

SONG 8: 1 Oh that you were like my brother, who nursed from the breasts of my mother! If I found you outside, I would kiss you; yes, and no one would despise me.

The love of the bride to her spouse, and the nature of that love, Sol 8:1-7. The younger sister, Sol 8:8-10. Solomon's vineyard, Sol 8:11, Sol 8:12. The confidence of the bride and bridegroom in each other, Sol 8:13, Sol 8:14.

Verse 1

O that thou wert as my brother - The bride, fearing that her fondness for her spouse might be construed into too great a familiarity, wishes that he were her little brother; and then she might treat him in the most affectionate manner, and kiss him even in the streets without suspicion, and without giving offense to any one.

SONG 8: 2 I would lead you, bringing you into my mother's house, who would instruct me. I would have you drink spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate.

Verse 2

Would - bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me - She would teach me how to conduct myself towards thee, as she would how to nurse a young child.

To drink of spiced wine - Wine rendered peculiarly strong and invigorating. The bride and bridegroom on the wedding day both drank out of the same cup, to show that they were to enjoy and equally bear together the comforts and adversities of life.

SONG 8: 3 His left hand would be under my head. His right hand would embrace me.

Verse 3

His left hand - See on Sol 2:6 (note).

With the fourth verse the Sixth night of the marriage week is supposed to end.

SONG 8: 4 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up, nor awaken love, until it so desires. Friends.

SONG 8: 5 Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved? Under the apple tree I aroused you. There your mother conceived you. There she was in labour and bore you.

Verse 5

That cometh up from the wilderness - Perhaps the words of the daughters of Jerusalem, who, seeing the bride returning from the country, leaning on the arm of her beloved, are filled with admiration at her excellent carriage and beauty.

I raised thee up under the apple tree - The original of this clause is obscure, and has given birth to various translations. The following is nearly literal: "Under the apple tree I excited thee (to espouse me): there, thy mother contracted thee; - there, she that brought thee forth contracted thee (to me). Or it may be understood of the following circumstance: The bridegroom found her once asleep under an apple tree, and awoke her; and this happened to be the very place where her mother, taken in untimely labor, had brought her into the world." And here the bridegroom, in his fondness and familiarity, recalls these little adventures to her memory.

The Vulgate gives this an abominable meaning.

Sub arbore malo suscitavi te: ibi corrupta est mater tua; ibi violata est genetrix tua; "I raised thee up under the apple tree: it was there that thy mother was corrupted; it was there that she who brought thee forth was violated." Spiritually, all this is applied to Eve losing her purity by sin; and Jesus as the promised seed raising her up by the promise of mercy, through the blood of his cross. But the text says nothing of this.

SONG 8: 6 Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is strong as death. Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a very flame of the LORD.

Verse 6

Set me as a seal upon thine heart - It was customary in the Levant and other places to make impressions of various kinds upon the arms, the breast, and other parts. I have seen these often: some slight punctures are made, and the place rubbed over with a sort of blue powder that, getting between the cuticle and cutis, is never discharged; it continues in all its distinctness throughout life. The figures of young women are frequently thus impressed on the arms and on the breasts. If the bride alludes to any thing of this kind, which is very probable, the interpretation is easy. Let me be thus depicted upon thine arm, which being constantly before thy eyes, thou wilt never forget me; and let me be thus depicted upon thy breast, the emblem of the share I have in thy heart and affections. Do this as a proof of the love I bear to thee, which is such as nothing but death can destroy; and do it to prevent any jealousy I might feel, which is as cruel as the grave, and as deadly as fiery arrows or poisoned darts shot into the body.

A most vehement flame - שלהבתיה shalhebethyah, "the flame of God;" for the word is divided שלהבת יה shalhebeth Yah, "the flame of Jehovah," by one hundred and sixteen of Dr. Kennicott's MSS., and by one hundred and fourteen of those of De Rossi. It may mean the lightning; or, as our text understands it, a most vehement or intense fire.

SONG 8: 7 Many waters can't quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned. Friends.

Verse 7

Many waters - Neither common nor uncommon adversities, even of the most ruinous nature, can destroy love when it is pure; and pure love is such that nothing can procure it. If it be not excited naturally, no money can purchase it, no property can procure it, no arts can persuade it. How vain is the thought of old rich men hoping to procure the affections of young women by loading them with presents and wealth! No woman can command her affections; they are not in her power. Where they do not rise spontaneously, they can never exist. "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned." Let the old, as well as the gay and the giddy, think of this.

SONG 8: 8 We have a little sister. She has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is to be spoken for?

Verse 8

We have a little sister - This young girl belonged most probably to the bride.

She hath no breasts - She is not yet marriageable.

What shall we do for our sister - How shall we secure her comfort and welfare?

In the day when she shall be spoken for? - When any person shall demand her in marriage.

SONG 8: 9 If she is a wall, we will build on her a turret of silver. if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. Beloved.

Verse 9

If she be a wall - All these expressions, says Calmet, show that it was necessary to provide a husband for this young sister. For a woman without a husband is like a wall without towers, and without defense; is like a gate or door without bar or lock; and like a city without walls. They must therefore provide for their sister a rich, powerful, and illustrious man; qualities here figured by towers or palaces of silver, and doors of cedar. As it is customary to build towers upon a wall, and to put bolts and bars upon a door in order to secure it, so the expressions may point out the defense, protection, and guardianship which they imagined this young woman to require.

SONG 8: 10 I am a wall, and my breasts like towers, then I was in his eyes like one who found peace.

Verse 10

I am a wall, and my breasts like towers - I am become marriageable, and I stood in need of the defense I have now in my beloved; and as soon as I was so, and became pleasing in the eyes of my beloved, I was given to him in marriage, and have ever since found favor in his sight. As soon then as my sister is in my state, let a proper match be sought out for her. These expressions show the solicitude which the bride felt for her sister, and in her favor she wishes to interest her spouse.

SONG 8: 11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon. He leased out the vineyard to keepers. Each was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit.

Verse 11

Solomon had a vineyard - Calmet translates and paraphrases the Hebrew of these two verses thus: "Sol 8:11 : Solomon has a vineyard at Baal-hamon: he has let it out to keepers, each of whom for the fruit of it was to bring a thousand pieces of silver. Sol 8:12 : As for me, my vineyard is before me; that is, it is my own; I am its proprietor. Keep thyself, O Solomon, thy thousand pieces of silver, and let those who dress (thy vineyard) have two hundred for their trouble. I neither envy thee thy vineyard, nor them their profits. I am satisfied with my own. My beloved is my vineyard - my heritage; I would not change him for all the riches of the universe."

Some suppose that there is a reference here to some property which Pharaoh had given to Solomon with his daughter. See Harmer's Outlines, where this subject is considered at large.

SONG 8: 12 My own vineyard is before me. The thousand are for you, Solomon; two hundred for those who tend its fruit. Lover.

SONG 8: 13 You who dwell in the gardens, with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice! Beloved.

Verse 13

Thou that dwellest in the gardens - This is supposed to refer to the bridegroom asking permission of his spouse early in the morning to retire, as was his usual custom. He intimates the companions were waiting to hear, and he wished to hear it in the way of permission to depart.

SONG 8: 14 Come away, my beloved! Be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices!

Verse 14

Make haste, my beloved - These appear to be the words of the bride giving permission, but entreating him to speed his return. What these mountains of spices were, we cannot particularly tell; but they must have been thus named from their producing the trees on which the spices grew. They might have been the same as the mountains of Bether, Sol 2:17 (note), or the mountains of myrrh, Sol 4:6 (note); where see the notes.

Here ends the seventh night of the marriage week.

Thus ends this most singular book; the oldest pastoral in the world, if it may be ranked among this species of writing. To whatever species of composition it belongs, it is, beyond all controversy, the finest, the most sublime for imagery and colouring, that ever came from the pen of man.

In the preceding notes I have carefully avoided all attempts to spiritualize this song. My reasons I have already given in the introduction; and in the course of writing these short notes I have seen no cause to alter my opinion. Any man may allegorize it; that is an easy matter; for when he once considers it to be an allegory, his own creed will furnish him with enough to say, write, or preach, upon the spiritual meanings of every part, which will be an exhibition of his own confession of faith! But when he has finished his work, the question will recur, By what authority do you give it these meanings? And till the day of judgment none shall be able to say, "I have the authority of God for my exposition."