limited worth. This continues the negative thread in the narrative of 1 Kings 3–11 wherein Solomon's focus on accumulating wealth and power detracted from his judgement in matters of love, which impacted his loyalty to Yahweh. When it comes to what the Song values most highly—intimacy, mutuality and exclusivity in love—all of Solomon's riches are inadequate to make him equal to the task of handling love in accordance with the Song's ideal.

The second effect of associating *כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ* with Solomon is to hyperbolically reaffirm love's unquantifiable value and unique nature. Even the entire wealth of *Solomon's* house, representative of the largest amount of material wealth imaginable in the Israelite consciousness, does not match the value of love. Love has just been compared to death and Sheol and has been described using language which evokes the covenantal love of Yahweh. Love is a phenomenon which operates outside of the realm of the material, not something that can be purchased for any amount of wealth. To handle it appropriately requires a skillset and a mindset completely at odds with Solomon's aptitude for financial excess, which is irrelevant and would disgrace him if he attempted to apply it to the pursuit of love.

The second allusion which enriches the meaning of 8:7b is to Proverbs 6. The folly of offering wealth for love is explicitly condemned in Song 8:7, but the depth of the folly is more thoroughly plumbed in Prov 6:20–35, in which a near-identical phrase appears: *כָּל־הוֹן*

בֵּיתוֹ יִתֵּן (6:31).<sup>467</sup> Mathys argues that “the correspondence between Song 8.7b and Prov. 6.31 is so close that it cannot be accidental. Yet, the author of Song 8.7b does not only cite Prov. 6.31. In order to grasp the intention underlying these references, one has to read the whole of Prov. 6.28–35.”<sup>468</sup> Further to this, the scope of reference is best extended to include the whole of Prov 6:20–35, given that 6:20–35 is a discrete literary unit and is one of four passages outside of Deuteronomy introduced by the Deuteronomistic language also employed in Song 8:6a.

In addition to the formula of their introductions, Prov 6:20–35 and Song 8:6–7 share the thematic concern of teaching about love. Proverbs 6:20–35 concerns itself specifically with warning against adultery, i.e., sleeping with a woman who is married to somebody else. Adultery is not a dominant topic in the Song, although the references to commitment and jealousy in Song 8:6–7 operate with implicit reference to the notion that exclusivity is a characteristic of ideal love. While the angles of approach taken by Prov 6:20–35 and Song 8:6–7 are different, the teaching of the two passages converges in the overlapping phrase found in Prov 6:31 and Song 8:7b. In Proverbs 6, a thief is required to pay back (a hyperbolic) “seven times” what he stole, amounting to “all the wealth of his house” (6:30). Yet a thief is *not* despised (בִּזוּ, cf. Song 8:7) for his thievery, because it is understandable for a hungry person to steal food (6:30). However, the passage goes on to reveal that there is no possibility of monetary compensation for the crime of taking another person’s wife. A jealous husband will not be appeased by any amount of money (6:34–35). The image of the thief serves to show by comparison that adultery is not only worse than stealing, but is a crime of an entirely different nature. “One who steals will pay a high price, but restitution is possible. In contrast, the one who commits adultery steals what cannot be returned or repaid.”<sup>469</sup> Hence Song 8:7b and Prov 6:20–35 convey a similar idea about the value of love: unlike bread or other material goods, love does not have a cash value. One who steals it

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<sup>467</sup> The correlation is widely recognised but has typically received only cursory attention: see for example Pope, *Song of Songs*, 675; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 192; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 276; Schwab, *The Song of Song’s Cautionary Message*, 57; Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely*, 211. Zakovitch asserts that Proverbs 6:20–35 is the source for Song 8:6–7, citing the identical phrase כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ (Proverbs 6:31; Song 8:7) and the words אֶשׁ (Proverbs 6:27; Song 8:6) and קִנְיָה (Proverbs 6:34; Song 8:6): Zakovitch, *Song*, 47; albeit Zakovitch sees that 8:6–7 adapts the material from Proverbs 6:20–35 into a new context with “eine ganz andere Bedeutung,” Yair Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied*, trans. Dafna Mach, HThKat (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 271–72.

<sup>468</sup> Mathys, “Song 8:6–7,” 139.

<sup>469</sup> Kitchen, *Proverbs*, 152.

(commits adultery) cannot pay back the wronged party with money, and one who would purchase it cannot do so for any amount of riches, even the whole wealth of his house.

Reading Song 8:7b and 11–12 alongside Prov 6:20–35 enriches the condemnation of Solomon in the Song. Firstly, the allusion supports the notion that Solomon either fundamentally misunderstands the nature of love, or claims to understand it but mishandles it anyway. Proverbs 6:20–35 clearly differentiates stealing goods (which can be compensated for with money) from adultery (which cannot), placing a unique value on the marital relationship. In 8:11–12 Solomon is portrayed as a person who attempts, contra to the teaching of Proverbs, to manage love as a commodity. This is ironic when it is considered that Proverbs 1–9 is attributed to Solomon. It has been noted in an earlier chapter that Solomon’s warning against the “foreign woman” (נְכַרִּיָּה) in Proverbs (2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5) conflicts with Solomon’s own love for foreign women recorded in 1 Kgs 3:1 and 11:1. A similar dissonance exists in the way that the difference between material ownership and marriage is taught under Solomon’s name in Prov 6:20–35, yet Song 8:11–12 depicts Solomon as one who treats women like property. Reading Prov 6:20–35 alongside 1 Kings 3–11, Steinmann notes that “it is tragic that in the end Solomon did not follow his own advice” regarding marital exclusivity.<sup>470</sup> Recognising the allusion to Prov 6:20–35 in Song 8:7b reinforces the tragedy of the disparity between Solomon’s teaching and his actions, as respectively presented in the Hebrew canon.

The allusion also deepens the condemnation of Solomon in 8:7b by comparison to the thief of Prov 6:30–31. This proverbial thief presumably has nothing, since he stole to appease his hunger, and so repaying “seven times” what he stole would exhaust any and all available capital; hence “the whole wealth of his house.”<sup>471</sup> Solomon’s riches are outrageously excessive by comparison. Yet the thief, with his meagre attempt at recompense, is *not* despised for his crime (though he is still required to compensate for it), while if Solomon were to offer all of his considerable wealth in exchange for love, he *would* (by implication, *should*) be despised.<sup>472</sup> Although Solomon is never characterised as an adulterer, the allusion of Song 8:7b to Prov 6:31 places Solomon’s sexual conduct morally lower than the crimes of a petty thief. The king who misunderstands and mishandles love, in

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<sup>470</sup> Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 182.

<sup>471</sup> Longman, *Proverbs*, 180.

<sup>472</sup> The *yiqtol* verb may encompass either or both senses (“should” and “would”).

the face of its nature as revealed in Song 8:6–7a, has less social capital than the impoverished criminal of Prov 6:30–31. Unlike the thief, whose hunger for bread was understandable though his theft was not acceptable, the man who offers wealth to satisfy his appetite for love is utterly despised.

### 5.3. Song 8:6–7 and Solomon

The purpose of this analysis is to assess whether the conclusions of previous chapters regarding the respective roles of Solomon and of the daughters of Jerusalem are upheld by the exegesis of key passages in the Song. Chapter 2 of this thesis argued that the aspect of Solomon’s character with which the Song is primarily concerned is the legacy of his conduct in love. In this regard, Solomon is remembered as a king who was loved by Yahweh, but whose own love for foreign wives, and his worship of their gods, turned his heart away from the God of Israel. Chapter 4 argued that this background awareness of Solomon provided a rationale for the seriousness of the woman’s adjurations to the daughters: within the Song, Solomon is the paradigmatic example of the negative consequences that can unfold when love is “not pleased.” Bringing the same awareness of Solomon to bear on Song 8:6–7 provides a basis for understanding the presence of “jealousy” and enriches the concept of setting a seal on the “heart.”

Firstly, Solomon’s story in 1 Kings 3–11 suggests a particular perspective on the appearance of “jealousy” in the Song’s sublime description of love. It was noted above that Fox and Exum raised the issue that there is no apparent cause for jealousy in the ideal central relationship but failed to provide a compelling explanation for the presence of jealousy without provocation. Reading the Song in concert with Solomon’s narrative in 1 Kings 3–11 suggests a rationale for warning about jealousy in the passage which crystallises the Song’s teaching about love. The foreign gods of Solomon’s wives threaten the **אַהֲבָה** between Solomon and Yahweh, even as Solomon’s penchant for keeping a harem is antithetical to monogamous fidelity. While **קִנְיָא** is not explicitly referred to in the account of Yahweh’s rebuke to Solomon in 1 Kgs 11:1–13, it is Yahweh’s jealousy that stands behind his anger at Solomon’s continued consorting with foreign idols. 1 Kgs 11:1–2 specifies that Solomon has broken a pre-established command not to marry women from foreign nations,

alluding to the injunction recorded in Exod 34:11–16 (cf. Deut 7:1–7) that when Israel enters the land, they are to drive out the inhabitants and not make any covenant with them. The specific rationale for this injunction given in Exod 34:14 is God’s jealous nature:

Indeed, you shall not worship other gods  
For Yahweh, whose name is Jealous,  
is a jealous God

כִּי לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לֵאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים  
כִּי יְהוָה קִנְאָה שְׁמוֹ  
אֵל קִנְאָה הוּא

Similarly, the reiteration of the command not to intermarry in Deut 7:1–7 closely proceeds from a warning to take care not to forget Yahweh and worship other gods, “for a jealous God is Yahweh your God” (כִּי אֵל קִנְאָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ; Deut 6:15). It is very clear that the command against intermarriage is grounded in Yahweh’s jealous love for Israel, a characteristic of the exclusivity of the relationship between God and people, which they are exhorted to maintain by avoiding marriage with foreign peoples and worship of foreign gods. In 1 Kings 11, the perspective of Solomon’s wives is never mentioned, reflecting that marital jealousy is not the primary concern in this narrative. Rather, 1 Kings 11 reflects the priority of Hebrew Scripture in general by emphasising the issue of infidelity to Yahweh. When the association between this portrayal of Solomon and the Song is not recognised, the mention of “jealousy” in Song 8:6–7 is unexpected and arbitrary, with no explanation beyond that “jealousy” may generically be a factor in an exclusive romantic relationship. However, when the Solomon of 1 Kgs is seen to cast his shadow over the Song, the ideal in the Song becomes a polemic against Solomon’s polygamous, idolatrous love, and the mention of jealousy is anchored to a specific example to avoid.

This is closely related to the way that the concept of the “heart” in Song 8:6–7 is enriched by association with Solomon’s portrayal in 1 Kings 3–11 and the significance of the heart in that narrative. The heart is the seat of human will in Hebrew thought, so there is nothing surprising in the fact that it is the focus of a call to fidelity in Song 8:6–7. This understanding of the heart is inferred without reference to the canonical material regarding Solomon. However, Solomon’s narrative in 1 Kings 3–11 includes a heavily detailed example of the way a person’s “heart” can affect their actions and lead to consequences, with specific reference to romantic relationships and the divine–human relationship.

In the denouement to Solomon's story arc in 1 Kings 3–11, his "heart" (לֵב) is central to his downfall. The word occurs six times in 1 Kgs 11:1–13, the passage describing Solomon's sin with foreign women and recording Yahweh's response, which is to promise to punish Solomon's descendants. The crux of the issue is that Solomon's wives have turned away his heart (cf. Deut 17:17, "[the king] shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away").

<sup>1</sup>Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, and the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabites, Amorites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites, <sup>2</sup>from the nations concerning which Yahweh had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not enter marriage with them, nor they with you; surely they will turn away your **hearts** after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. <sup>3</sup>He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines. His wives turned away his **heart**. <sup>4</sup>For in Solomon's old age his wives turned away his **heart** after other gods, and his **heart** was not fully with Yahweh his God, as was the **heart** of his father David...  
...<sup>9</sup>And Yahweh was angry with Solomon because his **heart** turned away from Yahweh the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice <sup>10</sup>and commanded him concerning this matter, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not obey what Yahweh had commanded.  
(1 Kgs 11:1–4; 9–10)

והמנוה מלך שלמה אהב נשים זכריות רבות ואת־בת־פרעה מואביות עמניות אדמית צדנית חתית מנהגים אשר אמר־יהוה אל־בני ישראל לא־תבאו בהם והם לא־יבאו בכם אכן יטו את־לבבכם אחרי אלהיהם בהם

דבק שלמה לאהבה ויהיו־לו נשים שרות שבע מאות ופלגשים שלש מאות ויטו נשיו את־לבבו ויהי לעת זקנת שלמה נשיו הטו את לבבו אחרי אלהים אחרים ולא־היה לבבו שלם עם־יהוה אלהיו כלבב דוד אביו

ויתאנף יהוה בשלמה כי־נטה לבבו מעם יהוה אלהי ישראל הנראה אליו פעמים וצוה אליו על־הדבר הזה לבלתי־לקח אחרי אלהים אחרים ולא שמר את אשר־צוה יהוה

The heart is a motif in the Samuel-Kings account of Israel's monarchy. The success or failure of kings, and their posture towards Yahweh, is frequently expressed in terms of the "heart." Some follow David's example of wholehearted devotion to Yahweh: "Asa's *heart* was wholly true to Yahweh all his days," 1 Kgs 15:14; "Before [Josiah] there was no king like him, who turned to Yahweh with all his *heart* and with all his soul and with all his might," 2 Kgs 23:25. Others turn aside and fail to maintain obedient devotion: "you [Jeroboam] have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his *heart*, doing only that which was right in my eyes," 1 Kgs 14:8; "[Abijam] walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his *heart* was not wholly true to Yahweh his God, as the *heart* of David his father," 15:3; "Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of Yahweh, the

God of Israel, with all his *heart*,” 2 Kgs 10:31). While many kings failed to emulate David and walk in Yahweh’s ways, Solomon’s example is the most prominent and includes the most detailed references to the heart.<sup>473</sup> He is the paradigmatic illustration in the Hebrew canon of a king who is led astray by his heart.

Solomon’s polygamy is a primary aspect of his negative portrayal in the Song, while his resounding legacy in the Hebrew canon is the consequence of this polygamy. He began to worship the many gods of his wives, formalising the practice and introducing it publicly by erecting places of worship in the vicinity of Jerusalem (1 Kgs 11:7–8). Solomon’s polygamy and his practice of idolatry are so enmeshed in his portrayal in 1 Kings as to be impossible to separate from one another. When Solomon appears as the antithesis of love in the Song, his conduct in love cannot be viewed in isolation from the legacy of that love’s consequences in the canon. His presence in the Song suggests that the Song’s climactic reflection on love is not a wholly abstract rumination on the general phenomenon of love. Rather, it is spoken in relation to a specific illustration regarding the significance of the heart and the potential consequences of love with respect to Israelite religion.

If Solomon is the antithesis to ideal love, the Song’s ideal is also antithetical to Solomon. Solomon’s presence in the Song, with all that he imports from his portrayal elsewhere in the canon, provides a justification for the woman’s exhortations regarding fidelity and jealousy even while she has no apparent rivals in the Song. Her words in 8:6–7 make sense as an effort to uphold the ideal of love by avoiding the example of Solomon, who is immortalised in the canon as the antithesis of both marital and religious exclusivity. All of this reinforces the notion that the canonical figure of Solomon justifies the urgency of the woman’s exhortation to her beloved—and the external audience to the Song, which is implicitly included—in 8:6–7.

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<sup>473</sup>In addition to the occurrences of לֵב cited above, Solomon initially asks Yahweh for a “discerning *heart*” (1 Kgs 3:9); later, in Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple he acknowledges that God knows people’s *hearts* (1 Kgs 8:39), calls on God to turn the *hearts* of the Israelites towards himself (8:58) and prays for the people that their *hearts* will remain wholly true to Yahweh (8:61). These references are ironic in light of the ultimate inclination of Solomon’s heart as revealed in 1 Kings 11.



#### 5.4. Song 8:6–7 and the daughters of Jerusalem

Chapter 3 of this thesis proposed that the phrase “daughters of Jerusalem” should be taken as a poetic alias for “people of Israel.” It was intended that the tenability of this proposal would be tested by whether the exegesis of the adjuration and of Song 8:6–7 revealed an interpretation that was coherent as a message to the people of Israel, that is, demonstrating a concern for issues that applied to the whole nation, not restricted to the personal experiences of young women in love. When the figure of Solomon was brought to bear on the exegesis of the adjurations, it was found that his presence in the Song provided the justification for the seriousness of the terms in which the woman adjures the daughters. Solomon’s love for foreign women had negative effects for the whole kingdom. The memory of this resonates in the accounts of Ezra (9–10) and Nehemiah (13:23–27), in which the returnees from exile imitated Solomon in marrying foreign women and worshipping their gods, threatening the Jewish identity of their children and their distinctiveness from the community around them. Both of these examples demonstrate that personal love is a corporate affair in the Hebrew Bible, with implications for the whole community. Therefore, it was concluded that the adjurations were coherent as a message for the citizens of Jerusalem (the seat of Solomon’s former glory), not just for young women regarding their personal relationships.

It has been argued above that the adjurations and 8:6–7 together convey the didactic message of the Song. A question that has not yet been addressed in this analysis or in previous interpretations is that of the apparent discrepancy between the respective addressees of the adjurations and 8:6–7. The adjurations are explicitly addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem, while the assumed audience of 8:6–7 is the woman’s beloved. (The masculine singular pronominal suffixes in these verses indicate that she is addressing him.) It was noted above that it is usual for commentators to assume that, like the adjurations, 8:6–7 transcends the immediate fiction of the poem and is intended ultimately for the external reader of the Song. The daughters and the beloved are two distinct characters throughout the Song and there is no suggestion of conflating them, yet the way they function in relation to the woman and to the external audience converges in 8:6–7. The interaction between the woman’s words, her addressees in the Song (the daughters of

Jerusalem and the beloved) and the intended effect on the external audience to the Song is elucidated by the literary techniques which control the external audience's reception of 8:6–7.

The first is the way Song 8:6–7, as has been described above, steps back from the immediacy of the central relationship and reflects on love as an abstract phenomenon. The universal quality of the woman's description of love, which transcends her own relationship, has the effect of causing the façade of the Song's personae to slip; Dharamraj describes this moment as the woman abruptly taking on the guise of a sage, "her words addressed to an audience well beyond her usual world-of-two."<sup>474</sup> In the same way that the universal quality of the adjurations invites the external audience to step into the place of the daughters of Jerusalem, the sudden slipperiness of the Song's personae in 8:6–7 opens a space for the external audience to identify themselves as the addressee of those lines.

Song 8:6–7 has a particular literary character that has prompted some scholars to characterise it as a *mashal*, an identification which bolsters the sudden expansion of the scope of the dialogue from woman-and-beloved to sage-and-students. Sadgrove has cited its strict parallelism, assonance and "formal generalized tone" as evidence that 8:6–7 has "at least a close affinity" with the *mashal*. He observes that this suggests that 8:6–7 is "a piece of instruction of a wisdom type" reflecting on the meaning of the Song as a whole, comparing it to Eccl 12:13 "as a similar universal statement intended to point up the meaning of the document as a whole."<sup>475</sup> Separately, Tromp has applied Eissfeldt's analysis of the *mashal* to the Song and found that it demonstrates four of the five proposed characteristics (the only one in doubt being the metrical form, because there is no consensus regarding metre in 8:6–7): parallelism, assonance, a "terse and vivid" ("knapp und anschaulich") style, and a general truth.<sup>476</sup> Andruska adopts Tromp's identification of 8:6–7 as a *mashal*, adding that these verses are "openly didactic" and the "summa" of the book.<sup>477</sup>

In addition to being marked out with a general heightened "wisdom quality," by virtue of bearing the characteristics of a *mashal*, the content of Song 8:6–7 employs specific

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<sup>474</sup> Dharamraj, *Altogether Lovely*, 200.

<sup>475</sup> Sadgrove, "The Song," 245–46.

<sup>476</sup> Tromp, "Wisdom and the Canticle," 92–93, citing Otto Eissfeldt, *Der Maschal Im Alten Testament*, BZAW 24 (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1913), 48–52.

<sup>477</sup> Andruska, *Wise and Foolish*, 78, 113–14.

vocabulary to signal that what follows has special authority. It was detailed above that Song 8:6a, “set me as seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm” takes up the language of the *Shema* in Deut 6:4–9 (cf. 11:18), which is also developed in Proverbs (3:3; 6:20–21; 7:1–3). Limited comment has been made on the effect of this language in Song 8:6, but numerous commentators have observed the way that the use of the Deuteronomic vocabulary in the introductions of the three passages in Proverbs shapes the audience’s reception of the latter. Schipper articulates that Proverbs 3, 6 and 7 employ specific key words from Deuteronomy 6 and 11 with the effect that the material presented in Proverbs as parental instruction is understood to refer to the will of Yahweh; “the quoted passages in Proverbs continue a kind of instruction which is initiated by Deuteronomy.”<sup>478</sup> This “continuation of instruction” is evident also in the Song, by virtue of the presence of the same language that is developed from Deuteronomy into the motif in Proverbs. In the same way that the parental instruction in Proverbs is understood to express the will of Yahweh, the poetic exhortation in Song 8:6–7 is awarded a special authority. The language alerts the external audience to understand implicitly that the content of this passage is intended to transcend its immediate poetic context and be received as a general instruction.

In this moment, the beloved (to whom the words are ostensibly addressed) and the external audience to the Song converge completely. Just as the daughters of Jerusalem invite identification from the external audience throughout and especially at the adjurations, the beloved invites identification in the same way in 8:6–7. The function of the daughters as surrogates for the external audience is almost universally acknowledged, but the fact that the beloved functions in the same way in 8:6–7 has not been stated as explicitly. While it is a common position to hold that the Song is wisdom for young women, it has hardly been acknowledged that there is a point (indeed, the key point) in the Song at which a man is positioned as the direct recipient of the wisdom teaching. The fact that it is the beloved (not the daughters of Jerusalem) who acts as the audience’s surrogate as the Song delivers its ultimate pronouncement on love supports the proposition that the didactic intent of the Song is not limited to an audience of young women. The woman’s final and

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<sup>478</sup> Bernd U. Schipper, “When Wisdom Is Not Enough! The Discourse on Wisdom and Torah and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs,” in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of “Torah” in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Bernd U. Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter, JSJSup 163 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 60.

most urgent sapiential utterance is addressed to the character of a young man. At this moment the Song's implied audience expands to encompass both the people looking on to the central romance (the daughters of Jerusalem) and the man at the heart of the romance itself.

It is not that the Song speaks separately to the daughters and the beloved, with different messages for each. As has been argued above, the adjurations and 8:6–7 together form a coherent message, with the latter providing the rationale for the former. Rather, the instruction contained in the Song is directed (at different points) at both female and male surrogate figures, who are respectively anticipating a relationship and in the throes of one. The plurality of the literary vehicle through whom the Song conveys its message to the external audience expands its understood audience, with implications for the literary identity of the daughters of Jerusalem. When the "daughters of Jerusalem" are understood broadly as surrogates for the external audience, and it is also recognised that the external audience is invited briefly into the identity of the male beloved, it is clear that the identity of the "daughters" is broader than that of a group of young women anticipating love.

This understanding resolves a puzzle that is created when the Song's primary audience is understood to be exclusively young women. An issue with reading the Song as instruction for young unmarried women is that it carries the assumption that young Israelite women had a high degree of agency in their choice of sexual or marriage partners, and thus required warning about their potential conduct. This assumption is at odds with the reality of the patriarchal society in which Ancient Israelite women lived. Even Carol Meyers, who argues that "patriarchal" is a misleading designation and inadequate to describe the realities of women in Ancient Israelite society, clarifies that nevertheless gender inequality still manifested particularly in the area of male control of female sexuality, which was enacted to preserve patrilineality.<sup>479</sup> Russaw's exhaustive study of "daughters" in the Hebrew Bible affirms that Israelite fathers exercise authority over their families "such that they determine the future of their children" and specifically that fathers "negotiate marriage contracts and control the commodity of their daughters' virginity."<sup>480</sup> There is no warrant for advising a young woman not to "stir up love" if her access to men is controlled

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<sup>479</sup> Carol L. Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *JBL* 133.1 (2014): 26–27.

<sup>480</sup> Russaw, *Daughters*, 125.

by her father, whose responsibility it is to preserve her virginity, just as there is little sense in counselling her to seek a partner like the ideal beloved in the Song if she has no opportunity to choose her own husband. The switch from addressing the daughters to addressing the beloved at a key didactic moment of the Song creates a slipperiness in the identity of the audience, allowing the reader to understand that the Song's purpose is broader than teaching young women to wait for the ideal spouse. At the crucial moment, the audience identifies with the beloved, the man at the heart of the Song, marking out the teaching of 8:6–7—and by extension, the whole Song—as a message for everyone. This supports the understanding that “daughters of Jerusalem” does not refer exclusively to women of Jerusalem but is used, in accordance with similar phrasing elsewhere in the Hebrew canon, to include all the people of Jerusalem (i.e., Israel).

The allusions contained in 8:6–7 are evidence that the Song's concern transcends the romantic love between one man and one woman and has broader implications for Israelite spirituality. As the veil of the Song's personae is briefly lifted in the direct address in 8:6–7, so does the romance which has so far dominated the Song suddenly defer to a different kind of love. The love that takes the stage in 8:6–7 is a jealous love, like an unquenchable fire, that cannot be overcome by many waters and rivers, sounding unmistakably like Yahweh's love as it is usually described imaginatively in the canon. The sudden appearance of this love in a Song otherwise concerned with human romance is coherent with the close relationship in the Hebrew Bible between romantic love and covenant loyalty. Solomon is the classic played-out example of this dynamic which is also present in Deuteronomy and Proverbs 1–9, two other texts invoked by the pattern of language in Song 8:6, and in Neh 13:26, another key Solomonic text.<sup>481</sup> The allusions to the power of divine love and judgement in Song 8:6–7 are present as the justification for the Song's instruction about love. The superlative moment of the poetry is an emotive reminder of what is ultimately at stake in matters of love: the intensity of Yahweh's love and the urgency of remaining loyal to it. The consequence of stirring up love when it is not pleased is not simply an unsatisfying personal relationship. The potential consequences include compromised loyalty to Yahweh leading to a breaking of covenant relationship and suffering the judgement that ensues (the fire of

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<sup>481</sup> These texts are not the only places in the Hebrew canon where romantic love is related to covenant religion, but the texts listed are selected for their relevance, having previously been identified as key Solomonic texts for the purposes of the present study.

God's wrath), rather than enjoying the protection it brings (the ability to withstand the metaphorical waters that threaten Yahweh's people). Such consequences are warned about in Deuteronomy (7:3–4), realised on a grand scale in 1 Kings (11:1–15), illustrated poetically in Proverbs (2:16–19; 5:1–6; 7, 9:13–18), and recalled as a cautionary tale in Nehemiah (13:26). These points of resonance with the content of the Song support the view that the Song has a didactic purpose that applies to the whole nation of Israel, not just to young women. The Song is consistent with other parts of the canon in that it elevates romantic love from a purely private matter to an issue for the whole community with implications for corporate covenantal loyalty. When the daughters of Jerusalem are understood to be a poetic surrogate for the people of Israel, the urgency of the adjurations and the magnificent tone of 8:6–7 are justified. The Song conveys a sweeping concern for the hearts of Yahweh's people and their loyalty as a nation, as impacted by the way they love.

## 5.5. Conclusions of Chapter 5

The aim of this chapter was to apply an inner-biblical approach to the exegesis of Song 8:6–7 and integrate it with the exegetical conclusions of the adjuration in order to test whether the conclusions of Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis are supported by the text of key passages in the Song.

The exegesis of 8:6–7 took as its starting point the universal recognition that this passage is the literary and theological highpoint of the Song. The literary qualities which endow this passage with its sapiential character were explored and found to resonate with the tone and mode of address of the adjurations in 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4. 8:6–7 concludes and rationalises the instruction contained in the adjurations, expanding its focus beyond the immediate relationship in the Song to offer a more universal teaching regarding love. It crystallises the complex picture of love on display throughout the Song, including both the ideal love and its antithesis as embodied by Solomon.

A stated exegetical guideline was to seek the symbolic value of key words in Song 8:6–7 within the Hebrew canon rather than from extra-biblical sources, not forcing arbitrary associations with other passages in the canon, but giving due acknowledgement to previously under-recognised, well-established biblical tropes that appear in the passage in

question. This approach led to the conclusion that 8:6–7 opens with language that positions the teaching of the Song on a par with the classic statement of Deuteronomic law in Deuteronomy 6 and the “parental” wisdom of Proverbs. Subsequently it employs a deliberately constructed series of established images from the Hebrew Bible to evoke the love, jealousy, judgement, and protection of Yahweh, as his love is enacted in relationship with his covenant people. This deliberate drawing upon an established pool of biblical references and imagery reveals that Yahweh’s love and covenant loyalty is at the heart of the Song’s concern.

The exegesis of 8:7b, enriched by literary links to 8:11–12 and Prov 6:20–35, affirmed that Solomon is the negative example of love that the Song urges its audience to avoid. When the Song is read alongside the relevant canonical material regarding Solomon, his presence in the Song justifies the presence of “jealousy” in 8:6–7 and the seriousness of the woman’s exhortations to the daughters of Jerusalem and to her beloved, both of whom function as surrogates for the external audience to the Song.

The content of 8:6–7 was found to support and be supported by the previous proposal that “daughters of Jerusalem” is a poetic alias for “people of Israel.” The way that the audience is positioned to identify both with the daughters of Jerusalem and with the beloved, at points where the Song addresses its external audience directly, broadens the assumed identity of the external audience beyond exclusively women. When Solomon’s resounding legacy of establishing corporate idolatry in Jerusalem is juxtaposed with the imagery associated with divine love and covenant jealousy, the Song’s teaching about romantic love is elevated to the level of a community concern with implications for the whole nation of Israel and their practice of covenant religion. Wise conduct in romantic relationships, imitating the ideal and avoiding the antithesis, is revealed to be an issue of national significance.

## Chapter 6 | Conclusion

### 6.1. Summary of Findings

Despite the multitude of interpretations that have been proposed for the Song of Songs throughout the history of its reception, significant contentions and silences still exist in the literature. The role of Solomon in the Song is not settled, the potential significance of the “daughters of Jerusalem” has been passed over, and the erroneous perception that the Song contains few references to other texts in the Hebrew Bible has been widely accepted, with the result that meaningful allusions have been overlooked.

This thesis sought to clarify the role of Solomon in the Song, articulate the significance of the daughters of Jerusalem, and explore previously under-recognised inner-biblical allusions embodied by these characters, testing the explanatory power of the preliminary conclusions by applying them to the exegesis of key verses. This was effected by: defining criteria for determining which Solomonic texts in the Hebrew canon should especially be brought to bear on the interpretation of the Song; analysing expressions containing “daughter(s)” in construct with place names in the Hebrew canon to determine the usual idiomatic usage and whether this applies in the Song; then conducting a sample exegesis with particular alertness to possible inner-biblical allusions suggested by the conclusions regarding the significance of Solomon and the daughters of Jerusalem.

Chapter 2 addressed the issue of Solomon’s role within the Song and the meaning of the superscription which includes his name (Song 1:1). The literature review had exposed that the perception of Solomon’s role depends on which aspects of his persona the interpreter selects as the basis for his characterisation in the Song, and that this selection is typically assumed without acknowledging the composite nature of Solomon’s portrayal in the wider canon. A solution was offered in the form of a set of criteria for selecting Solomonic texts with the most relevance to interpretation of the Song of Songs. A synthesis of the texts indicated by the criteria indicated that the enduring association between Solomon and אֶתְבָּה in the Hebrew Bible is negative; in turn, analysing the passages in the



Song which include Solomon by name led to the conclusion that this negative association is sustained in the Song of Songs. Solomon is differentiated from the beloved and characterised with specific allusion to his portrayal in 1 Kings 3–11, embodying antithetical characteristics to the Song's ideal for love. It was concluded that the superscription indicates that the Song of Songs should be read in concert with other Solomonic texts in the Bible, enriching and being enriched by the interaction with key texts that depict Solomon in relation to the theme of אהבה.

Chapter 3 addressed the universal tacit assumption that the daughters of Jerusalem act as a surrogate for the external recipient of the Song. The precise mechanics of how this effects the Song's didactic purpose has rarely been articulated. Furthermore, interpreters have collectively insisted that the daughters of Jerusalem are a literary device whose purpose is restricted to acting as the woman's audience within the Song and whose identity is completely indeterminate. Their association with "Jerusalem," with all the theological and cultural weight it carries in the Hebrew canon, has never been brought to bear on the interpretation of the Song. Hauge was identified as the only scholar to have given sustained attention to the first matter, and his conclusion was adapted: namely, that the adjurations (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) reveal a didactic intent which is enacted on the reader through the medium of the daughters of Jerusalem, in an analogous manner to the way Proverbs operates on the reader through the literary figure of "my son." In response to the second issue, the literary trope of "daughter(s)" in construct with place names in the Hebrew canon was analysed, revealing that its usual usage in poetic and prophetic texts is figurative, indicating a group of people connected to a location and bearing the cultural associations of that place. This suggested the likelihood that the "daughters" in the Song represent a wider population (not exclusively women) and that the cultural associations of "Jerusalem," their only identifying feature, are significant to their characterisation. Juxtaposing the connotations of Jerusalem with the associations borne by Solomon strengthened the proposition that the daughters of Jerusalem represented the people of Israel and that the Song's message regarding love had corporate religious significance.

To test the explanatory power of these preliminary conclusions, they were brought to bear on the exegesis of key passages from the Song of Songs. Building on the work of Hauge and Andruska, it was identified that the adjurations at 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 and the

climactic reflection at 8:6–7 together form a didactic frame for the Song, with the latter passage providing the rationale for the instruction in the adjurations.

Chapter 4 exegeted the adjuration and concluded that the oath formula and circumlocutive invocation of Yahweh indicate that the adjuration is a serious exhortation with a negative motivation; that “love” may refer to the ideal relationship or its Solomonic antithesis, both of which are present in the Song; and that love is “pleased” when the Song, through the voice of the woman, implicitly endorses it. It was found that Solomon’s biography in 1 Kings 3–11 provides an example of potential negative consequences of love, justifying the urgency of the adjuration. The particularity of the Solomonic association between love and corporate idolatry extended the implications of individual love to include consequences for the national community, strengthening the proposition that the daughters of Jerusalem represent the people of Israel. This was found to have more explanatory power than the common understanding that the adjuration contains instruction exclusively for young women regarding conduct in love. It was concluded that the people of Jerusalem are collectively adjured to avoid the negative example of Solomon, who is synonymous in the Hebrew Bible with the issue of covenant infidelity catalysed by stirring up love when it is “not pleased.”

Chapter 5 conducted an exegesis of 8:6–7 in relation to the exegetical conclusions from the adjuration. It was noted in the literature review that it has been typical for interpreters to pass over the significance of biblical imagery present in 8:6–7, looking instead to extra-biblical mythologies to inform the interpretation of these verses. To address this, the exegesis was conducted with alertness to potential inner-biblical allusions that had previously been overlooked. It was established that Song 8:6a introduces the rationale in 6b–7b using language that is demonstrably developed from authoritative passages in Deuteronomy and Proverbs, endowing Song 8:6–7 with a similar weight of authority. Further, it was demonstrated that 8:6b–7a constitutes a dense cluster of images that are familiar from elsewhere in the canon and bear strong associations with characteristics and functions of Yahweh’s covenant love. Finally, it was shown that 8:7b constructs its condemnation of the “despised man” with reference to Solomon in Song 8:11–12 and 1 Kings 3–11, a condemnation that is deepened by way of allusion to Prov 6:20–35. These conclusions all indicated that the didactic purpose of the Song is broader than educating young women about romantic love, supporting the position that the

daughters of Jerusalem stand in not for women only, but for all citizens of Israel. It was ultimately concluded that the Song of Songs calls its audience to wise conduct in romantic love, avoiding the example of Solomon and imitating the ideal in the Song, because romantic love has impacts for covenant fidelity and the experience of Yahweh's love.

## 6.2. Implications

To counterbalance the tendency of Christian interpreters to over-rely on New Testament texts to interpret the Song of Songs, the interest of this thesis was deliberately restricted to the interaction between the Song of Songs and texts in the Hebrew Bible. The exegetical approach consciously avoided using the relationship between Christ and Church as a parameter for interpreting the relationship between the couple in the Song, instead seeking the theological message of the Song in the literary context of the Hebrew Bible. This produced findings that challenge common Christian perceptions of the Song, inviting a re-consideration of its applications for the church today.

A dominant Christian teaching is that the Song primarily exhorts readers to preserve virginity until marriage. While not undermining the virtue of premarital abstinence, the exegetical findings of this thesis did not reflect the popularly-assumed emphasis on virginity. Rather, it was demonstrated that the formal institution of marriage is peripheral to the concern of the Song, and that rather than promoting chastity the main virtues extolled were intimacy, mutuality and exclusivity. Further, fidelity in love was tied to the preservation of corporate covenant fidelity: the identification of the "daughters of Jerusalem" as a poetic alias for the people of Israel gave more emphasis to the corporate consequences of individual conduct in love than has previously been recognised. Admitting that the concern of the Song extends beyond the preservation of an individual's virginity invites wider, more complex and more creative applications for Christian readers, in fresh consideration of the interplay between conduct in sex and love, individual spiritual flourishing and the religious health of the community.

The identification of the daughters of Jerusalem also particularised the message of the Song to the people of Israel. While the specific historical milieu of the Song remains uncertain, it can be broadly said to have theological import that is pre-Christian and created

with specific reference to Israel's historical issue with intermarriage and religious assimilation. The Song's ultimate incorporation as Christian Scripture, for use by an audience of new covenant people differentiated from the historical community of Israel, raises questions as to the posture that a Christian audience takes towards the Song and the degree to which they should identify with the daughters of Jerusalem. While this thesis intentionally disengaged from New Testament theological concepts which typically dominate Christian interpretation of the Song, it would be fruitful now to re-engage with New Testament frameworks in light of the conclusions of this thesis in order to discern Christian applications for the Song.

Although this thesis consciously rejected the metaphorical "marriage" relationship between Christ and Church as an interpretative control, the findings uphold the validity of relating this metaphor to the Song, albeit the association was created via a different path than the one that is usually taken. The Song of Songs was not read *through* the New Testament metaphor, but reading the Song of Songs with reference to Israelite history and theology produced a message about covenant fidelity which organically extends *towards* its realisation in the New Testament picture of Christ and Church. The present study does not discount the traditional conclusion but suggests a way to reach it that does not rely on the superimposition of Ephesians 5:23 or the eschatological notion of the Bride of Christ onto the Song, being generated rather from within the text of the Song and supported by its original literary context in the Hebrew Bible.

One reason that Christian interpreters have relied over-heavily on New Testament metaphors to shape the interpretation of the Song, as was noted in the literature review, is that the Song of Songs is commonly perceived as having little affinity with other texts in the Hebrew canon. This study challenged that perception by illuminating firmer connections between the Song and historically-located issues of Israelite theology and practice than have previously been recognised. Relatedly, it was identified that the Song's perspective on Solomon accords with and elaborates upon the critical view of Solomon presented in the Samuel-Kings account (a perspective which is also evident in Neh 13:26). Identifying the shared perspective of these texts and the Song's deliberate use of Samuel-Kings raises new questions about the composition and original intent of the Song, which may ultimately elude definitive answers due to a lack of evidence, but nevertheless invite further consideration. Moreover, the usual practice of interpreting the Song in relative isolation

from other texts in the canon is undermined by the findings of this thesis. The strength of the allusions identified to 1 Kings and Deuteronomy, in particular, bring the theology of the Song into sharper relief against the theological background provided by the Deuteronomistic History. This invites an interpretation of the whole Song with awareness of this theological foundation, the legacy of Solomon regarding love, and the critical posture of 1 and 2 Kings towards the monarchy, to test whether the central claims of this thesis are sustained across an exegesis of the whole book.

The positive results of this thesis suggest the tenability of dating the Song late, certainly later than many (if not all) biblical books. However, it remains impossible to date the Song with certainty and a question mark remains over the direction of influence between the Song and some books of the Hebrew Bible. This thesis has relied on an educated estimation of the relationship between the Writings and other collections of texts in the Hebrew Bible, taking the relatively uncontroversial position that the Song extends theological ideas established in the Law and Prophets. It also referred to the interaction between the Song and Proverbs, the relative dating of which is contested. Based on evident literary development in the passages of interest, the position taken was that the Song drew on Proverbs, rather than the other way around. It is acknowledged that assuming a different direction of influence between the Song and Proverbs may generate different conclusions regarding the interpretation of the Song. The degree of overlapping language between the Song and Proverbs, particularly with regard to the portrayal of the woman in the Song and the two archetypal female figures in Proverbs, is an area of interest which lay outside the scope of this thesis. A manifest opportunity for further study is to bring the conclusions of this thesis into conversation with scholarly work already performed in the area of the Song's interaction with Proverbs. It was identified that the Song and Proverbs both echo the language of the *Shema* in Deut 6:4 to introduce key passages, begging further investigation of how the two books develop their teaching on love and sexual relationships in relation to each other and to the theological foundation of Deuteronomy.

The original contributions of this thesis lie in its definition of the significance of the named characters in the Song of Songs and the effect this has of elevating love from an individual to a corporate concern, with specific reference to Israel's history. Firstly, it has addressed the ongoing contention regarding the role of Solomon in the Song by offering the only sustained discussion of the composite nature of his persona in the canon with

reference to the Song of Songs, and by defining a criteria to determine which texts in the Hebrew canon are most relevant to the characterisation of Solomon in the Song. Secondly, it has made the unique proposition that the daughters of Jerusalem are something more than a literary “void” and that the significant associations of Jerusalem position the daughters as surrogates, not for a generic female audience but for people of both sexes who are “citizens of Jerusalem,” that is Yahweh’s covenant people. Thirdly, properly recognising the significance of these characters in the Song has clarified the theological import of the Song’s message regarding love. It has argued the case that the Song reflects the position evident throughout the Hebrew canon that love is not an individual concern, but that (un)wise conduct in romantic love has urgent implications for the preservation of corporate covenant fidelity.

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