

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a long, flowing white dress, stands in a stone archway. She is holding the hem of her dress with both hands, and the fabric is billowing out. The archway is made of rough-hewn stone. In the background, there is a lush green forest with tall trees. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The overall mood is serene and romantic.

The Song of Solomon

*A Love Story with a
Hidden Message*

Grace 4 You Ministries, Inc.

Stephen F. Shober

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The cover picture represents Song of Solomon 6:9, "My dove, my perfect one"; see Chapter 6, The Interpretation: Revealing the Hidden Message.

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The Song of Solomon

A Love Story with a Hidden Message

Preface

The Song of Solomon (SOS) has had a peculiar attraction throughout the ages for God's people, perhaps due to its unusual content or the fascination with trying to determine a deeper, hidden meaning. The goal of this book is to unravel SOS, and, in so doing, we will see it contains an intriguing love story. However, SOS' secrets will only begin to be uncovered once we decipher the love story; indeed, the depth of SOS lies below this surface story. The love story reveals something much more germane to the Bible—it reveals a far more ingenious, hidden message. Determining the hidden message need not be subject to conjecture or whimsical human imagination. The hidden message is a Scriptural truth told many times in the Bible, but in various ways, that is, alternative ways of telling the same story. The hidden message is actually a continuing theme in the Bible, but one that is deeply veiled within SOS.

Unfortunately, the actual love story is so obscure that we mistakenly think discovering that story is in itself the goal, the deeper truth. Thus, the effort to unravel the love story tends to divert our thoughts and attention from what may lie deeper within. The mystical nature of the love story obscures the underlying hidden message, perhaps for a God-given reason. However, once the love story is unraveled, the hidden message really is not so hidden after all; those familiar with how God instructs His own, through the Word, will readily see it. Those not so familiar with the Word will begin to see the wonder and awe inherent in the workings of the Lord.

The love story in SOS is the means by which the Lord uses an earthly story to symbolically portray something deeper. The love story will have a time of tender first love and many of the other features we expect in a love story. However, there are twists and turns we would not expect. Those twists and turns at times seem unfair to the heroine in the story, but the hidden meaning brings out all the truth so that the love story and its interpretation make perfect sense. The Song of Solomon is a true story of love, joy, sorrow, separation, and finally restoration. The interpretation (deeper hidden meaning) brings out the purpose of the Song of Solomon and explains why this book is not only historic but has profound future implications. Since the interpretation extends into the future, the Song ties in beautifully with prophesied future events, as seen in the book of Revelation.

There are wonderful applications for us today from this most remarkable book of the Bible. This study will reveal a compelling reason for the Rapture, the purpose of the Tribulation, what occurs during the

Day of the Lord, and why our lives must be anchored to something deeper than that offered by this world. In addition, the Song of Solomon will teach us much about: God's faithfulness in spite of our failures, how He protects His own from the coming horrific world events, the meaning of true love, how God accomplishes the unthinkable in our lives, and what we must do not to end up like Solomon.

The final two chapters of this book will discuss some unusual ideas whose time may have come. The ideas and concepts presented will challenge some traditional views and introduce new thoughts, which can enhance our appreciation of the Lord. The final chapter will discuss how the stars and constellations in heaven relate to the Song of Solomon, and this chapter will offer insights into the Word that are indeed worth your time.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all those who are willing to explore God's Word in a sincere desire to know the truth. Oftentimes we do not understand the simple truth revealed in God's Word, even though it is clearly stated. One reason we cannot understand the Word is that spiritual truth is communicated to us through different means than secular truth. Spiritual truth comes to us by the written Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Who enables us to understand what God has written). So, merely reading and learning facts are not the answers to gaining true spiritual understanding. That understanding depends upon, at least in part, a person's heartfelt desire to know the truth, a personal conviction to believe His Word apart from human restraints, and an intimate-personal relationship with God. Understanding the deeper truths of His Word are even more of a challenge, so the reader is asked to have an open mind as he/she considers this book with what may seem to be a "non-traditional approach" to teaching the Word. Each reader may want to ask the Lord to allow his/her mind to be unlimited by preconceived ideas or any theologically imposed boundaries. To this end, may the mind of each reader be unshackled by authority, free of preconceived opinions, and uncensored in his/her desire to explore God's Word as he/she studies the intriguing Song of Solomon.

This book is also dedicated to Christian, Trinity, and Aleah.

About the Author

Steve was raised in a Christian home in Wisconsin (USA) and placed his faith in Jesus Christ at an early age. He has a bachelors' degree in civil engineering and a master's degree in structural engineering. He served in the US Army in the late 1960's. The author is married to Ruth and they have three daughters and three grandchildren. A considerable number of secular and faith-based publications were authored by him, and, he has served on numerous engineering-scientific committees, research boards, and religious organizations. After retiring from the engineering profession, he worked as a natural health doctor (received a doctorate in naturopathy), then as the Director of Growing Up in Grace (a Sunday school ministry). In 2012, he felt the need to create a new ministry to reach teens and adults (*Grace 4 You Ministries, Inc.*). Steve has had a life-long fascination with the Bible and is responding to an impression upon his heart to write about the love and grace of God

Chapter 1

Getting Off on the Right Foot

It would be a pity if, in a desire (rightly) to treat the Bible as more than a book, we ended up treating it as less than a book by not permitting it the range and use of language, order, and figures of speech that are (or ought to be) familiar to us from our ordinary experience of conversation and reading.¹

Initial Considerations

The typical love story we have all seen in movies or read in books follows a common theme: boy meets girl, they fall in love, there are obstacles to their relationship, fighting and separation result, we wonder if they will ever get back together, finally there is restoration, and they live happily ever after. Surprisingly, this is pretty much the love story in the Song of Solomon, but it is complicated and hard to unravel because of the literary style used to present it. It is a story written by Solomon but from the heroine's perspective, which is rather rare in the Bible. Since it is written from the her perspective, at times the story seems to dance around some of her possible failures or implied embarrassing events, which is what Solomon would pen for her out of respect.

Unraveling this most charming love story is, in itself, rewarding; an unusual twist here and there adds intrigue that we would not expect to find in a biblical love story. What really makes this book so special is that it has a hidden message related to biblical prophecy.

While SOS has been an attraction for some, the unusual subject matter raises concern that stems from a supposed lack of spiritual content because it does not even mention God, or any of His Old Testament names. Such concerns have led some critics to question why this book has a place in the canon of Scripture. This book, however, has a very special place in Scripture, and it serves a clear purpose in God's eternal plan. The problem with recognizing its spiritual value lies in our inability to understand

¹ Lennox, John C.; *Seven Days That Divide The World*; Zondervan; Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530; 2011; pg. 26.

the love story between the man and the woman, but unless we understand that story we cannot see the deeper interpretation that has the true spiritual value within it.

The love story is hard to unravel (or at least get the general drift), but to do so is essential if we even hope to find the hidden message or present spiritual applications for today. Once the love story is unraveled (Chapter 4), then the search for a deeper, hidden meaning can begin (Chapter 5). Over the years, many interpretations for the love story have been devised in an effort to explain this Song. Perhaps it is a complicated love story for a reason, the same reason that Jesus spoke in parables, that is, so that those with a hunger to learn could indeed do so. Those wanting only outward compliance with the Law, not caring about true spirituality, would not.

The Song of Solomon is interesting poetically and as a song of love, but why is such a "thing" in Holy Writ? What purpose does it serve and why would God elect to put such an unusual book, with such torrid language and with such an earthy human relationship in His Word? The Song of Solomon seems a bit incongruous with the rest of Scripture in which many admonitions are given to abstain from immoral thoughts and desires, yet this book seemingly feeds those very things. Sensual material in the Bible serves what divine purpose? Did the Almighty think a romantic interlude was needed to warm the hearts of believers before revealing the coming doom (and the later glory) announced in the prophetic books of Isaiah through Malachi?

This book will endeavor to answer the questions posed above. A verse-by-verse exposition will not be used since such an exposition would only get bogged down in details, while the big picture would invariably get lost in mundane ramblings of the extended exegesis. The goal here is to present the overall view of what God is saying, without trying to expound on specifics that would distract from the overall goal. Thus, the intent of this book is to present the overall teaching of the Song of Solomon so the reader can see how it fits into the entire Word of God, and to see why He chose to use such an unusual vehicle to relay a special message.

Each of us responds to music, prose, poetry, and so forth, in a different manner. Some are not touched or moved by one medium, but profoundly affected by another. The Lord recognizes this difference in humans and uses different means to appeal to us. For example: Romans uses logic; Psalms employs poetry/song; the prophets make use of visions, demonstrative acts, and prose; and Jesus Christ, while on the earth, used many parables. Similarly, the style of SOS seems to be directed at touching the hearts of the hearers in an unusual manner, as God reaches out in yet another way to instruct His own. Indeed, the Song of Solomon is much like the common distress signal (SOS—save our souls), only this time God is sending a signal to the nation of Israel, letting them know they are in distress and need to be saved. While SOS uses an usual style, the underlying interpretation is not unusual; indeed, it is consistent with what God has revealed in many other Scriptures. When SOS was written, the target audience, Israel, was dull of hearing and its senses were not keen to discern; so, it seems, God used this unusual format as a way of reaching those whose senses were blunted to spiritual truth.

The Style and Position of SOS

By the use of various styles of writing, God draws attention to portions of Scripture, creates intrigue, and fascinates our minds. One example of a various style of writing is afforded by the use of poetry, which generally has two forms in the Hebrew Old Testament. The first form of Hebrew poetry is used in Psalms 136, in which the phrase, "**For His mercy endures forever,**" is used repeatedly at the end of each verse. Such repetition serves a purpose known by the Almighty, and which we should endeavor to comprehend. Another example of Hebrew poetry (as found in Psalms 104, Job 26 and 28, and Proverbs 8) employs parallel thoughts in each verse, that is, a statement is made in the first part of the verse and then a related or similar thought is repeated in different wording in the second part of the verse. An example of Hebrew parallel poetry would be, "**He looks on the earth, and it trembles; He touches the hills, and they smoke**" (Psa. 104:32). Such use of a poetic style of writing certainly draws attention to the text; in addition, it helps the reader grasp what is being said. Such passages stand out in the Scripture, as if written in bold type. SOS is not only written in bold, but in huge capital letters, screaming, "Wake up."

Another style of writing, which certainly garners attention, is in Proverbs 31:10-31. This passage forms an acrostic (each verse starts with a different Hebrew letter, in alphabetic order—but this is not seen in English translations). This acrostic is designed to draw attention to the text, and the Hebrew reader, no doubt, would have been aware of this. In this passage, it seems Solomon himself needed to pay attention and learn the lesson of a virtuous woman: apparently he did not. This acrostic draws attention and emphasizes the last chapter in the Book of Wisdom, so that the reader will recognize this eulogy of the model Israeli woman. Likewise, SOS is a book designed to draw the reader's attention to the fact something is unusual is happening in God's Word. Its style, position in the Bible, and unusual subject matter almost scream to the reader to pay attention. Something unusual is being said, but it is being said in a stylistic way that will require study and guidance from above to grasp its profundity. God is speaking in an unusual way in SOS, designed to create in us the desire to search and listen very carefully.

In addition to the unusual style of the Song of Solomon, such that it provokes wonder, its position in Scripture is also instructive. The Song of Solomon is strategically located in the Bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures, it was between Job and Ruth, but in the same general area as the present wisdom-poetic books. Each year at the feast of the Passover, on the eighth day², the Song of Solomon was read to the assembly³. This feast was designed to commemorate the original Passover, which occurred while the children of Israel were in Egypt. The book of Ruth was read at the feast of Pentecost (harvest feast) because it so beautifully tied into the theme of harvest and joy⁴. Lamentations was read at the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple; it appropriately tied a Scripture of lament to Israel's tragic history. So why would the Song of Solomon be read each year at Passover? This will be discussed later (Chapter 6,

² Note: The feast of the Passover was one day long and the feast of the Unleavened Bread was seven days long, but since the feast of Unleavened Bread started the next day after the Passover the combined length was eight days. In time, the entire eight days were referred to as the feast of the Passover (Acts 12:3-4).

³ Samuel Schultz; *The Old Testament Speaks*; Harper & Brothers; New York, NY; 1960.

⁴ Davis, John; *A Dictionary of the Bible*; 4th edition; Baker Book House; 1962.

First Love), but we can be sure there were special, God-designed purposes; for instance, shortly after the original Passover in Egypt, Israel and God entered into their first love.

The Song of Solomon is one of the poetic books of wisdom and philosophy, just before the Old Testament prophetic books. Its location in the canon of Scripture is a key to understanding its contents. The books of Job through the Song of Solomon are called the wisdom-poetic books, and they interrupt the flow of the Old Testament's historical account. They interrupt the flow by introducing both a new form of writing and new subject matter. The wisdom-poetic books introduce a range of timeless and profound subject materials in ways no other human literature has ever approached. The value of these books cannot be overestimated, and they were certainly placed in the Scripture by divine inspiration.

As the wisdom-poetic books come to an end, it is the Song that provides a smooth transition out of these books. After SOS, the next book, Isaiah, returns to prose, and the subject matter then turns to what the prophets declare will occur to God's chosen people. The overarching theme of the prophets is no longer historical; they announce that which is to come from their time in history. Thus, SOS is a poetic book that subtly slides the reader into what is to come.

It can, therefore, be called a transition book, bridging the gap between the heartbreaking experiences and vain wanderings of man (Ecclesiastes) and Isaiah's incredible prophecies of events never before envisioned.

Saying that SOS is a poetic book teaching a prophetic message cleverly interwoven within a love story is not mere conjecture. Those "who have ears to hear" will understand what that message is. After SOS, the Bible presents prophecies that tell of great tragedy and heartache, pain and suffering, betrayal and deception, captivity, and, eventually, the establishment of the promised earthly kingdom. Before the kingdom arrives, the issues of Israel's/Judah's disobedience, punishment, captivity, dispersion, tribulation, repentance, re-gathering, and terrible Day of the Lord must be understood. We will see that SOS is a poetic love story that teaches a lesson similar to that of the prophets, but entwined in a fascinating love story.

For the sake of the general reader, this section will be kept short (more information on transitional books of the Bible can be found in Chapter 9). We can profit from knowing that SOS serves a special function in the Word by serving as a transitional book. Once we understand what transitional books are, then the placement of SOS in the Bible, its purpose, and the style of writing make more sense.

Schools of Interpretation

There are common extremes in the interpretation of this book. It seems many theological schools see SOS primarily as a book devoted to sensual, sexual passion; almost everything mentioned is a supposed aphrodisiac or reference to sexual activity. To this school of thought, often weak on the inspiration of Scripture, this interpretation seems to “spice up” a dry Bible. What a shame to think God needs a book on sensual love to enliven the Bible; such thoughts are foreign to Scripture and only serve the salacious interests of man. This form of interpretation totally misses the point God is making to those to whom it was written. These schools tend to believe SOS is an allegory (a figurative story not generally based upon historical reality, but with a deeper spiritual truth). They often present it as a fictional drama with spiritual undertones that can take any direction the expositor desires. However, as Carr points out, "...so that what the original author *said* takes second place to what the interpreter wants to say."⁵ Generally the spiritual meaning the interpreters give seems to be a mere human invention to fit the author's own theology.

On the other side of thought are the typical schools that believe in divine inspiration, but mistakenly believe everything is written for us today. These interpreters often miss entirely the context for those to whom SOS was written, that is, the clear intention of the book and its application to Israel. These schools (or individuals) go to incredible lengths to find ways to apply SOS to our present day and to the Church of today. An example of this is shown in Chapter 9 in the subsection entitled, "*Interpretational Abyss.*"

This book will be quite different from the two schools noted above. It may even plow a bit of new ground in the struggle to interpret this alluring Holy Book. It will be shown that SOS had a direct meaning to those to whom it was written, it is historical, and it will instruct those alive on earth after the Rapture. For us today, SOS serves to teach us some touching lessons on the nature of God, His faithfulness to mankind, and the meaning of true love.

While two schools of thought have been discussed, of course, more exist. The latter school, which holds to the inspiration of Scripture, tends to assume SOS is about the joys and sufferings of marriage and further portrays the relationship between Christ and the Church of today. The latter school's view is briefly discussed below so that there can be an informed understanding of the truth within this wonderful Song.

Wedded Love

Some insist SOS is a book outlining the joys and sorrows of wedded love. Let's see: Solomon had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines, perhaps not at one time but over his lifetime (I Kings 11:1-3). Hmmm, how does this fit into the joys of wedded love or how does it fit into the one-man-one-woman concept instituted by God? He had 60 queens, 80 concubines, and virgins without number when SOS was written (6:8) (references such as 6:8 refer to the Song of Solomon). Thus, Solomon had little time for any one wife or woman, especially considering he was often on “ventures” to find and court new

⁵Carr, Lloyd; *The Song of Solomon*; Inter-varsity Press; Leicester, England;1984, pg 21.

women, conduct official business, or study nature. Maybe this is someone's idea of wedded bliss, but pity such a soul.

In some defense of Solomon, it should be noted that at the end of SOS he does mention something about true love, that is, that it cannot be quenched (8:6). This is good teaching for all ages, and somewhat typical of Solomon's style of writing. For example, in Ecclesiastes, he goes into great lengths to prove in detail what does not work and then very briefly states at the end what does work if one wants to have a life that does not end in vanity (Eccl. 12:1). As mentioned previously, this is a stylistic approach that draws our attention. The style employs a technique of only briefly stating what does work, but that in itself draws attention to God's truth and highlights it. We can learn from this style of writing that sometimes the over-use of any term or line of thinking can work against us. Just as a soft whisper at times can be more powerful than a loud shout, so, too, a brief mention of a truth has more impact, at times, than excessive words, which tend to distract and lessen the truth.

A simple reading of the SOS text indicates the great virtues of a godly woman, as taught in Proverbs 31, are not even broached. Proverbs 31 is the prophecy of the mother of King Lemuel, who understood the dangers of vain women and how they can destroy a king. The truth of Proverbs 31:3 is absent: **"Do not give your strength to women, Nor your ways to that which destroys kings."** In large part, SOS presents a purely physical relationship and attraction; the true values of a godly woman are seemingly missing, as presented in Prov. 31:30: **"Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised."** Oh, that Solomon had listened to these words of wisdom from this woman rather than the words of his "foreign" wives who worshipped other gods.

Exploring further the idea that SOS is about wedded bliss, we must consider that most of the love language (perhaps banter) between the male and female in SOS is that of an emerging love, in the infatuation stage, not the deep, true love of maturity (except at the very end true love is briefly mentioned). Then we must recognize the text discusses polygamy, love at first sight, primarily physical love not deeper love, harems, heathen wives, and so forth. This is not the biblical concept of marital bliss. A blueprint for marriage or marital counseling it is not; it has another clear purpose. In fact, Solomon's departure from the Lord's instructions not to marry women from other countries was instrumental in his downfall (see Chapter 8, *Not Ending Like Solomon*). Because of this, SOS is not the book to use for teaching marital purity and joy, although, individual passages can be taken to make a worthy marital application. It has another clear and poignant purpose, as we shall see.

Christ and the Church

There are those who see the whole book as an analogy, in which most everything is interpreted as a type of Christ and the Church of today. Often, when the words or concepts of "love" and a "bride"⁶ are mentioned today, people automatically leap to the conclusion that the passage is referring to Christ and the Church. This faulty logic assumes everything is written to us today and is symptomatic of the desire

⁶ The word "bride" is not even mentioned in SOS. It is put into the section headings and the comment areas by editors, which taints our thinking.

to satisfy ourselves with personal applications, while neglecting the interpretation to those who received the Word. Assuming the interpreting of SOS relates to Christ and the Church is a weak and self-serving exposition of the Holy Word, and is precisely what is meant by, and a natural result of, not rightly dividing the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

SOS is truly a love story, but it certainly is not about Christ and the Church. Why would the Lord be telling people around 1000 BC something about a Church that centuries later even the twelve Apostles would find hard to understand? They needed information about their own future and the earthly Kingdom the children of Israel would one day inherit, not about a Church that in no way affected them. We should not read something into the text that is clearly not there. Sir Robert Anderson (Irish born, English author, theologian, and police commissioner, 1841-1918) was a brilliant man and had unusual insights into God's Word; he most profoundly stated:⁷

In Scripture the church of this dispensation is symbolized as the Body of Christ, never as the Bride. From the close of John Baptist's ministry the Bride is never mentioned until she appears in the Apocalypse (John iii. 29; Rev. xxi 2, 9). The force of the "nevertheless" in Eph. v. 33 depends on the fact that the Church is the Body, not the Bride. The earthly relationship is readjusted by a heavenly standard....

Converted Israel of the future will be the Bride (this will be discussed later). Today the believer *is already joined to Christ* (Eph. 5:30); as such, we are members of His body. We (members of the Church, the body of Christ) are not part of a future bride waiting to be joined to Him. So, the bride is not the believer today, and any supposed reference to a bride in SOS relates to Israel.

It would be of absolutely no value for those in Israel, living a millennium before Christ, to hear about (or be given references to) the Church Age (our Age of Grace, also called the Dispensation of Grace). The Church of our Age is called the body of Christ (the group of believers from all nationalities joined into one body). Telling Israel about that church would be incredulous. God does not specialize in dispensing useless or inappropriate information to those whom He is addressing. He had an immediate need and necessary message for Israel, which directly related to them. That message covers a vast period of time (even extending into our future), but it is a message specifically to and for Israel.

Confusing the Church with Israel is common practice today, a consequence of years of neglecting to maintain the distinctions God has specifically created. This is precisely what is meant by, and a natural result of, not rightly dividing the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). The belief that the Church has replaced Israel is partially responsible for this confusion, but that confusion does not in any way allow us to read the Church into Old Testament Scripture. Confusing the Church and Israel is also common in the Gospels and Revelation (see Chapter 7, Israel's Hope). Concerning this matter in Revelation, Lehman Strauss quotes J. A. Seiss (*The Apocalypse*): "There is no vice or device of sacred hermeneutics, which so beclouds the Scriptures, and so unsettles the faith of man, as this attempt to read *Church* for *Israel*,

⁷ Anderson, Sir Robert: *The Coming Prince*; 18th edition, 1972; Kregel Publications; Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501.

and Christian peoples for Jewish tribes. As I read the Bible, when God says '*children of Israel*,' I do not understand Him to mean any but people of Jewish blood, be they Christian or not."⁸

Further, it would directly violate God's Word to reveal anything about our Age at that time. God clearly and pointedly states the Age of Grace (and thus the Church) was a mystery, a secret, not revealed until Paul's day (Col. 1:25-27; Eph. 3:2; 3:9). The Church of the Age of Grace is not found in figure, type, or symbolism in the Old Testament because it was unsearchable (Eph. 3:8), that is, it cannot be found in any form before it was actually revealed to the Apostle Paul (during the mid-Acts period). If it were in type or symbolism in SOS, then it would be searchable since it could be found—a direct violation of what God says.

The Age of Grace and its Church had to be kept a secret by God for very legitimate reasons. **"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"** (I Cor. 2:7-8). Had Satan, and the rulers of this world under his influence, known of our Age, they would not have crucified Christ. It was not a mystery that Christ had to die, it was well prophesied. Our Age is what was a mystery. Satan knew the prophecies that Christ had to die, and he gladly participated in that. Had Satan know about our Age, he would not have crucified Christ, and that would mean no one, in any age, would be saved (there would be no provision for the forgiveness of sin) and all would be condemned. This is a fascinating study and is the subject of a future book. For now, we must grasp the importance of why our Age, at all cost, had to be kept a secret known only by God. Thus, the purpose of SOS must adhere to God's overall plan, and this reason establishes its intended context. The purpose of SOS was to teach God's chosen people (at the time SOS was written) about something crucially important to them, right then. It was not written to tell them of something of no interest or value to them that would take place in the far future.

A simple analogy may help. Suppose you were about to be hit by a truck speeding down the road. Would you want someone to scream, "Look out," or would you want them to tell you about a solar eclipse that will occur a thousand years from now?

Israel was about to be hit by a truck. God was screaming in numerous ways, "Look out!" That is the message of the Old Testament prophets, and that is what SOS starts to reveal to them. They were at the pinnacle, the golden age, of their national existence, and everything seemed fine, but that would soon change. God needed to warn them all, and especially the believers, of what was about to transpire: it was not pleasant. Captivity, desolation, servitude, dispersion and so forth, were in their immediate future. God was not telling them about a future solar eclipse. They would go through all the events just mentioned and still reject God, and then later, reject the coming Messiah. Thus, God also had to inform them of even more distant (in time) events that were so horrendous they would finally bring this defiled people back to Him. In the process, Israel's defilement would be removed and the believers would become a restored

⁸ Strauss, Lehmann; *The Book of the Revelation*; Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, New Jersey; 1970; pg 172.

virgin fit to be the bride of the Redeemer. What? Regaining one's virginity, how can that be? This notion, too, will be covered in detail later.

We may query, why would God tell people in Solomon's day anything about a future Age or the Church of today? If the Church was meant to be the underlying interpretation, why would God give it to those for whom such knowledge had no use? They had enough trouble figuring out God's plan for them because they were without a clue as to what was going to happen; and they were woefully closed-minded to matters related to their own Messiah. God wrote to them to help them, not confuse them about another dispensation/age far in the future.

God was using SOS to instruct members of the nation of Israel about their present condition and what was going to happen to them in the future, not to tell them about something in which they had no part. They were the chosen nation, so for them to comprehend that God would set aside that nation and create a predominantly gentile Church would be incredulous. This had to be revealed much later in God's plan. Such thinking is totally devoid of an understanding of the people at that time and certainly of the Mystery revealed to the Apostle Paul (see Chapter 5 for more information on the Mystery). One has to read the Church into SOS because it is not there. That said, we must not error in the opposite extreme. We must humbly recall that all Scripture is written for us and is profitable for us. As we search SOS, we find eternal principles for us to treasure and passages that clearly teach of our Savior's love and faithfulness.

Chapter 2

Unravelling the Love Story

**How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
O prince's daughter!
The curves of your thighs are like jewels,
The work of the hands of a skillful workman.
Your navel is a rounded goblet;
It lacks no blended beverage.
Your waist is a heap of wheat
Set about with lilies.
Your two breasts are like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle.
Your neck is like an ivory tower,
Your eyes like the pools in Hesbon
By the gate of Bath Rabbim.
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon,
Which looks toward Damascus.**
(SOS 7:1-4)

Humorous and Realistic Anecdotes

To help make the point of using Scripture correctly and to bring a little levity into this discussion, consider the case of a young man who was courting his fiancée and really wanted to impress her with his scriptural wisdom and sincerity toward her. What better way, he thought, to woo the object of his affection than to use some of the great love passages in SOS? So, during an intimate moment he gazed into her eyes and quoted SOS 7:1-4. When he told her, "**How beautiful are your feet in sandals,**" she was amused, but wondered what he thought of them without sandals. When he got to, "**The curves of your thighs are like jewels,**" she began to wonder about his intentions. Then, when he said, "**Your navel is a rounded goblet; It lacks no blended beverage,**" she was shocked and began to wonder about his mental stability. By this time our hero began to realize something was wrong, so he earnestly

completed the passage by complimenting her beauty, stating, “**Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon.**” Well, after getting out of the hospital with his nose rearranged, our young man realized that the random, uninformed use of passages from SOS can be dangerous.

As foolish as the above story sounds, it is not much different than many of the interpretations of SOS. As an example, considering SOS a love story about Christ and the Church is, frankly, as off-centered as this young man using it to woo his fiancée.

There is so much love language in SOS that some attention must be given to it, other than the above attempt at humor. The impact and relevance of that language is assuredly lost in our day since we are so far removed from the meanings of the figures of speech used. Some of the language is decipherable, but only a little will be presented here so as not to get sidetracked. The love language does not imply any inappropriate obsession or fetish, merely an overall appreciation for the human body (not much is said about the deeper values of the soul and spirit). The passage of SOS above suggests the original readers would have understood the text something along these lines:

How beautiful are your feet in sandals: her feet were attractive in their own right and accentuated by her footwear. Nothing in life had caused her feet to be misshaped or harmed; they were notable.

The curves of your thighs are like jewels, The work of the hands of a skillful workman: legs/thighs have curves and intriguing shapes that create sensual attraction. Her thighs were perfectly formed and quite remarkable, as though crafted by a skilled practitioner who creates beautiful jewels from rather common appearing stones. Since she has worked physically her entire life, she likely developed musculature that provided a defined shape and tone the other ladies lacked.

Your navel is a rounded goblet; It lacks no blended beverage: a rounded goblet would be delicate and desired, as a symbol of joy for what it contained. Within her was the joy her lover desired; she lacked nothing.

Your waist is a heap of wheat Set about with lilies: a heap of wheat sure sounds silly to us, how can this be a compliment to a young lady? Presumably it refers to a sheaf of wheat, which would be tied in the middle into a bundle, for ease of handling and transport. Tying the wheat in this way creates a narrow central portion, thus creating the classic hourglass figure that has been a fascination of mankind throughout history. Not only did she have a slim waist and fine curves, but her belt further accentuated her form, as lilies charm a domestic setting.

Your two breasts are like two fawns, Twins of a gazelle: the author has to be careful with some of these phrases, but the reference to two is obvious, and also the fact that they were similar. The fawns would be young, growing, full of vigor, playful, and would tend to bound about.

Your neck is like an ivory tower: such a tower would be graceful and alluring, capturing the eye from afar. A graceful neck is something that lends to a statuesque and alluring appearance. Her carriage, that is, the way she carried herself, would be influenced by her neck and thus catch the eye from a distance.

Your eyes like the pools in Hesbon: eyes like pools (or dove's eyes, as stated elsewhere in SOS) are indeed compliments we can understand. Pools are large enough to be seen from afar, but not threatening like lakes or seas. A pool is an instant source of attraction, as are eyes. Pools attract us (as do eyes) because of their beauty, serenity, and peacefulness. Pools assure an ample supply of life-giving water; eyes intrigue us because they can impart a tender and loving heart. Pools reflect the sky and images around them, creating fascination and wonder. Eyes supposedly reflect the soul and portray the beauty within. Pools allure and draw us in, so did her eyes for the captivating affect they had.

Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon: a nose likened to a tower would be an insult today. A tower in Solomon's day was much different. A tower was a tall structure (height exceeding its breadth) erected for defense and to provide security for shepherds and vineyards (Matt. 21:33).¹ A tower was something in which Solomon and the Shulamite would find comfort and beauty. Comfort, because of the security and belonging it provided for shepherds often alone in the fields. Beauty, because of its symmetry and the way it accentuated the landscape.

In summary, it could be said she represented the composite of every woman's best. She was without "spot" (perfect), as seen by Solomon and the women in SOS. Interestingly, she portrays Solomon in much the same manner. Nevertheless, physical beauty only goes so far in creating a lasting relationship, much more is needed, as will be revealed.

Teaching an Old Message in a New Way

The Love Story

Since the actual love story in SOS is not readily apparent, the initial problem is determining that basic story. Thus, we have two major hurdles to understanding this book. First, we have to figure out (decipher) the actual love story. Second, we have to determine what that story means (its interpretation) in the sense of teaching something important to its original readers (Israel). It is not possible to render a logical, cogent interpretation until we successfully get over the first hurdle. If we can determine what the basic love story is about, then it is likely we can determine the interpretation (the hidden meaning) of that story. If we cannot, then the possibility of correctly rendering the interpretation becomes remote.

When we read a parable uttered by our Lord, and we understand what the parable actually means, then determining the spiritual interpretation is fairly easy. For example, when Christ spoke of the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30), we can understand quite easily a young grain crop being harmed by weeds growing in it, and the further harm done to tender plants by pulling out the weeds. That is

¹ Davis, John; *A Dictionary of the Bible*; 4th edition; Baker Book House; 1962.

deciphering the actual parable. Then, with the understanding of the parable, we need to determine the correct spiritual interpretation, that is, what Jesus wanted the hearers to understand. The **spiritual interpretation** refers to making the correct analysis of the parable so that its deeper meaning can be presented to the people God was addressing, those to whom the text was written. In this parable, the spiritual interpretation relates to Christ's Second Coming and how He will send reapers to take the unbelievers out (the weeds) without harming the young, tender believers. However, if we do not understand what the basic parable means, then our interpretation will most surely be incorrect. That is the problem with SOS; we must determine what the actual love story really is saying before we can proceed to the interpretation. Finally, the spiritually mature can take a text not specifically written to them (but for them, 2 Tim. 3:16), and make **appropriate applications**. In this case, an application for us today would be that God cares for His saints and takes great care to protect them.

Thus, our objective for SOS may be summarized in this way:

1. First, decipher the love story
2. Second, render the correct spiritual interpretation
3. Finally, make appropriate applications

Solomon wrote 1005 songs (1 Kg. 4:32), presumably a song for each lady in his court. SOS was the song of songs, perhaps one reason it is in the Bible. If he wrote a song for each courtesan, one would think that to have specific meaning for that woman, the song must relate to her specific and private relationship with Solomon. The song must reflect "their relationship" for it to have meaning and be personal to her. SOS is a song only two can share. The secret times and experiences they had are what only those two knew, making the song her personal treasure. In the case of SOS, the song reflects a relationship developed in the countryside. It is rife with poetic language of places, plants, sights, smells, animals, gems, and more. The events and private conversations were part of Solomon's and the Shulamite's love story, theirs alone. What makes SOS even more precious is that Solomon apparently wrote it from the Shulamite's perspective, through her eyes, to make it a treasure she would never forget.

SOS originally may have been some sort of play, drama, or musical. All through the book, there appear to be interludes or refrains that sometimes seem out of place, but one can easily imagine how such refrains would fit into a musical. Even if a musical or drama, the basic story is quite surely true and historic. SOS is one love story between Solomon and a country girl, not a collection of non-related love passages, as some propose. While it contains one love story, that story is not written or arranged in an easily understood manner. It takes some unraveling to understand that love story. Why God would have an author write in this manner can only be conjectured, most likely to make us search out the meaning. Jesus often spoke in parables and for a reason, the same applies here. Once that story is unraveled, the actual meaning behind it (the interpretation) becomes fairly straight forward.

Analysis of Style

One of the problems in understanding SOS is that it seems to be written in an unusual manner. In the common forms of writing used today, we expect a story will flow from beginning to end in an orderly

fashion, in some form of chronological (or logical) order, with the first part of the story presented first and the last near the end. This form of writing would have the story's beginning information, A, before the next information, B, which comes before later information, C. Accordingly, the story would unfold like this: ABCDE. Sometimes a writer will employ a technique in which the story starts somewhere other than the beginning, perhaps even the end. A popular television show in the 1990s had a backward episode, in which the end came first and the story progressed backward in time, from the end to the beginning: it was a very clever technique to garner attention.

The Song of Solomon is different from most writing in the Bible; some of the first material in the story is found at the end, like this format: BCDEA, where the beginning information, A, is found at the end of SOS, in Chapter 8. This is a stylistic approach to draw us in, to make us study this book until we finally understand its basic premise. Once this form of writing is realized, the whole story starts opening itself to our understanding. This understanding helps us see SOS is not a series of non-related love poems but a continuous story between a man (Solomon) and a woman (called the Shulamite).

Deciphering the Love Story

The German theologian, Heinrich Ewald (1803-1875), was a recognized biblical scholar and is widely known for his Hebrew Grammar and knowledge of Semitic languages. He was prominent in historic criticism (higher criticism), which had the primary goal of ascertaining the biblical text's original meaning in its historical context and literal sense. Thus, Ewald was prominent in the investigation of the origin of a biblical text, dates, authorship, sources, and associated literature. The higher critics, as they are often called, generally did not believe, at least not strongly, in the divine inspiration of the Scripture, and their beliefs were often instrumental in undermining the authority of the Bible. However, as is often the case, God can use imperfect humans to perform His purpose, and that seems to be the case with Ewald and the Song of Solomon.

In the case of SOS, Ewald proposed a love triangle between a shepherd, whom the female loved, and a third party, Solomon. This story is still held by many today. He did have considerable linguistic skills and insights to discern many truths with respect to the love story. Those truths spurred others to go further into deciphering the love story. The Canadian-American Bible teacher and pastor, Harry A. Ironside (1876-1951), advanced the story and developed, so it seems, a more accurate account of the love story.² The insights of Ewald and Ironside have been further developed for the love story presented in this book. The hidden meaning (interpretation) of that love story is unique to this book.

Recognition is given to Ironside for what he developed with respect to the actual love story, as he advanced the work of Ewald. Both men's analyses of the love story were rather ground breaking; however, Ironside mistakenly saw the Church (the Body of Christ) everywhere in SOS and was just plain off-track in most of his applications. It is the clear teaching of pastor-author Cornelius R. Stam (1908-2003, founder of the Berean Bible Society) and pastor-author Charles Baker (1905-1994, founder

² Ironside, H.A.; *Proverbs and The Song of Solomon*; Loizeaux Brothers; 1981.

of Grace Bible College) that revealed the error of taking Scripture at random and twisting it to make it apply to today (see Interpretational Abyss in Chapter 9). It is Stam and Baker (and others) who taught how to best understanding and correctly interpret the Bible, and that teaching has helped shape this book's interpretation of the SOS love story.^{3 4}

While it is believed the analysis of the actual love story in this book, and the interpretation, are on the "right track," it is readily admitted that much is yet to be learned about SOS. Until more understanding is gained on this book, the reader should recognize that some skepticism about the actual love story and its interpretation is healthy. Further light will clarify some issues. Admittedly, while everything does not fit as nicely as one would like, no exegesis of SOS seems to accomplish this feat. It seems the depth of SOS is only slowly emerging; time and input by godly persons are needed to help refine and advance our understanding.

³ Stam, C. R.; *Things That Differ*; Berean Bible Society; Germantown, WI; 1951.

⁴ Baker, Charles; *"A Dispensational Theology,"* Grace Bible College Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49509, Second Edition, 1972.

Chapter 3

Authorship and Characters

The way I see it, dogs had this big meeting, oh, maybe 20,000 years ago. A huge meeting—an international convention with delegates from everywhere. And that's when they decided that humans were the up-and-coming species and dogs were going to throw their lot in with them. The decision was obviously not unanimous. The wolves and dingoes walked out in protest.¹

Charles Krauthammer

It's of great consolation to know dogs have thrown their lot in with us, but for the reader who has gotten this far and feels more like a wolf or dingo, please don't discontinue reading in protest. SOS is a short but difficult book to understand, the complexities of this book belie its brevity. If the goal is to render a cogent spiritual interpretation, that requires establishing a basic understanding of the story and characters, and then building upon that framework in a logical manner.

Author and Date

Some authors say that Solomon did not write SOS. In addition, they say he was the "third" party in a love triangle between a simple country girl and a shepherd (Ewald's view). Accordingly, the reference in SOS 1:1 is meant to imply the Song belonged to Solomon, not that he wrote it. This view is not the one taken in this book.

This book maintains that SOS was written by Solomon. After all, he wrote 1005 songs (1 Kg. 4:32) and that one of them would be preserved in Scripture seems reasonable. He may have written a song for each wife, princess, and concubine (over 1000 in all), this being the Song of Songs (chief song of them all).

It is very intriguing as to when in Solomon's life SOS was written. The approximate date is somewhere around 1000 BC, the exact date depending upon which dating system is used. However, the actual date

¹ Krauthammer, Charles; "Things That Matter;" Crown Forum, Crown Publishing Group; New York, NY; www.crownpublishing.com; 2013; pg. 58.

of authorship is not as important as the time period in Solomon's life when it was written. Using Ussher's chronology, Solomon became King when he was 19 years old (1015 BC, 1 Kg. 1:39) and reigned for 40 years (dying around 975 BC). Twenty years after his coronation (995 BC), he had completed the Temple and the associated buildings.

Ussher gives the order of his writings as: SOS (1015 BC), Proverbs (1005 BC), and Ecclesiastes (977 BC). Accordingly, SOS was written first, soon after Solomon became King, but this timing seems an unlikely scenario.

How do we arrive at the approximate time in Solomon's life when SOS was written? One might think that the mention of the number of wives and concubines would help date the authorship. In SOS 6:8 he had 60 queens, 80 concubines, and virgins without number (for a total of 140 plus the virgins). Some of these women were gifts to him from other rulers in an attempt to secure peace with this most powerful king. Some were the result of his own avarice. In I Kg 11:3, it is noted he had 700 wives (of noble birth), princesses, and 300 concubines (not of noble birth), for a total of over 1000. Since in SOS 6:8, he had 140 wives and concubines (and countless virgins: women who may become wedded to him?), one might think SOS was written early in his career, while he was increasing his entourage. However, one cannot really conclude anything about when he wrote SOS based upon the number of wives/concubines because we do not know if the 1000 were the number at any one time, or if that is the summation of all he had during his lifetime.

Here are some questions and comments related to when he wrote SOS:

- Was he in his early career when he had only 140 wives and concubines, and was he increasing the number to end up eventually with around 1000? This seems possible.
- Was he in the latter part of his career and decreasing the number of wives/concubines (down to 140) because he saw the error of his ways? This does not seem consistent with the rest of Scripture.
- Was the 1000 figure the total during his lifetime, so that at any one time 140 may have been an average number? This seems the most likely scenario.

The important fact is that he loved many "foreign women" (1 Kg. 11:1-6). His foreign wives are called that because they were strangers to the house of Israel. These women brought their idolatry into Solomon's life, and they were certainly foreigners to the Lord. His many wives, and where they were from, were in direct contradiction to what the Lord had instructed the children of Israel, (1 Kg. 11:2). These foreign wives had a catastrophic impact on the wisest man who ever lived, **"For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, ..."** (1 Kg. 11: 4). There are other factors leading to his downfall (discussed in Chapter 8, section entitled, "Not Ending Like Solomon").

One would think that if he had written SOS in the early to middle years of his career, when he was building the Temple, some reference to the Temple would have been made. However, this line of

reasoning does not help for no reference to the Temple is made in any of his writings (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or SOS). In Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, his wisdom is clearly seen, testifying to the fact he was given great wisdom and knowledge by God; thus, for these two books he could have been young or old (1 Chr. 1:12). When he wrote his various books may relate to issues such as these:

- Did he write all his books after the novelty of building the Temple had worn off and before he was led astray by his wives?
- Whenever he wrote, did the Lord purposely inspire him not to mention the Temple for some reason?
- If he wrote in his mid to latter years, he would have had the additional wisdom and knowledge of life gained by living with many wives, but before he was led astray.
- He seems to have grown in knowledge over his lifetime (in addition to that given to him by the Lord), and that is also seen in his books, indicating a middle-aged to older man.

One would think that before he was led astray there would have been a time of spiritual decline: would God inspire him to write during a spiritual decline before being totally led astray, or, did he turn back to the Lord at the very end of his life? The many references to living with a woman with a contrite spirit (Prov. 19:13, 21:9 & 19, 25:24, 27:15) indicate he wrote Proverbs after considerable experience with his wives. (This is mentioned here not as a derogatory comment about women, but as an observation of what happens when a man disobeys God.)

So far none of the lines of reasoning has indicated when in Solomon's career he wrote SOS. There is a line of reasoning that may help date SOS. In 1 Kings 4:33, it is mentioned that Solomon spoke of trees, animals, birds, creeping things, and fish. His knowledge of these would quite assuredly have been gained over time as he studied and observed nature, no doubt aided by a keen wisdom and perception given by God. Studying a great diversity of matters and understanding what is studied are signs of a great intellect, perhaps a reason he was often in his garden and/or feeding among the lilies. Interestingly, of the five things he spoke, as mentioned in 1 Kings, three are mentioned in SOS and they are introduced the same order as in 1 Kings. Even more telling is the fact that SOS is replete with love language between Solomon and the Shulamite containing the very subjects in which Solomon is said to have spoken. Thus, the basis for the love banter is in exact concordance with what the Bible says Solomon knew and spoke. Is this mere coincidence, or an indication of authorship? If this is a solid line of reasoning, indicating authorship, then SOS would have been written in his mid to later years as he acquired this knowledge.

It is conjectural, but likely that Proverbs and Ecclesiastes were written in that part of his career when he had: 1) the wisdom and knowledge from God, 2) the knowledge gained from experience, and 3) when he wrote using many references to God. Perhaps, just perhaps, he was close to, or in, his decline when he wrote SOS. Could he have been on his path of downfall just as Israel was on her similar path? Could that be why there is no reference to God? Even if he were in his spiritual decline, God could inspire him to write a love song with a hidden meaning (which perhaps even Solomon did not realize).

The Woman in SOS

The female protagonist in SOS is not named; she is only referred to as the Shulamite (6:13). Where did the Shulamites live, where is her homeland? We will see her homeland has a direct bearing upon our study.

We will get to her homeland briefly, but first we must mention another woman often confused with the Shulamite. That woman was Abishag.² Abishag was a fair damsel brought in to keep King David warm when he was old (1 Kg. 2:17). Abishag was referred to as a Shunammite (not to be confused with a Shulamite). In 2 Kings 4:8, Elisha had dealings with a woman from Shunem, also called a Shunammite. In Solomon's time Shunem was located in the tribe of Issachar, southwest of the Sea of Galilee (see Map 3.1., below); in Christ's time this area was called Galilee. Thus, people from Shunem were Jewish and called Shunammites; the Bible makes a distinction between Shulamites and Shunammites. There is no more reason to believe the female in SOS was a Shunammite than to think she was a Shuhite (group in Job's life, Job 18:1), that is, no reason to believe either of these tribes has any bearing on her heritage based upon similarities in tribal spelling. In addition, Abishag and Solomon knew each other, while the preponderance of Scriptural evidence indicates the Shulamite and Solomon did not. Thus, Abishag does not appear to be the female in SOS. Our female must not have been from Shunem, but from a place named something like Shula or Shulam. No record of the Shulamites (tribe, country, city, etc.) exists today.

While there is no known location of a place called Shula(m) or group of people called Shulamites, we get some tantalizing information from the Bible. There are seven references in SOS to Lebanon (3:9, 4:8 twice, 4:11, 4:15, 5:15, 7:4); perhaps SOS 4:8 is the most revealing: **"Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, With me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, From the top of Senir and Hermon, From the lions' dens, From the mountains of the leopards."** This conversation takes place in the heart of the SOS story, with Solomon imploring the Shulamite to leave her home and come with him. Her homeland seems most likely to be in an area just north of Israel, in today's Lebanon. Within this general area are Sidon, Mount Lebanon, and Mount Hermon. Lebanon, in the verse above, apparently refers to the mountainous chain that occupies most of the county of today's Lebanon (much of this area was called Phoenicia in Solomon's day). Senir refers Mount Hermon (Deut. 3:9), and Hermon also refers to Mount Hermon (Shenir and Hermon appear to be two different names for the same general location). She is asked to leave her mountainous home and come live with him.

² "Oh behave;" Mike Meyers, aka Austin Powers.



Map 3.1. The Holy Land and surrounding countries.³ Very near the top you can see Sidon on the Mediterranean, to the right of Sidon is Mount Lebanon, and Mt. Hermon is further to the right; the present-day area of these three sites is basically in southern Lebanon.

You will note in Map 3.1. that Tyre is just South of Sidon. It was from Sidon and Tyre that King Hiram provided much of the raw material for building the Temple and other buildings, and provided many laborers for Solomon and his father David. Further North (not shown in the map above) was where Solomon had a naval port in Tarshish.

A vineyard in Baal-Hamon is mentioned in SOS 8:11, but the location is unknown. This was the vineyard Solomon owned and presumably rented to the Shulamite's family. Hamon was a town located in northern Israel (approximately 10 miles South of Tyre). Since Hamon was near to the mountainous regions of southern Lebanon, it may be reasonable to suggest Baal-Hamon was

also in the general area of southern Lebanon.

Southern Lebanon is the beginning of the Bekaa valley (the valley just to the East of the Mount Lebanon chain), which has produced some of the finest wines for millennia. This is not an incidental observation; the wines of Lebanon were well known in biblical times. Hosea says, "**Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon**" (Hos. 14:7b). The reference to a vineyard and wine in the passages in SOS and Hosea create more evidence for a Lebanese connection for the Shulamite.

The fragrance of Lebanon is noted in Hosea 14:6 and in SOS 4:11, presumably a reference to the fresh mountain air filled with the smells of grape blossoms, cedars, apple trees, almond blossoms, and others, all of which proliferate in Lebanon. The considerable mention of Lebanon in SOS, the smells, the vineyard, the specific locations, and so forth, create a compelling argument that the homeland of the Shulamite was in southern Lebanon.

³ Pfeiffer, Charles F.; "Baker's Bible Atlas;" Revised Edition; Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI;14th printing, 1976.



Picture 3.1. The Bekaa valley region of Lebanon, where the female in the Song of Solomon apparently was raised. (www.vinsdolive.com)

In the background, Picture 3.1., are the Lebanon Mountains. In the lower right is a vineyard snuggled in the valley. This is one of the oldest wine producing regions in the world. It is early spring; the trees with light pink blossoms appear to be apricot trees, which bloom early in the year when most trees are still dormant. The winding dirt road,

apricot trees, fruit/olive trees, grape vines, mountains, and hills all relate to the ancient setting of the Song of Solomon. Notice the beauty, serenity, and pristine nature of this rural setting—exactly as the Song describes. The reader is asked to imagine this to be similar to the scene in Solomon's day, when Solomon and the Shulamite first fell in love. Not only was she born in this area, but her love was awakened under an apple tree. You can easily envision the vineyard that Solomon owned and she managed, with the blooming vines wafting a heavenly aroma. In your mind, you can see the two lovers in this scene watching the foxes dig holes and scamper around. On the distant hills, gazelles and stags would be skipping and leaping. The aroma and beauty of this area would be worth mentioning to anyone, as it is in the Song. This is the stage setting for the Song of Solomon, all natural and perfect. What could be more idyllic?

If the Shulamite's homeland were the Bekaa valley, this may have an unexpected importance to our understanding of SOS. Of critical importance is noting that approximately 4000 years ago (well before Solomon), the Phoenicians developed vineyards, wine production facilities, and trading settlements. These settlements stretched all the way to Spain and were of renown in the later Roman Empire. In fact, the Romans recognized the major contribution of the Phoenicians to the wine world by building a large temple dedicated to the god of grapes and wines in the Bekaa Valley. In the city of Baalbek the Emperor Antoninus Pius erected the Temple of Bacchus in A.D. 150, adorning its columns with vine carvings in honor of Bacchus (the Roman name for Dionysus, the god of wine and merriment).⁴

Solomon's vineyard in Baal-Hamon seems very likely to have been in the Bekaa valley. Baal-Hamon was not only a location, but also was the chief god of the Phoenicians. He was a deity of sky and vegetation, depicted as a bearded older man with curling ram's horns. Notice the strong historical connection of the Bekaa valley region with foreign-god worship (Baal, Baal-Hamon, Dionysus, etc.), and this is the probable homeland of the Shulamite.

⁴ Saad, Shirine: "Ancient Vines, Modern Times;" RL Magazine, 2014.

Because of his many travels, perhaps earlier in his career, to secure materials for the Temple, to inspect his military garrisons, and to review his naval port to the north, Solomon often could have been in this region. Having a vineyard(s) in the general locality would have provided another reason to visit the area. (This is mentioned because vineyards enter into the discussion later.) During such visits, he would have had opportunity to meet new rulers and females for his court. We can see he often could easily have been in the area from which the Shulamite originated, thus providing a possible explanation of where and how they met.

The Shulamite was apparently not of Israeli heritage, lived in a mountainous area of southern Lebanon, and tended grapes and goats. As we get into the story later, we will certainly sympathize with her early life. However, with the limited information we now have, a dreadful thought occurs. Was Baal-Hamon (where Solomon had a vineyard) a place in Lebanon where Baal/Baal-Hamon was worshipped? It seems so. In addition, 1 Kings 11:1 makes it clear Solomon loved foreign women, which specifically included those of the Sidonians (those in the Sidon area of Lebanon). The Bible reveals that Sidon was an area where Baal was a prominent god. Can we infer the Shulamite was one of the "foreign" women, an unbeliever, who eventually led Solomon astray (1 Kings 11:1-8)? Remember a few decades after Solomon, evil King Ahab married Jezebel the daughter of the king of the Sidonians (1 Kg. 16:31). We know Jezebel promoted the worship of Baal in Israel. These strong lines of reasoning indicate a tie between the Shulamite and foreign-god worship. To suggest she was instrumental in leading Solomon astray is a hard thing to say, at this point, yet it is the type of thought we must entertain if we want to understand SOS.

Castigating this woman would be a terrible thing to do if she were a God-fearing woman. However, there seems to be little or no evidence to suggest she was a believer, at least not when they met. Certainly this area of Lebanon (Phoenicia in Solomon's day) became a part of the expanded kingdom under Solomon, so he had many opportunities to go there (to meet with King Hiram, conduct business with other rulers, to inspect Temple materials, build his navy, observe the vineyards, to see his new lands, and to seek new wives). We will only suggest she may have been a foreign woman who initially helped lead Solomon astray. In Chapter 6 we will also suggest a drastic change in her and allow further research to shed light on this issue.

Chapter 4

Presenting the Love Story

*Full many a lady
I have ey'd with best regard, and many a time
The harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
Brought my too diligent ear: for several virtues
Have I lik'd several women, never any
With so full soul but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she ow'd,
And put it to the foil: but you, O you!
So perfect and so peerless, are created
Of every creature's best.*

The Tempest (Act 3, Scene 1): by William Shakespeare

Deciphering the Love Story

We will now plunge into SOS to reveal the love story. (Remember, references without a book name, such as 8:8-14, refer to SOS.) As we proceed, the area of SOS being referenced is made clear, but all the verses may not be printed in full here.

Before we can get into the true love story, an "early life" account helps set the stage, followed by some introductory and overview comments in SOS. After those items are briefly considered, we will delve into the actual love story, showing how it is composed of seven clearly identifiable stages. The seven stages are the key to the hidden message in SOS. After discussing the seven stages of the love story, the next step will be to show the true, hidden interpretation of that story, after which, some applications for our Age of Grace will be made.

The Early Life

**We have a little sister,
And she hath no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister
In the day when she is spoken for?
If she is a wall,
We will build upon her
A battlement of silver;
And if she is a door,
We will enclose her
With boards of cedar.
I am a wall,
And my breasts like towers;
Then I became in his eyes
As one who found peace.
Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon;
He leased the vineyard to keepers;
Everyone was to bring for its fruit
A thousand silver coins.
My own vineyard is before me.
You, O Solomon, may have a thousand,
And those who tend its fruit two hundred.
You who dwell in the gardens,
The companions listen for your voice—Let me hear it!
Make haste, my beloved,
And be like a gazelle
Or a young stag
On the mountains of spices.
(SOS 8:8-14)**

The story's beginning is found in the concluding verses of SOS. A long time ago in a far away land there was a young girl (she is only called the Shulamite); her father was apparently gone or dead since there is no mention of him in the entire book. The father's role seems to have been assumed by her evil step-brothers, who treated her poorly (1:6) and only wanted her for the work she could perform. When she was young, the brothers pondered her future in order to keep her at home, working. They reasoned if she were a wall (wanting to keep men out of her life), they would reward her and capitalize upon her desire to keep men out of her life. On the other hand, if she were a door (wanting men in her life) they would discourage her by enclosing her (cutting off her access to men and vice versa). You can see how this would nicely fit into the opening scene of a musical or play.

The brothers' wildest dreams came true: as she matured she proudly proclaimed she was a wall. Not only did she dislike men in general, but she built defenses against them. Instead of her breast offering warmth and endearment, they were like towers set in array to defend her from men. She even seemed to have a special antipathy for Solomon (whom she had not met but who, she believed, charged excessive taxes/rent for the vineyard they managed for him in Baal-Hamon). Did the lack of a kind father, the presence of selfish step-brothers, and excessive work to pay Solomon make her a man-hater? We will soon discuss her unkempt appearance and, out of curiosity and ignoring her possible dislike of men, doesn't this sound a little like a childhood fairy tale? One has to wonder if the author of Cinderella (Charles Perrault originally and a later version by the Brothers Grimm) borrowed ideas from this story.

The ending two verses show a radical change in her attitude towards men. There are several radical changes in SOS that are hard to understand, but here it seems clear. No sooner had she exclaimed she was a wall and her defenses were set against men, than the dramatic change occurs: "Then I became in his eyes As one who found peace" (8:10). She was a wall, but all of a sudden something dramatic happens. She met someone she really liked and who swept her off her feet. She then wishes for him to make haste to come to her. Her defensive towers are down. Now what?

Introduction and Overview

**THE song of songs, which is Solomon's.
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth--
For your love is better than wine.
Because of the fragrance of your good ointments,
Your name is ointment poured forth;
Therefore the virgins love you.
Draw me away!
We will run after you.
The king has brought me into his chambers:
We will be glad and rejoice in you.
We will remember your love more than wine.
Rightly do they love you.
I am dark, but lovely,
O daughters of Jerusalem,
Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the curtains of Solomon.
Do not look upon me, because I am dark,
Because the sun has tanned me.
My mother's sons were angry with me;
They made me the keeper of the vineyards;**

But my own vineyard I have not kept.

(SOS 1:1-6)

These opening verses in SOS are not the beginning the story, which is found at the end of SOS. These verses refer to a time after her early life back in her homeland, and after the start of the love story, which has not been discussed yet. If SOS were a musical or play one can envision why these verses were presented at this time, perhaps as an introduction to draw us in, to incite our curiosity. These verses jump ahead of the story, as though to ask, who is this and why is she saying this? While these verses seem out of order here, we recall this book is written differently than we normally expect. This introduction seems to be setting the stage for the drama about to unfold. The opening verses give a general introduction and overview, which took place in the King's chambers.

These verses must have occurred around the time of their espousal. She was madly in love with Solomon, and asked the daughters of Jerusalem (most likely the wives, princesses, virgins of Solomon, and/or potential members of his court) to not look at her because she was dark. Back home when she was working outside alone, or with other women, she could lift or remove her veil, which would have caused her to be tanned. Thus, she had a dark complexion because she had been forced to worked outside by her mother's sons (apparently step-brothers). Clearly she looked different from the other ladies in the chambers, and she was ashamed, but, as noted, she was "lovely." Her family made her tend goats (1:8) and keep the vineyard(s), but her own vineyard (her own personal appearance) she could not keep. Solomon had no trouble discerning her true beauty even though she was much different looking than the other women.

The early life and the introduction/overview above set the stage for our story. These are somewhat analogous to the opening chapters of the Old Testament, which set the stage for Israel's saga. Now that the stage is set, the story actually begins. From this point, the stages of the story will be numbered for future reference.

1. First Love

**Tell me, O you whom I love,
Where you feed your flock,
Where you make it rest a noon.
For why should I be as one who veils herself
By the flocks of your companions?
If you do not know, O fairest among women,
Follow in the footsteps of the flock,
And feed your little goats
Beside the shepherds' tents.
I have compared you, my love,
To my filly among Pharaoh's chariots.**

**Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments,
 Your neck with chains of gold.
 ...While the king is at his table,
 My spikenard sends forth its fragrance.
 A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me,
 That lies all night between my breasts.
 ...I am the rose of Sharon,
 And the lily of the valleys.
 Like the lily among thorns,
 So is my love among the daughters.
 Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods,
 So is my beloved among the sons.
 I sat down in his shade with great delight,
 And his fruit was sweet to my taste.
 ...Oh, that you were like my brother,
 Who nursed at my mother's breasts!
 If I should find you outside,
 I would kiss you;
 I would not be despised.
 I would lead you and bring you
 Into the house of my mother,
 She who used to instruct me.
 I would cause you to drink the spiced wine,
 Of the juice of my pomegranate.
 ...I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
 Do not stir up nor awaken love
 Until it pleases.
 (SOS 1:7-2:3; 8:1-4)**

After the early life (found at the end of Chapter 8 in SOS) came a brief introduction and overview. Now the love story begins in earnest. The story quickly comes to the event that is ever so important, the time of first love. The text takes us to the countryside when the Shulamite was old enough to fall in love, and describes how our two lovers meet. Normally a father would be involved in any courting, but it appears there was no father in her life. In place of a father, her step-brothers played the role of the male in her life. Unfortunately, they do not want her to like men and had no interest in arranging for her courtship. Recall the early life when they wanted her to work and be a door (closed to men). The two lovers seem to have met in a rural area, but this meeting was not arranged by her family.

The story gets most interesting here for it has a twist we would not expect, especially in the Bible. While she was working in the vineyards or tending her sheep/goats, she met this man she believed to be a

shepherd and fell for him in a big way. This shepherd was really Solomon, but she did not know it. But you may ask, how could she not know this was Solomon? He certainly was not a shepherd. Clearly he was not arrayed in royal splendor, perhaps traveling incognito (to avoid enemies, or so he could observe things without people knowing who he was, or some other reason). Perhaps he was playing the part of a common shepherd to experience the daily life of his people, or, because of her dislike for the King, he had planned to break down her defenses. He clearly saw a special woman in the Shulamite. This was the stage of emerging love.

During their courtship, she and her "shepherd" seemed to chide the King, "**While the king is at his table, My spikenard sends forth its fragrance**"(1:12). She believed she was addressing another sympathetic shepherd, and Solomon played along. The reference is to the king whom she believed charged too much rent for his vineyard and sat at his table with untold luxury. True spikenard was very expensive and she was unlikely to possess it (Jn. 12:3). Her spikenard is an apparent figurative reference to her love sending forth a fragrance as strong as the king's expensive perfume oils. While the king has his expensive oils, she has a love that matches anything the king possesses. This would be similar to her figurative comment about her own vineyard which she could not keep. She was saying her love was strong and sent forth a wonderful aroma, and her shepherd was like a bundle of expensive myrrh to her (1:13).

She is in love with him. However, the first verses give a clue that all is not right in this relationship; that clue helps us unravel a mysterious thing about this love story. It seems she did not know where her beloved shepherd, for whom her defenses were down, kept his sheep. She did not know where he was from or anything about him. This was not an arranged courtship, for the family would have known his origins. To make matters more intriguing (for us, not her), he did not help much and was either evasive, or at least not willing to reveal too much about himself.

Solomon may not have been purposely evasive; she may have misunderstood who he was and he simply went along with it. He may have heard of her dislike for Solomon and knew if he fully revealed himself that would be the end of any relationship. So, he had to play his cards very carefully in order to win her heart. In time, he could reveal his identity, but she was not yet ready for that. Sometimes too much, too soon, can have a detrimental impact, especially at this time when the Shulamite's mind was of a different proclivity.

Yikes! This sounds pretty scary by today's standards: a poor, young, country girl madly in love with someone who is either evasive or not fully open with her. His identity and where he resided would be no mystery if the shepherd were a local man in a small community; she would know where he was from and something about his family. These verses strongly work against the view of a love triangle (Ewald's view) because she or her people would know of a local shepherd's family background. This man was some other mysterious shepherd, and she seems to have fallen for him, head over heels.

She refers to herself as the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, common flowers of no special beauty. The lily of the valley is most likely, "... the hyacinth the 'lilies among which browsing animals grazed,' for these are the plants of the grassy fields, not like true lilies of the dark woods."¹ A silver-tongued suitor, Solomon turns the table on her and indicates that compared to other women, she is like a lily among thorns. Their love language is not what we might appreciate today, but it had the affect of turning the Shulamite into a woman in love, but she did not know to whom.

She sometimes wished he were like a brother (a real brother) because she could then greet him with a kiss and bring him into the house without any eyebrows being raised. Once she got him into her house in private, she would give him spiced wine, and this may be exactly for the reason we suspect: wink, wink. Nevertheless, she charges the daughters of Jerusalem **"Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases."** This expression is not easy to understand, nor do commentators agree on this charge. It seems to be an expression of not rushing into love affairs until the heart is awakened and it pleases both parties. This phrase, or similar phrases, are repeated in SOS (2:7, 3:5, 8:4) and one can envision them being sung in a musical by a group of women representing the courtesans.

2. Promised Coming (Envisioning the Future)

**He brought me to the banqueting house,
and his banner over me was love.
Sustain me with cakes of raisins,
Refresh me with apples,
For I am lovesick.
His left hand is under my head,
And his right hand embraces me.
I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelle or by the does of the field,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases.
The voice of my beloved!
Behold, he comes
Leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping upon the hills,
My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.
Behold, he stands behind our wall;
He is looking through the windows,
Gazing through the lattice.
My beloved spoke, and said to me;
"Rise up, my love, my fair one,**

¹ Moldenke Harold; *"Plants of the Bible;"* The Ronald Press Company; New York; 1952.

**And come away.
For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of singing has come,
And the voice of the turtledove
Is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth her green figs,
And the vines with the tender grapes
Give a good smell.
Rise up, my love, my fair one,
And come away!
...Catch us the foxes,
The little foxes that spoil the vines,
For our vines have tender grapes.
My beloved is mine, and I am his.
He feeds his flock among the lilies...**
(SOS 2:4-16)

The first part of this section seems to take place in Jerusalem, and she is lovesick. The banqueting house is an apparent reference to a wine house. Her love was so intense and so filled with infatuation that it was like Solomon had a banner over her declaring his love. She again charges the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken love until it pleases. Perhaps this phrase is often repeated because she ironically knew she was the one violating her own common sense by getting overly involved in love before she was ready. It would certainly fit well into a musical chorus. Then the text apparently goes back in time to her home country, to the time of their first love, when she did not know the true identity of her shepherd. He had promised to come and get her to be his bride, and she was filled with euphoric musings of future events.

Envisioning his coming for her is indeed tender. Her love language paints a picture (and this is how she figuratively saw events) of her lover coming to get her in similar fashion as the gazelles and does when they skipped upon the hills. A lover's dreams of great expectations. It is not hard to imagine how she saw all this happening and viewed it in terms she thought most romantic. After all, she was a country girl and this was what she saw animals do all the time. Continuing the animal metaphor, she saw him (in her mind) gazing into her house, that is, like a gazelle or stag would do from a distance; and her shepherd beckoned her to come away with him. It was springtime and what is more perfect than her lover coming leaping upon the mountains and skipping upon the hills? She was in the infatuation stage of love and not ready for reality. Little does she know her shepherd will not come in this manner.



Picture 4.1. Maxfield Parrish (American artist, 1870-1966) captured the mood of our heroine as she dreamed of her lover's coming. (*Public domain picture.*)

Her shepherd is very wise and refers to animals, flowers, trees, and nature in a way she (but few others) could appreciate. His wisdom is exemplified when he mentions the tender grapes, which in springtime bloom with tiny, inconspicuous flowers that have a heavenly aroma (unknown to most people, but not her). Few lovers would have tender grape aromas as part of their relationship, but this indicates that SOS is a very private and intimate song by Solomon written specifically for the Shulamite. In their courtship, and when she/he read the Song, they could compare the secret delight of the grape's aroma to the sweetness of their love.

She imagined him (presumably a shepherd) calling her to come away with him, much like a fantasized Prince Charming. However, the evil step-brothers try to hinder true love by telling her to catch the foxes that would harm the grapes (a great refrain for a musical, especially if done in a humorous manner owing to its triviality). They lose of course. Important as grapes may be, they pale in comparisons to the awakened call of love.



Picture 4.2. The idea of foxes harming tender grapes is not exactly what our young lovers had in mind; a rather humorous quip at this stage in an emerging love. (*Aesop's Fables Illustrations 'The Fox the Grapes,' public domain.*)

The phrase "**he feeds his flock among the lilies,**" is rather hard to understand. The "his flock" has been added by the translators, so it is not exactly clear what she is saying. This recondite phrase is repeated (2:16, 4:5, 6:2-3). SOS 4:5 offers some insight and a possible explanation; in this passage, twin fawns of a gazelle also are said to feed among the lilies. It is unlikely these immature, related fawns are doing anything other than grazing in the fields among the lilies. So, the phrase may simply mean that her beloved was gone, for whatever reason. Early in their relationship she may have thought he was gone to feed his flock in the fields, but later she knew Solomon was traveling or on some venture, eating and living in the hills and fields where the lilies grow. It is more a comment on his being gone than of anything else. However, why was he gone?

Reasonably, gathering an entourage of 1000 females takes a considerable amount of time, requiring him to be gone into unknown places quite often to meet potential courtesans or to meet with rulers of other nations who offered him their daughters (who would become Solomon's wives of royal birth). In addition, he must have been gone often on official business, managing his kingdom. He also carefully studied nature, observed his vineyards, secured sources of materials needed for his many building

ventures, and attending to other responsibilities. He did many great works (houses, the Jewish Temple, vineyards, gardens, orchards, pools... (Eccl. 2:4-6); gathered many talented people such as musicians; secured many treasures; built a navy in Ezion-geber (Red Sea) and in Tarshish (Mediterranean) (1 Kg. 9:26, 10:22); and built garrisons and defensive installations at strategic locations for his vast empire (2 Sam. 8:6, 14; 1 Kg. 4:21). All these required him to be gone often. She had no idea where he was, except he was somewhere among the lilies. Were his frequent departures (and perhaps the possible betrayal it must have created in her heart) the cause of what happens next?

3. Warning of Separation

**By night on my bed I sought the one I love;
I sought him, but I did not find him.
'I will rise now,' I said
'And go about the city;
In the streets and in the squares
I will seek the one I love.'
I sought him, but I did not find him.
The watchmen who go about the city found me;
I said, "have you seen the one I love?"
Scarcely had I passed by them,
When I found the one I love.
I held him and would not let him go,
Until I had brought him to the house of my mother,
And into the chamber of her who conceived me.
I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases.
(SOS 3:1-5)**

This section seems to take place in her home town during the time Solomon had not yet revealed his true identity. On her bed at night she is lovesick and distressed. It seems her heart was telling her what her mind would not admit, that something was wrong. Either she was dreaming or envisioning impending troubles, or perhaps the Lord forewarning her of issues that will take place in the future. Isaiah has a similar passage related to searching for the Lord: "**Yes, in the way of Your judgments, O LORD, we have waited for You; The desire of our soul is for Your name And for the remembrance of You. With my soul I have desired You in the night, Yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early**" (Isa. 26:8-9a). Her soul sought him in the night since he was missing.



Picture 4.3. This painting captures the feeling of our text, in which the Shulamite had warnings of pending troubles (here represented by dangers below). (*Maxfield Parrish, American artist, 1870-1966*)

She went out looking for him at night and soon she found him whom her soul loved. Most likely this all takes place in her home town (where she was known and could go out at night and not be considered a prostitute by the watchmen). When she found him, she held him and would not let him go until she had brought him into her mother's house (perhaps implying the espousal). She was madly in love with a shepherd who apparently had not yet revealed his true identity. At this time, she still presumably despised the real Solomon.

The day dreaming woman (of Picture 4.1) had night dreams warning her of impending trouble. Jumping ahead, when we get to the interpretation we will see this is exactly what happened to the nation of Israel, i.e., she had warnings of coming trouble but did not heed those warnings; she was on the wrong path but would not turn around.

She repeats the common phrase to the daughters of Jerusalem, which again fits nicely into a musical. She tells them not to stir up or awaken love till he pleases. Again, this phrase seems to be saying they should not awaken love in general until it is an appropriate time. In love she was. Now she seemingly is betrothed to the one she loves; next he will come to get her.

4. His Coming

**Who is this coming out of the wilderness
Like pillars of smoke,
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
With all the merchant's fragrant powder?
Behold, it is Solomon's couch,
With sixty valiant men around it,
Of the valiant of Israel.
(SOS 3:6-7)**

**Behold, you are fair, my love!
Behold, you are fair!
You have dove's eyes behind your veil.
Your hair is like a flock of goats,
Going down from Mount Gilead.
(SOS 4:1)**

**Your are all fair, my love,
And there is no spot in you,
Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse,
With me from Lebanon,
Look from the top of Amana,
From the top of Senir and Hermon,
From the lions' dens,
From the mountains of the leopards.**
(SOS 4:7-8)

**A garden enclosed
Is my sister, my spouse,
A spring shut up,
A fountain sealed.
Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates
With pleasant fruits,
Fragrant henna with spikenard,...**
(SOS 4:12-13)

One day, finally, her beloved shepherd came to take his espoused wife. It was not at all the way she imagined. In the past, her shepherd was just a common guy; this man wore myrrh and frankincense, perfumes of a king. Her simple shepherd was coming in great glory and splendor, but he was not the man she thought. In fact, when she saw him coming (in a royal wedding train) she cried in astonishment, **“Who is this ...?”** To her amazement, her shepherd was Solomon! She was dumbfounded. We cannot begin to empathize with her shock and feelings of being overwhelmed with betrayal. He did not come skipping upon the hills like a gazelle, but come with valiant men and a royal entourage.

This coming of her shepherd may seem odd and certainly seems a betrayal. When we get further into this matter, this episode perfectly fits into the intended spiritual interpretation of this story. She was shocked, and we feel her pain; her outburst in utter amazement is exactly in accord with her understanding. This revelation was not good from her perspective. However, as we delve further, we will find in the end a complete reversal of this phrase "Who is this?" and it will be very, very good for her.

Naturally he understood her shock and knew her feeling of betrayal. He had to immediately begin to soothe and win her over, no doubt letting her know why he played the part of a shepherd. How could any girl resist the charm of being told, "Your hair is like a flock of goats," (it must lose something in translation). This section concerning his coming for her is not completely shown above, just enough to get the overview of what is happening. There is poetic love language that seems to go well beyond just talk in SOS 4:12-16.

Notice she is fair and has no spot in her (4:7), implying a beautiful and pure virgin. In 4:12-16, the figurative terms again strongly indicate her purity ("a garden enclosed," "a spring shut up," and "a fountain sealed"). The figurative terms are used to impart a literal understanding of her chastity. As a side note, in Solomon's time a literal garden was not a public park, but rather a royal retreat, walled off from common eyes with trees, flowers, and fountains (Neh.3:15, Est. 1:5). This walled-off garden was the Shulamite.

All the references to locations in 4:8 are in her home country, which, as discussed previously, appears to be southern Lebanon. Solomon came to Lebanon to get her and bring her to his home in Jerusalem. He took her to his royal chambers in Jerusalem, which was all quite a departure from what she had envisioned. She had been lovesick and had longed for him, but now her love had to be redirected to who her shepherd really was. Perhaps this is when the charge was made to the daughter of Jerusalem not to awaken love before its time. This is when the opening verses of SOS take place, when she asks the daughters of Jerusalem not to look upon her because she is dark.

5. Indifference and Separation

**I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse;
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;
...I sleep, but my heart is awake;
It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying,
'Open for me, my sister, my love,
My dove, my perfect one;
For my head is covered with dew,
My locks with the drops of the night.'
I have taken off my robe;
How can I put it on again?
I have washed my feet;
How can I defile them?
My beloved put his hand
by the latch of the door,
And my heart yearned for him,
'I arose to open for my beloved,
And my hands dripped with myrrh,
My fingers with liquid myrrh,
On the handles of the lock.
I opened for my beloved,
But my beloved had turned away and was gone.**

**My heart leaped up when he spoke.
I sought him, but I could not find him;
I called him, but he gave me no answer.
The watchmen who went about the city found me.
They struck me, they wounded me;
The keepers of the walls
Took my veil away from me.
(SOS 5:1-7)**

It breaks the reader's heart to read this. What is going on anyway? This love story is like many love affairs, with twists, and turns, and events that are hard to explain. Just when the reader thinks he/she understands where SOS is going, nagging doubts and questions arise. Some passages do not lend themselves to ease of understanding, nor satisfaction on particular points.

This is a dream sequence, in which the heroin was in a dream-like state. She was asleep but her heart was awake, which seems to imply troubled sleep resulting in her being in a state of irrational semi-consciousness. Delitzsch comments, "...to sleep while the heart wakes signifies to dream, for sleep and distinct consciousness cannot be co-existent."² We all know what it is like to be in such a state, when rationality and dreams mix. Being in such a state explains the rapid shifts of emphasis and the apparent inexplicable reactions of the Shulamite.

Solomon had apparently been gone (his locks were covered with dew and it was late in the night). He came to her door in love. She had taken her robe off (she was in bed) and had washed her feet and did not want to get them dirty again (by going to the door). When she first heard his voice she may have thought it was all a dream—she has been down this road before. She was asleep but her heart awakened her, implying a heart that was troubled by events while the body slept; she was not sure what was real and what was dream-like. When she realized it was not a dream and that he was actually at the door, her heart yearned for him. He was right there at her door. In her dream-like state, he came to her in love, but she either rejected him or was very slow in responding (due to being half-asleep or her heart being broken). Whatever happened, by the time she got to the door, he had left.

She had a forewarning of impending troubles (see Stage 3 above) and this event seems to be the fulfillment. She, again, went searching for him. However, she was not in her home town, but in Jerusalem. The watchmen of the city found her wondering alone at night. They wounded her and took her veil away. This strongly implies some mischief, to be wounded and have her veil taken away were pretty serious actions. These watchmen must not have known who she was; they certainly would not have touched one of Solomon's women. Since she was out in the city at night and perhaps still very tan, they may have mistaken her for a prostitute. She was treated very harshly by the very ones who should

² Delitzsch, F.; "*Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*;" T. & T. Clark; 1885.

have protected her, but why? It seems there are things implied here, but one cannot be certain. Since Solomon's wrote this book from her perspective, he may be vague in this area and at a crucial time, because he lacked firsthand witness. Perhaps Solomon was protecting her honor, because from her perspective she would not want all the sordid details mentioned.

Certainly women did not normally wander about the city at night and her veil was taken away, implying something improper. "It is well to remember that prostitutes went unveiled."³ If she were still tan, the watchmen may have taken her veil away since it was incongruous with what they were observing. Being out at night where she should not have been, and with a question about her character, created a perfect storm for mischief. It seems the text is implying that she was sexually defiled.

Not only had Solomon left, but now she seems to have been defiled. She and Solomon then became separated, but for how long is not clear. The reader will perhaps find this all a bit "unfair" to the Shulamite in our story, but the interpretation will make clearer the reason for the separation. At this point in the narrative, the love story has entered the tragic stage, and as we near the end of SOS, our two lovers are separated. Pending doom and a dark cloud hang over our lovers. Now what?

6. Restoration

**I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
If you find my beloved,
That you tell him I am lovesick!
"What is your beloved
More than another beloved,
O fairest among women?
What is your beloved
More than another beloved,
That you so charge us?
(SOS 5:8-9)**

**Where has your beloved gone,
O fairest among women?
Where has your beloved turned aside,
That we may seek him with you?
My beloved has gone to his garden,
To the beds of spices,
To feed his flock in the gardens,
And to gather lilies.**

³ Wight, Fred H.; "*Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*;" Moody Press, Chicago, IL; 32 printing , 1987; pg 99.

**I am my beloved's,
And my beloved is mine.
He feeds his flock among the lilies.
(SOS 6:1-3)**

**My dove, my perfect one,
Is the only one,...
"Who is she who looks forth as the morning,
Fair as the moon,
Clear as the sun,
Awesome as an army with banners?
I went down to the garden of nuts
To see if the verdure of the valley
To see whether the vine had budded
And the pomegranates had bloomed.
Before I was even aware,
My soul had made me
As the chariots of my noble people.
(SOS 6:9-12)**

**Return, return, O Shulamite;
Return, return, that we may look upon you!
What would you see in the Shulamite—
As it were, the dance of the two camps?
How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
O prince's daughter!
The curves of your thighs are like jewels,
The works of the hands of a skillful workman.
Your navel is a rounded goblet;
it lacks no blended beverage.
Your waist is a heap of wheat
Set about with lilies.
Your two breasts are like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle.
Your neck is like an ivory tower,
Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon
By the gate of Bath Rabbim.
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon
Which looks toward Damascus.
Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel.**

**And the hair of your head is like purple;
A king is held captive by your tresses.
How fair and how pleasant you are,
O love, with your delights!
This stature of yours is like a palm tree,
And your breasts like its cluster.
...The fragrance of your breath like apples,
And the roof of your mouth like the best wine.
(SOS 6:13-7:9)**

**I am my beloved's,
And his desire is toward me.
Come, my beloved,
let us go forth to the field;
Let us lodge in the villages.
Let us get up early to the vineyards;
Let us see if the vine has budded,
Whether the grape blossoms are open.
And the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give you my love.
(SOS 7:10-12)**

Perhaps the cloud of despair is lifting for we now see signs of a silver lining. In fact, the storm clouds will entirely roll away as we get into this stage. The sunshine of a restored relationship is in view. What is so fascinating is that in the interpretation of this story, an absolutely astounding future restoration will take place (as the analog of this story).

Our heroine tells the daughters of Jerusalem that if they find Solomon to tell him, "I am lovesick" (5:8). Some other translations read, "I am sick of love." Quite a difference--they are in direct opposition. In SOS 2:5 she used the same phrase during the time of the promise of his coming when they would be enjoying their first love. It would seem incompatible to say she was sick of love during that stage of their relationship. This phrase may very well be a play on words, that is, the first time she was lovesick, the second time she was sick of love. However, it seems wise to adhere to the translation above (her being lovesick) for it makes perfect sense and is well supported.^{4 5} The first time she was so madly in love that she was physically and emotionally ill. The second time at the end of their separation, and as restoration begins, she found she was still in love with Solomon (perhaps saying "she rediscovered her love" would be a better description). Thus, at the end of her indifference and separation, she realized her love for him

⁴ Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius; *"The New Hebrew and English Lexicon;"* Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc.; LaFayette, Indiana; 1978. This lexicon indicates sick means "become sick" and by hyperbole "be sick unto dying;" page 317.

⁵ Strong, James; *"The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible;"* Abingdon Press; New York, NY; 20th printing 1979. "to be sick, make sick;" page 39 of Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary.

was as strong as ever, still lovesick. She truly loved him for who he was. This fits well with the next verses, which show their relationship was restored, in large part because each of them loved the other.

As we continue, we find Solomon had turned aside, and there was a rift between the two lovers. The Shulamite in this section of Scripture rediscovers her first love. She realized she had taken him for granted, and he had other interests (feeding among the lilies seems to imply he had reasons to be gone and to be out in the fields and villages).

In SOS 6:9 she is referred to as perfect (the KJV translates it, “undefiled”). This is very instructive for she seems to have been defiled prior to this--when her veil was taken away and she was wounded by the watchmen (5:7). Several things happened during their separation that allowed for a restoration of their relationship. First, she seems to have rediscovered her first love. Second, the fact she says her soul had been made as the chariots of her noble people (6:12) may be an indication she became a Jewish proselyte ("her noble people" would indicate she accepted them as not only noble, but her own). Finally, it is clear she had a transformation in her mind. A transformed mind and possible conversion in faith would erase the stigma she experienced and make her perfect in Solomon's eyes. As we get into the interpretation, this will make more sense.

She notes that before she was aware of what was really going on, she had become a member of a noble family (perhaps the origin of the phrase not to stir or awaken love until it pleases). Coping with this situation would be hard for any young woman; her life was completely turned upside-down. She went from a poor country girl, who did not like men, to becoming a royal wife of Solomon almost overnight. Her sense of being overwhelmed because of the rapid changes in her life must have been intense. She seems to have left for awhile and that caused someone (the daughters of Jerusalem or perhaps homeland friends) to cry out for her to return (6:13). During the separation is when she changed, which allowed for the restoration that followed. She and Solomon reunite, and he gushes forth with profuse love language (7:1-9).

The text contains subtle indications of a change in attitude and perspective. If she were not a believer, we would naturally hope that this change was the result of a conversion in faith. We know her heart and mind were transformed as she recognized her self-interest and attitude had not been in tune with Solomon. It may be reading into the text to speak of a conversion, but her conversion would fit well into this story and be totally aligned with the interpretation, but it is conjecture. We can say that as a result of whatever happened (and conversion would best explain this), she was again defined as perfect (undefiled).

The beauty of restoration and renewed first love become apparent. Their final love transcended the former; his desire (thoughts, heart, mind, actions) was toward her, and she attained that which she had always wanted—Solomon to be by her side (1:13). They went to the vineyard to see if the vines flourish and whether the tender grapes appeared. This would be a trip down memory lane, with a renewal of

cherished memories. As they recapitulated their past and visited former places with deep significance to their relationship, the joy of their first love was restored.

In SOS 7:1-5, there is a subtle change in how the beauty of the Shulamite is expressed. This change is designed by the Almighty to draw our attention to a change in their relationship, just as the entire book of SOS is designed to attract attention to a change in Israel's relationship with God. In this passage, the description of the Shulamite is given from the bottom to the top, starting with the sandals and feet and proceeding upward to the hair and crowning tresses. In two other descriptions of the lovers (4:1-5 and 5:10-16), the order is from the head downward (not exactly in that order but in general). Indeed, if we were describing her beauty, we would proceed from the crown of her head to the soul of her feet, just the opposite of this description. This reversal in order should cause us to ask why. When the interpretation of this story is given, the intent of the reversed order will become more obvious. For now, we must just be aware of the reversal in order. We must primarily grasp that overall she is beautiful, statuesque, shapely, and smells like the best wine and fruit (resulting from good hygiene and healthy diet).

7. Perfect Love

**Who is this coming up from the wilderness,
Leaning upon her beloved?
I awakened you under the apple tree.
There your mother brought you forth;
There she who bore you brought you forth.
Set me as a seal upon your heart,
As a seal upon your arm;
For love is as strong as death,
Jealously as cruel as the grave;
Its flames are flames of fire,
A most vehement flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
nor can the floods drown it.
If a man would give for love
All the wealth of his house,
It would be utterly despised.
(SOS 8:5-7)**

The story ends with a reversal of the question, who is this? This time it is said of her, **“Who is this coming up from the wilderness Leaning on her beloved?”** It is of course rhetorical, but her change is so complete it had to be asked. After being reunited and going back to the countryside where they courted, they relived their past and their first love was rekindled. She now recognizes love is much more

than infatuation. They were back to the countryside where she was born and where love was awakened in her heart. Now everyone could see the transformation in her: how she went from a man-hater and Solomon despiser to one who leaned upon him and him only, how she went from rags to riches, how she tried to do it her way and it resulted in failure, how her self-interests led to defilement, how she finally turned to him, how she came up out of the wilderness as pure (undefiled). The onlookers could see the glory that flowed from her change in attitude and perhaps conversion for she had become a new person. Now love had truly awakened.

This time it is the onlookers (most likely the people in her homeland), recalling what she said when he first came to get her, who now ask, "Who is this?" She has been so completely changed that this is only a natural question to ask. She was a new person because of him; she was transformed in her mind. She was dumbfounded and shocked when he came in royal splendor. Now the local people experience the same when they see her. We will see in the next chapter that this love story parallels another love story in the Bible. They are entirely different love stories but God uses the two (and more) to teach a common truth about Israel.

There are many verses in this story, but just two verses (8:6-7) present the timeless conclusion and eternal truth for all ages. Those verses (see above) start with, "**Set me as a seal upon your heart**" and end with "**It would be utterly despised.**" Using so few verses to teach the eternal truth of this book is how God inspired Solomon to write SOS, and the logic follows that of Ecclesiastes. That is, after a lengthy presentation, the final eternal truth is presented in a short but memorial form, indeed, its surprising succinctness is what draws our attention. Our attention is awake and keenly focused, the text has drawn us in, and now the timeless truth can be expounded concisely. The message is similar to the old saying, "If you want someone to hear, whisper." If this were a musical, one could only imagine the beauty of these verses in song.

God is whispering here for a reason, and the reader best listen; He is directly stating what is eternal, true, and profoundly important.

What constitutes true love is of interest and a godly principle for all ages. The Shulamite asks to be set as a seal upon Solomon's heart and arm, his heart being the seat of love and his arm the source of strength. A seal was the sign of a finished and secure transaction, which is what she desired (for her love for him, and vice versa). She wanted a permanent place in his heart and for that place to be secure. She wanted to be placed permanently in the deepest part of his being, based upon his strength. The seal she desires was a binding seal that could not be broken.

Watchman Nee⁶ notes that she had no doubt seen Israeli priests carry the names of the tribes of Israel on their breastplates, so as to be held close to their heart and sustained by their position of authority. The reference to love being as strong as death recognizes that death does not care about our emotions, the pain of parents, the tears of a spouse, the heartache of children; none of these can overcome the strength of death that holds its victims in an immovable vice. Death has no pity, is cruel, feels no pain, is devoid of compassion, and torments us. The Shulamite may have been jealous and now recognized that love has the same power as death. Love often creates jealousy in this life, and that, too, is as cruel as the grave/death. We now know that perfect love (agape love) casts out all fear (1 Jn. 4:18) because fear causes torment, but true love creates peace and assurance. Understanding true love, versus infatuation or idyllic love, is part of her transformation.

From SOS we learn that true love is:

- **unquenchable:** not even a flood can quench it.
- **priceless:** there is nothing we have that can pay its price. If we tried, anything we offered would be so insignificant that it would be despised.
- **strong:** as strong as death, which will take each of us.
- **a fire:** the flame of Yah (poetic form of YHWH, i.e., Yahweh the LORD), which is vehement and cannot be quenched.
- **enduring:** it endures all pain, circumstances, trials ... for our entire lives.

There is so much more to be said about true love, especially how it relates to the truth for this Age, but that is for later. For now, we will content ourselves with the fact the basic love story has been sufficiently revealed so we can say we "get the gist" of it. So what if we know the general love story? It is only the hidden, deeper, spiritual meaning that can truly satisfy the searching soul. We now are compelled to ask: what does this love story really mean, what is the spiritual interpretation, and does it in any way relate to the future?

Here is where we are in this presentation: we have discovered the relationship between the Shulamite and Solomon had seven distinct stages (phases).

The Seven Stage of the Relationship in SOS

1. First love
2. Promised Coming
3. Warning of Separation
4. His Coming
5. Indifference and Separation
6. Final Restoration
7. Perfect Love

⁶ Nee, Watchman; "*Song of Songs*;" Christian Literature Crusade; Fort Washington, Pennsylvania 19034; sixth printing 1977.

Chapter 5

Truth Needed to Reveal the Hidden Message

The works of the LORD are great, Studied by all who have pleasure in them.

(Psalm 111:2)

Interpretation of SOS: The Hidden Message

Figures of Speech

SOS employs some of the most figurative language in the Bible, which has led many to contend the story is figurative and any interpretation must, of necessity, be the same. However, figurative language does not negate a literal understanding. Yes, we all have questions as to what some of the figures mean and we are sometimes confused by them, but those questions do not allow us to say the story is not real, or that we may infer from it anything that fits our personal theology or philosophy. While imagery is used, the author wanted to communicate something specific to the readers, something that does not change over time, as happens with figurative interpretations.

Today, the term literal, when applied to biblical matters, means to understand what the author intended the text to mean to those to whom it was written. However, do not mistake the word literal to mean words cannot be used figuratively. Consider this phrase, "...the car was flying down the road...." In a literal sense we do not understand the car to be actually flying. "Reading it literally—that is, in the natural sense—would mean that the car was going very fast."¹ In this literal understanding, the hearer is assumed to know the car really did not fly, that the words are a figure of speech. We are to understand the car was going so fast it seemed like it was flying. The car is real and literal, the story of its speed is real and literal, the story itself is real and literal (even though a figure is employed). The same is true with SOS: the story is real and literal but has many figures of speech. The interpretation must be equally real and literal, not some far-out nonsense that an author wants to promote. The story of SOS and its

¹ Lennox, John C.; "Seven Days That Divide The World;" Zondervan; Grand Rapids, MI 49530; 2011; pg. 25

interpretation should be the same for all ages, no matter who is reading it or his or her perspectives on life; such can only be the case if the story and its interpretation are real and literal.

Figures of speech add special meaning and create mind pictures that can be extremely helpful for our understanding. Yet at the same time, they can introduce difficulty for those trying to understand the Word, as is the case in SOS, because the figures of speech are used so frequently, and we are unfamiliar with the figures employed.

As we endeavor to understand SOS, we see the inherent problems with any example, metaphor, type, analogy, or other figure of speech, in which a person or thing in some way represents God. The problem is that we can over-extended or overwork the figure of speech, so much so that it no longer makes sense. The figurative language is often driven to an absurd extreme, then that extreme is used to easily discredit an argument (*reductio ad absurdum*: reduction to absurdity). Recognizing this problem is crucial to understanding SOS; we do not want to discredit any argument by creating a straw dummy (never intended by the author) in order to cast it down.

We can have that problem here. If we say Solomon represents God, and the woman Israel, then what do we make of his failures in having multiple, heathen wives? Obviously God has no such failures. It is the overworking of the analogy that negates the intended teaching; we must not overwork this story to the point of absurdity. A similar thing occurs when Christ says He is the vine; if so, what do the gnarls and shaggy bark on the vine represent? Imperfection? Certainly not! What do the roots (that nourish the vine) represent, God? If so, is God dependent upon the soil for support and sustenance? Obviously, this is discrediting the analogy by reducing it to absurdity. The analogy does not discuss gnarls, bark, roots, or soil; they cannot be introduced into the story or confusion will result.

In our story, the analogy has to do with the relationship between Solomon and the woman, not the nature, morality, or virtue of the people themselves. If we carefully maintain this understanding we will avoid many of the possible pitfalls. Again, it is the relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite that will be the basis of our interpretation, not the nature of the characters. The relationships of this book are what historically have been considered important: "For the Jewish interpreters the account was understood in terms of the LORD's relationship with Israel."²

The Hidden Message

The meaning behind SOS's love story is very similar to the message God presents in numerous other biblical passages, that is, a summary of Israel's history. The love story not only presents her historic past at the time when SOS was written, but goes into the future to teach what will happen (prophecy). In those similar biblical passages, the basic stories are not the same as in SOS, but the basic information the reader is to gather from the stories is very much the same. In SOS, this recurring biblical truth is being taught in a new way (poetry, drama, play, musical) as the Lord employs an alternative means to

² Carr, Lloyd; "*The Song of Solomon*;" Inter-varsity Press; Leicester, England; 1984, pg 25.

instruct His own. In SOS, the love story is very unusual, but it is precisely this unusualness that generates intrigue and captivates the reader. Examples of scriptural stories with similar interpretations are found in: Ezekiel 16 and 23; Hosea; Isaiah 24, 50-52, 54; Acts 7, and Revelation 2-3.

Ezekiel 16 will be used as an example. It is a great example since its interpretation (meaning) is very similar to SOS; however, the storyline is very different. Ezekiel's account is one of the most touching chapters in the Bible, and few can read it with a dry eye. This brief summary will enable the reader to see how a completely different story from SOS can be used to present a common message (same interpretation).

Ezekiel 16 speaks of a baby girl being thrown and abandoned in an open field, polluted in her own blood and left to die. No one wanted her to live, no one loved her, and no one showed pity. The story continues with the entrance of a kind man who took compassion on her, nursed her to health. She grew and became a beautiful young woman. They entered into a time of love, first love. Her fame and beauty continued to grow and things went well for a time, until she began to trust in her own beauty and forgot he who really enabled her to be so. She eventually began to commit adultery and played the part of a harlot; they divorced, and she continued to live in gross sin. She loathed her husband, and forgot the days of her youth. Through it all, He never forgot His covenant with her. Finally, she remembered her ways and was ashamed. This example is a rather tragic love story, but in the end, they are restored.

Notice that the story in Ezekiel 16 is clearly an allegory and the story of the girl and good man is not historic. However, the interpretation of that story is given to us by the Lord in the same chapter—the interpretation is real, historic, and literal—just as SOS. Ezekiel 16 is a straight-forward historic portrayal of Jerusalem's relationship with God: birth, first love, espousal, spiritual adultery, divorce, purification, restoration, and reunification. The Ezekiel love story is intended to teach the relationship between God and Israel and all the various phases it went through and will go through. In a nutshell, Ezekiel's love story can be interpreted as a recapitulation of Israel's historical relationship with God, with its ups and downs. It answers the question they should have been asking a long time ago, and will in the future: "How did we (Israel) get into this mess and what is our future?"

The Song of Solomon does not appear to be an allegory; thus, it is considered historical. It has the same basic interpretation as Ezekiel 16; however, in SOS the meaning is entwined, even buried, in unusual love language and a poetic format that make it difficult to understand. Perhaps it is the Lord's intent to make us study and study, drawing us in, because we sense there are buried nuggets of spiritual wisdom. Now that the love story in SOS has been untwined, we can be sure the interpretation of it is correct if it agrees with the rest of Scripture. The interpretation presented here is in exact agreement with Ezekiel, and numerous other passages; thus, we can be sure the correct interpretation is presented.

The love story in SOS is the means by which the Lord uses an earthly story to symbolically portray the relationship between Israel and God over the span of history.

The love story teaches that Israel and God initially had a strong "first love" and how that relationship changed over time. The Song reviews their entire relationship, and this review is a reminder to Israel of the reasons why she ended up where she is today, and what is in her future. It is a story of true love, joy, sorrow, separation (which continues to this day), and finally restoration (yet in the future). The purpose of the Song of Solomon is to alert Israel of her failure to keep her covenant with the Lord, and to remind the people of His faithfulness through it all. Again, the Song's complicated love story serves as a reminder of Israel's relationship to God, past and future. Since that reminder extends into the future, the Song ties in beautifully with prophesied future events, as seen in the book of Revelation.

Transitional Book

Chapter 1 mentioned that SOS is a transitional book, taking the reader out of the books of wisdom into the prophetic books, which announce terrible upcoming events for the chosen nation. It provides a smooth flow, in a poetic style, into those prophetic books, rather than a harsh, abrupt change. The poetic style and its underlying interpretation prepare the reader for what the prophets will have to say.

In SOS the Lord alerts the wise reader to coming changes in the subject matter. SOS provides a transition into the prophetic books in an ingenious manner, that is, a love song with a hidden prophetic message. The first prophet is Isaiah, and in just the first chapter and first two verses of Chapter 2, here is what he says about the relationship between Israel and God: they rebelled against Him, they do not know Him, they are sinful, they have forsaken the Lord, there is no soundness in them, their sins were as scarlet, the faithful city had become a harlot, Israel will be ashamed, He would purge away the dross, Zion will be redeemed, the last days, and the establishment of the Kingdom. We will see these are the basic elements resulting from the proper interpretation of SOS, indicating SOS is a carefully, divinely crafted love story alerting the reader to profound spiritual truths. (More on transitional books will be found in Chapter 9.)

Overview of God's Plan for the Ages

Before we can get into the interpretation of SOS, we have to understand God's overall prophetic plan. That plan is the basis for understanding the hidden message in SOS. Thus, a brief overview of the God's plan for the ages is needed to make sure that the reader knows the frame of reference of SOS and this book. Of course, God's plan for the ages begins in Genesis and continues throughout the entire Bible. However, an overview of the entire plan will not be undertaken here; that is a study all by itself. Instead, reference will be made to one of Daniel's significant prophecies, and then a general synopsis will be

presented of God's plan and actions from around the time of Christ's crucifixion to the establishment of the future Millennial Kingdom.

Without a general understanding of God's overall plan for the ages, this book will make little sense, neither will the Bible. Please understand this presentation will be kept short so that it helps augment, but does not sidetrack, the discussion of the Song of Solomon. This section will help the reader see the Bible was written in such a manner that it normally should be interpreted literally (even though passages may employ figure[s] of speech).

Note: figures of speech are common in the Bible, but they follow known rules. This means we cannot infer, ignore, or interpret such figures any way we want. Figures of speech must be appreciated and recognized so that a literal interpretation is not forced upon an intended figurative passage, or vice versa.³

Because people do not understand God's plan for the ages, they tend to "spiritualize" (a figurative interpretation of a spiritual nature) many passages of Scripture when indeed the passages are intended to be taken literally. It is the spiritualization of prophetic Scripture that seems to be a common problem with interpreting the Bible. Thus, when prophetic utterances do not seem to make literal (or real-world) sense, they are then spiritualized in an attempt to say they offer something of a spiritual nature.

Again, our overview of God's plan for the ages will basically start at the time of Christ's death and proceed from there, but brief mention of Daniel's writings is also required.

The General Prophetic Plan

It seems one of the most perplexing problems we encounter when we try to understand Biblical prophecy is the timeline. Historic events can be generally understood and placed into their appropriate place in time. However, prophetic events (of the future) are another thing. When viewing events far into the future, for the prophets of old and for us, it is not only hard to differentiate between events but even harder to know when they will occur. We often wonder about prophetic passages: "When does this apply, to what time period does this passage refer, is this event before or after some other prophesied event...?" The Bible can be very hard to understand at times because the timing of prophesied events is not as clear as we would like. There can be little doubt that as the time draws nearer to an event, the timeline will also be much clearer to those living at that time. While we may not know how some future events will play out, slowly but surely as we get closer to those events, the fulfillment will become clearer.

If we are honest, we have to admit that if we try to literally interpret some of the Bible's prophecies, we run headlong into a brick wall. So many prophecies make sense up to around the time of Christ, and then they seem to fall apart. If we try to put some of the Bible's prophecies into a timeline of what happened and when, the Bible just does not seem to be correct. We will look at one of Daniel's prophecies to see why this is the case. There is something missing in prophesied events that seems to mess them up. As we

³ Bullinger, E. W.; *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI; 4th printing; 1974.

look into prophecy, we will come to grips with the fact the prophecies of old were looking far into the future, so it was hard to see details in such a view.

Prophets saw the future much like we see distant mountain ranges. When we look at a mountain range far in the distance, we may see the closer foothills, then the first lower mountains, and then behind them the huge mountains. We get the impression the foothills are relatively close to the towering mountains. When we get there, we find there are tremendous distances between these features, even though they looked close together from a distant view. When we get there, we see valleys and wide open spaces between the features. The prophets saw the mountain peaks but could not see the valleys. Thus, their prophecies mentioned the peaks but give no mention of the valleys, which makes their prophecies seem incorrect to us now.

This is perfectly exemplified in Isaiah, "**For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**" (Isa. 9:6). The first part of this verse explains the Jesus Christ would come as a child, and yet in the same sentence it tells of the time when He will rule as the exalted Lord. We now know that over 2000 years has intervened between "Unto us a Son is given" and "the government will be upon His shoulder." This gap in time does not in any way cast doubt upon the prophecy, its literal fulfillment, or God's faithfulness. It shows how the prophets saw the mountain peaks, in this case one peak was His first coming to die and the second peak was his second coming to reign. What they did not see was the vast valley between, which is over 2000 years wide. That valley is where our Age of Grace is being played out (no prophet saw it or predicted it). It is this gap in time that totally befuddles many and makes them think prophecy is not intended to be taken literally.

The prophets themselves did not understand their own prophecies, but that did not make them doubt the veracity of the Word. Peter notes that they tried to understand prophecies but knew something was hidden from them, "**...searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow**" (1 Pt. 1:11). The Bible's own prophets saw the future as though it were in the horizon, far off. When they spoke of it, they spoke of the mountain tops: His first coming in suffering and His second coming in triumph and glory. The valley(s) were often not visible or shown to these prophets. Thus, the prophets saw many future events, but the time between them generally was completely unknown since they saw only the peaks and not the valleys. This has the effect of foreshortening time, that is, making the time seem shorter than it actual turns out to be. Because many people do not understand this effect, prophecy does not make sense to them, so they say that God abandoned certain prophecies when He set Israel aside, or that the prophecy is not to be taken literally.

A specific prophecy of Daniel will be given here to further demonstrate what was said above. His prophecy will show a huge gap in what we would think should be a continuous timeline. As we look at Daniel's prophecy, we will see God's word is one-hundred percent accurate. Daniel's prophecy will

reveal that prophecy is meant to be taken literally, with the correct and proper use of figures of speech. Finally, his prophecy will show that a prophecy can "skip" over thousands of years—the huge valley between the peaks that was not visible to the prophets.

Traditionally, the book of Daniel is dated in the 6th century BC. Daniel spoke of 70 periods of seven (called weeks) that are "determined upon" Israel (Dan. 9:23-27). Analysis of his writings shows this period amounts to 490 years (each day of his prophetic week represents one year in our time). Stated another way, each prophetic week equals seven years. Of Daniel's 70 prophetic weeks, 69 weeks (483 years) have been fulfilled. What is important to understand is that they were absolutely literally and exactly fulfilled. One week remains to be fulfilled in God's prophetic plan for Israel.

That one prophetic week will be seven literal years long. However, each literal year (in prophetic reckoning) has 360 days, so each prophetic week amounts to a total of 2520 days (7 years x 360 days/year = 2520 days). This seven-year period is called the Tribulation, a furnace of fire (affliction) especially designed for Israel. The final seven years (Daniel's 70th week) will be literally and exactly fulfilled, just as the preceding 69 weeks were.

The first 69 weeks had a specific beginning point and ending point (Dan. 9:25-26). The absolute accuracy of this prophecy can be checked out to see if the Bible is accurate and reliable. The beginning point is "**... the command to restore and to build Jerusalem,**" which can be determined by secular history as being given on March 14, 445 BC (see Neh. 2:6). This command was given on Passover (more on this later). The ending point is, "**... unto the Messiah the Prince,**" which was when Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (this date is established by astronomy as April 6, 32 AD). So Daniel's prophecy has an exact starting point, a specific ending point, and the period between the two is precisely stated (69 prophetic weeks, or 483 years).*

Determining the exact time period between these two dates gets tricky; thankfully, Sir Robert Anderson has done the work.⁴ When worked out in days, the time period (between the two events noted above) should be 173,880 days (69 x 7 years x 360 days/year = 173,880 days). When leap years and all other factors are considered, the time period between the two events noted above turns out to be exactly that: 173,880 days. Exact, to the very day! This is absolutely mind boggling. The Bible reveals two future events and the exact time between them. We can check the accuracy of the Bible by use of secular history and astronomy—they establish the two dates. When the calculations are made, the time between the two events is exactly as stated in Daniel. His prophecy was literal, to the very day.

Based upon the absolute accuracy of Daniel's prophecy, which has already been fulfilled, there is no doubt the one remaining period (seven years), the Tribulation, will be exactly 2520 days long (seven

⁴ Anderson, Sir Robert; *"The Coming Prince;"* Kregel Publications; Grand Rapids, MI; 18th Ed.; 1972

* Note: some assign slightly different dates to the two events than shown here. Even so, those two events did historically occur and the time period between them still comes out to be 69 prophetic weeks.

years times 360 days a year). Those who do not believe in inspiration have great problems with Daniel's prophecy, so they come up with all sorts of ideas to try to discredit this prophecy.

The problem is, that last week (seven years) has not occurred for over 2000 years; this causes some to think the last week either was abrogated when Israel was set aside, or, perhaps most commonly, that it has to be taken figuratively. Neither is right; it will occur exactly as prophesied and just as literally as the first 69 weeks. Not understanding how there can be such a gap in prophesied events has caused irreparable damage in Christendom; indeed, it has been a major factor in determining how various church groups have evolved over the ages. We need to see that God intentionally caused the break in prophesied events so that He could introduce a special Age (our Age) and how that stopped the prophetic clock for 2000 years. God did not do this as a trick, but just the opposite, so that He could extend His grace and save millions/billions before He must finally bring regular history to a close by declaring war on the world.

The first 69 weeks came to an end with the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem. Then Christ was crucified, " **'And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself...'** " (Dan. 9:26). He had to die for all mankind's sins, in all ages. It was no secret; it was prophesied He had to die. However, at the time of Christ's death God did not reveal all that His death would accomplish. The fullness of what His death accomplishes in our Age is what God had to keep secret.

After Christ's death, Pentecost came and the believers were filled with the Holy Ghost, displaying gifts, proofs of His filling (Acts 2:1-14). These gifts were a sign to Israel that God was still working with them, but they had better repent. They should have known from their own Scriptures what this meant, that is, that if they did not accept Him they would go into the terrible days predicted by the prophets (Isa. 28:11; Joel 2:28-32). After the Holy Spirit came the promised Kingdom was again offered to Israel (Acts 3:19-21), but this required the majority of them (and the rulers) to accept Christ as Savior.

It is hard to grasp from our perspective, but as far as had been prophesied, Israel was at the threshold of entering into the terrible last days; the Tribulation was about to begin (Acts 2:14-18). It will be explained shortly how Israel could be in the last days, and yet how the prophecies of the Tribulation and doom have not occurred for over 2000 years. In Acts, Israel (in general) rejected the Holy Spirit. This was strike three (they had rejected the Father in the Old Testament, Christ while on earth, and then the Holy Spirit).⁵ Israel was then set aside (this is what the book of Acts is mostly about, as well as Romans 11). This setting aside was not permanent, but was only temporary and for a specific purpose. Setting aside means that God stopped dealing with Israel as the chosen nation, but this pause has a time limit.

Now something occurred that must be understood in order for God's plan to make sense. God announced He had a mystery (a secret) that He had purposely kept secret since the beginning of the world (Eph. 3:1-10; Col. 1:25-27). The prophets saw the mountain peaks, but the mystery is what happens in the valley, which they could not see. Here are the basics of that mystery.

⁵ Stam, C. R.; *Things That Differ*; Berean Bible Society; Germantown, WI; 1951.

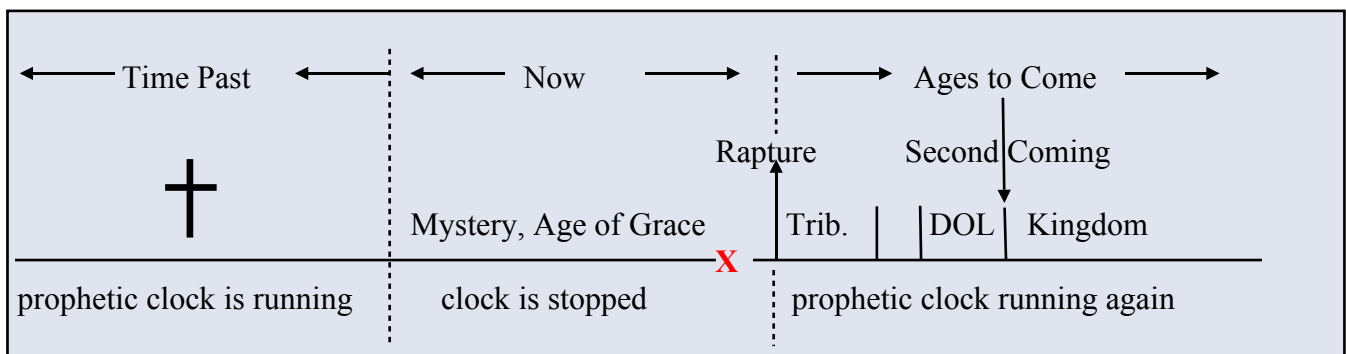
1. This mystery/secret was not that Christ would die. Prior to Christ's death, there are many verses stating He would die. John 3:14-16 is an example. Isaiah 53:4-6 is a clear reference to the Messiah, and numerous Old Testament types and symbolisms teach about His death (serpent being lifted up by Moses, Passover, etc.)
2. This mystery/secret was not that Gentiles would be saved (the clearly announced plan of God was always that the Gentiles would come to Him); but it was through the rise of Israel, coming into prominence because of national belief in Jesus Christ. Gentile salvation was to be through Israel—the "channel of blessing" to the Gentiles.
3. The Mystery was that God had an entirely non-revealed Age of Grace (Church Age) in mind; however, He kept it secret (not foretold anywhere in Scripture prior to this time, not in type or word). Why did He keep it a secret? Paul clearly states that if God had revealed what Christ's death would accomplish in this Age the princes of this world would not have crucified Christ (I Cor. 2:6-8).
4. God had to keep our Age a mystery so that Christ would be crucified; if His death did not occur, no sin could be forgiven; there would be no salvation for any human. Satan thought, from all that had been revealed, that he was about to upset the eternal plan of God by causing the chosen nation to go completely awry. With Israel in a condition of unbelief and the world going into the Tribulation, Satan would have gained a huge victory because Israel was the nation that was to take the good news of Christ to the world. However, a new Age of Grace and people being saved totally apart from the nation of Israel was a mystery about which he had no knowledge.
5. The mystery was that Gentiles and Jews would be saved by God's grace through faith alone. This all would occur without the involvement of Israel as the channel of blessing (so it was totally by His grace); both Jew and Gentile would be members of one spiritual Body, the Body of Christ (Church).
6. A new Apostle was brought onto the scene, Paul. He became the Apostle to the Gentiles.
7. Our Age of Grace ends with the Rapture of the Church, which occurs at some time known only by the Lord. The body of believers will be instantaneously removed from this earth and taken to Heaven.
8. After the Rapture, the Tribulation begins; this is the last week (70th) of Daniel's vision. This is that one week that has been held in abeyance for over 2000 years.
9. The Day of the Lord (DOL) then occurs; it is of an unspecified length. However, this well-prophesied day will likely be several months long. There are an incredible number of things that will transpire during this day (Zech. 14; Joel 3:14-16; Rev. 16). This is the Day when the wrath of God is poured out, and Christ will defeat all His enemies. The battle of Armageddon takes place then.
10. Christ will be on the earth at the end of the Day of the Lord; the long desired Kingdom will be established upon the Earth. The Gospels and prophetic Scripture are replete with references to the Kingdom after the Tribulation. This is a real, literal Kingdom on this earth; it will be exactly 1000 years long; Christ will reign upon the Earth as the King. This Kingdom can be viewed as "heaven coming down to earth." This Kingdom is not some mystic thing or Christ within the believer: it is a literal kingdom on earth with Christ as the supreme ruler.

God had to keep our Age a mystery so that Christ would be crucified; if His death did not occur, no sin could be forgiven; there would be no salvation for any human.

Understanding the Mystery is the key to understanding God's overall plan. It was kept a secret until it was revealed to the Apostle Paul. Unfortunately, it seems to still be a mystery in most circles. If one does not understand the Mystery (Eph. 3:1-10; Col 1:24-29; Rom. 16:25-26), then biblical prophecy seems wildly exaggerated and is, therefore, interpreted in a figurative manner. It is anyone's guess as to what the figure or spiritualized interpretation will be. The mystery makes it easy to understand why prophesy has been put on hold for 2000 years, that is, prophesy is held in abeyance until our Age ends at the Rapture. Then the prophetic clock starts again and clicks off time literally and exactly as written. If one does grasp the mystery, then the literal interpretation of prophecy jumps out and we can exclaim, "Finally, I see that God meant what he said. Now I see how beautifully it all fits together!"

As you refer to the simple chart below, please note that in the Age of Grace (also called the Dispensation of Grace and Church Age) God's prophetic clock has stopped (even though real time continues). If the Age of Grace were taken out, the prophetic program would be seen to continue, uninterrupted. After the Rapture, the prophetic program continues right where it left off. Consider the Mystery a secret age, during which the prophetic clock has stopped while God is doing something different and Israel is set aside. When the Rapture occurs, God goes right back to the prophetic plan and the clock starts again.

In the chart below, creation is not shown but it would be on the far left side. Time progresses to the right. The terms, "time past, now, and ages to come" are terms the Apostle Paul uses to divide time periods (as seen in the King James Version of the Bible in Eph. 2:2,7,13,19). The "now" is our entire Age of Grace. Only those prominent features that relate to this study are shown, with an **X** marking the spot (under the word Grace) to show where it is estimated we are today on this chart. Incidentally, there may be a short time between the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord in which Matt. 25 takes place. DOL means the Day of the Lord.



Chapter 6

The Interpretation

Revealing the Hidden Message

Narrowness of interpretation is the bane of apocalyptic study.

Sir Robert Anderson

The minds of most men are in bondage to the commonplace facts of their experiences.¹

Basic Stages of the Love Story

Chapter four noted the introductory parts of SOS and then revealed that the love story contains these basic stages (or phases) in the relationship between God and Israel:

1. First love
2. Promised Coming
3. Warning of Separation
4. His Coming
5. Indifference and Separation
6. Final Restoration
7. Perfect Love

These seven stages will be readily seen by those familiar with the Scripture to be the highlights of Israel's relationship with God, the same as in Ezekiel 16. The interpretation of SOS looks through the prism of time to reiterate Israel's sordid past (stages 1-5). Stages six and seven of the interpretation look over the horizon of time to what the future holds in store. Today, Israel is in unbelief (stage 5) and temporarily set aside (Romans 11), while God is pouring out His grace upon Jew and Gentile alike in the Age of Grace.

¹ Anderson, Sir Robert; *The Coming Prince*; 18th edition, 1972; Kregel Publications; Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501; first quote page pg 171, second quote pg 150.

The continued unfolding of the prophetic program is held in abeyance today and this will continue until the Rapture, at which time the prophetic program will begin again. This means that Israel will have to go through the final two stages after the Rapture. The restoration of unbelieving Israel is brought about by a severe chastening (the believers of this Age will be removed from this world first) that converts and restores Israel to that which God desires. The seven stages shown above will be used for reference as we now embark upon the interpretation of the SOS love story.

Interpreting the Love Story

1. First Love

It initially seems Solomon was evasive concerning his identity. This may be stating the matter incorrectly; he may have been wisely revealing himself in a manner she could understand. It was not obfuscation on his part, but using his wisdom of how people interact to accomplish the seemingly impossible, just as he did determining the true mother of the child in 1 Kings 3. If he unloaded his true self to her right from the start, would she have loved him? Not likely. She seemed not to like men in general, and this certainly included Solomon, whom she did not know by sight. Solomon had to use his wisdom to win her heart, or at least her trust, then he could reveal himself. He had to show her his kindness, wisdom, tenderness first, and then later reveal his true identity.

Similarly, when Israel was being born (coming out of Egypt), God was not well known by the general population. God had to make Himself known to them in a gradual way so they could grow in their understanding and faith. As God worked through Moses and Aaron, He manifested His true nature and attributes more and more. Thus, in the Old Testament, we have a progressive revelation of who God is. He revealed Himself in a succession of names, terms, and events to which Israel could relate and understand. In beginning of her history, the people of Israel were not well informed as to the Person of God, but that was slowly and progressively revealed to them.

The same is true in the New Testament. The Jewish people in the Gospels did not really understand Christ or the Holy Spirit. Slowly but surely, the nature of Christ and the Spirit were revealed to the believers; the most thorough portrayal of the person of Christ did not occur until Colossians 1. Imagine that, it was not until the first century that we get the full discourse of the person of Christ. God is so complex that we will never really understand His entire character, attributes, and person. God has to reveal such things at the right time and in the right way, for the sake of our understanding. That seems to be the exact case with Solomon and the Shulamite.

Israel did love the Lord early in her history, as the Bible clearly states. However, during the time of first love, she did not really know the fullness of God; that was revealed to Israel over time. The first love stage began when Israel came out of Egypt and wandered in the wilderness, when she was being born as a nation. This is important because the concept of first love is a recurring theme in the Bible. Ezekiel

notes her beginning this way, “...**your time was the time of love**” (Ezek. 16:8). Then Jeremiah says, “**I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown**” (Jer. 2:2). Israel’s first love was special, pure, and without conditions. It is very precious to our Lord because of its sincerity and purity, like a baby towards its mother (and a baby does not really know its mother).

First love is also precious because it is never forgotten, though it may be pushed aside for a while, since the emotions tied to it are burned into our hearts and minds. Such love has total acceptance and willing reliance on each other because there is no fear of being hurt. God often recalls Israel’s first love after she came out of Egypt and became a nation, leaning on and implicitly trusting in Him. Recall in Revelation 2:4 the Lord reminds Israel she has left her first love. We will see later that SOS has strong ties to the book of Revelation and the seven churches mentioned there.

Israel celebrated seven feast days: the first three feast days were Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. These three feast days ran consecutively for eight days and SOS was read to the congregation on the last day of these feast days.² There can be little doubt that this reading was God's desire. What a beautiful way to end a celebration with a reading from God's Word so everyone could hear it for themselves. SOS is short enough to be read aloud to the entire assembly, and it would remind Israel of her "first love." It would also remind her that somehow that first love had been lost (not permanently, but temporarily pushed to the back of her mind).

The first three feast days should have reminded Israel of her history throughout the Old Testament: the Passover lamb in Egypt, the time of unleavened bread tied to the Exodus, the eating of the firstfruit of the Promised Land. The comfort of the feasts derived from the fact they were a witness of God's love and faithfulness throughout all the trials and tribulations of their relationship.

It is incredible symbolic and poignant that SOS was read at the end of three feast days, because the hearer of SOS was reminded of Israel's history, i.e., the first three stages. They should have discerned from the reading of SOS about their first love, starting soon after the Passover and progressively blooming as they came out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. The reading should have reminded them of the Messiah's promised coming (mentioned as early as Gen. 3:15), and that should have inculcated in them a desire to have a deep and abiding faith. It should have jolted their lethargic minds when they heard about the early warnings of separation that would occur unless she walked closely with the Lord.

In addition to reminding Israel of her first love, SOS should have brought to memory:

- God's deliverance and redemption from the Egyptians.
- God's miraculous interventions in their affairs.
- God's care for them even when they did not know it (or care).
- All blessing came from above and faithfully continued.

² See "Note on Feast Days" at the end of this section on First Love for more information on how the feast days relate to SOS.

- They had abandoned their first love (took Him for granted).
- There were warnings of separation—the looming consequences of abandoning their first love.

Note on Feast Days

The first three of the annual feast that Israel observed— the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits—were spiritually fulfilled during the first coming of our Lord Jesus. The fourth feast, the Feast of Pentecost, was fulfilled fifty days after His resurrection. It is believed the final three feasts—the Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles—will be fulfilled at His second coming.³

Passover was celebrated on the 14 of Nisan (our March), a date that coincides with: God's covenant with Abraham, the Passover supper prior to the Exodus, the command to restore the walls and rebuild Jerusalem, the book of the Law being found under Josiah, the dedication of the second temple, and the Last Supper of our Lord.

The day after the Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted seven days, starting on the 15th of Nisan. This Feast coincides with the beginning of the Exodus journey from Egypt, the Crucifixion of Christ (our Passover Lamb), and the fall of the Jewish resistance at Massada.⁴ Then on the 17th of Nisan, the Feast of Firstfruits began (they were still eating unleavened bread). This date coincides with the Ark resting on Mount Ararat, Israel crossing the Red Sea, eating the firstfruits in the promised land, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Notice how important dates in Israel's history coincided with these feasts. In the future, considerable precedence indicates that important events will be tied to the Jewish feasts dates.

2. Promised Coming

The promise of His first coming was made to Israel throughout the Scripture, starting in Genesis 3:15, **"And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."** The Seed of the woman is Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Redeemer) and that was known right from the start (see Chapter 10 for more details). It was no secret the Redeemer would come and suffer and that He ultimately would win the victory over Satan.

One of the clearest prophecies of God sending His Son to earth is **"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel (God with us)"** (Isa. 7:14, parenthesis added). They knew God's promise of sending His Son, and when He came that would quite literally be "God with us." Then Isaiah goes further by prophesying, **"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given..."** (Isa. 9:6). Even the gentile Magi were able to read the signs of His coming and saw "His star" (Matt. 2:7). It is very likely Daniel taught some magi what to look for while he was in Babylonian captivity centuries earlier (see Chapter 10, The Heavens Declare the Glory

³ Jeffrey, Grant; *Armageddon Appointment with Destiny*; Frontier Research Publications; Toronto, Ontario M8Z 5M4;1997; pg 45-46.

⁴ same as reference 16, pg56.

of God--Starry Wonders). So, even the gentiles were aware of the promise of His coming into the world, but Israel was asleep when it did occur.

God promised the Messiah would come into the world to save the world from sin, but Israel mistook this promise through unbelief and self-interest. They were not looking for spiritual light or rescue from sin, but physical deliverance from their enemies. They viewed the coming Messiah (the equivalent New Testament term is Christ, the Anointed One) as a military type rescuer-deliverer, and limited their concept of Him to that viewpoint. God had a higher view of a deliverer, a spiritual view, which is of greater importance than the physical view. Israel knew of the promise, even rejoiced in it, but twisted the promise into what they wanted, not what God said.

Israel's euphoric view of that coming was much like the Shulamite's musing. The Shulamite envisioned her lover skipping on the hills when he came. Israel also wanted her Messiah to come "skipping on the hills" as a conquering general giving her reprieve from oppression. The majority in Israel wanted Him to fulfill their desires by deliverance from Roman oppression and divine blessings; but they were less interested in matters of faith and the need to be born again.

At this point in the interpretation, God's and Israel's early relationship was satisfying and in early bloom, having a sweet aroma—recall the grape blossoms and their fragrance (2:13). Grape vines, generally called just the "vine" in the Bible, have a special connection with Israel's national history. Arthur Custance notes:

...when Israel came out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus, they were welded together in a unique way under recognized leadership so that the event marked the strictest sense the Birth of a Nation. In Psalm 80:8-19 a summary of Israel's history is given which opens with the words, "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land." The record goes on to describe how this vine spread across the country from Jordan to the Mediterranean. And then it was forsaken by the husbandman who planted it, and it perished.⁵

Interestingly, when the children of Israel had come out of Egypt, they sent spies into the Promised Land, and when the spies returned from their explorations, they brought a token of the national possession they were to inherit, an example as the prime witness of the land's super abundance and agricultural strength: grapes (Num. 13:23, 24). By Solomon's time, not only did the vine (Israel) stretch from the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea, but it went from the Sinai Peninsula to the Euphrates River (1 Kg. 4:21). This was the Lord's true vine, and Israel had gone through the stage of first love and was in the stage of the promise of His coming. In Solomon's day, they were about to enter the next stage, warning of separation, in their relationship. This vine would soon reject its Husbandman. How much this divine Husbandman had done for His vineyard is told to us in Isaiah 5:1-7. The vine eventually ran wild and produced wild grapes

⁵ Custance, Arthur C.; *Time and Eternity*; Volume VI: The Doorway Papers; Zondervan Publishing House; Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506; 1967; pg 60.

(small and sour/bitter). This was the vineyard of the Lord, **"For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel ... He looked for justice, but behold, oppression..."** (Isa. 5:7).

A Bible student cannot help but see the clear and direct relationship between Psalms 80 and Isaiah 5 to what is being presented here. The Lord most likely referred to Himself as the true vine because He was, in the strictest sense, the true King of Israel. Matt. 21:33-43 records a similar parable outlining Israel's national history. All these references create overwhelming, compelling, scriptural evidence that the interpretation being presented here is substantially correct.

Returning to our interpretation, after the time of first love between Israel and the Lord, the nature of the promise of His coming was not really understood by Israel, though not due to any lack of information on God's part. They did not know because of their own interests obscuring His Word. Their self-interests created a scenario for future problems.⁶ In any love affair, there must be a clear understanding of the other person and oneself; this is intimacy. If intimacy is incomplete, when each person does not understand the other and himself/herself, there will be future problems. In this case, Israel did not understand God nor her own heart, so how could a lasting relationship be built upon such misunderstandings? In addition, Israel did not want to hear what God was saying; it is often more fun to live in a fantasy world of one's own invention than to deal with the truth.

It seems in the SOS love story the Shulamite did not listen to what her shepherd was really saying. Thus, her shepherd was not recognized for who he really was. As we interpret the love story, it is certain that God did not in any way deceive, misinform, or trick Israel; yet she did not know Him for Who He was. In fact, God had carefully and with great wisdom revealed Himself to them, in numerous ways, so that all that was required could be known. There can be no downplaying Israel's culpability in this matter. They did not know their own Lord for a reason, and that relates to their own desires being placed first.

It was at this point in the love story that the brothers wanted her to catch the foxes. By analogy, there were those in Israel's life (and ours today) who want believers to "catch the foxes," as a way to divert believers from duty and faith. In Israel's case, she was infatuated with her fanaticized Messiah, but did not really know Him. However, their relationship was blooming, and, at this point, she did not go back to her former ways.

3. Warning of Separation

Israel was given warning after warning of what would happen if she obeyed Him and what would transpire if she did not. These warnings are replete throughout the whole Old Testament, and the warnings of disaster are prominent in Isaiah through Malachi, the books following SOS. First God told them what would happen if they followed Him. **"If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit..."** (Lev. 26:3-4). Then He warned of what would

⁶ Shober, Stephen F.; *Biblical Transformation--the Renewed Mind*; Grace 4 You Ministries, Inc.; Waunakee, WI. 53597; www.grace4you.com; 2014.

happen if they did not follow Him. **"But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes ... I also will do this to you: I will even appoint error over you, wasting disease ... And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set my face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies"** (Lev. 26:14-17). After these verses and in the same chapter of Leviticus, He describes how the punishment will increase seven times more for continued sins, and seven more after that if it continues, and seven times more after that....

There were clear and direct references in the Scripture that they had at that time, explaining exactly what would happen if they did not obey the Lord. On top of that, the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, **"...that the LORD appeared to Solomon the second time ... 'Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in the integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments , then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever ... But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statues which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples' "** (1 Kg. 9:2-7). There was no ambiguity, there was no doubt, there was no excuse; Solomon and Israel knew precisely the consequences of not following the Lord.

Israel was warned over and over that her continued sin would result in her capture, many dying, unbelievable suffering, captivity, being treated cruelly, dispersion among the nations, and separation from God. Isaiah saw a vision concerning what would happen to Judah and Jerusalem writing, **"The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider' ... They had forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward ... From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it ... Your country is desolate, Your cities are burned with fire; Strangers devour your land in your presence; And it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers"** (Isa 1:3-7). This is a stern warning of separation from God if they did not turn to the Lord.

Hosea prophesied to the ten tribes of Israel and His life's story is a portrayal of Israel's relationship with God, just as SOS is. He prophesied, **" 'Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; For she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, And her adulteries from between her breasts"** (Hosea 2:2). Thus, Israel was amply warned of being separated, even seeing it played out in Hosea's life, yet they did not heed the warning. Similar warnings to Judah were made, but it was not until the first century AD that God set her aside. All twelve tribes were warned, and in their hearts they knew, but their minds would not acquiesce nor fully comply.

In stage three of the love story, the Shulamite's heart was telling her what her mind did not want to hear, much less admit something was wrong. In the interpretation, God was telling Israel over and over what

she did not want to hear and certainly would not admit. God was longsuffering and patient, giving Israel numerous chances to repent. Eventually, if those warnings were not heeded, then He would be compelled to take action; otherwise His warnings would have amounted to nothing but empty words. For the sake of truth and justice, those warnings had to be given, with the earnest desire that Israel would repent. At this time in history, He would give the warnings and at times Israel did repent. She was amply forewarned that she had better wake up; just as the Shulamite had warnings of troubles ahead. In time, because of spiritual adultery (worshipping other gods), the northern ten tribes (Israel) were separated (divorced) from God, before Christ's first coming. The southern two tribes (Judah) were still in a relationship with God when Christ came.

4. His Coming

Christ's first coming was just as the Song of Solomon story describes, "**Who is this coming out of the wilderness ...**" (3:6). In SOS, the Shulamite did not know her shepherd was Solomon. In the interpretation of SOS (the historic relationship between Israel and God), we see the real lack of recognition was on Judah's part, not that He was deceptive or tricked her. Solomon revealed his identity in ways the Shulamite could comprehend and thus learn to trust and love him. God did the same thing with Israel throughout the Old Testament, gently and wisely teaching, proving, and demonstrating His faithfulness and mercy. He did all He could so Israel could know Him. Yet, when His Son came (a well-propheesied event), they rejected Him.

The Shulamite expected a shepherd to come for her and got the king. Judah expected a king to come and got the Shepherd.

There is a bit of irony here. It may seem this reversal in who came is an indication the interpretation is not correct. However, the Scripture is making the point of a reversal in expectations, and that is what we are to recognize and for good reason.

As far as Judah (the leadership and people in general) was concerned, Jesus came out of Egypt and Nazareth. The general view of Nazareth is seen in John 1:46, "**...Can anything good come out of Nazareth?**" Thus, in the general view, the Lord came from nowhere of importance. He came from an insignificant place(s), from insignificant parents, and there was nothing noteworthy about Him—a nobody from nowhere.

The common belief, especially among the rulers, was that Jesus was an imposter. He may have had a forerunner, but he was merely the voice of one crying in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23). Israel did not understand the importance of the ministry of John the Baptist (the forerunner), nor did they accept Jesus Christ's ministry. When the Lord Jesus Christ forgave sins, they showed their ignorance of who Christ was: "**And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, 'Who is this who speaks**

blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' " (Luke 5:21). Who is this, indeed. There was a monumental disconnect here, between God's reality and their selfish beliefs. What does it take to wake mankind up? We will see it takes a great trial by the Lord. They should have fallen to their faces in His presence, but they were a stiff-necked (stubborn, obstinate) people.

Chapter 5 mentioned that Daniel's prophecy of the 69 weeks ends with the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. That triumphal entry is recorded in the Gospels: "**And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, 'Who is this?'** " (Matt. 21:10). The majority in Israel missed His entrance into the world when He was born, a scant few recognized who He was. During His life only a small group truly recognized He was the Messiah. At the triumphal entry, there were multitudes that hailed His entry, yet the chief priests and scribes denied Him. In the matter of a few days, the multitudes would also deny Him and demand His death. Even though the multitudes were moved by His entrance as He rode into Jerusalem, they soon forsook Him because they did not recognize Him as the Messiah.

*They did not recognize the most important person
in the entire history of the world, and He was
right before their eyes.*

The majority in Judah closed their eyes to His life and ministry. They had their own view of how He would come. Their machinations of what the Messiah would be like and how He would come prevented them from seeing the truth right in front of them. This is their error and there was plenty of Scripture to guide them, if they had any interest. To Judah, His first coming (birth, life, and death) is characterized by the phrase, "Who is this?"

They wanted a deliverer and what did they get? Someone who was gentle, meek, and lowly. He came the wrong way; He was a carpenter by trade and a shepherd of men, not a general. He rode a donkey, not a triumphant horse. He failed to deliver them and was far too gentle; He would not even quench a burning flax or bend a bruised reed (Matt. 12:20; Isa. 53:2-3). They did not know it was their Messiah ("Who is this?") when He came the first time because they were blinded by self-interests and unbelief. The least of their interests were the critical issues of true faith and the need to be born again.

The promised Messiah (which means anointed or producing light) did not come as they envisioned. Israel hid their face from Him. "**For He (Christ) shall grow up before Him (God) as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him**" (Isa. 53:2-3, parentheses added). Interestingly, if we had been there, we would have

done the exact same thing. Israel was just a sample of humanity and that sample represented accurately the population of all humans in all ages.

As mentioned previously, the Shulamite could not believe who came out of the wilderness because it was not a shepherd at all; it was the king. Judah could not believe who came out of the wilderness: it was not a king; it was a shepherd ("Who is this?"). God foretold of two aspects of His coming, one in humiliation and one in glory. The coming in humiliation and suffering was the first coming. The Second Coming will be in glory and splendor. The prophets struggled to understand the time difference between the two events (1 Pt. 1:11), but Judah really was primarily interested in the Second Coming. The next time He comes, it will be as the King to conquer and deliver, but it will be a terrifying time for the unbelievers, that is, the terrible Day of the Lord.

This was Judah's hour of decision, her Waterloo. She failed to recognize God in human form. Christ was the visible image (the Greek word is icon) of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). As such, the icon (Christ) represented everything God is, in human form. However, Israel's and Judah's failure and rejection of Christ was foreknown by God, so He had a plan in mind from before the foundation of the world to make something glorious out of this disaster.

5. Indifference and Separation

At this point in SOS's love story it is hard to fully understand what really occurred. Solomon came to her in love, she seems to have rejected him at first in a semi-awakened state, and by the time she "woke up," he had gone. So much in the actual love story seems a bit unfair to the Shulamite. Yet, when we understand the relationship between God and Israel we see the exact parallel. Isaiah helps us understand what a lack of response means, "**...Because, when I called, you did not answer; When I spoke, you did not hear, But did evil before My eyes, And chose that in which I do not delight**" (Isa. 65:12 and Isa. 66:4).

Scripturally we know Israel did not respond to the Lord. What then occurred was her slow but perceptible downfall. After many warnings to Israel because of her sins and spiritual adultery, God was eventually compelled to take action. Unrepentant sin cannot go on forever; it has to be dealt with or God would be seen as unfaithful to His own Word and slack concerning sin. After Solomon's death the twelve tribes of Israel split into two groups, the northern ten tribes (which maintained the name of Israel) and the southern two tribes (called Judah). The northern tribes were divorced by God: "**Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.**" (Jer. 3:8; also see Hos. 2:2; Isa. 50:1). Israel was taken into captivity, and the people were sent out of the land (just as a divorced wife in those days was sent out of the house) long before His first coming. This was the dispersion of the ten tribes.

The two southern tribes (Judah) had a history of blessing and failure in their relationship with the Lord. Judah often found pleasure in her own pursuits and other gods. God reminded them of the past and let

them know they had left their first love: **“And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, struggling in your blood”** (Ezekiel 16:22; also Jeremiah 2:2). Accordingly, He told them He would recompense their ways upon them, **“ 'Because you did not remember the days of your youth ... surely I will also recompense your deeds on your own head' ”** (Ezek 16:43).

Indeed He did. This is the tragic story of Israel, Judah, and the Shulamite. All Israel has a history of being mistreated by the nations because they did not remember the Lord. Recall the Shulamite was wounded and her veil taken away by the watchmen (5:7). This mistreatment of her seems to imply some sort of sexual defilement. This would be consistent and fit perfectly with Israel's history. She was cold and indifferent to God and willfully committed spiritual adultery; she became a harlot. Ezekiel's story (the story of the abandoned baby girl left to die, but for the actions of a good man) is a portrayal of Israel's history and has the same analogy as SOS. Ezekiel says, **“ 'But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it' ”** (Ezek. 16:15). It has to be admitted the SOS story is not this direct, but it does imply some defilement of the Shulamite, which is consistent with all the other accounts of Israel's history.

Shortly after His first coming the entire nation of Israel was given-up by the Lord (at least temporarily) for unbelief. Because of Israel's spiritual fornication (worshiping other gods), God had to divorce/separate from them all. To this day, the wife of the covenant is separated from the Lord and remains in unbelief. Israel at this time is an "empty vine" (Hosea 10:1), that is, spiritually dead. It seems a biblical principle emerges from this, that is, one can forgive someone and be extremely patient, but at some point, if forgiveness ends up encouraging or enabling the other to continue in sin, then it may be time to apply tough love. God had to do this with Israel.

In the future, Israel will be driven by God's tough love through the fires of the Tribulation, she will eventually awaken to her need. **“I opened for my beloved, But my beloved had turned away and was gone”** (SOS 5:6). Hosea also speaks of this general time period and also ties a common thread of understanding of what will happen with Israel: **“With their flocks and herds They shall go to seek the LORD, But they will not find Him; He has withdrawn Himself from them”** (Hosea 5:6). For a moment the Lord will forsake her (Isa. 54:7-8). By the time Israel awakens to the need for the Messiah, He will be gone and there will be a drought of understanding in Israel. However, the Lord says in Hos. 5:15, **“I will return again to My place, Till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.’ ”**

After the people of Israel acknowledge their ways and seek the Lord, Scripture says they will say: **“Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up”** (Hosea 6:1). Is this not exactly what we see in the Shulamite in SOS? Apparently the separation of the Shulamite and Solomon, and the resulting tribulation in her life, is what woke her up also. So, even though there is a drought of understanding, those who truly do seek the Lord will find Him; but what wakes them up to their need is the affliction of the Tribulation. Now, the purpose of the

Tribulation is made perfectly clear, it is a furnace of affliction to restore and purify Israel. The Tribulation, as tragic as it is, is apparently the only way they can be brought back to Him, and God knew this from the start.

The Lord says to them, **"For a mere moment I have forsaken you, But with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,' Says the LORD, your Redeemer"** (Isa. 54:7-8). Israel is now temporarily set aside as a nation. Technically speaking, her moment of being forsaken as God hides His face will be during the early Tribulation period. But look, what an incredible future she has as the Lord restores her in everlasting kindness then blesses her with mercy.

Final Restoration

The final restoration of Israel is a major element of biblical prophecy yet to be fulfilled. The body of believers in this Age will be removed from this world, and then the prophetic program will begin again, taking off right where it stopped when interrupted by the Age of Grace. Recall that right now, God has separated from all twelve tribes and is joined unto the believers of this Age. When our Age ends, He will resume action with His former wife, remembering the eternal covenant He made with her in her youth. This means we have to be taken out of this world first, or He would have multiple wives (see Chapter 8, The Rapture).

Finally they begin to recognize His true identity. **"And one will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?' Then he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends' "** (Zech. 13:6). After Israel wakes up with respect to her former treatment of the Lord, she wonders where He got His crucifixion wounds. This is astounding, but it does reveal her depth of ignorance of the past. Those wounds are there because of what Israel demanded (that He be put to death). Of course, we now realize each one of us is responsible for those wounds because He also died for each of us. This new-found faith and love in Israel is touching in light of her rejection and unbelief for millennia. Now restoration is taking place, the relationship between the Lord and Israel is being recreated. This is all the result of God's faithfulness and mercy. **"Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you"** (Ezek. 16:60).

We know what happened with Israel historically, so as we try to understand SOS, we may carefully infer some of that into the SOS story (a bit dangerous to do this, but we will be careful). Inferring something into SOS is reading back into the story something that is alluded to, but not directly stated; however, we know from what happened to Israel that it would correctly fit into the story. Perhaps the writing style of SOS leads us in this direction and begs us to do exactly this. As was said earlier, SOS is designed to make Israel wake up and start asking serious questions. That design, in similar fashion, makes us wonder on what basis reconciliation took place between Solomon and the Shulamite. Certainly a transformation in her attitude and values would have a lot to do with reconciliation, and we know that will take place in Israel. However, the most important event in Israel's future change is her new-found faith, her coming to

believe in Jesus Christ. Thus, in retrospective analysis, it would seem this is what very well may have happened with the Shulamite: she became a believer. This makes a lot of sense as we correlate events between SOS and Israel's story, both past and future.

The Shulamite's journey and her relationship with Solomon are symbolic of Israel's journey and her relationship with Christ. Thus, it is possible she became a believer, as Israel will, and that helped restore her relationship with Solomon. This restoration would be the exact parallel of what happens to Israel, so it makes sense even if not explicitly stated in SOS. If she did become a believer, she may have been one of the foreign women who initially led Solomon astray, but not in the end of the story.

An interesting, ironic reversal may have taken place: she initially may have been a foreign woman and later became a believer, while Solomon was initially a believer and later became disloyal to the Lord.

Now we must consider how such a restoration between God and Israel can take place in view of Deut. 24:1-4. In this passage of Scripture, a specific case of divorce and remarriage is considered. This passage teaches that a man cannot remarry a woman he previously divorced if she has remarried and divorced again. A bit confusing, but the passage is saying that if a man divorced his wife, after which she remarried, and later was divorced again, then the first husband was forbidden to remarry his former wife. This injunction seems to be premised upon the original divorce having been based upon a trivial matter; thus the original divorce was not legitimate in God's sight. Since she was not legitimately divorced, her remarriage would then make her an adulteress. Thus, the Scripture says the former wife would be defiled and her former husband was forbidden to remarry her. The remarriage was forbidden because of adultery's defilement. This passage is very instructive and directs our understanding of SOS. It raises the question, how can God remarry his former wife, defiled Israel?

God and Israel are now legitimately divorced (she was put away) by God, but she was not put away for trivial reasons. However, the matter of adultery still applies because she committed spiritual adultery by worshiping the gods of the nations around her. Ezekiel 16 goes even further by stating she not only committed harlotry, but was so debased she paid lovers from all around to come to her. So how can God remain true to His own Word by remarrying a most assuredly defiled former spouse?

Although we know all things are possible with God, remarriage seems impossible in this case if God is to act in accordance with His own Word. His solution to this enigmatic, unsolvable problem is this: He will restore the adulterous former wife to the state of a pure virgin, that is, completely remove any and all defilement. Such purification means she will become a pure, perfect, undefiled virgin once again.

Becoming a virgin again would seem to be the purpose of the reference in SOS 6:9 to the Shulamite being "my perfect one." The process of restoring Israel's purity also would seem impossible to us. Indeed, this process is not simple and requires a special purification by the hand of God. The cover picture (of the woman in a white, flowing dress) represents, **"My dove, my perfect one,"** that is, the picture represents Israel as a result of the final restoration process in which she is made perfect--a restored virgin.

The Tribulation is a furnace of affliction to purify Israel by removing the dross and refining her as pure gold. **"I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested"** (Zechariah 13:9). Gold is "aurum" in Latin, from which the chemical symbol for gold, Au, is derived. Aurum means "shining dawn," which is the perfect description of what will occur to Israel in the restoration. Gold represents purity of love that Israel had in her youth. After her first love, Israel's history is typified by rejection, ignorance, self, lust, idolatry, spiritual fornication, and so forth. Her heart has to be purified and doing so requires the heat of a furnace. In this case, the furnace of affliction will refine and prepare the metal to be useful for the Refiner's purpose (Prov. 27:21).⁷



Picture 6.1. The four horsemen of the apocalypse typify what will occur in the Tribulation (Rev. 6:1-8). This time of great testing for Israel will lead to purification in the crucible of fire—a necessary event to purify and bring Israel to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (*"Four Horsemen of Apocalypse,"* 1887, by the Russian artist Viktor Vasnetsov, <http://publicdomainreview.org/collecti>

[ons/the-four-horsemen-of-the-apocalypse/#sthash.x9Q0TL0U.dpuf.](http://publicdomainreview.org/collecti))

The Lord tries the heart just like gold is tried (purified) in the fire of a furnace, or crucible. However, the Lord's trials are not destructive but constructive, for sorting people out—in this case, those in the crucible of affliction.⁸ The trial by fire will remove the "stone" impurities in their hearts. Stone is hard and brittle, but gold is soft and malleable (amenable to being easily formed and shaped to conform to the Master's desire). Ezekiel 11:19 states, **"Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh..."**

Ezekiel 37:3 notes that there is no more defilement after Israel is purified during the Tribulation and Day of the Lord. There was defilement (SOS 5:7) leading to the separation, but in the restoration that defilement is removed. Isaiah 62:4 reads, **"You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah (my delight is in her), and your land Beulah (married); For the LORD delights in you, And your land shall be married"**

⁷ Kidner, Derek; *The Proverbs*; Inter-Varsity Press; Downers Grove, IL; 1972.

⁸ Bullinger, E. W.; *The Apocalypse*; Fleming H. Ravell Company; reprinted 1972.

(parentheses added). In the final restoration, God will be delighted in Israel, and they will be rejoined as husband and wife.

Not only will Israel's relationship be restored, but it will blossom to the point where Israel will be a beacon for the Lord. With this restoration in view, note SOS 6:1, when the women ask where the Shulamite's beloved has gone: "...**That we may seek him with you.**" This is akin to the gentiles coming to Israel, seeking the Lord during the Tribulation and Kingdom. Her change will result in others wanting to have a relationship with Him: "**The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising**" (Isa 60:3). Finally, Israel will be the vessel through which the nations will learn of Christ. We learn of Christ in our Age totally apart from Israel's "rising," which is part of the Mystery.

Isaiah paints a picture of this rebirth of Israel in a remarkable passage of Scripture: "**Before she was in labor, she gave birth; Before her pain came, She delivered a male child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, She gave birth to her children**" (Isa. 66:7-8). The first part of this passage is saying before Israel was in labor, before her pain, she gave birth to a male child. The labor and pain are referring to the Tribulation, that is, before the Tribulation she gave birth to the Lord Jesus. Who ever heard of a child being born before the mother was in labor? From our perspective, with all the biblical history we have, we can now understand this passage, and it is historically accurate. Then the text jumps over 1000s of years to the time when a nation will be born at once. This occurs during the Tribulation and/or Day of the Lord. This event is even more astounding than a baby being born before labor pains. Who ever heard of a nation being born at once? We talk about nation building, but that takes a long time. Nations do come and go, but they never come overnight. However, as soon as Israel is in labor (the Tribulation), she will give birth to a holy nation, a nation of believers. Who ever heard of such a thing? Surely the hand of the Lord will move in ways we have never heard or could ever imagine.

In Chapter 4 it was noted the description of the Shulamite in SOS 7:1-5 proceeds from the bottom to the top, from her sandals to her hair. This is the reverse order of other descriptions of the two lovers. This reversal is designed to capture our attention and makes us see something has changed. The Shulamite was always physically beautiful, but this passage takes place after their relationship was restored. It is most assuredly her change of attitude and presumed conversion that makes her of special beauty now. It is no longer just physical beauty that counts, but that which results from coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and having a transformed mind. This is the emergence of a true and perfect love. Similarly, Israel's future beauty derives from an internal change of heart. As individuals in Israel are born again, their virginity is restored, and the nation will be reborn; this all happens very rapidly. The national rebirth is in purity. The nation's eternal beauty is that of a heart in tune with the Lord.

The reversed order of describing the Shulamite, bottom to top, is symbolic of building any new structure. Structures are built from the bottom to top: first the footings, then the foundation, next the various floors, and finally the crowning roof. This is what God will be doing with Israel, building her from the

bottom-up. The starting point is individuals in Israel coming to the realization of Who Jesus Christ is, then each person recognizing his/her sin, and finally coming to faith in Him. It is her rebirth that makes her beautiful. The beauty of the soul and spirit of the individuals in reborn Israel will be the beauty of that new nation.

Once Israel is converted to a pure virgin, there is no sin in her (perfect one) and God can remarry her. His wife of today, the Church, is in Heaven when Israel is reborn, so multiple wives is not an issue. This re-purification has never happened in all recorded history and is something that mankind would not even think in the realm of possibility. Once she is pure and undefiled, she is totally fit to take the Lord's hand in marriage. When Christ came the first time, He was born of a virgin. Who ever heard of such a thing?

When He comes again, He will restore an adulterous wife to a perfect virgin. Who ever heard of that?

Perfect Love

Removing her defilement is a true miracle! It is the basic goal of the Tribulation, which occurs right after the Rapture of the Church. During the Tribulation and Day of the Lord, Israel is driven into the wilderness and eventually all idolatry is removed and faith is restored (only one-third will make it through, Rev. 12:14). They that do make it through the Tribulation will have been transformed into pure virgins, coming out "leaning on Him." These undefiled virgins will have all the defilement of spiritual adultery, idolatry, self-interest, and worldly desires completely removed: they will be as pure gold. The new, virginal Israel will be an appropriate spouse for our Lord. Israel's change will be so dramatic that the world will rhetorically ask, "**Who is this coming up from the wilderness, Leaning upon her beloved?**" (SOS 8:5). No one will be able to believe what has been done to Israel for she will be an astonishment to the world through His redeeming power.

Israel will then be the true, pure wife of the Lord. His ardent desire is toward her, and vice versa, forever. God's perfect love casts out all fear (I John 4:18). With perfect love a person can lean on the other without any fear. SOS 8:7b says, "**If a man would give for love All the wealth of his house, It would be utterly despised.**" Knowing this, our Lord not only gave more than the substance of His wealth; He gave Himself to make this relationship work. Without His death on the Cross, there could be no restoration for Israel or any of us.

Another use of the praise, "Who is this?" occurs during this period in reference to Jesus Christ. During the Day of the Lord, Christ will be providing for the restoration and deliverance of Israel. This time, He is the victorious general on a white horse. This is the time of His Second Coming, and one of the first things He will do is to go to Bozrah for a prophesied battle. He comes out of the battle with blood upon His garments. "**Who is this who comes from Edom, With dyed garments from Bozrah, This One**

Who is glorious in His apparel, Traveling in the greatness of His strength? —I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save...Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, And the year of my redeemed has come" (Isa. 63:1, 3b-4). The reason Christ is involved in this battle is because the Father says this event is needed, **"Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel by the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, when their iniquity came to an end, 'therefore, as I live', says the Lord GOD, 'I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you..."** (Ezek. 35:5-6a). After this event at Bozrah (present day Jordan), there are other battles, the most prominent of which is in the valley of Megiddo—the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 14:19-20, 16:15-16). At Armageddon the Lord defeats all His enemies. All these final battles are horrendous in scope and severity. After this one last battle, the millennial Kingdom is established on the earth and Christ reigns with His new bride, restored Israel, in perfect love.

Continuing with the topic of perfect love, in 1 John 4:18 perfect love is mentioned, **"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."** How wonderfully appropriate this passage is to our topic. In the Kingdom, Israel will have a love for Him that will have been perfected during the trials of the Tribulation and Day of the Lord. That perfect love will cast out all fear. At first the Shulamite was troubled at night, which reflects inner fear and doubt due to imperfect love. After her restoration, she and Solomon had perfect love, as will Israel and the Lord.

In addition to realizing that Israel will be completely transformed, it is interesting to note the location in our Bibles of the Hebrew-general Epistles (Hebrews through Revelation). Based upon their subject matter, those books will have special importance after the Rapture because the people living in that day will need special instruction on what perfect love is. It will be extremely hard for Israel to give up trying to do it her way, and to lean on another. After centuries of defending themselves and relying upon the strength of their "own arm," they will have to learn to trust totally in Him; He will be their only hope. The people of Israel will be entrenched in trusting in their own strength, knowledge, and character; now all that will fail. They will be in a furnace of affliction, much like Daniel, and there is only one hope for deliverance. They must learn to read the New Testament, grasp what the book of Hebrews really means, and study Revelation and the Hebrew-general Epistles. As they rediscover their first love and turn to Him, the perfect love of God will drive out their fear and they will lean, steadfastly, upon Him.

Jeremiah 31: 31-33 reads, **"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, through I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."** From that day onward Israel will be holy. In that day there will be a new Heaven and Earth (2 Pt. 3:10-12). The purified, holy, children of Israel will become more precious than gold (Isa. 13:12).

Chapter 7

SOS's Hidden Message as seen in Revelation

Once when I was lost, I saw a policeman, and asked him to help me find my parents. I said to him, "Do you think we'll ever find them?" He said, "I don't know kid. There's so many places they can hide."

Rodney Dangerfield

In a time of universal deceit - telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

George Orwell

The hidden message in SOS relates to the relationship between Israel and the Lord. Much of that message relates to the future. Thus, SOS has strong ties to the book of Revelation. It is quite remarkable that an Old Testament love song has a message concerning the past and the future. In addition to what has been presented, concerning the corresponding events of SOS and Revelation, many items have not been discussed, some of which are addressed below. The last two stages of that relationship (restoration and perfect love) are in the future. As such, they are prophetic for us today, not that we will necessarily take part, but that the prophecies teach what will yet happen upon this earth.

The comedian Rodney Dangerfield made a career out of claiming he was an ugly child and stating he never got any respect. The quote above relates to his comedic portrayal of childhood. It is poignant to our topic (how SOS relates to the book of The Revelation) because some people wonder if God is hiding from us, or holding out by not giving us all the information that we need. This raises the question of God's goodness and fidelity. Perhaps before we entertain such a thought, we best determine who is hiding what from whom. As for God, He has fully revealed the truth and all we need in His Word, so we know the "Who and what" are not hidden. He has not hidden the truth from anyone living today, and what has been revealed in His Word is complete (God calls it fulfilled in Col. 1:25-27). So, if anyone is

unsure or ignorant of coming events, it is that person who has hidden his/her eyes from that truth; it is not a lack of truth from above. We live in an age, and it will get worse, when Orwell's words will be uncannily accurate: during the days of universal deceit, truth will be a revolutionary act. Few will want to believe or be associated with it.

SOS and the Seven Churches in Revelation

Much more could be said about Revelation and biblical prophecy in connection with SOS, but the basics have already been covered (Chapters 5 and 6). However, this study would be remiss if it did not point out the interesting connection between the seven churches in Revelation and the story in SOS. Granted, the letters to the churches (Revelation 2 and 3) are hard to understand, and there certainly is no consensus as to what those letters are teaching. Some say the letters to these churches are a message for us today, since they believe the Rapture takes place in Revelation, Chapter 4. Some see them as having a message to the churches of the first century, but not prophetic.

The position of this book is that the fulfillment of entire book of Revelation is yet future, including the letters to the seven churches. The letters to the seven churches teach an important message to those living after the Rapture. As we get closer to end times, it seems this position is gaining acceptance as many believers are beginning to see how the entire book of Revelation applies to the future. Thus, the messages to those churches are designed by God to teach something important to the people living then, with special emphasis for the end times. As God resumes the prophetic program after the Rapture, these letters yield a similar message to that of SOS.

The word church in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 is the basic Greek word (ekklesia), which means a called out assembly of people. Such an assembly could be any assembly from a mob (Acts 19:32), to a body of citizens (Acts 19:39), to a religious body.¹ When reading Revelation, we should not conclude that ekklesia is a church in the sense of the Body of Christ of today. That is a common mistake, not supported by Scripture. Certainly, in Revelation, ekklesia is a body of believers, but that word does not require that it refers to the Body of Christ, as in today's Church. Thus, Revelation can be entirely in the future after today's Church has been raptured, without any problem with Greek terms.

The seven cities mentioned in Revelation were in a specific area of Asia Minor where Paul was forbidden to go (in western Turkey today). The places he did visit on his missionary journeys in Asia Minor were often mentioned as being synagogues (Acts 13:14, 17; 17: 18:4; 18:26,...). This fact indicates the initial assemblies in that part of the world were started by dispersed Israelis, as synagogues. Paul generally went into the synagogues and reasoned with them concerning Christ. However, Paul was specifically forbidden by God to go to the location of certain synagogues: "**Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Sprit did not**

¹ Vine, W. E., *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*; Flemming H. Revell Company; Old Tappan, NJ; seventeenth impression, 1966; page 84.

permit them" (Acts 16:6-7, Asia refers to the Roman province of Asia). It is not a coincidence that the seven assemblies in Revelation were in the forbidden area (with the sole exception of Ephesus, which was on the border of the forbidden zone).

This is a difficult matter to understand. There were reasons God did not want Paul going into this region, such as, he had important matters to address elsewhere. In spite of being forbidden to go into this region, Paul did send an Epistle to the Colossians and Laodiceans (both bordering the forbidden area). It must be made clear the message of the Gospel of the Grace of God did get into this area in due time. However, it also seems God may have reserved this area for a special message that relates to the future.

It is most interesting that Peter was authorized by God to minister in the heart of the very area forbidden to Paul. Peter wrote them and addressed them this way: **"...To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia"** (1 Pt. 1:1). Not only Peter, but John in Revelation wrote to these churches. A review of a biblical map of Paul's journeys shows the forbidden area is the exact area where the seven assemblies in Revelation existed.² This is very significant for it shows the Apostle to the gentiles did not go to certain, specific synagogues, but that Peter and John did minister in that area. The pilgrims (sojourners in a foreign land and no doubt belonging to synagogues) to whom Peter and John ministered were primarily Jewish and in the forbidden area.

This evidence demonstrates that these groups of believers were reserved for a special purpose, indeed for a special message from God. God gave them a prophetic message of value to them at that time, but primarily to provide a message for future Jews seeking God. Consistent with the belief that the books of Hebrews through Revelation have a special meaning for future assemblies (a prophetic message) to help them during the coming events on God's calendar, the messages to those churches in the first century would have had meaning to them, but also a profound message for the future.

The seven assemblies³ in Revelation existed at the time John wrote; they were in the area Paul was forbidden to go, but where Peter could minister. They were basically synagogues comprised of mostly Jewish members but with some proselytes. The value of the books of Hebrews through Revelation to those living at that time would have been essentially the same as they are for us today. What is that value? Well, we (and they) learn a lot about the nature of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); we have our fascination with the future tantalized, even satisfied; we are given fulfillment details of prophecies that have not yet occurred; we are presented with the proper perspective of God's overall actions with mankind; and we realize that God has unfinished business with Israel and the world. That unfinished business is explained below.

There are many reasons why the entire book of the Revelation is a message for the future. Here are a few:

² Anderson, Roger; *Revealing Revelation*; Grace Publications; PO Box 9432, Grand Rapids, MI 49509; www.gracepublications.org.

³ This book on SOS will intersperse the use of the word church and assembly, just to make sure we do not get caught in the trap of thinking any use of the word church means the spiritual body of believers today.

1. The next age will need special instructions. When the Tribulation starts, there will be no believers to teach or show unbelievers the way because all the believers of the Church Age will be taken in the Rapture. The testimony of the Lord will be His Word and the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3.
2. God always provides a message to His saints in every age. There are always needs that God supplies it at the right time. This provision will become even more apparent in Chapter 10. The message in Revelation will speak to those in the future to guide and comfort them, especially Israel.
3. God has unfinished business with Israel and the world. The unfinished business refers to all the promises/prophecies that He temporarily put on hold, so that He could save the nations when Israel rejected Him. Those promises/prophecies (like the 70th week of Daniel, the Day of the Lord, the earthly Kingdom, and the new Heaven and Earth), will then be fulfilled in every detail.
4. The language, Old Testament references, Biblical events, relevance to the times, etc., all point to the fact the message in Revelation is specifically designed by God to speak to those living during the Tribulation and thereafter.
5. The entire book of the Revelation is devoid of terminology, references, events, and doctrines specifically related to the Age of Grace. It is obviously written for a future age.

The message God has for those living at that time will become clearer during the Tribulation, and it will touch them in a special way because it will no doubt be seen as a Word from God with special significance to their situation. We do not understand a good deal of Revelation because of where we are in history. Our perspectives are tainted by our world experiences, but at that time the world circumstances will hone people, especially Israel, to see Revelation with new eyes. Those people will be asking the same questions that they in SOS should have asked, "What is going on, why are these bad events occurring, what will happen to Israel, what should we believe and do...." Some expositors believe that since the message to these assemblies is primarily for the future, that these assemblies also have to be in existence when Revelation takes Place. Whether or not there will be seven future churches/assemblies in the cities mentioned is probably irrelevant; what is relevant is the combined testimony of the seven letters to all those who are searching the Scripture for truth. It is the combined message (of the letters to the seven churches) that teaches the necessary truth for those living at that time.

When the world stage is set, the characters in place, and the time is right, then the letters to the seven assemblies will make much more sense to the people living at that time. Those seeking Him will be coming to an understanding of Jesus Christ through the Hebrew-Jewish Epistles and Revelation letters and the testimony of the two witnesses. These letters will speak to them in a special way, in a way they cannot speak to us. This is not unusual. If we consider the book of Ephesians, how much sense would it have made to someone who read it in Daniel's day? Very little indeed! It makes sense to us because it is written specifically to us, for our Age, and for our time in history. It does not matter to us today if a Pauline epistle was written to a church in Ephesus, Rome, or Philippi (or if those churches exist today); those epistles were all written to us and for us. Similarly, the letters to the seven churches contain specific instructions written to seekers, for their age, and for their time in history. While the letters may have a specific message to a particular assembly, the combined testimony of all seven letters most assuredly will

apply to all people for the precise circumstances at that time. The general scope of the messages provides a comprehensive teaching applicable to that time. Considering world events, they will need it.

Pastor Roger Anderson notes the letters to the seven churches have a historic parallel to Israel's history.⁴ Bullinger also indicates these letters are messages to seven churches, which refer to seven stages of Israel's history.⁵ Both men see the book of Revelation as entirely future, and the letters a reminder for those people of Israel's history. Just as SOS refers to seven stages of Israel's history, Revelation gives another seven-stage reminder. The seven letters are presented in the order of Israel's history; the seven letters correspond with the historical order of Old Testament events. The seven letters combine into a unified message to remind those in the Tribulation of why and how they got into this predicament, what the future holds for them, and what God wants them to do. In the simple chart below, the seven churches are listed and the historic reminder the seven letters are intended to teach are shown (per Bullinger).

<u>Revelation Church</u>	<u>Historic Reminder</u>
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1. Ephesus	The Exodus
2. Smyrna	Wanderings
3. Pergamos	Wilderness
4. Thyatira	Period of the Kings
5. Sardis	Ten tribes removed
6. Philadelphia	Judah removed
7. Laodicea	Minor prophets

The Revelation letters cover Israel's birth (Exodus out of Egypt), her wanderings in the wilderness, her early life (period of the kings), her removal (Israel first, then Judah), and the Minor Prophets (who discuss the Messiah, Tribulation, Kingdom, and Day of the Lord). The historic reminders of these letters and the interpretation of SOS are very similar; it is no mere coincidence. There are seven key stages in SOS and seven Revelation churches; the teachings of both books are clearly aligned. The parallel teaching shows God's efforts to remind Israel of her past and what lies ahead.

The purpose of this discussion is to show a parallel between the seven churches and the Song of Solomon. Showing a parallel and proving it (with all the supporting evidence) are two different things, and not the intent of this book. More supporting evidence can be found in *Revealing Revelation and The Apocalypse* (see references). However, just a few correlations between Revelation and SOS are apropos in order for the reader to see the common teaching. The correlation with Israel's history is a reminder to the future churches/believers of their past history; but God also has a message that is "present day" for those future believers.

⁴ Anderson, Roger; *Revealing Revelation*; Grace Publications; PO Box 9432, Grand Rapids, MI 49509; www.gracepublications.org.

⁵ Bullinger, E. W.; *The Apocalypse*; Fleming H. Ravell Company; reprinted 1972.

The first church (Ephesus) is told that He has something against them, **"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love"** (Rev. 2:4). The topic of losing one's first love is repeated often in the Bible (Ezekiel 16:22 & 43; Jer. 2:2; and Hosea 2:15). Israel's first love occurred during the Exodus period of her history. The interpretation of SOS indicates the problems resulting from the loss of first love, which helps show the parallel historic interpretation of SOS and Revelation. To the third church (Pergamos) the Lord has a few things against them because of the doctrine of Balaam. This problem occurred during the wilderness experience (and will be an issue again). To Thyatira God reminds them of that woman Jezebel who promoted Baal worship during the period of the kings. You get the point, the churches have a reminder of Israel's past, but there is also a message for their present time.

The seven stages represented above (in the Historic Reminder) all pertain to Israel's past. Now, refer to the "Meanings of the Church Names" (below), as given by Roger Anderson, and somewhat modified by this author. The actual meanings of the names of the seven churches, derived from their Greek names, is very instructive and also correlates with the SOS story. The meanings give a reminder of her past history and a future prophetic view. The meanings yield the same general theme of historic parallels of which Israel must be aware: they must get on the same page as God. The historical flow proceeds from desirableness (early days of courtship), to the sweet smell of first love, to marriage and continual sacrifice, to removal (though a remnant escapes). The first five are historic, and the next two are prophetic. There will be a need for brotherly love in order to survive in the Tribulation and finally to the establishment of a righteous people in the Kingdom. The church names provide a recapitulation of Israel's history⁶ and a message for the future, providing an exact analog of what we see in the Song of Solomon.

<u>Revelation Church</u>	<u>Meaning of Church</u>
1. Ephesus	Desirable
2. Smyrna	Sweet smelling
3. Pergamos	Marriage
4. Thyatira	Continual sacrifice
5. Sardis	A remnant escapes
6. Philadelphia	Brotherly love
7. Laodicea	A righteous people

The Historic Reminders and Meaning of Church Names tell a similar story. You may say they are not exactly the same story, or not exactly that of SOS: precisely, and for good reason. The Lord is teaching a similar lesson via alternative means. Alternative ways of teaching can have the same intended message even if certain points slightly differ. The impact and teaching should resonate with the hearer because of these alternative means. Thus, Revelation's historic reminders and meaning of church names tell a similar story. That story is the same as found in Ezekiel 16 and as presented in SOS. This similarity is proof that the hidden meaning of SOS presented in this book is in accord with the rest of Scripture. God ties His

⁶ Anderson, Roger; *Revealing Revelation*; Grace Publications; PO Box 9432, Grand Rapids, MI 49509; www.gracepublications.org.

Book together beautifully and continually reminds believers, in different ways, what has happened and what lies ahead.

In Revelation and in SOS, Israel is reminded of her sad history, why she is in her present condition at the time of the Tribulation, and what lies ahead. Revelation and the Hebrew General Epistles provide the Scripture Israel will need to learn the lessons they long ago forgot. They will need these special Scriptures to know what to believe and how to live during the coming times of peril. They will have to overcome by blood of the Lamb, as mentioned to the churches in Revelation. However, they will not be living in the Age of Grace, but will be back on legal grounds as they prepare for the coming Kingdom.

What does being back on legal grounds mean? It relates to the fact that God administers His grace in different ways at various times in history. In Gospel times, they were under the law because Christ had to live under the Law in order to fulfill it for us (Gal. 4:5). The Age of Grace did not start until mid-Acts. After the Rapture occurs, the secret Age of Grace will be over, and the prophetic clock begins right where it stopped long ago. Just as they were under the law in Gospel times, they will go right back to that administration during the Tribulation and Day of the Lord. Thus, legal requirements will again be effect. Under the law, some act of obedience was required along with faith in order to become saved. Matt. 24:13 looks forward to this time, and believers are told they must endure to the end to be saved. Of course, they must also believe in Jesus Christ. Enduring to the end is not eternal security, which is a hallmark of our Age; enduring to the end is an act of obedience that makes it clear they are not living in the Age of Grace.

After the Age of Grace, the Bible picks up right where it left off before our secret Age was introduced. It seems that spiritual life will continue as though our Age never existed. As we approach the end of our Age, there is a growing understanding that the biblical books of Hebrews through Revelation were written with special significance for those living after the Rapture, to provide those people the special insights they will need to survive. God has not hidden any needed truth from them; in fact, He has provided special instructions. The Age of Grace will be over, and they need special Scriptures so they know how to survive and how to be saved. They especially need to come to grips with Who Christ is, which is the topic of Hebrews.

Is Israel God's Chosen Nation Today?

Israel was God's chosen nation. That nation was temporarily set aside in this Age. Israel will be brought back and will again be His chosen people. Before Israel was set aside, gentiles had no hope (Eph. 2:11-13). If a gentile wanted to be saved he/she had to become a Jewish proselyte. This path to salvation was true for most of the Old Testament and Gospel periods.

Changes occurred as the nation became composed more and more of non-believers. As a nation, Israel rejected the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, a little flock was always faithful. All twelve tribes

are now divorced from God, separated from Him, cast off (Hosea 9:17), living as an adulterous wife. God has now hidden His face from them (Ezek 39:22-29). Today she is cast away, set aside, has stumbled, and is broken off (Rom. 11:1, 2,11,15,17, 20). Israel today, is “not my people” (Hosea 1:9, Lo-ammi).

However, that separation is not the end of her saga. By the end of Tribulation, all Israel will be saved, that is all those that make it through the Tribulation or die in faith (Romans 11:25-26). Something unbelievable and supernatural has to occur to get her from where she is today to becoming entirely saved. The Tribulation and Day of the Lord will cause her to believe and turn to Jesus Christ. She will become Ammi, “my people” (Hosea 2:1), as a result of the fires of affliction that will purify her. When she becomes Ammi, then God will remarry her (because she is made a pure virgin). Hosea 2:7-23 speaks of the former separation in unrighteousness and the future reunion of Israel in righteousness, in perfect love.

Israel Set Aside

The chosen nation is now set aside and divorced. No chosen nation is in operation today. Those Jewish people who believe in Jesus Christ come on equal footing with everyone else to the Cross and become a member of the Body of Christ. The revealed plan (Old Testament and Gospels) was that all nations would be blessed through the "rising of Israel," i.e., through the singular seed, Christ, and by the multiplied seed, Israel. Israel never did rise because she rejected her own Messiah. God could have caused the whole world to enter the Tribulation and made an end of things, but He had a secret plan that He kept hidden from the beginning.

That secret plan (mystery) has to do with how He would bring salvation to the world in spite of Israel's downfall. Again, the Age of Grace was a mystery (it interrupted the prophetic program) so that the rest of the world could be offered a chance for salvation. Individual faith is the emphasis today, not national association with faith. All believers today are the “elect.” We believers today are not the result of Israel's conversion or rise to power; instead we are Christians though her fall, divorce, and diminution. In the Age of Grace, gentiles and Jews are “made both one” because of what Christ did: “...**create in Himself one new man from the two...**” (Eph. 2:12-16, 19). Israel is no longer the special nation; the Body of Christ is God's special creation today.

Today there is no difference between Jew and gentile (Gal. 3:28-29). Some think gentiles become spiritual Jews when they believe; however, this implies inequality. Gentiles do not become Jews when they believe; they become the spiritual seed of Abraham (not the spiritual seed of Jacob, which is Israel). Romans 2:28-29 is often thought to mean gentiles become Jews upon faith, but it is speaking to Jews (see Romans 2:17 and 7:24), and Paul is making the point that not all Jews of the flesh are true Jews because that requires faith and lineage. The Scripture in these verses is not suggesting being a Jew is better, or that a gentile becomes a Jew by faith. The Scripture is saying even a Jew by lineage is not a true Jew unless he/she has faith. Today, we are all spiritually baptized (identified) into one body, with no preferential treatment given (I Cor. 12:13). Today, He is reconciling both Jew and gentile unto God in one Body (Eph 2:16) with everyone equal before Him. He is working with the Body of Christ today, not the nation of Israel.

Israel's Hope

The temporary setting aside of Israel resulted in a terrible misunderstanding by many theologians. They reasoned, "If God is done with Israel, if she is rejected of God and the Church took her place, then we are helping God if we treat her as a reject." By the second century A.D., the evolving doctrine of Replacement Theology had begun to permeate the early church's thinking.⁷ The distinction is subtle, but the Lord did not permanently set Israel aside and replace her with the Church. Instead, Israel was only temporarily set aside, and the Church is a whole new thing. However, Israel is still very much in God's future plans (Rom. 11:1).

Romans 11:15-26 makes it clear that God is not done with Israel. There will be a day when Israel is grafted back into the olive tree (partakers of the blessing of God). When this regrafting occurs, she will be healed and a spiritual rebirth will have occurred. The present blindness of Israel will continue **"...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in"** (the permanent end of gentile domination of Israel) (Rom. 11:25). However, in Romans 11:26 the conclusion to this whole matter is clearly stated: **"And so all Israel will be saved...."** This salvation is future, and shows that God has a very specific plan in store for Israel even though she is temporarily set aside for the sake of the rest of the world.

Replacement Theology teaches that Israel failed, and God has replaced Israel with the Church. It teaches the Church has completely replaced national Israel and the Jews are no longer in God's future plans. The idea that God is done with Israel, and has permanently replaced her with the Church, was adopted by many Christian churches. Since they believe God is done with Israel, those remaining prophecies related to Israel are also considered abandoned by God. That is why they do not believe in the literal fulfillment of Daniel's 70th week or the other unfulfilled Old Testament and Gospel prophecies. Accordingly, some churches today do not support Israel as much as others churches (those that believe God has a future plan for Israel, and, one day she will become the center of His actions).

The cruel results of anti-Semitism are found in Replacement Theology. The Crusades, Inquisition, and Holocaust resulted in million of Jews being brutally killed. These tragedies (and many more) were fed and promoted by Replacement Theology. This teaching is why some churches either closed their eyes to such events or actively participated in them. The Roman Catholic church was deeply anti-Semitic for centuries. In addition, some reformers were upset that the Jewish rabbis did not support the Reformation, so they then turned on them. It is not the author's desire to denigrate any church, but Christian culpability and recognition of historic facts is needed. This anti-Semitism was deeply appreciated by Adolf Hitler.⁸ The Roman Catholic church has apologized for its error and we do owe much to the reformers, but this example helps us see how Christianity can get tainted with a false view of God's plan and how that view can have tragic results. Thankfully, many Christians have held a theology that is true to the Bible, and those believers and churches have been great allies of Israel.

⁷ Hagee, John; *Jerusalem Countdown*; FrontLine Publishing; Lake Mary, FL; 2006.

⁸ Hay, Malcolm; *The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism*; Freedom Library Press; New York, NY; 1981.

The Church did **not** take the place of Israel. The Church is a whole new thing and Israel's future is held in abeyance; she has not been forgotten or replaced by God. The key point is to distinguish between Israel's being put aside for a time (which is the case), and God's getting rid of her permanently and replacing her with the Church (which is not the case). Israel has stumbled and during her fall, God has introduced the Church, but she will rise again. The teaching of Romans 11 is that Israel has stumbled, so that we can be saved through that fall, but she has not stumble irreparably (she will get up). She stumbled but did not die. People get up from a stumble, and so will Israel, in God's due time. When she gets back up, not one promise to Israel will be negated nor forgotten by God. He is ever faithful to His Word and is keeping His eye on them, and throughout history has known where everyone was. He still loves them and wishes for them to accept Him as Savior.

The Church did get the spiritual blessing promised to Israel (acceptance, salvation, redemption, sealed, seated, justified, etc.) and we got them ahead of time, that is, before Israel's conversion, not as a result of her conversion. However, the Church did not get her physical blessings (land, earthly kingdom...). Israel will get all her promised blessings, earthly and spiritual, in the Millennial Kingdom. Ezekiel 16:59 shows God never forgets and will restore Israel as His chosen ones.

How should we treat individual Jews (a person of Israeli ancestry)? Just like anyone else. We should love them, respect them, have concern for their eternal salvation. If they trust in Christ, they become members of the Body of Christ.

No biblical prophecy is being fulfilled today! We are in the Mystery Age; prophecy and mystery do not mix. Prophecy will start again after the Rapture of the church. However, God may be putting things into place now, things that are not in direct fulfillment of any prophecy, but which He will use in the future to fulfill prophecy: for example, the formation of the nation of Israel in 1947/8. That national formation may or may not fit into future prophecy; we do not know. It may be that Israel will continue to exist until Christ returns, it may not. To state dogmatically that Israel's national birth was a direct fulfillment of prophecy would be foolish; it could be that Israel will be taken into captivity again for hundreds of years. We just don't know. We must always remember our Age interrupted the prophetic plan and prophecy's fulfillment is on hold for now.

Israel has to come to grips with the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is He, what did He accomplish, what lies ahead? Perhaps reading and studying the Old Testament "with new eyes" will help them gain spiritual insight. In addition, during the Tribulation they will have to read the New Testament, especially Hebrews through Revelation, to acquire an understanding of God's will, and to see their need for Christ.

How should we treat the nation of Israel?

1. God is watching them individually and has a restored nation of Israel in view. We must take care that we (as individuals and as a nation) are not fighting against Israel because it would be like fighting God.

2. We must recognize that hard times will come to Israel, and while we cannot stop them, we surely should not be part of them.
3. God may be establishing things now that will result in the fulfillment of prophecy in the future. We know He will raise Israel up, so we ought to believe and promote what seems to be directed to that end.
4. Before Israel is converted, she has to go through the Tribulation, a time when certain believers and/or nations may have a special place in history (as those who help Israel during the hard times). Those who do help Israel will be blessed and are referred to as sheep in Matt. 25:32-40. We will be raptured by that time, so it will be the new believers and/or those nations that support Israel, for whatever reasons, that will be blessed.
5. There are very few nations and few organized religions, even Christian, that officially support Israel. Those Christian churches that see Israel has a part of God's future plans tend to support her.
6. As we approach the end times, conditions will most likely continue to get worse for Israel. In the Tribulation and Day of the Lord, finding individuals and nations which support her will be difficult. However, it will become clear that the only real hope she has comes from the Lord. An eternal principle seems to be: those who help Israel will be blessed by God.

Chapter 8

Applications for Today

*Drop Thy still dew of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease:
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.*

*Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm:
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!*

John Greenleaf Whittier, 1872

His Faithfulness

The Song of Solomon, a timeless poetic song from the mind of the Lord, holds much for us today by way of application. An application is a spiritual truth for us, whereas, the interpretation is what the Word means to those to whom it was written. The interpretation of SOS reveals that God remembers His eternal covenant with Israel, even after thousands of years of unbelief and rejection. Such an interpretation is very touching to us. Based upon the interpretation, and the testimony of other Scripture, an application would be that God is always faithful to His Word. This truth applies to us today, and this application could also be called an eternal principle.

He is ever true to His promises and Word. This principle sounds rather obvious; but it is the an-

chor for our souls, especially when we are going through our times of tribulation.

His faithfulness is our assurance that no believer will be forgotten nor will our spiritual blessings be rescinded/abrogated in any way by Him. As an example, when God tells us we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14), that is something in which we can have absolute confidence; it will never change because it is based upon His faithfulness and Word. This eternal principle becomes our confident expectation during the trials and disappointments of life. His faithfulness applies to every aspect of our lives: body, soul, and spirit.

Depth of Love

God's perfect love for Israel is an example to us of what our love should be for our family and members of the Body of Christ. Solomon's desire toward his beloved (SOS 7:10) reflects God's perfect love for Israel. Paul reinforces this: "**Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things**" (I Cor. 13:4-7). These concepts seem elementary, but they are much deeper than initially realized and require meditation on the Word. As the Word is made part of our inner being, in our thoughts and desires, we will see pronounced changes in our lives. We will see relationships improving and broken hearts mending as our hearts learn to lean upon Him. Each of the items in the verses above is a message in itself, and worthy of hours upon hours of our meditation so that we may apply them to our lives.

It is not enough to know something, it must be made part of our thoughts, desires, and patterns of daily life. As Solomon's desire was toward his beloved, we should ponder what placing our desire toward our loved ones means. It may have far-reaching implications toward maintaining marriages and promoting unity.

The concluding highlight of Solomon's Song is:

For love is as strong as death, Jealousy as cruel as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, Nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love All the wealth of his house, It would be utterly despised. (SOS 8:6b-7)

This explains why His love for mankind was so strong that it could not be quenched, even by death, even by the death of His Son. In spite of all the evil humans have done since the dawn of creation, He has not wavered in His love for us. We caused a separation through our sin, yet through it all His love burned with a vehement flame. That love compelled Him to provide a means of reconciliation for the fallen race, and the only way He could affect reconciliation was through the love sacrifice of His Son.

Ephesians 5:2b says, **"...as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."** He wants us all to be reconciled to Him by that unfailing love, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Although priceless, we have nothing to give for this love.

Those who deny His love, jealously trusting in their own works or goodness, will find jealousy is as cruel as the grave.

Not only does the Lord delight in saving us, but that salvation is perfect; it is complete and lacking nothing, **"...that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"** (Col. 1:28b). The comment about presenting us perfect is not something that takes place in the future, but right now. The moment we believe, we are presented to God as perfect because we are in Christ. May we all rejoice in the true, pure love of our heavenly Father who has brought us salvation through His Son, and sealed it with His Spirit.

On top of all that God has done for us, He then assures us that nothing can separate us from His love. That very thing is what the Shulamite desired, a seal by God Himself that His love for us will be eternal: a guarantee that it will not be altered by Him, by anything we do, by anyone else's actions, or by anything else. **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Rom. 8:35-39).

The Unthinkable

God is not some distant deistic figure disinterested in His creation. He regards each of us with enthusiasm and joy, and delights in what we are in Christ (His new creation). His desire is to help us mature and to be transformed so we can become more like His Son. Make no mistake; transformation often requires hardship and suffering. Just as a chrysalis struggles to become a butterfly, so, too, our lives have struggles and difficulties as we are made more and more like Christ. Difficulties in life do not suggest God does not care; generally it is just the opposite.

It is certainly true that in some of our struggles that we may think are unsolvable, the Lord provides an unimaginable deliverance. Ephesians 3:20 says, **"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...."** We all have times when we hit rock bottom, when everything in our lives bottoms out. We have no solutions and do not know what to do. These are the times when this verse is so precious, it gives us hope and confidence that God knows and will help us in unforeseen ways.

There is a truth concerning Ephesians 3:20 fundamental to the Christian life. We often expect that He will come to our aide and provide a solution just like we imagine. In some respects, we Christians expect deliverance from our problems much like Israel. There is only one problem with this line of thought: we don't know what is right or even what is good for us. Thus, what most people experience is not God's intervention as they might imagine. Doing it our way, as we imagine, is just what unbelieving Israel and the Shulamite expected when He first came. We are often misled to believe this verse is referring to how we limit God from delivering us in some unimaginable manner because we do not ask or think He is capable. That misses the point entirely. The point is, we do not know what is good or right for us, and our imaginations are generally self-serving and not as spiritual as we think. How can we know when our prayer is answered in God's correct way when our imaginations are messed up? Often when believers are down, they rely upon the power of God but "do not see it" as they hoped. Heaven seems to be silent. It is not an issue of limiting God or lack of faith; it is a matter of how God works. This verse is teaching something profound we often miss. The primary meaning relates to what the vast majority of Christians in this Age have experienced, that is, deliverance in another manner.

What God generally provides for us today is indeed unimaginable; but, it is not deliverance from our problems. We can all imagine deliverance; in fact, that is usually what we ask in prayer. Our prayers are generally filled with what we want and when; we often humbly submit we don't know how what we want can be done, so we leave that up to God. What is unimaginable is for Him to provide the grace so that we can successfully get through the situation. This grace to "get through" is precisely what we do not want to ask for nor do we want to imagine. We would prefer a fairy tale solution in which God waves some magic wand and "poof, everything is changed and we live happily ever after." God may or may not provide some sort of miraculous deliverance; however, He always provides sufficient grace to see us through our struggles. Our struggles coupled with His grace result in personal, spiritual growth. This is what transformation of our minds is about; it results in a change in us, which is against our natural desires because we would rather see others changed and circumstances altered.

This answer to prayer is above all we ask or think. We are looking for deliverance, but He provides something far more important: transformation. Through it all we grow spiritually, our minds are renewed, and the power of Christ rests upon us. Paul had to learn this lesson in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. While our journey may have some difficulties, through it all He will transform us to be more like His Son, which will be the best thing for us and have a positive impact upon others. It is unthinkable that when we have problems, God will not just take them away; instead, He works in us, enabling us to get through them, and in the process become Christ-like.

Not Ending Like Solomon

The wealthiest, most powerful, wisest, most knowledgeable man who ever lived ended his life poorly. What can bring a man to such a tragic fate? The issue of multiple, heathen wives was discussed, but there is more to this story. We know he wrote 1005 songs, apparently one for each woman in his entourage. Why is only one such song in the Bible? His father, David, also wrote songs/psalms, and many, or all, are

preserved in the Word. One has to wonder if most of Solomon's songs were merely sensual love songs of no spiritual value.

Solomon's findings in life are recorded in Ecclesiastes. In the first chapter, he makes it clear that wisdom by itself is meaningless and ends up being a source of grief. For wisdom to be of eternal value, it cannot be based upon human intellect; it has to be based upon something deeper. Wisdom has to be grounded in the Lord; if not, this most treasured quality ends up being meaningless. Thus, he ends Ecclesiastes by stating what really is important, that is, **"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, ...,"** and to **"Fear God and keep his commandments, For this is man's all"** (Eccl. 12:1 & 13). Had he followed his own advice, his life would not have ended as it did.

Other factors led to his downfall. God told Moses several important things related to the time when Israel would want to establish a king. This instruction was given when Israel was coming out of Egypt. Solomon, who lived 450 years later, surely knew the commands written in Deuteronomy 17:15-17 were specifically written for the kings. The kings were forbidden by God to do four things:

1. He shall not multiply horses to himself,
2. Nor cause the people to return to Egypt to get more horses,
3. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself,
4. Neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

These four items were disregarded, as much as possible it seems, by Solomon. Let's see:

1. He had 12,000 horsemen and 1400 chariots (1 Kg. 10:26).
2. He had horses specifically brought out of Egypt (1 Kg. 10:28).
3. He had 1000 wives and concubines, plus princesses (1 Kg. 11:3).
4. The weight of gold that came to him in one year was 666 talents (1 Kg. 10:14). Mention of the weight of the gold was not a coincidental thing; it was mentioned for a reason. Certainly we know that number is associated with the mark of the Beast (Antichrist) who is empowered by Satan (Rev. 13:18). The Beast is a great deceiver and will lead many astray. Thus, it would seem reasonable to infer that the number 666 indicates Solomon was being led astray by his gold. Just for reference sake, 666 talents amounts to something on the order of 80,000 pounds of gold a year (in today's world, using a value of \$1500 per ounce, this amounts to around two billion dollars worth of gold each year). Gold was so plentiful in Israel that silver became like stones in the street.

There was only one thing each king was specifically instructed to do by God. **"...he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left...."** (Deut. 17:18-20). Solomon broke all the forbidden items, and did it flagrantly! There is

no record he followed the one item he was told to do as king. He lifted himself up above his brethren and his heart was turned away from the Lord. In the end, his great wisdom and knowledge became mere human intellect, meaningless and vain.

Without following what God had specifically instructed him resulted in his heart being led astray. He was a godly man at first, but that changed. What he had was based upon the world's values; it was bereft of being grounded on something deep and eternal. To have a god-honoring life and to end life with joy, one has to be grounded in the Word and the things of the Lord. Being grounded in the Word creates a foundation that is sure and unmovable. It establishes and secures us to the eternal Truth. The Apostle Paul recognized this need to be grounded, and in the beginning of his first epistle discussed this very issue, "**...that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established....**" (Rom. 1:11b). Then, he provided God's newly revealed truth for our Age (which grounds and establishes us) in the book of Romans. Romans concludes that being established comes from the Lord and His Word: "**Now to him who is of power to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began**" (Rom. 16:25).

Another key verse relating to anyone's success or failure is found in 2 Tim. 2:22, "**Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.**" We have an example of what this verse means by looking at Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. He started life out well, but something terrible happened to him, something captured his heart and led him astray. What in the world could capture his heart and lead astray the wisest man who every lived? Answer: he did not flee youthful lusts, even as an adult man.

Solomon was not only the richest, wisest, most politically powerful man in biblical history; he also walked with the Lord while he was young. Talk about talented and smart: he wrote 3000 proverbs (much of the book of Proverbs), he wrote 1005 songs (the Song of Solomon is one of them), he knew more about nature (stars, animals, plants, etc.) than anyone, and could discern why things happen as they do (Kings 4:32-34). He reigned over what could be called Israel's golden age. He was the man whom God allowed to build Him a temple, likely the greatest building (and complex of associated structures) ever constructed. He ruled over Israel for 40 years and had completed the temple by his 20th year as king. On top of his great wisdom, wealth, and power, he had 700 wives and many "girlfriends" (1 Kings 11:3-8). Opps!

"If she had only turned his head and not his heart."

Solomon started life well, but ended up a failure; some think he was not a believer when he died. What caused this tremendous downfall? *His "foreign" wives were heaven on his eyes, but horrible on his heart.* Not only did Solomon forget about the one-man-one-woman concept taught since the days of creation,

he also forgot that God had specifically told the children of Israel not to go to the nations around them to get wives or husbands because they all were idolaters. That is what the word "foreign" means: they worshipped other gods; they were foreigners (strangers) with respect to the Lord and His people."

These foreign women eventually led Solomon away from the Lord; *maybe, just maybe, 700 wives were 699 too many*. He could have anything he wanted, but his youthful lust caused him to disobey God. It took many years for his disobedience to catch up with him, but it surely did, as it will any of us. After having it all and experiencing everything this world has to offer (all the money, fame, power, and women possible), he could write the book of Ecclesiastes from first-hand experience. Ecclesiastes tells us that all that this world has to offer looks wonderfully fun and promising; and so it is, at first, but in the end it amounts to nothing. All the things we may lust after in this life only end up deceiving us and causing an empty life with despair and nothingness. Solomon lived a charmed life; we can only hope he woke up, as did the Shulamite, and finally realized one can gain the whole world but lose his own soul (Matt. 16:26).

The conclusion to Ecclesiastes explains "youthful lusts." **"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them....' "** (Eccl. 12:1). If we forget the Lord in our youth, we will pay the price of disobedience just as Solomon did. We are told to flee from the things that cause us to lust, and rather to grab hold of godliness. If we do that, our final end will be as good as, or better than, our beginning. Solomon ended his life as a defeated man, full of regrets, bitterness, and wondering why he did not obey the Lord. That is what 2 Tim. 2:22 is trying to prevent in our lives. If we follow the Word, the things of this world will not capture our minds and our relationships with others will not bring us to ruin.

It is important that you make up your mind now about what you will and will not do in the future. In the Old Testament we read about a teenager named Daniel: **"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself...."** (Dan. 1:8). He was surrounded by immoral people, yet he made up his mind that he would not be like them. He set himself apart from the crowd and as a result of his choices, he was blessed. Solomon was corrupted, and you see what happened. Young people, especially, have to choose friends that have good values, morals, and who follow the Lord.

No one wants to end his or her life with regrets, full of bitterness, or feeling his/her life made no difference. No one wants to end life having been led away from the Lord. Staying close to Him means being grounded and established in the Word. Day by day, each Christian must delve into the Word and allow the Spirit to teach him/her from it; this is what establishes us and keeps us on a firm foundation. No other way, or thing, can keep us firmly grounded. Without proper spiritual grounding, we will surely drift into some form of sin, obsessive behavior, skewed priorities, or a host of many other things. Anyone, whether rich or poor, mentally gifted or not, healthy or handicapped ... can be grounded and end life the right way. Mighty Solomon did not. To prevent ending up like Solomon, we need to follow the Word in all things and to walk by faith—without exception.

The Rapture

In Chapter 5 it was noted that in the Age of Grace God's prophetic clock has stopped, even though real time continues. If the Age of Grace were taken out of history, the prophetic program would be seen as running continuously, uninterrupted throughout the Bible. The Age of Grace is like a parenthetic phrase in a sentence (which interrupts the sentence to add information) which could be taken out and the sentence would still make perfect sense. Our Age interrupted the prophetic program; if it did not occur, history would still make sense. The interruption of history by our Age was done so that God could save millions—even billions—of people by His grace, in spite of Israel's rejection of Him. That is why our Age is called the Age of Grace.

Our Age ends with the Rapture, which will occur before the Tribulation starts. The Rapture is the secret coming of the Lord to snatch away (like a raptor) His beloved saints of this Age. This is done without any pain, it is something to be desired, and is a deliverance from the wrath to come. Then God's prophetic program continues right where it left off. Our Age was a secret (mystery) age, during which the prophetic clock has stopped while God is doing something different and Israel is set aside. When the Rapture occurs, God will go back to the prophetic plan as though history were not interrupted by our Age.

Chapter 6 noted that the final restoration of Israel is a major element of biblical prophecy yet to be fulfilled. Recall that right now God has divorced all twelve tribes and is presently joined unto the believers of this Age. When our Age ends, He will resume action with His former wife. He will remember the eternal covenant made with her in her youth. However, at that time she will be a former, defiled wife, and He cannot remarry her until she is purified (restored to a pure virgin). Once she is purified, He will remarry her. The issue of multiple wives, which is not in God's perfect will, now arises. To make this remarriage legitimate biblically, He cannot already have a wife when He remarries Israel, even if she is a restored virgin. The solution is the Rapture. We, every believer of this Age, dead or alive, will be taken out of this world so that He has no earthly wife when He begins courting Israel. It is analogous to a wife dying (taken to Heaven), and the former husband then being scripturally allowed to take a new wife. Once we are taken to Heaven, then He can remarry His former wife, who at that time will be undefiled. All this fits perfectly into God's stated will concerning marriage and makes us see the Rapture in new light.

Who Is This?

Israel did not recognize their messiah when He came. Is it possible we may have that problem in some respect? Not that we do not know Him at all, but that we may not see His fullness and by not so doing, relegate Him to a lesser status. Who is Jesus Christ today? Jesus was God in human form when He was on the earth. However, He is no longer on earth and the revelation of Who He is has changed tremendously. He is now the Lord in Heaven, not a humble shepherd. It is incumbent upon us to recognize and worship Him for who He is now; otherwise, we are only seeing His earthly aspect but avoiding His true and full self.

The Scripture clearly teaches that our relationship with Christ has changed since the days He walked this earth. We are now, in the Age of Grace, to view Him in a new way: **"Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"** (2 Cor. 5:16-17). Our view of Christ is to be based upon the new person we are in Him. We now should see Him with new spiritual eyes, which see the fullness of His person.

Paul's wanted us to know who Jesus Christ really is.¹ Colossians 1:14-22 gives the best description of the person of Lord Jesus Christ. This passage presents us with who He is today. No other Scripture so succinctly and thoroughly portrays the person of Christ. As each of us contemplates who Christ is to us personally, the descriptions in Colossians should weigh heavily in our minds; otherwise we may be much like Israel and blind to the fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ. As you read the 14 items below (and you can find more), you will acquaint yourself with Who Christ is today, and that will reflect in your awe, praise, and worship of the Lord Almighty. According to Colossians, the Lord Jesus Christ is the:

1. Redeemer (through Whom we have forgiveness of sins)
2. Image of the invisible God (the icon that represents everything that is God)
3. Firstborn over all creation (first in rank and authority, not in time)
4. Creator of all things
5. Purpose (He is the purpose of creation; it is for His glory)
6. Beginning (eternal and self-existing)
7. Sustainer (all things are presently and continually held together by Him)
8. Head of Body (from Whom all nourishment, strength, and wisdom flow to the body of believers)
9. Firstborn from the dead (Lazarus and those in Eph. 4:8-10 & Matt. 27:51-53, were raised temporarily, but had to die again. The Firstborn's resurrection was permanent.)
10. Preeminent One (He holds the position of supremacy)
11. Fullness (He is Complete, the exact essence of the Father, and the All-in-All)
12. Reconciler (we are reconciled to God because of His death for us)
13. Peacemaker (through the blood of His Cross)
14. Presenter (He presents us holy, blameless, and above reproach to the Father—this happens at the moment we believe; it is not something in the future.)

¹ Campbell, Ernest R.; *Colossians & Philemon*; Canyonview Press; Silverton, OR 97381-9535; 1982.

Chapter 9

SOS Essentials

If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.

George Bernard Shaw

For an idea that does not first seem insane, there is no hope.

Albert Einstein

A thousand years ago, everybody knew the Earth was the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago, they knew the Earth was flat. Fifteen minutes ago, you knew we humans were alone on it. Imagine what you'll know tomorrow.

Tommy Lee Jones

As you no doubt suspect, based upon the quotes above, this chapter (and Chapter 10) will be presenting some ideas that are either new or non-orthodox. The reader is asked to keep an open mind, and not dismiss the ideas right from the start. If you find the ideas virtually insane, then Einstein would say there is hope. You do not necessarily have to believe everything presented; but give it an audience, mull it around in your mind, and allow it considerable time to mature in your thinking. Your study of Scripture and insights into how the Lord works may help you to find them worthy of consideration, even acceptance.

Transitional Books

There are certain books of the Bible that are transitional in nature; that is, they provide a means of smoothly transitioning from one line of thought, style of writing, or age/dispensation to another. Without such books, the Bible would be extremely hard to understand. One such book is Acts. Without Acts, there would be an inexplicable change between the Gospels and Romans. We would wonder why the Bible jumps from a Jewish program about an earthly kingdom to a prominently Gentile program with heavenly blessings. How did we get from the Law (Kingdom Program) to the Age of Grace (Church age)? Who is Paul? Where did he come from and why? What happened to the twelve apostles? Why was Israel set aside? Acts is the book that explains a rapid change in God's dealings with mankind by explaining the change in the way God dispenses His grace. It explains the fall of Israel and the rise of a new Apostle, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The Song of Solomon has indications of being a transitional book. In the Old Testament, the transitional books do not take the reader into a new age, but prepare the reader for a drastic change in subject matter. When correctly interpreted, we will see SOS is exactly that: a book to take the reader from one subject to another subject of a completely different nature. SOS takes the reader from the books of wisdom/poetry (Job through Ecclesiastes) into the books of prophecy (Isaiah through Malachi). The books of prophecy contain a lot of bad news for Israel; SOS is the wake-up call in subtle form to the nation of Israel. It helps the reader look further than he/she could otherwise see.

Transitional books are put in the Bible to draw our attention to something. Something is about to change. Transitional books create a smooth flow (a transition) to help the reader recognize and adjust from the former to the latter. SOS uses the former (poetic style and wisdom teaching) to slide the reader smoothly into the latter (prose and prophetic events).

Going back in time, it is very likely that Esther is the book that transitions the reader into the wisdom books, while SOS transitions the reader back out. Note that Esther and SOS both use a love story to alert the reader to a change in topic. The change in topic is obviously required and designed by God. Esther and SOS use an actual love account to teach great biblical truths, while at the same time providing a transition into something new. The use of a love story in Esther and SOS make those books jump out as unusual, thus drawing attention to what comes next.

The book of Hebrews is another transitional book, taking the reader into those books with special significance for the future. Once our Age of Grace comes to an end at the Rapture, those living on earth will need special advice and instruction for what lies ahead. It is inconceivable that the Lord would leave them without a special Word since this will be the most difficult time the in the history of the world. Those people will all be unsaved at first, but we know there will be many saved during the Tribulation. The Two Witnesses (including subsequent believers) and the Word of God will be instrumental in the conversion of Israel (Rev. 11:3), and The Holy Spirit will be here to comfort those who are saved. However, as always, faith will come from hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

The special Word of God to those living after the Rapture is in the books of Hebrews through Revelation. Hebrews provides the transition from the Age of Grace into the prophetic program (or we could call it the Kingdom Program since the final, long-sought, grand event is the establishment of the earthly Kingdom with Christ reigning as King). For those living then, the main issue is to finally grasp who Jesus Christ is: is He really the Son of God, why did He die, what did animal sacrifices accomplish, what did His death accomplish, what should we believe now? Hebrews provides that very information; information essential for those living then (also precious and of great value to us now, as is all Scripture). Therefore, Acts transitions the reader from the Kingdom Program into the Age of Grace (Romans through Philemon), and Hebrews transitions the reader back into the Kingdom Program, which was interrupted by the Age of Grace (see Figure 9.1. below, transitional books are shown with a dashed line).

The transition books seem to use the style of the book(s) immediately preceding them. In addition, the transition books seem to be written by an author or character in the book(s) immediately preceding them (see note below). Using an author from a preceding book(s) provides instant credibility. Esther provides the transition into new books of wisdom and poetry (which interjected new thoughts and writing styles). Esther uses the former prose and an author (or character) from the former books to transition into the new books, which interrupted the flow of Old Testament prose. To get back into prose from the wisdom and poetry books, SOS (the author is Solomon) uses the poetic style of the wisdom books and transitions the reader back into the flow of the historic and prophetic books. The style of writing and love topic of SOS alert the reader to a change in subject matter. The love story in SOS has a way of reaching the heart that straight prose may not be able to accomplish. More than anything else, the transition book of SOS provides a wake-up call, a call that something profound is happening; those who have ears to hear, better hear.

Note: The mention of the authorship of the transition books is only presented as a possibility. The authors/characters noted below would be from the books immediately preceding the transition book. However, not all the authors are known, such as the authors of Esther and Hebrews. If this line of reasoning is correct, it may provide insights into at least the authorship of Hebrews. This scheme employs a bit of circular reasoning, so it is only presented as a possibility.

1. Esther is generally thought to have been written by either Mordecai, Ezra, or Nehemiah.
2. SOS was written by Solomon.
3. Acts was written by Luke.
4. Hebrews most likely would have been written by Paul (former author used to provide a transition into the new age).

In Figure 9.1., the lower line is the general flow of scriptural books; it represents the "original" line. The books involved in a dramatic change in style, content, or age are shown in the upper line. The books that transition the reader from one line to the other are shown as dashed lines (with the transitional book being shown in italics). The transition books take the reader either into the books with a change, or back to the books on the original line below.

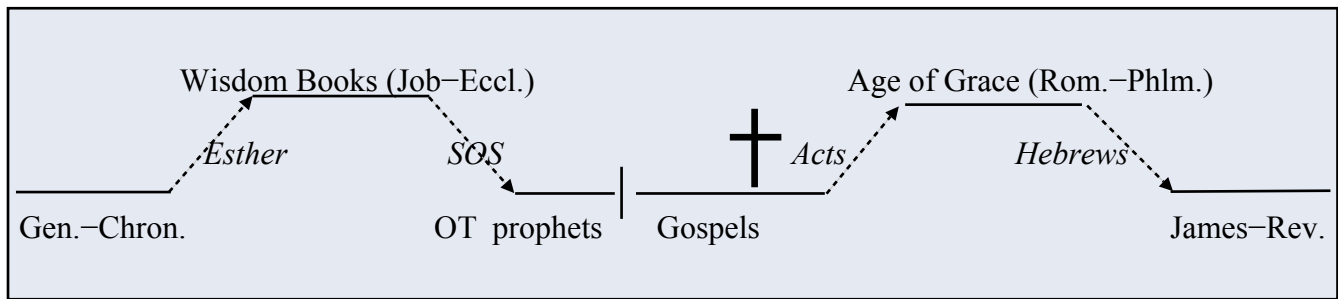


Figure 9.1. Four transition books are suggested (Esther, SOS, Acts, and Hebrews). Two transitional books take the reader into and out of the wisdom books. Two other transition books take the reader into and out of the Age of Grace (Paul's books).

Interpretational Abyss

Many authors and speakers struggle with cogent things to say about the Song of Solomon. They are often very sincere and have a true desire to honor the Lord. However, they often disregard what the book is really saying (perhaps because they do not know) and substitute their own thoughts to make a spiritual point. Here is an example by a godly, well respected author, commenting on the phrase used by the Shulatmite, "He feeds among the lilies." The author states,

Though she is here speaking about the question of His service, yet there is no emphasis on how He deals with His flock. She simply stresses the relation between the Lord and the lilies—the lilies being those people with dedicated and pure hearts toward the Beloved. They are the planting of the Lord Himself—the Lord's peculiar workmanship because of so great measure of response to Him.¹

The above quote may be linguistically beautiful, it may contain biblical truth, and it sounds ever so "spiritual," but what does it mean? It certainly does not explain the text and, though not shown in the above quote, makes the typical error of assuming any love story in the Bible has to be about Christ and the Church, if not in reality, then in type. As gifted as many authors may be, they seem to miss the point entirely. In an effort to sound "spiritual," many authors/teachers go to extreme lengths, often avoiding the actual text, in order to present something they sincerely believe. What they believe may be absolutely correct, but if it does not apply to the text, then it is wrong to force it as an explanation of that text.

As a means of demonstrating this wrong method of exegesis (as noted above for the phrase, "He feeds among the lilies"), the author decided to make a simple but similar exegesis of a newspaper article. So the author took a local newspaper, went to the advice section, picked out the very first article, and applied this principle. The absurdity of this exegesis is clear and unacceptable to everyone. Yet, in biblical studies, people commonly get away with this sort of exegesis; in fact, they are lauded as having great spiritual insight.

¹ Nee, Watchman; *Song of Songs*; Christian Literature Crusade; Fort Washington, PA 19034; 1965.

Advice section (Amy Dickinson) in the Wisconsin State Journal, April 13, 2010. The first entry is by a lady calling herself "Romance Deprived." After some background information, Romance Deprived wrote the following (sentence numbers are added for future reference).

1) Here is my problem. Here I am, nearly 80 years old, and I have met a widower. 2) Let me call him "Mr. Romantic." 3) He is sending me roses. 4) What do I do with them? Do I just put them in a vase? 5) Other than writing him a thank-you note, how do I reciprocate? 6) I feel like a 16-year-old girl again, but I don't want to ruin this relationship or embarrass him.

Here is how this letter could be answered by someone wanting to sound "spiritual" (the numbers below correspond to the numbered sentences above).

1. Even in our advancing years, God brings new and wonderful things into our lives. God is never done with us (Phil. 3:15-16). He is always moving us on, to new and exciting levels of maturity as He transforms our lives and makes us more like His Son (Rom. 12:2). He always provides His best and that is seen especially in our latter years.
2. Do you recall your first love with the Lord Jesus Christ when you first were saved? Recall the romance and how He changed your life. He became the center of your every thought and changed your life completely. However, over time your love for the Lord can grow cool or you may begin to take Him for granted. We must always honor His love, the "lover of my soul."
3. The Lord knows how to touch our hearts and soul; He sends His grace at just the right time and provides just what we need. He never fails to comfort, assure, uphold, and astound us.
4. We do not know what to do with God's best because it is so much more that we have every dreamed or expected (Eph. 3:20-21).
5. It is not possible to repay God for His grace, or it would not be grace. So, we reciprocate by walking in His ways and allowing Him to work within us (Eph. 3:17).
6. He makes us new again, reviving us each day and by making us a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). As a newborn baby, we rely totally upon our heavenly Father. Nothing we do can destroy our salvation, and His love for us never changes.

This response to the advice column appears to be very biblical, it contains significant spiritual truth, and it is supposedly "proven" to be correct by the biblical references. It perfectly describes the relationship between God and His saints; however, it is totally bogus with respect to the news article at hand. It has absolutely nothing to do with the letter, even though true. It totally fails to explain or respond to "Romance Deprived." Similarly, an author, teacher, or pastor can sound very spiritual with his or her comments, but totally fail to teach a text in an expository manner. This sort of apparent spirituality fools

many Christians into thinking the writer/speaker really knows the topic and speaks with the conviction of the Lord. Once a person knows the Bible, he or she can cleverly read almost anything into the text (as above). This misuse is a terrible practice, dishonoring Holy Scripture and our Lord.

To employ this tactic is not rightly-dividing the Word of truth, as we are instructed to do (2 Tim. 2:15). Instead, it is making the Word in our image, to our liking. It is not as much about what the text says, as it is about what the person wants to say. That problem is one we face with most writings concerning SOS, that is, the writings give the pretense of spirituality, but fail to expound the text in a way that teaches what God has written.

Solomon's Seal

SOS 8:6 says, **“Set me as a seal upon your heart, As a seal upon your arm....”** A seal is a confirmation or proof of completion, of being official, and of secrecy. In our study of SOS, a sealed heart is one that has God's law written within it (Jer. 31:31). When Israel is restored and perfect love is in place, then the relationship between Israel and God is completed and perfect. The seal upon the heart is the final proof and confirmation of a finished transaction, taking thousands of years to complete, between God and the chosen nation Israel. A seal upon the heart indicates that all thoughts, desires, and attitudes of the heart are in accordance with His will. A seal upon the arm appears to indicate that the strength of God will ensure this relationship never changes. Both seals proclaim the completeness, perfection, and unchanging nature of the relationship between God and Israel. From this time onward, all behavior of redeemed Israel will flow from a life sealed in Christ. Interestingly, we can have these spiritual blessing today (Eph. 1:3), before Israel is restored, by placing our faith in Christ's substitutionary death for us. When a person believes, he or she is immediately sealed into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). This sealing indicates a completed transaction that can never change because it is based upon His faithfulness, not our performance.



Picture 9.1. Solomon's seal growing wild. (www.solomonseal.net)



Picture 9.2. Solomon's seal root, with characteristic "seal" marks (note the oval mark in the center). (www.solomonseal.net)

Here is another interesting item. God makes it clear that He has provided for mankind in many ways we do not recognize, in fact, in ways we have forgotten. Psalms 104:14 says that God created herbs for the use of mankind “...and vegetation for the service of man.” The word “service” has been translated “medicine” by some. This is interesting because there is a rather common herb called Solomon’s Seal that has some unusual medicinal properties. But why would it have been given that name?

The scientific name gives no clue (*Polygonatum multiflorum*, means “many jointed with many flowers,” referring to the nodes on the stems and jointed roots, as well as the flowers spread along the stems). The common name, Solomon’s Seal, derives from the fact that at the end of one season the stem dies and detaches from the root leaving behind a round mark that looks like a seal-mark, Picture 9.2. Each year there is a new mark or seal. The marks reminded people of the signet ring used by kings like Solomon to seal a letter, giving it a unique mark to show it was completed, official, and secure. In addition, Solomon was connected with wisdom in the Bible, and this herb figuratively was seen as wise.

For hundreds of years, people have seen a connection between this herb and Solomon (the seal marks and with wisdom). Gerard (16th century herbalist) says, “Common experience teacheth, that in the world there is not to be found another herbe comparable to it...”² When taken as a medicine, this common herb has an affinity for ligaments, tendons, and joints that are too loose, and for a skeletal system that is not in proper alignment. It tightens and corrects some muscular-skeletal problems. (Note: only the root is used for medicine; the berries are poisonous.) Solomon’s Seal restores physical alignment much like Solomon restored his relationship with the Shulamite. However, it is spiritual alignment that is most important, and herbs do not work in that arena. Only our Lord does! He alone has the power to give spiritual health through salvation, transformation, and countless other things. This herb can stand as a reminder of God's continued desire for us to be correctly aligned (in a right relationship) with Him.

The Refrains

He feeds among the lilies

This refrain is seen in SOS 2:16, 4:5, and 6:2-3. Local idioms and figures of speech have a way of working their way into cultural expression; for an outsider, they are difficult to understand. For example, we say an idea is “Pie in the sky,” meaning that the idea seems good but it is not likely to happen. “Your business ideas are pie in the sky.” However, those not ingrained in the culture, even though they can speak the language, have trouble with such expressions. This may be the case with this refrain in SOS. To those in Israel at that time, this refrain may have been cultural and easy to understand; to us it is perplexing.

As mentioned previously, early in their relationship, the Shulamite may have thought her shepherd was gone to feed his flock in the fields. Later she knew Solomon was traveling or on some venture, eating and living in the hills and fields where the lilies grow. It may be a phrase referring to his being gone, more than to anything else. Since Solomon seems to have written this Song from the heroine's perspec-

² From *Gerard's Herbal*; 1597; as quoted by M. Wood; *The Book of Herbal Wisdom*; North Atlantic Books; 1997.

tive, he had no problem stating it this way. The refrain does not specify what he was doing or why he was gone, which Solomon knew, but she did not. We must remember, this relationship was not a monogamous one, and he was not accountable to her in the sense we think of marital relationships today.

The interpretation of this phrase with respect to God and Israel may relate to the fact that God had universal concerns; He did not just devote Himself to meeting Israel's every whim and desire. This does not suggest He did not hear and answer prayers, or provide their needs, or succor them. However, the fact He did not do what they wanted may have had the effect of their perceiving God as feeding among the lilies, in an anthropomorphic sense.

In John 10:16, Jesus mentioned that He had other sheep that were not of this fold (the fold of Judah). It seems to this author that the reference to other sheep was not meant to be a reference to the gentiles in the Age of Grace (that was still a mystery), but to the flock of Israel (the scattered flock—the ten tribes). Part of this other fold would be the Samaritans (neither of pure Hebrew blood nor of uncontaminated worship). The fact God was dealing with other sheep, especially the Samaritans, would certainly "rankle their feathers," because the Samaritans were despised. Going back in time, God had stated there would be a division in the twelve tribes, and that breach would eventually be healed. Thus, Ezekiel 37:16-28 speaks of two sticks, Judah and Israel, that will be united into one during the Restoration stage. Thus, God had a world view, those in Judah had a self-view. Judah's self-view caused concern as to where God was and what He was doing; a self-view would demand she have Him alone.

Another reason for this refrain is that in the Old Testament God's Spirit was not within most believers. The Spirit did come in/on certain people, but only for a limited time to serve a specific purpose. The Holy Spirit did not indwell them like in the Age of Grace, in which each believer gets all of the Spirit and He does not leave. Therefore, the believer today has a very intimate relationship with God, unlike Israel's relationship with God. He was more distant, more of an external presence, and not within them. He did not work from within, like the Spirit does today. They could sense this, and knew from Scripture that a closer relationship was possible, one which they will have in the Kingdom. At that time, God's glory was in the Temple, not in the heart of the believer. This distance must have created feelings of not having as intimate of a relationship as possible with God, as though He were feeding among the lilies. The indwelling Spirit is what makes our Age so wonderful: we have the Spirit within us, and we have as intimate a relationship as possible. We are blessed.

There are other factors that would make them think God was often gone. At times in their history, He declared that they were not His people (Hosea 1:8). Then there was a 400-year silence between the Old and New Testaments. Events such as these led Israel, or the believers in Israel, to think they were all alone, basically forgotten by God. Elijah had this problem: " **'LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.'** " **But what does the divine response say to Him? " 'I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal' "** (Rom. 11:3-4). God assured him that his feelings and beliefs were wrong, God was there and working out His eternal plan. Then jumping ahead in time, Romans goes on to address those in Paul's

day who suffered the same feelings of being abandoned, so they were reassured, **"Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace"** (Rom. 11:5). God was still there. It is common among believers, even today, to feel that God has abandoned them or that Heaven is silent. While that is not true, it is true our feelings can be strong and at such times we think, "He feeds among the lilies."

Do not stir nor awaken love until it pleases

This refrain is seen in SOS 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4. This was the Shulamite's, not Solomon's, perspective. Similarly, this was never God's perspective of Israel; He loved her from the start and that never changed. God wanted an awakened love, not infatuation but true love, and was always ready. Even when we were not ready He was. This is exemplified in Christ, who was willing to die for those who did not love Him: **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Rom. 5:8).

In SOS, things did not go according to the heroine's visions based upon her infatuation; her dreams were not realized. Her dreams were pitiful in comparison to what she did get, but it took time for her to come to that conclusion. While she was maturing in her love, the value of loving Solomon was at times difficult to appreciate. In Israel's relationship with God, it was always His time (the time of love), but not always Israel's time. Serving and loving God was not always easy for Israel because, for some strange reason, He just did not do what Israel wanted. Israel did have her first love, but then drifted away. In a backslidden state, they could say do not awaken a relationship with God until the time is right. This advice is not the correct thing to say, but it is the way people commonly think. When Israel matures and her love is true, as noted in the final stage in SOS, then she will realize she got far more than ever imagined.

The Shulamite said in SOS 6:12 that before she knew it, she was a member of the royal family. For Israel this would mean that she became the chosen nation before she was fully aware of what that meant. Being a chosen people sounds really great, until one realizes that the Lord has a yoke, and it is not necessarily easy. The future for a chosen people sounds most glorious; the journey not so much so. Thus, this refrain may be a way of saying not to rush into a love affair until the heart is awakened and it pleases both parties. An awakened love is one that is well beyond the infatuation phase and is realistic. An awakened love is based upon truly knowing God and yourself. If Israel had known Him and recognized her sinfulness, the time for an awakened love would have been possible.

It was mentioned previously that perhaps this refrain is often repeated because in an ironic way the Shulamite knew she was the one violating her own common sense and getting overly involved in love before she was ready. The Lord is always ready. However, in all ages, those who want a relationship with Him have to realize He is in control and that may mean adjustment, transformation, and other things not initially visualized. A spiritual conversion is what awakens true love; this apparently occurred in the Shulamite and it will occur in Israel. A conversion is needed in each of us to see God in His true splendor.

Chapter 10

The Heavens Declare the Glory of God— Starry Wonders

It is always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look further than you can see.

Winston Churchill

No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come.

Victor Hugo

**He counts the number of the stars;
He calls them all by name.
(Psa. 147:4)**

**Lift up your eyes on high,
And see who has created these things,
Who brings out their host by number;
He calls them all by name....
(Isa. 40:26)**

This book will now make a departure from typical biblical teaching. The topic will switch to how the stars in heaven contain the Gospel in rudimentary form. This departure will seem rather odd to some, and to others even the mention of such a thing will seem on the fringe of heretical teaching. Many Christians fear that any reference to stars being anything more than balls of hot gas is delving into astrology, which we will not do. Please be patient and give this section an objective reading. The information presented here is helpful for each of us to see beyond our present horizon, and in the process see God's ineffable provisions for us with new eyes and understanding. The introduction is long because a lot of information is needed to prepare correctly for this topic. The purpose of this discussion is to show

that the stars in the sky can teach us more about the Lord than realized, and, how that teaching sometimes relates to the Song of Solomon.

Introduction

Many Christians have deprived themselves of a deep source of inspiration that God has provided in the stars above. This depravation comes to us in a rather logical manner. We have been taught that the Zodiac and the constellations (figures produced by a group of stars in a certain location) are, at best, not worthy of our time or study since they are based upon Greek mythology. At worst, we think they are a demonic tool that we must avoid at all costs. Even the word Zodiac conjures up all sorts of deception and tricks used by the Devil to divert us from the truth of God. Such beliefs are true with respect to today's astrology, the pseudoscience that considers the influences of the stars upon human affairs and that foretells events by their positions. Today's astrology is much akin to palm reading or fortunetelling and is based upon Greek mythology and perhaps Satanic influence. However, the original wisdom placed in the starry heavens is a completely different story.

This book is not the place to delve deeply into this issue. However, a brief overview of some constellations will be given because there are some interesting connections with SOS. We have all seen the drawings of constellations with the weird beasts and mythological heroes that are supposedly visible in the heavens. When we look at the real stars, however, the figures and drawings shown in the books are just not there. With few exceptions, you can search in vain to find even a suggestion or rough outline of what those drawings show. There is just no way to connect a few stars and come up with the drawings depicted in the literature. The figures of the constellations are figments, for the most part, inventions, that do not really exist.

Because we cannot really see the supposed constellation figures, we may also suspect that anything connected to the constellations is of dubious value and origin. However, our lack of acquaintance with constellations should not deter us from further study. For Christians, there is always the issue: "For anyone with the complete Word of God, what value could there be in studying the stars today?" Would not such study merely be a means of side-tracking true Bible study and belief? The answer to both of these questions would be affirmative if it were not for the testimony of Scripture itself. Yes, the Bible itself (most often in Job, the presumed oldest book in the Bible) devotes a fair amount of verses to the discussion of constellations, stars, star clusters, and even the Zodiac. To get to the point, there is fascinating information in the stars that advances our appreciation of SOS. The follow background information is provided to prepare the reader for this unusual topic and to establish the proper orientation.

As we embark on this unusual topic, perhaps considered on the "fringe" by some, remember that the Lord Himself numbered, apparently named, and calls the stars by their names (Psa. 147:4; Isa. 40:26). He named them, or calls them by name, for a reason. Many of those original names have been preserved and passed down to us. He named them so humans in all ages could know about Him so He could

communicate truth to mankind throughout history, even if humans had lost the written Word. In the event a person could not read, or was not connected with the nation of Israel, a visual testimony was displayed in the stars by God.

God's Word and the Heavens

As mentioned, God uses the names of stars, constellations, star clusters, and refers to the Zodiac in many places: "**He made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, And the chambers of the south...**" (Job 9:9; also see Job 38:31; Amos 5:8; Acts 28:11). The Bear most likely refers to the constellation Ursa major, which we call the Big Dipper. We will discuss the constellation of Orion later. The Pleiades is a star cluster that star gazers throughout history have admired and found fascinating. The meaning of "chambers of the south" is not clear. It is very possibly a reference from the perspective of someone in the northern hemisphere to the core of our Milky Way Galaxy. This chamber of the south is mysterious and a scary place indeed, with unbelievable radiation, number of stars, and a black hole. How could people in Job's day know about the chambers of the south, except if they were told by God?

In Job 38:32 the word Mazzaroth appears to refer to the Zodiac; God is asking Job if he can command the stars to rise in their season and order, as in the Zodiac (Mazzaroth). Since Job was apparently written around, or slightly before, the time of Abraham (~ 2000 BC), we see that the star names and constellations were established at this early date and have been handed down to us in a recognizable fashion. They are obviously important if they are mentioned in the Bible so often and if God calls them by their names.

The original constellations and star names were apparently given to man by God for a purpose. The evidence points to the fact that God's purpose was to record Scriptural truth in a non-verbal form in the heavens. The truth He wanted enshrined in the stars was for the purpose of having a divine testimony written there for all people and generations. This established His truth in an unchanging format, for common purposes, in the heavens.

There is considerable archeological evidence that shows the names of stars and constellations were well established long ago, some even suggest all the way back to the time of the Flood. For example, there was a temple in Egypt (Denderah) that had a ceiling display made of sandstone on which there was a beautifully carved bas-relief of the Zodiac, much as we have it today. This temple existed as far back as 2000 BC, and was based upon even more ancient teaching when it was constructed. The interior ceiling's Zodiac was more recent than the temple, but it reflects an ancient knowledge. This temple's Zodiac is now in the Louvre in Paris. Josephus and the Jewish rabbis affirm that the "starry Lore" had its origin with the antediluvian patriarchs, Seth and Enoch.^{1 2}

¹ Bullinger, E. W.; *The Witness of the Stars*; Kregel Publications; Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501; 1972 reprint from the edition published in London in 1893.

² Seiss, Joseph A.; *The Gospel in the Stars*; General Books; Breinigsville, PA; copyright 2009.

Truth Enshrined

The grouping of the stars to form constellations is purely arbitrary, that is, the stars do not form the elaborate figures we see in books and charts. "There is nothing in the positions of the stars to suggest the picture originally drawn around them."³ The figures are not real, and we cannot see real figures of men, women, or animals. What we can see are several stars in each constellation, and they merely *suggest the figures as* seen in charts and books.

The stars only create a crude representation of the constellations' figures. One has to be trained (or self-taught) to find the constellations, and one has to be taught what they mean. The original meanings do not seem to be myths at all; they represent the truth God had revealed to early mankind. The constellations contain an unchanging message visually displayed (written) in the stars.

Having this testimony written in the stars enabled the ancient generations, often living in tents or huts in the far reaches of the world, to teach the younger generation the truth of God through the use of the stars. This teaching may have been especially valuable after the tower of Babel, or in other times in biblical history, when those scattered did not have any written Word. The stars were one thing they all had, and the story could be told even if one could not read. The information was passed from generation to generation. It did not matter if the actual elaborate figures as we have in charts and books could be seen; enough could be seen to say, "These stars represent a virgin who will give birth to a special Child that all men/women must worship."

The main truths recorded in the stars are pictorial representations of Gen. 3:15. They show how the Seed of the woman has a long struggle with the enemy and is injured in the battle, but in the end the Seed crushes the enemy's head. The Zodiac and constellations portray the Redeemer: His birth, struggles, nature, life, and triumph. They also portray the redeemed. (More on this soon.)

That original truth written in the stars was corrupted, paganized, and polluted by succeeding generations, especially the Greeks. It is those paganized corruptions that have a connection with astrology, which we will completely avoid. However, if we go farther back in time, we can see God's truth. Corruption of original truth is common in our world, but that should not deter anyone from seeking the original truth. Seeing that truth helps us understand the written Word even more.

The Heavens Declare

When we learn the truth written (or enshrined) in the stars, we finally can come to grips with Psa. 19:1-4: **"THE heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world."** We can finally see how the heavens declare the glory of God. The heavens declare more than His existence and creative power, they also declare the Redeemer's life and triumph over sin. The

³ Menzel, D. H. and Pasachoff, J. M.; *A Field Guide to the Stars and Planets*; Peterson Field Guide Series; Houghton Mifflin company; Boston, MA; second edition.

Bible clearly teaches that the heavens speak words, show knowledge, and have a voice that goes out to all people in all places. How can that be? The answer certainly seems more than their mere existence; they have a story to tell and the ancients knew it. Stars are not just specks of light, they have a voice that day unto day speaks. While not seen in the daylight, the star's message is there during the twenty-four hour day, day after day, and night unto night shines the message of God to all mankind. There is not a language or person that their testimony has not reached.

Romans 10:18 refers to Psalms 19 and confirms this far reaching testimony written in the stars by stating, **"But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.' "** In addition to the testimony of the stars being worldwide, it has existed from the beginning, from creation onward, **"...because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse"** (Rom. 1:19-20). His invisible attributes are seen and that would seem to mean far more than just His existence and power. Certainly, "seeing" His Godhead is a reference to grasping a considerable amount of Who He is. There is not a language or person who has not been spoken to in this manner. Not only have they been spoken to, but the truth has been revealed in a message that is sufficiently clear and persuasive for the Bible to conclude they are without excuse.

We can finally understand what Romans 1 and Psalms 19 mean when they state every person has heard. Even for those without the written Word, for those who cannot read, for those that live in the far corners of the earth, and for those living in any age, God gave them enough information to realize they needed to get to know the true God. If they desired this, they were given, by whatever means God chose, the information they needed. This explains how God is just in condemning those who supposedly never knew; they did see, and they did know! They rejected the truth so they are without excuse.

Is the Mystery (our Age of Grace, the Church Age) revealed in the stars? No. This secret was hidden in God (Eph. 3:9), not in the stars. The Mystery was revealed to the Apostle Paul but not before that time in any manner. There is a clear distinction between, "revealed in the stars," and that not revealed, but hidden: "kept secret since the world began." However, even though we live in the Age of Grace, we are still part of those "redeemed by the blood of the Lamb"; in that respect, believers from Adam to the very end are represented.

Legitimate Study of the Heavens

While the figures shown in charts (pictures of unreal beasts, super-heroes, and wondrous women) cannot be seen, the main stars of the constellations are clearly visible. The constellations are used in astronomy, cosmology, astrophysics, and archeoastronomy today, all of which are the legitimate, scientific studies of the heavens.^{4 5 6 7} Sometimes enough stars can be seen so that some form of stick-figures can be

⁴ Menzel, D. H. and Pasachoff, J. M.; *A Field Guide to the Stars and Planets*; Peterson Field Guide Series; Houghton Mifflin company; Boston, MA; second edition.

⁵ Bauval, Robert and Hancock, Graham; *Keeper of Genesis*; Arrow Books; London, England; Reprinted 1997.

drawn. However, it is the biblical teaching that goes with the constellations that is important while seeing a full figure in the sky is not important. That teaching was handed down through the generations, and all cultures and all languages had the same basic original teaching.

Today there is so much human light at night that the stars are often drowned out, even in many rural areas. *Our light drowns out His*. If we lived in the distant past, when there was no light pollution, and we lived or sat outside almost every evening, the stars would be more familiar to us. However, this unfamiliarity need not deter us because we can see each of the constellations now, and we have the story of the starry sky preserved for us. Again, what is important is the story or meaning that is tied to each constellation, as God revealed it to mankind, apparently from the beginning. Thus, the stars are reminders, heavenly beacons, of what God has to say to mankind. As the Bible clearly teaches, we have two testimonies from God: the written Word and the natural revelation seen in the stars.

The Zodiac is composed of twelve constellations that are visible at one time or another during the year. Several can be seen every night, and a new one rises, becoming visible, each month and another one sets. Thus, all twelve constellations are seen over the course of one year. The constellations that make up the Zodiac are those that travel close to the route followed by the Sun and planets (that route is due to the earth's rotation and alignment within the solar system). These twelve constellations are referred to as the "signs" of the Zodiac. Close by each of the twelve signs are three other constellations that help form the complete story of each sign. Thus, the complete story written in the stars is composed of forty-eight constellations. The stars in most of these constellations also have names that have been preserved for us and are part of the story. For this study, we will look at just a few examples, mostly related to SOS, of what the stars teach. The story in the stars begins with the Redeemer's birth and ends with His final victory.

Revealing the Heaven's Story

The story in the stars starts long before Israel was even founded. It teaches the basic message of Genesis 3:15. Thus, the constellations do not specifically teach the seven basic stages of the relationship between God and Israel, as seen in SOS. God is teaching about the Redeemer and the redeemed for all ages, not exclusively about Israel. However, some of what is learned from SOS can be seen in the stars' story, since the story of Israel, the Redeemer, and redeemed are all very closely tied together.

Remember, in round figures and in the grand scheme of things, there were over 2000 years of biblical history before Israel came on the scene, then Israel existed for less than 2000 years, and there have been 2000 years since Israel's fall. The stars provide teaching for this entire span of time, not just Israel's time. God wanted to provide instruction for all ages and all peoples, not just for Israel. Thus, to some degree, SOS fits into the overall teaching of the heavens but is not the specific, sole intent of that teaching.

The teachings of the constellations can be grouped into three themes.

- Theme 1 is about the Redeemer in His first coming.

⁶ Moche, Dinah L.; *Astronomy*; John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; Hoboken, NJ; Seventh Edition; 2009.

⁷ Zeilik, Michael; *Astronomy, The Evolving Universe*; Cambridge University Press; www.cambridge.org; 2002.

- Theme 2 considers the redeemed as a result of the Redeemer's sufferings.
- Theme 3 is about the Redeemer's second coming (the glory to follow).

The first sign of the Zodiac is the constellation of Virgo (the virgin). This constellation is visible in the northern hemisphere in Winter and Spring. Virgo shows a woman bearing a branch in her right hand and stalks of wheat in the other. Spica is the brightest star in this constellation, and its ancient name meant "the branch." The two items in her hands speak of the two-fold testimony of the Coming One. The wheat reportedly refers to being born of a virgin in His first advent (Isa. 7:14), and the branch refers to the future to His second coming in judgment and glory (Isa:9:6-7). Recall the many references to the righteous Branch connected with the second coming and reign of Christ: " **'Behold, the days are coming' says the LORD, 'That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A king shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth'** (Jer. 23:5; also see Zech 3:8, 6:12). This all speaks of the promised seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15).

Virgo explains that the coming Branch will first be born as a child and that He will become, in the last days, the Desire of All Nations. Associated with Virgo (close by) is a small, seemingly insignificant constellation, originally called Coma before the Greeks modified it to Coma Berenice. Coma shows a woman holding an infant boy in her arms. Coma means "the Desired." The virgin has given birth to a Child who will become the Desire of All Nations, " **'...and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts'** (Hag. 2:7). The teachings of Virgo and Coma create a clear reference to the birth of Christ and what He will be in the final analysis. There is some evidence it was this insignificant constellation, Coma, in which "His star" (the star of Bethlehem) appeared. The idea of God using an insignificant constellation to announce His birth is very consistent with His coming to an insignificant planet, for insignificant beings, to show His love through suffering and death. That depth of love transcends any measure of love we can imagine.

Since Coma is a constellation associated with Virgo, it is referred to as being "in the sign of the Virgin." There is a most interesting quote concerning this insignificant constellation, Coma, from Abulfaragius (Arab, Christian historian, 1226-1286 AD) who said:

ZOROASTER ... the Persian, was a pupil of Daniel the Prophet, and that he predicted to the Magians (who were the astronomers of Persia), that when they should see a new star appear it would notify the birth of a mysterious child, whom they were to adore ... this new star was to appear in the sign of the Virgin. ⁸

Going even further, Albumzarz, a non-Christian Arabian astronomer of the eight century, says:

⁸ Bullinger, E. W.; *The Witness of the Stars*; Kregel Publications; Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501; 1972 reprint from the edition published in London in 1893, page 37.

There arises in the first Decan [Coma, a constellation associated with the sign of Virgo], as the Persians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians ... teach, a young woman, whose Persian name denotes a pure virgin ... nourishing an infant boy, said boy having a Hebrew name, by some nations called Ihesu ... which in Greek is called Christ (brackets added).⁹

Zoroastrianism, named after Zoroaster, is a religion/philosophy that emerged from an Indo-Iranian religious system dating back into antiquity. Zoroaster lived around the time of Daniel and was the father of this Iranian religion. Daniel was in exile in Babylon (modern day Iraq) but may have taught magi from Persia, as this text indicates. (Persia is modern day Iran.) No endorsement is made or implied for this religion, but it is worth noting they recognized a virgin giving birth to a Hebrew baby who would be called Jesus, and who would have a special star. It is even more interesting to note the nation of Israel did not know who He was when He came the first time (SOS 3:6), but the Magi did. Who is this?

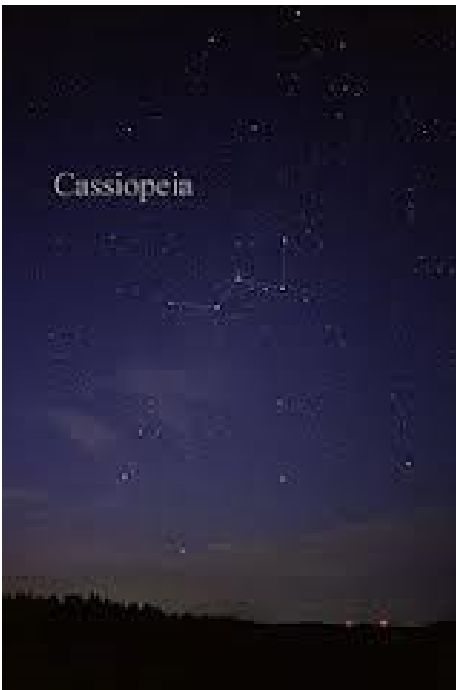
Since the magi presumably studied under Daniel when he was in Babylon, they searched the heavens and knew how to "read the signs." They knew when He was born and went to Jerusalem and then Bethlehem for His birth. The signs written in the stars were accurate and very important for they led the Magi to Christ. Their ventures are very much part of our written Scriptures. They offered gifts to the Babe, which the family used for money to flee to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. Is it not amazing how centuries before, God had placed Daniel right where He needed Him. He needed him to do a most important job of putatively teaching others the gospel in the stars, in a foreign nation; Daniel may have had no clue of the significance of his testimony. God used Joseph in a similar manner, allowing him to be sold into slavery in Egypt so that he could later save his family when famine occurred.

We will now skip way ahead (from Virgo) in the story shown in the stars. When we get to Pisces (the Fishes) we are at the seventh of twelve signs of the Zodiac. Pisces refers to the redeemed being blessed even though they are bound. They are bound by a great monster: a reference to Satanic influence binding the redeemed, especially Israel, with pain and suffering in this life. A constellation in association with Pisces is Andromeda (the chained woman). Andromeda shows a woman bound by chains to the heavens. This constellation speaks of the redeemed in their bondage and affliction. Then, the next constellation, Cepheus (the King), shows the Redeemer coming to rescue them. This interpretation all fits in nicely with the message within SOS of how the redeemed struggle in this life, especially Israel, but one day she will be delivered.

The eighth sign is Aries (the Ram). The Lamb that was slain in earlier signs is now a Ram, and He is prepared for victory. An associated constellation is Cassiopea (the Enthroned Woman). When we see Cassiopea, we see stars in the shape of a spread-out "W," an example of seeing something, but hardly the woman described. This is one of the more memorable constellations and is seen in the northern hemisphere most of the year. At any rate, when we see the W, it reminds us that the bound woman seen before (Andromeda), is now freed and about to be seated with her husband. Obviously, this is (or

⁹ Seiss, Joseph A.; *The Gospel in the Stars*; General Books; Breinigsville, PA; copyright 2009, page 25.

includes) redeemed Israel who will be married to Christ, as noted in the last phase in the love story in the Song of Solomon.



Picture 10.1. Cassiopeia with faint lines drawn to show the W. (*commons.wikimedia.org*)



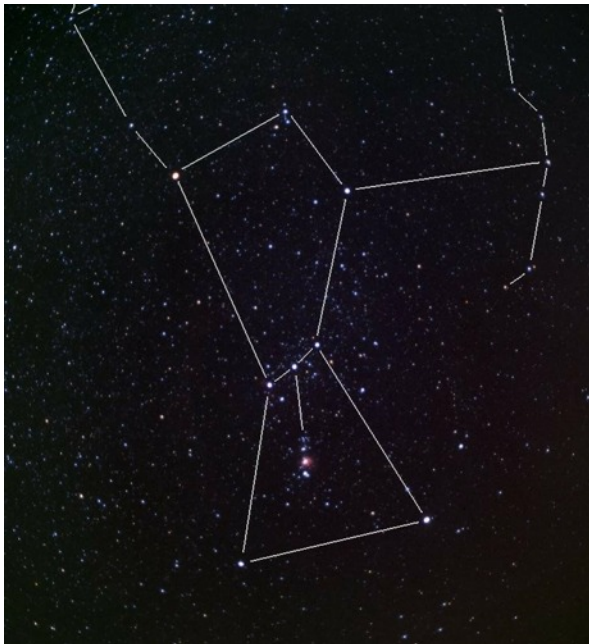
The ninth sign is Taurus (the Bull). Taurus refers to the coming Messiah, "the judge of all the earth." The picture is of a powerful bull that is unstoppable. His horns are set to push his enemies, pierce them through, and destroy them. This sign refers to Christ's second coming in great fury and wrath in the Day of the Lord. This wrathful side of the Messiah is how the unsaved world will see Him. Later we will learn this is not how the saved will view the second coming. The main star is Aldebaran, which means "the leader." The star cluster to the right is the Pleiades (Job 9:9), which means "the congregation of the judge." The Lord is coming to judge and rule, but the "congregation" is safe.

Picture 10.2. The constellation of Taurus. A stick figure is shown, but it hardly shows a bull. The bright slightly orange colored star near the center is Aldebaran. The star cluster in the middle-right (with a light line drawn to it) is the Pleiades. (*commons.wikimedia.org*)



A constellation associated with Taurus is Orion, "light breaking forth." This is a constellation few can forget once they see it. Orion tells of the person of the Redeemer. Orion is one constellation that shows more than a few scattered stars, and a stick figure can easily be imagined. When Orion is seen, the question has to be asked, "Who is this?"¹⁰ That exact question was asked in SOS by Israel concerning Christ in His first coming. Only now, this is Christ in His second coming. The names of the stars yield the answer: Orion is a man (a hunter) and on his right shoulder is Betelgeuz (pronounced beetle-juice), which means "the coming"; the star on his left shoulder is Bellatrix, which means "quickly coming"; and his left foot is marked by Rigel, which means "the foot that crusheth."

Picture 10.3. The constellation of Orion (seen in the northern hemisphere most clearly in Winter months; it is located somewhat in the southern sky). The big yellowish star on the upper left is Betelgeuz, to the right is Bellatrix, the three stars in nearly a straight line in the center of the image are Orion's belt. Below the belt is a group of stars and nebula which form his sword. Rigel is the white star on the lower right and Saiph is to the left. (www.wikipedia.org)



That foot is raised over the head of the elusive enemy ready to crush it (reference to Gen. 3:15). The star in his right foot is Saiph (bruised), which shows the coming deliverer was bruised in the conflict but will ultimately triumph by crushing the head of the enemy. "Who is this?" was asked when He first came, but when He comes again, the redeemed will know but the unsaved will ask this question, and soon find out. At the time of His second coming, the Body of Christ will be at rest in Heaven (2 Thes. 1:7-9). The redeemed of Israel will be on the earth but comforted and protected. Finally, it will be the nations who will ask this about Israel, when they see her shining forth after her conversion (SOS 6:10).

Picture 10.4. In this stick figure of Orion; you can see how a hunter figure emerges from these stars. The extended arm is holding a shield, the stars associated with the shield cannot be seen in Picture 10.3. Elaborate drawings or images are built upon this depiction, but this is what a normal person can envision when looking at the stars of this constellation. (reductionism.net/seanic.net)

¹⁰ Bullinger, E. W.; *The Witness of the Stars*; Kregel Publications; Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501; 1972 reprint from the edition published in London in 1893.



Another constellation associated with Taurus is Auriga (the Shepherd). This is the Chief Shepherd of 1 Peter 5:4. Auriga is a very touching constellation for it shows the tender care of the Lord for the redeemed during the Day of the Lord. In Auriga, there is a bright star called Capella (can mean the she goat, or more likely ewe) marking the heart of a ewe. The female is on the lap of the seated Shepherd and nursing two young lambs. He is holding her with one arm, and she is looking back at the Bull (Taurus, which shows Christ in His wrath in the Day of the Lord). She is very frightened by what is going on and presses against Him. Though afraid, she and her young are safe in the Shepherd's bosom. **"He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young"** (Isa. 40:11). Psalm 37:39-40 also refers to this: **"...He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help**

Picture 10.5. An artist's conception of Auriga, with a female sheep (with her helpless lambs) looking backward, but well protected in the Shepherd's arms. Capella marks the heart of the ewe. (*Auriga depiction by Sidney Hall, London circa 1825.*)

them and deliver them...."

The Lord's tender care for His own is clearly shown; this is why the redeemed are safe during the Day of the Lord. This picture of tender care ties in perfectly with the Lord's parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 24:24-30), in which the tender plants (newly converted Israel) are not harmed by pulling out the tares (the wicked). During the Day of the Lord, He will protect the believers while removing the unbelievers. Israel (represented by the ewe and lambs) will be protected by the Shepherd during this most horrendous time on earth; she will be the ewe looking back in astonishment.

Incidentally (perhaps coincidentally), the first two letters of Auriga are Au, the symbol for gold. Recall it is at this time, during her restitution and perfect love stages, that Israel will be made into pure gold (Zech. 13:9).

During the Day of the Lord there will be protection for the redeemed, but wrath to the unsaved. Zechariah 14:5 refers to the redeemed fleeing to a valley where they will be safe while Christ destroys the nations that have come to fight against Him. Zechariah also says, **" ' It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem..."** (Zech.

12:9-11). During the great day of His wrath, carefully designed precautions will be executed by the Lord to ensure the tender care of the redeemed. That care, by the compassionate Shepherd, will ensure there is no "collateral damage" to His saints during the great day of His wrath. The mourning in the verses above relates to their sorrow as they wake up to what they did to Christ the first time He came; now, by His grace, they will be secure and protected from the carnage taking place.

Benediction

The Lord's desire is toward the believer today (whether Jew or gentile). His love, blessings, and heart are all directed to profit us beyond our imagination. We, too, must come up out of our wanderings and learn to lean upon Him, by believing that Christ died for our sins. When we do, He saves us and then begins to transform our lives. May each of us be so transformed by the Lord that others will look at us and say, **"Who is this?"**