

Dr. Lloyd Carr, Song of Songs, Lecture 2
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We were talking a moment ago about the song as in a natural interpretation, the Song of Solomon as not allegory, not typology, not drama but simply as poetry, love poetry. I want to take some time now to look at those two elements. First, what it means to say this is poetry and then specifically what we mean by love poetry and how this particular book relates to the ancient near eastern love poetry of which we have some examples. We'll talk about that now for the next several minutes.

First, the song is poetry. A poem is a work, the Greek word itself means something constructed or put together. I always get a laugh out of people who come into a poetry reading and say "well I just jotted this on the back of the envelope on the way in tonight." My immediate reaction is "that ain't poetry." Poetry takes some work, some shaping, some structuring, some choice of words, idioms and formats.

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

But when we're talking about biblical poetry, and ancient Near Eastern poetry, generally we have a little different perspective. The key idea and the key method in ancient poetry is not necessarily rhyme or rhythm, there is a little bit of that but not a lot. Rather the hallmark of biblical poetry particularly and ancient near eastern poetry generally, is what's called parallelism. That means that a statement is repeated or added to in a certain way that gives a repetition. You might call it thought rhyme rather than word rhyme. The book of Psalms is full of

these sorts of things, there's several different categories and just to mention two or three. One is the standard normal parallelism, where the second line repeats the idea or the thought of the first line. The second approach to this is where the second line reverses the idea of the first line, antithetical parallelism. Or you may get a situation where the second line adds to the first line and then the third line adds to the second line, so it's sort of a step movement; a line at a time. Or you'll have a particular passage which we'll talk about in more detail later, a poetic form of parallelism which is called chiasmic ABBA or cross shaped, where you've got the statement made, a second comment about that and then in the next line the second comment is picked up first and then the first part of the first line is commented on in the last half of the second line. So the first half of the first line and the second half of the second line go together and the opposite the first half of the second line and the last half of the first line go together, that's cross-shaped. Now we'll come back to that because it's an important point because that has a great deal to say about how we understand the Song of Solomon.

But these are ways of expressing these thought rhymes, a couple of examples from the Song of Solomon chapter two, the eighth verse "the voice of my beloved, behold he come leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills." "Leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills," are not two separate ideas but two ways of saying the same thing, and that's parallelism in the full and normal sense of the word.

Another example, chapter two, verse six. This is parallelism but it's a little different, in this one the second one adds to the first line. This poor young lady is madly in love with a guy; "Oh that his left hand were under my head and his right hand embraced me." She doesn't want both hands under her head, she wants one around her back and one on her head. So there's an adding to the idea here in this verse. We'll find many many examples of that through this book and in your other studies in Psalms and many of the prophets and other sorts of things. The standard mark of Hebrew poetry is parallelism, adding or saying the same thing in two or

three different ways.

Now, specifically the Song of Solomon is in the category of what we would identify as love poetry. Now that's not unusual, every nation has its love poetry; whether it goes all the way back to ancient Mesopotamia, which we'll look at in a minute or two, or down to the one that somebody just finished five minutes ago, for his new girlfriend, there is love poetry, lots of it. Now the difference is some of it is good, some of it isn't, "I love you, I love you yeah yeah yeah," that says one thing but "how do I love thee, let me count the ways" is a much better expression of love poetry.

Now, what are we dealing with here? Well we do have a lot of examples of love poetry from the ancient world several collections, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and a few other bits and pieces from various places, and they have certain elements with them. Let's look first at some of the Mesopotamian love poetry. Now a couple of things about this; I'm going to read some of these rather than just try to quote them for you. Certainly as I say this is common in many languages and there are a lot of parallels, a lot similarities and differences in these love poems. Let's look at them first and then we'll come back, look at some of the common elements and then look at some of the differences.

Babylonian love poetry, in the Mesopotamian stuff there's two groups. There's one early group that goes back possibly as early as the third millennium B.C. and then another one which comes out of the first millennium, about the time or maybe a little bit later than the Song of Solomon from Babylon and Mesopotamia. Now in the Mesopotamian poetry and the Babylonian poetry, there are collections of individual pieces, when we were talking about drama a few minutes ago, I mentioned that there is a series of stage directions, or directions to the readers as to where this is to be done, and how it is to be quoted and the love poetry in ancient Mesopotamia has these elements in it. But the thing that's important in this ancient Babylonian and Mesopotamian love poetry is that it's related to worship. It's a fertility ritual, fertility worship whether we are looking at

the Canaanite material from Ugarit or elsewhere, we're looking at the Babylonian material, we're looking at the earlier Sumer material; the key theme in all of it is the relationship between the god and the goddess. The fertility which brings, which comes to the land, when the marital relationship between the god and the goddess is fulfilled. This is a common theme through all of the ancient Near Eastern fertility religions, and apart from Israel, through the ancient world completely. Now what that means is the reenactment of the sacred marriage between the god and the goddess is carried out on a yearly basis between sometimes the king the Dumuzi, and the high priestess who is the embodiment of Inanna the goddess. So the king and the goddess have the marriage union, the sexual union as part of the ritual worship on a regular basis in the community. Same thing occurs in the later material, you've got the Dumuzi and Inanna in the first one, you've got Baal and Anat in the Canaanite cult, those kinds of things going on all the time. And the love poetry is tied in with those specific relationships; let me give you an example.

In the Babylonian material the chief God is Marduk and his goddess is Ishtar; and he's also got a girlfriend on the side, her name is Zerpanitum. There is a relationship going on here that is fairly explicitly spelled out. Let me quote here, this is from the relationship between the king Dumuzi and the goddess Inanna, she is getting ready to welcome him into the temple palace, into the sacred bedchamber. The poet says: "She picks up the buttock stones and puts them on her buttocks. Inanna picks the head stones and puts them on her head. She picks the lapis lazuli stones and puts them on the nape of her neck. She picks ribbons of gold puts her in her hair and her head. She picks the narrow gold earrings and puts them on her ears. She picks the sweet honey well, puts it about her loins. She picks bright alabaster, puts it on her anus. She picks black willow and puts it on her vulva. She picks ornate sandals and puts them on her feet, and in the naval of heaven, the house of Endol, the temple, Dumuzi met her." Now this is a love poem from this period and its very explicit, and its very obviously tied into the fertility

cult. In the next sequence Marduk, this is the Babylonian god, Marduk is speaking to Ishtar. Zerpanitum, that's his consort, the queen Ishtar is sort of the girlfriend here. Zerpanitum is sleeping in her cell, her room. "You are my short silvery girl." Sounds like blondes have more fun in ancient Babylon too. "You are the mother, Ishtar of Babylon, you are the mother, the queen to Babylonians. You are the mother of palm of Cornelius, the beautiful one." So there's descriptions here, there's these love poems that come out of these sorts of things.

Now in Egypt we have similar kind of thing. There's one collection called *The Songs of the Orchard* and these are fairly short. This is one little example: *The Pomegranate* says: "Like her teeth are my seeds; like her breasts, my fruit." Here is the pomegranate tree speaking, identifying itself with the girl in the poem; very common ideas, both from Egypt and from Mesopotamia. Let me give you a couple of other examples of Egyptian literature and the way some of this ties in with the *Song of Solomon*. First, in chapter 1, verse 10 of the song we get this; well actually beginning in verse 9: "I compare you my love to a mare from Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are comely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels. We will make your ornaments of gold, studded with silver." That's kind of an interesting passage. One of the Egyptian poems; this is from the so-called Chester Beatty Cycle of poems. This is number 39 in this collection; the woman is speaking to her lover: "Please come quick to the lady love like the king's steed, the pick of a thousand from all the herds, the foremost of the stables. It is set apart from the others in its feed and its master knows its gate. As soon as it hears the crack of the whip, there's no holding back." There's not a captain in the chariotry who can pull ahead of it. But the ladylove knows he cannot go far from her. "You are like a mare among Pharaoh's chariots, the ultimate in sex appeal." Now, mares would never pull the chariots, those were pulled by the stallions, and one of the things that the enemy learned to do to disrupt the chariot charges was to turn a mare in heat loose among stallions, that caused all kinds of problems. Well, the girl in the *Song of Solomon* knew that one.

Another example, chapter 2, twelfth verse: “The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The winter has passed, the rain is over and gone. The fig tree puts forth its figs, the vines turn blossom, they give forth fragrance. Arise my love, my fair one come away, O my dove come away.”

One of the Egyptian love poems; this is in that early collection I mentioned. I’ll read just a part. “The voice of the turtle dove speaks out. The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The voice of the turtledove speaks out, it says: ‘Day is breaking, which way are you going?’ Lay off little bird, must you scold me so? I found my lover on his bed and my heart was swept to excess. We said ‘I shall never be far away from you while my hand is in your hand and I shall stroll with you in every favored place.’ He sets me up as the first of the girls, he doesn’t break my heart.” But there it is, the love poetry and this idea here, this comment on the song of the turtledove.

One other example, over in chapter 6. Beginning at the eighth verse, we read part of this before. “There were 60 queens and 80 concubines, maidens without number. My dove, my perfect one is the only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her.” Again in the Egyptian love poetry “My dove, my perfect one is the only one. One, the ladylove with out a duplicate, more perfect than the world, she is like the rising star at the start of an auspicious year. She whose excellence shines, whose body glistens; glorious her eyes when she stares. Sweet her lips when she converses. She says not a word too much. High her neck, glistening her nipples; with true lapis her hair. Her arms finer than gold, her fingers like lotus flowers unfolding. Her buttocks droop when her waist is girt, her legs reveal her perfection. Her steps are pleading when she walks the earth, She takes my heart in her embrace. She turns the head of every man, all are captivated at the sight of her. Everyone who embraces her rejoices for she has become the most successful of lovers. When she comes forth anyone can see there is none like that one.” Now this is a song about one of the goddesses, but the idea is there. It’s

a love song and we've got an example of that from Babylon, from Mesopotamia, from Egypt, from Canaan, all around the place. It's a common theme, love poetry.

Now, what are some of the elements in love poetry and does the *Song of Solomon* share these? Yes, there is actually. One of the very interesting things; and this runs right across the examples that we have, all of them; the songs are speeches, the man and the woman. The fascinating thing about it is that in every example we've gotten so far, the woman speaks twice as many lines as the man does. Babylon, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, *Song of Solomon*, the pattern is consistent: twice as many lines for the woman as for the man. Now that's more than just happenstance. You might get it once or twice, but when it occurs in all of literature it looks like this is a pattern, and the song fits the pattern.

A couple of other things, some of the common elements. Very common is what we call the "I, thou" statements. Now, if they're talking about the lover to someone else they will say "he" or "she" or "my beloved" or "my lover" in the third person, but when they're talking to each other it's always in the "I, thou" relationship. Now, that doesn't mean much to us in English because we don't have a singular form for the second person. It's "I, you, he; we, you, they." But if you, for instance, speak German, or French, or Latin, or many of other languages, there is a separate form in the second person singular. For instance in French it's [juh] for 'me' and [tu] for 'you' but if it's 'you' in a group it's [vu] not [tu]. You use that singular form [tu] only in family or very close relationships never with a superior or never with a stranger. In the Hebrew and in the translations here, in the song and in the Egyptian material and Mesopotamian Literature it's always in this singular form, you, [tu] if it was French, this personal intimate relationship expression, the 'I, thou' form. This is common across literature.

The second element that comes in frequently here in the literature is the idea of the joy and the excitement that the lovers are either anticipating or sharing. Again that runs all the way through the literature. "Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arms, love is as strong as death," the excitement of that

relationship. “Oh that you are like a brother to me that nursed at my mother’s breast, and met you outside I would kiss you. None would despise me,” that longing for intimacy the joy and excitement. Right alongside that, there is the problem of some sort of hindrance or something getting in the way, love is never smooth. In this case, Song of Solomon, this young lady has some brothers, chapter 1. “My brothers were angry with me, they made me the keeper of the vineyard but my own vineyard I have not kept.” We don’t want our little sister getting into trouble, would you? Chapter 8, verse 8,” We have a little sister she’s not grown up yet, what will we do for her when she’s spoken for? If she’s a wall we’ll build upon her battlements of silver, if she’s a door we’ll enclose her with boards of cedar” anything to keep her away from this guy who’s coming around. Sometimes it’s the weather. There’s a very itchy little poem in the Egyptian texts. The man is describing his intent to go meet the woman and she’s across the other side of the Nile River, but he’s going to swim the Nile to get to her. “The crocodiles will be like mice to me, because I want to get with you.” So that idea is there as well. You know that old story of the young man that called up his girlfriend and told her how much he loved her and he would go through Hell and high water to be with her and then he said if it rains tonight I won’t be over. Well you don’t find that in these things, there is that joy and excitement, the anticipation of the union and the time together, but there are always these objections and obstructions in the way, but in the love poetry they are set aside and the consummation is arrived at somewhere along the line, that joy and excitement is part of it.

Another common element in the love poetry is what we might call physical descriptions. This isn’t in the Songs of Solomon, way back in the first book of the Bible in the book of Genesis chapter two. When Adam is created God can’t find any partner suitable for him, he puts him to sleep and takes a rib from Adam. Verse 21 and verse 22, “From the rib which he had taken, he made a woman and brought her to the man” and then verse 23. I find it interesting that the first recorded words of the human species in the Scripture, now Adam named the

animals but we don't know what he named them because we don't have those words, but the first recorded words of the man are here in verse 23 and it's a love poem, "This at last is bones of my bones, flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man." See right back in the Garden of Eden, God knew that love was an important part of relationships and when Adam woke up from that God induced anesthetic and saw that gorgeous creature standing beside him, "Wow! At last, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh." Now that's a good start, not very elaborate but it's a good start.

When we get into the Song of Solomon and the other literature as well, we get very precise descriptions of the physical beauties of the characters. For instance, in chapter four of the Songs, "Behold you are beautiful my love, behold you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves behind your veil, your hair is like a flock of goats moving down the slopes of Gilead." Those long black-haired goats coming down looks like her hair rippling as she moves. This next image is a little strange, but listen to it for a moment. "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of them bare twins not one among them is bereaved." A little translation problem, we'll get to that a bit later, but again it's the description of the girl. In verse five, "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle that feed among the lilies." In verse seven, "You are all fair my love, there is no flaw in you, come away with me from Lebanon my bride, come away with me." In verse eleven or verse ten. "How sweet is your love my sister, my bride, how much better is your love, than wine, than the fragrance of your oils than any spice. Your lips distill nectar my bride, honey and milk are under your tongue, the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon." Okay, fairly precise description. Chapter five, I said earlier that the girl speaks twice as much as the man does in these poems. Here's an example of it, verse ten of chapter five, "My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand; his head is the finest gold, his locks are wavy black as a raven, his eyes are like doves besides springs of water, bathed in milk fitly said. His cheeks are like beds of

spices yielding fragrance, his lips are lilies distilling liquid myrrh. His arms are rounded gold set with jewels. His body is ivory, work encrusted with sapphires, his legs are alabaster columns set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars, his speech is most sweet, he is all together desirable, this is my beloved, this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” She is pretty explicit there. We have another example of this in chapter seven, this is a description of the young lady, “How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden, your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat encircled with lilies; your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, your neck like an ivory tower. Your eyes like pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus. Your head crowns you like Carmel and your flowing locks are like purple. A king is held captive in the tresses. How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, delectable maiden.” It’s very, very explicit. These are the kinds of descriptions that we have, physical descriptions, in the stories here in the love poetry of the Song of Solomon and elsewhere.

Another element here is the description of physical intimacy between the man and the woman. Sometimes it’s spelled out very specifically as the bed room. Verse two of chapter eight, “If I met you outside I would kiss you and none would despise me, I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, into the chamber of her who conceived me (the bed chamber), I will give you spiced-wine to drink and the juice of pomegranates.” Then she goes on to describe that relationship.

Verse eleven of chapter six, “I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. Before I was aware, my fancy set me in the chariot beside my prince.” The garden, in the Egyptian love poetry there are a number of references to secluded places along the river, where the lovers can hide and not be

found. This again is a common theme whether we get it from Mesopotamia, from Egypt, or from the Song. Another series of ideas that are common to the literature is the emphasis on looking at the beloved, seeing the person, describing him, and hearing the voice.

There's one in the Egyptian poems where the woman hears her lover's voice beyond the marsh as he comes to her. We have that sort of thing here, "I heard my beloved on the mountains." There are numbers of those kinds of things. There is a great deal of physical contact, kissing, touching, and fondling. The comment there, "His left hand under my head, his right hand embraced me," it's more than just put his arm around me, its actual intimate, physical fondling of each other that is part of the description and it's quite explicit and quite obvious. Ultimately, the union, the sexual union between the lovers is spelled out very, very clearly. In song, we'll come back to this in a few minutes when we talk about the structure of the book. In verses 16 of chapter 4 through chapter 5 verse 1, "Awake O north wind and come O south wind blow upon my garden. May its fragrance be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits." "I come to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk. Eat O friends and drink, drink deeply, O lovers, in your lovemaking" is the idea that the last phrase there could be translated as addressed to them "O lovers" or "drink deeply in your lovemaking." The text can go either way. This is the consummation of the relationship. And we find it not only here in the Mesopotamian poetry. We find it spelled out quite clearly and also in a number of Egyptian poems as well. This is the woman speaking, "Take my breast, for you its gift overflows better indeed is one day in your arms than a hundred thousand anywhere else on earth." And those kinds of ideas are there. This cute little poem is not directly related but it's got something of the idea. It's the man speaking, "I'll lie down inside and act as if I'm sick. My neighbors will come in for visit, and with them my girl. She'll put the doctors out. She knows how to fix my hurt." Those kinds of ideas run through the

love poetry, Song of Solomon and others as well.

Now the third, or what are we up to now, six or seven I guess whatever it is, another common theme that runs through the love poetry, Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Egyptian, Babylonian, and biblical, and that is the use of family terms to describe the relationship. “Come to me my sister, my bride.” Sister? She’s not his sister. She’s his girlfriend, his bride, wife to be in this case. There are references to “my brother.” We find it in the Egyptian poetry and find it elsewhere as well. Let me get one here for us. Number 12, “I must depart from the brother and as I long for your love my heart stands still inside me.” “My brother, my loved one, my heart chases after your love.” “I set my mind and the brother comes to me.” “You are the sole concern for me, my brother. My heart remembers well your love. One half of my temple was combed I came rushing to see you and I forgot to finish my hair.” We have that sort of thing back and forth: brother, lover; sister, bride.

Another theme that comes through frequently and this gives some support to the idea that this song is about King Solomon because we have references in these to the king and the queen. King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him. The one who is dressed like the queen coming up on the day of the wedding. There are references through here. Verse 12 of chapter 6, “Before I was aware, my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince.” Now these are again common terms in the literature and in both the love poetry from the ancient world and from the biblical material. That reference in chapter 6 of Song of Solomon verse 12, couple of references that are quite close to that. “When tore the outer door, I set my mind. The brother comes to me. I set my eyes upon the road, my ear listening that I may ambush Maehee.” Maehee, there is some debate whether he was a real prince or a fictional prince who inspired these songs. It may be a pseudonym to hide the identity of whoever it is. But she’s setting out to ambush him. “My sole concern I have set the love of my brother for him my heart will not keep silent. I’ve sent the messenger off and he’s going to bring me to him.”

There's another reference to prince Maehee in these poems. Number 33 Maehee in this one is a negative character. "My heart proposed to see her beauty while I was sitting in her house." "I found Maehee in his chariot on the road with his burly gang. I do not know how to take myself from his presence. Shall I pass by him at a walk? The river is a roadway for I have no place for my feet." "How foolish you are my heart. Why would you stroll by Maehee? If I pass beside him I'll have to tell him my troubles. See? 'I'm yours,' I'll say to him and he'll shout out my name. But he'll pass me on to the harem with the first man of his troop." He's not very consistent. She loves him but she can't get anywhere with him, those sorts of problems. Now the idea here of the prince or the king or the princess or the queen made some people think that this really was a princess and a queen and King Solomon but the evidence from the literature is that sister, brother, prince, princess, queen, king are just standard forms which are used in the literature.

The woman in the Egyptian poetry wants to be treated like his sister just like here in the Song of Solomon. "If you were my brother I could you kiss you right on the street and no one would be surprised." You're not so I can't, but boy would I like to. We have that theme over and over again: brother and sister; the king, queen. It is the same sort of thing, common motif, common ideas. Now there's all of these elements which run through the literature. But there's some very interesting differences in the Song of Solomon and the rest of the ancient literature love poems. As I said a while ago that Mesopotamian, Canaanite, the Egyptian, Babylonian, love poetry is cult related. It has to do with religion and with the worship. It's God centered, or gods centered. Song of Solomon has none of that in it. One of the reasons which I think that this cannot be an allegory talking about God's love for Israel or Christ's love for the church is that none of the literature, none of the vocabulary, none of God words, or the cult words, appear in the song. Not a single one of the normal religious words in the rest of the Old Testament crop up here.

The only possibility, and this is just on the very edge of possibility, is in

chapter 8 verse 6. The text reads, “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm for love is as strong as death and jealousy is cruel as the grave. It’s flashes are flashes of fire a most vehement flame.” Several of the versions translate that last part of that line as “a flame of Yahweh.”

Now, problem is that Yahweh’s name doesn’t appear in the text. There is an abbreviation: *Ya*, which is the first half of Yahweh and sometimes is used as God’s name in the Old Testament. Some of the commentators suggested that this is a flash of fire from God. But the term is used simply as a superlative. It’s “a mighty flame,” or “a vehement flame.” A flame that would come from God, but God is not specifically identified in this context. That’s the only reference anywhere in the Song of Solomon of any single one of the religious words; you don’t find any of them in the book. That came to me as quite a shock when I was writing the commentary for this book, going through the Hebrew Lexicon and identifying all the words in the references on the Song of Solomon. I got about half way through the list and I realized, “have I missed something?” None of these religious words were appearing! So I went back and double-checked and sure enough, not a single one is there. This is a, if I may say without sounding irreligious, this is a purely secular book. God’s and God’s activities in the cultic sense, just don’t appear. They’re just not there. That’s one of the very clear distinctions between this book and the rest of the ancient Near Eastern love poetry.

There’s another element, which I find kind of fascinating: much of the literature is related to the hunt. Going after wild animals, to either capture or kill them. For instance, in the Egyptian love poetry: “...come quick to the lady love like a gazelle, running in the desert, it’s feet are wounded, it’s limbs are exhausted, fear penetrates its body, the hunters are after it, the hounds are with them, they cannot see, because of the dust, it sees its rest place like a mirage, it takes a canal as its road. Before you have kissed your hand four times, you shall have reached her hideaway as you chase the lady love. For it is the golden Goddess, who has set her aside for you, friend.” This is just one example of many of this kind of hunting

motifs.

Now, in ancient Israel, hunt was not part of the culture. We don't find any references to it in the biblical material. Other people hunt but it's never seen as the great things which the king or the mighty men do. There's too much respect for life in Israel. If a lion came after your sheep, you kill the lion; if the bear came after them, or the wolves came after them, you kill them. But you didn't hunt for sport. Life was too valuable, even animal life. So we don't find the hunt motif in the Song of Solomon, as we do in the other nature poetry.

A third element which is distinct here, is in the literature from the other parts of the ancient Near East. There is a confusion between God and nature. The whole fertility ritual is based on that situation. Nature will not produce, the animals will not produce young, the crops won't grow unless we, as god and goddess, priest, priestess and king, have this physical, sexual union, there will be no fertility in the land, because the gods and the land, the creation, are one and the same. In the biblical material, there is that great gulf between God and the creature. Nature is God's creation, it is not God. And in Song of Solomon, that distinction is kept clear. Nature is good, nature is there, nature is important, nature is what we are, but we are not God. That is distinctly biblical, where it is confused in the other literature.

Another series of references this is kind of a minor thing, but it is of interest, in the biblical material, there is references, a number of references: to the vineyard, to wine, to the drinking, to the excitement and joy, which comes with that celebration. In the non-biblical literature, there are a number of references to wine but there are also a large number of references to the brewing of beer. Now I am not sure, but I have not been able to find any reference in the biblical or extra-biblical material to the brewing of beer in ancient Israel. My guess is that the grain was too valuable to spend in making beer out of; it had to be used for food. Plenty of grapes so they can make wine, and we find that reference here, but we don't find references in the biblical material to the brewing of beer. Again, a very

interesting distinction.

And finally, on these distinctions, one of the things which comes across to me very, very clearly is, in the biblical record, in the Song of Solomon, there is a sense of commitment. There is the unity of this man and this woman. There's no trace here of infidelity, there's no trace of things falling away or the relationship deteriorating. Oh, you've got some ups and downs in the story—we'll come back to that next time we come around here. But there is no sense in the Song that this relationship is going to fall apart. You do find that in the literature from the other parts of the ancient Near East. There is in the non-biblical literature a sense of fidelity, but it's not really solid. If somebody comes along, well, maybe we'll switch; we don't find that here.

Another thing that's missing from this love poetry, and particularly from the biblical material, is there's nothing in here that talks about family, raising children, there is certainly the sexual encounter, but it's not developed into a family relationship. There's nothing in here that would suggest growing old together, or simply growing old with the memory of a lost spouse. This is a cohesive piece that focuses on the unity in this relationship. We find the other things in the other literature; we don't find it here in the Song of Solomon.

Now one final thing on this section, something about the vocabulary of the biblical Song, and here again I'm going to have to refer to some detailed notes because this gets a little complicated. Song of Solomon is a relatively short book. We'll come back to some of the implications of that later. Including the title, verse one: "the Song of Songs which is Solomon's," there are only a hundred and seventeen verses in the Song. So we've got a hundred and sixteen plus the title. The title as I said earlier, is set off to the side. Now, in this book, a hundred and seventeen verses, there are four hundred and seventy different words, different Hebrew words. They come in different forms of course, but the roots are four hundred and seventy of them. Now, immediately we have a problem, because of those four hundred and seventy, ten percent, forty-seven of them, occur only once

in the literature. There's nowhere else in the ancient literature, in the Hebrew literature that these words appear. Forty-seven of them. That's ten percent of the vocabulary. We have no real idea what it means. We can make a guess, but we can't be sure. There's another fifty-one words that occur fewer than five times, and many of those, occur four or five times but they occur in identical contexts. So we've got no way of checking what they mean, because it might as well just have it once instead of five times saying exactly the same thing. We just don't know. There's another forty-five, which occur between six and ten times in the whole of literature—not just in the Song, but in the whole of literature. And there are twenty-seven others that occur fewer than twenty times in the whole of the Old Testament. I'm not very good at arithmetic but I think we've got close to two hundred words here that occur fewer than twenty times in the whole of the Old Testament. Over a hundred of those occur fewer than five times. Now that puts us in a little of a problem. Since these words are not very common, we can't always be sure of the meanings. Now, that's compounded in the Song of Solomon. I said we have a hundred and seventeen verses including the title line.

Of those 117, ninety-nine of them have one or more of these unusual words. So, only 18 verses in the song have words, which are common. That gives us a bit of a problem and interpretation. 50 verses have words that are not used outside the Song of Solomon. Another 12 have words that are used fewer than three times. What all that boils down to, is that there are lots of verses here while we can't be precisely sure of the exactly what they mean. We get the sense. We get the broad understanding. But, when it comes right down to the precise details of the text, half the time we use, more than half the time, 97% of the time, we have to say, "Hmm, this is a good guess, but I really can't be sure." That makes it very tough on commentators. Commentators don't like to be caught without being able to tell you exactly what it says, but in the Song, you can't. You can come close, get some ideas, but that's the best we can do. But later on, we'll look at several

passages, we'll look at some of these, problem texts, and what the options are, and why certain suggestions are made as to what that particular verse means.

Now let's look at the vocabulary. There are a lot of unusual words in the Song. Some other things: the Song, a song of songs, like the other literature, is loaded with common love poetry vocabulary. What do we mean by that? Well, among other things, we are looking at the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Babylonian, and the biblical material. There are certain, common groups of word, which appear. For instance, pet names, the fox, the gazelle, the beloved, the sister, the bride, the king, the queen, these are common names, and they run through those songs as well. But there are other specific things, which are of interest in this love poetry literature. There are animal names, the gazelle, the fox, the dove, the turtledove, those sorts of things in the literature. In the literature from Babylon and from Egypt, we have Egyptian and Babylonian animals. In the Song, we have animals from Palestine. They are generic in their animal names, but they are site specific or locale specific, those kind of things. We have the same thing with the plants, or flowers in Egyptian literature and Babylonian literature, you get references to the papyrus reed, or the lotus flower. In the biblical material, you get references to the Rose of Sharon, a biblical term. You get, again, plant names, but they're local names. You get the same thing with the collection of jewels, of spices, of trees, you talk about the cedars of Lebanon in biblical material, you don't find those phrases in the non-biblical love poetry. So there's common vocabulary like this, but it doesn't have a universal flavor, it has a local flavor. Of course, it's exactly what to expect. Love poets use what's at hand. So if you are in Egypt, you use what's there in Egypt. The papyrus plants, crocodiles, and marshes. In Babylon, you talk about the river, and the plants there. In Israel, you talk about the desert, you talk about the mountains, you talk about the springs of Engedi. Local stuff which marks the vocabulary of the poems.

Another element in the vocabulary, is a large number, and this is again across the board, not just in biblical material, is what we called, double entendres,

words which have double meanings. My sister, my bride, well, maybe she's my bride, she's certainly my girlfriend, she's going to be my bride, but there's a relationship. There are a number of references here, we looked at a couple of them in the 8th and 7th chapter, where the description of her rounded thighs like jewels, work of master hand, navel as rounded bowl. What exactly is he describing there? Well, we'll look at that little bit later, but it's a quite explicit, quite specific. The meaning here is not hidden, but disguised. And we got a number of these cases through here. There are references to putting the hand to the hole in the door. Double meanings in all of those words. Again, we'll come back to those as we get down to it.

Then there are three words in Hebrew which are used for the word "to know." And they occur here, let me just run down them specifically and as they come through both in the song and in some of the other literature. There is the word "to know" that is to have discernment, to understand. And the song has the girl trying to get the other people to understand what she means about her lover, to know what she means. That is the idea in some of those. Another term, that is used frequently, is the term to "recognize" or "to look at." Quiet common in the Old Testament, and it occurs in the Song, "Look at my beloved. Set your eyes upon him, or on my lover on her." That word is never used of the sexual relationship in the Old Testament. The third word is the word *yadah*, which means knowledge gained by the senses or by experience, to know is to experience. That one is used specifically of a sexual relationship. The Song uses that twice in this book, in chapter 1 verse 7, "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock and where you make it lie down at noon. For why should I be like one who wanders beside the flocks of your companions. Let me know, tell me." Where this takes place, there is very obviously a double meaning here, in this word.

Then, finally, on this section. The use of the word "love," in the Old Testament. You've probably heard that among the Greeks they had three different words, well actually 4. The word *agape*, which means godly love, that elevated

love we talk about; the word *phileo*, which means kind of brotherly love, city of brotherly love, Philadelphia; and the word *eros*, which usually has sexual overtones to it, the erotic. The fourth term, *storge* occurs in the Septuagint, but does not occur in the New Testament. But these words have different implications, different connotations with them. Unfortunately in Hebrew, there's only one, the word 'ahav. And it is for all three of these, in fact, if you look at the Greek translation in Old Testament, the same Hebrew word is translated by all four of the Greek words. So in the Hebrew, there is no distinction between erotic love, brotherly love, sexual love in terms of vocabulary, certainly differences in the actual meaning and the carrying out of them, but the vocabulary is there. So when you see the word "love," coming up in the Old Testament, you have to stop and ask yourself, which particular emphasis is the author trying to bring to our attention. Again this goes back to the problem of vocabulary, it's up to how you interpret, how you understand the context and the vocabulary that surrounds it. So the problem of vocabulary is a very critical one, in understanding and teaching of the song of Solomon. There's a couple of others, but we'll get to those on the next round.

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