

The bride is ready



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I dedicate this book to all those who want a sincere and intimate relationship with God and, despite the struggles and temptations, keep the flame of a so intense and complete love burning until His coming.

I thank the Lord for His unchanging love that manifested itself fully through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross, showing us the unconditional way of loving Him and our fellow men.

Introduction

The title “*Song of Songs*” (*shir hashshirim*, Song 1: 1) is a superlative which means “*The best of the songs*”. It was the first of the five scrolls to be read on Jewish holidays and used during Passover.

The traditional attribution of the book to Solomon (10th century BC) is based on the references to him (Song of Songs 1: 1; 3: 7; 3: 9; 3: 11; 8: 11), especially in verse of the title (Song of Songs 1: 1). Some believe that Solomon wrote this song in his youth, before acquiring his huge harem. Others think that the book of Songs reflects the love of a young Israelite shepherd and his bride, creating the fantasy of being ‘king and queen’ for one day.

There are innumerable interpretations, but little agreement among scholars as to its origin, meaning and purpose. The rabbinic and Christian allegorical interpretations raised the poems in the book above the sensual level.

The two main characters are Solomon and the young Shulammitte. Having taken her from her home in the north of Israel and brought her to Jerusalem, Solomon ended up for loving her as his wife with a fondness that was lifted much above the physical attraction. The word shulammitte (*shūlammīth*: ‘complete, having perfect peace’) can be variant of shunammite, natural of Shunem (*shūnem*: ‘resting place’ or ‘storehouse’), a city in the territory of Issachar, near Jezreel (Josh. 19: 18). It was from Shunem that was brought the beautiful Abishag to David to comfort him in his old age. Whether be Solomon the author of the work or not, certainly it shows the story of a couple in love, and not only speaks about the purity of human love, but its inclusion in the Canon (the bible) reminds us of a love that is purer than ours, God’s love (*Agape*), the love of total surrender. Thus, the book of Songs expresses the desire of the human heart to be united with God in full and complete manner. This work does not bring the revelation about the whole book of Songs in the bible, but few parts which the Holy Spirit opened my understanding to His Word.

Under this spiritual vision we can have important revelations from the Lord for His Church, for His bride, whom He hopes to find pure, without spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind, but holy and without blemish on the day of His coming (Eph. 5: 27).

Note: I write here the same words used in the NIV for the characters (‘Beloved, Lover and friends’), although the verses are drawn from New Revised Standard Version.



“Solomon’s Song of Songs”

Beloved

*“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine, your anointing oils
are fragrant, your name is perfume poured out;
therefore the maidens love you” (Song of Songs 1: 1-3).*

Friends

*“We will exult and rejoice in you;
we will extol your love more than wine;
rightly do they love you” (Song of Songs 1: 4b).*

In these verses we can already see a reference to God’s love, which is greater than the pleasures of the world, here symbolized by wine. Wine is the most common of physical stimuli, as well as symbol of artificial gratifications that the man uses to become inebriated and alienated. The joy it produces is profane. It is not a real enthusiasm of the soul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the joy of holiness that comes from above. So the beloved says that the husband’s love does not compare to anything that the world can offer.

In the second place, she says that his name (here we see a reference to Jesus, the name that is above all names) is like an ointment (‘anointing oils’, v. 3) poured on her. The ointment, very common in Ancient times, had refreshing effect, bringing relief; it was usually kept in vessels of alabaster and decreased the skin dryness and irritation caused by heat. The aromatic ointments were used as a cosmetic. Usually those who prepared them were the priests or perfumers. The holy anointing oil of the priests was composed of olive oil, myrrh, cinnamon, calamus and cassia. According to this reasoning, the name of Jesus brings refreshment to our lives as an ointment that is poured to ease the pain and the spiritual and emotional irritations that hit us.

The friends repeat the words of the bride in another way, reinforcing the idea that complete joy is found in the presence of the groom, not in the worldly pleasures, and that the love of God remains, it is never forgotten.



Beloved

*"I am black and beautiful,
 O daughters of Jerusalem,
 like the tents of Kedar,
 like the curtains of Solomon.
 Do not gaze at me because I am dark,
 because the sun has gazed on me.
 My mother's sons were angry with me;
 they made me keeper of the vineyards,
 but my own vineyard I have not kept!
 Tell me, you whom my soul loves,
 where you pasture [NIV, graze] your flock,
 where you make it lie down at noon;
 for why should I be like one who is
 veiled beside the flocks of your companions?"*

Lover

*"If you do not know, O fairest among women,
 follow the tracks of the flock, and pasture
 your kids beside the shepherds' tents" (Song of Songs 1: 5-8).*

The beloved talks about the fact of she is dark, for she was exposed to the sun, keeping vineyards. Here we have many lessons. In the first place, there are several meanings to vineyard or vine in the bible. The vine is a symbol of prosperity and peace, a symbol of divine favor. It is also a symbol of the chosen people who were taken out of Egypt and planted in a land promised by God. It means the union of Christ and His church, as He refers in Jn. 15: 5, by saying that He is the true vine and we are the branches. Here in Song of Songs, especially in this text, the vine can symbolize the body of the beloved and her love for the lover, as well as her soul that she gave in the hands of others before (his brothers) and for some reason forced her to take care of the vineyards of the family. Metaphorically speaking, her family connections could be sick and she felt responsible for taking care of her relatives, neglecting herself. She says she was dark because the sun burned her ('because the sun has gazed on me'), but she was still beautiful and fair. She was shy before society because girls with darker faces were those who had to work under full sun, in the fields or vineyards. The most privileged young ladies could be recognized by the lighter skin of their faces. She refers to her color as the tents of Kedar, which is an area of the Arabian desert where the tents of Bedouins were generally made from the skins of black male goats. Spiritually, for us, this means that the tan skin symbolizes our sin, before we were rescued by Jesus. Though tainted by sin and impure, the King found us and threw His great love on us through which we will be perfected. Before being Jesus' we did not give value to our spiritual appearance, to our soul and even to our body, being slaves of worldly passions and desires of others about us.

Then, she asks her lover where he pastures his flock and where he makes it lie down at noon so that she doesn't go wandering anywhere. This means that she was engaged with the love of one man and she wouldn't like to be taken for a frivolous woman, looking for peasants, so she asked her beloved shepherd where she could find him readily while he tended the sheep. Why wander through life and be led by others other than Jesus? Moreover, the verb used is to pasture ('to graze', in NIV, or 'feed', in other versions), which means, in Greek, 'to give the best of livelihoods.' She also uses the verb 'to rest' (in NIV; or 'lie down', in NRSV) which means: to rest, safety at home, in our land and in our holy temple. Thus she recognizes that the shepherd is the one to feed her with the best food and the one to give her the true rest, the peace she needs in her soul, in her inner temple. In other words, the Church needs to be certain that the Lord is always there ready to feed His sheep so that they don't stay wandering through dry places of His word of life.

The lover replies, "If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow the tracks of the flock, and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents." He sees her beautiful despite her color, because His eyes are of love for her. Thus, Christ sees us with eyes of love, not giving importance to what was gone in our lives and He does not see us with the eyes with which we see ourselves. He sees us covered by His love and His blood. In addition to tell his beloved where to find him, he gives her a similar job as his: to pasture (feed) her lambs along with other shepherds. Thus, Jesus is found where there are persons who are also willing to feed others. That's what He says to His Church: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Paraphrasing: "For where two or three are willing to pasture, there I will be shepherding them too." When the Church is willing to give the best of livelihoods to those in need, Jesus is present pasturing all with His own life.



Beloved

*"While the king was on his couch,
my nard gave forth its fragrance.
My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh
that lies between my breasts.
My beloved is to me a cluster of henna
blossoms in the vineyards of En-Gedi" (Song of Songs 1: 12-14).*

Myrrh was a perfumed ointment used by royalty to perfume the clothes of marriage. It was also used as a seductive perfume. In the opinion of the beloved, love substituted this perfume very well.

Nard is an expensive ointment and that was usually used for perfuming the hair (in this case, the beloved's hair). It means strengthening, the presence of Jesus with us every day. Thus the Church has Christ as head, bringing it strength.

The beloved also compared the lover to a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En-Gedi. Henna, which is widely used as a cosmetic to dye hair and nails, has branches covered with spines that produce clusters of whitish and fragrant flowers at the ends. En-Gedi ('en-gedhī, 'fountain of the goat') is a fountain of fresh water to the west of the Dead Sea, in the land of Judah. The fertility of this area, in the midst of a so barren region, made it appropriate for outlaws, to find food (Song of Songs 1: 14) and as a hiding place. Thus, the beloved gave such value to her husband's love as a wellspring of water in a desert and barren place, or a cluster of fragrant flower among the vineyards planted in an arid land.

Beloved

"I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys."

Lover

"As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens."

Beloved

*"As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my beloved among young men.
With great delight I sat in his shadow,
and his fruit was sweet to my taste.
He brought me to the banqueting house,
and his intention toward me was love.
Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples;
for I am faint with love.
O that his left hand were under my head,
and that his right hand embraced me!
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:
do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!
The voice of my beloved!
Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.
Look, there he stands behind our wall,*

*gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.
My beloved speaks and says to me: "*



Lover

*"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;
for now 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 its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.
O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the covert of the cliff,
let me see your face, let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."*

Beloved

*"Catch us the foxes, the little foxes,
that ruin the vineyards –
for our vineyards are in blossom.
My beloved is mine and I am his;
he pastures his flock among the lilies.
Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved,
be like a gazelle or a young stag
on the cleft mountains" (Song of Songs 2: 1-17).*

The beloved says that she is the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys. Sharon is a swamp on the Mediterranean coast, to the south of Mount Carmel. It is a place unfit for grazing (except in the southern part), for it is swampy ground; however, in a place like this the rose blooms, whose word in Hebrew is here identified with many other bulbous plants (narcissus, lily, tulip and hyacinth) and that multiplies abundantly in the Plain of Sharon. The rose symbolizes love, romance, tenderness, mild fragrance of the presence of the bride, and a common feature that can be observed in the rose, more clearly than in other flowers, is its blossom. The lily, in Palestine, is related to several varieties not specified in the translations. Most of the references in the Book of Songs, probably relates to the hyacinth, while the ‘lips like lilies’ (Song of Songs 5: 13) may allude to the red anemone or the Madonna lily (Song of Songs 6: 2), which is native to Palestine. Lily is born in the valleys, which exhibit water only during the rainy season, and reminds us of purity, simplicity and holiness (cf. Matt. 6: 28-29). So, when the beloved says she is the rose of Sharon, she identifies herself with something delicate that awakens love and exudes its scent and is able to flourish in a soil seemingly inappropriate, just because she is loved by her husband and feels safe with his presence. When she compares herself to the lily, she exalts her simplicity, purity and holiness. Thus, the Lord wants to see His Church blossoming for love, exuding its perfume to the needy of joy and beauty and dressing itself in robes of holiness, purity and simplicity, even though the circumstances around seem contrary, arid of the water of life, which is the word of God.

The beloved also compares the lover to an apple tree, symbol of wisdom. It is a tree that provides good shade, the fruit is sweet and the perfume, very popular in the East (Song of Songs 2: 3; 7: 8) where the apple (tappūah) was well known and cultivated in Ancient times, more probably by Arabs than in Palestine, due to climatic conditions. Hence, the beloved wants to stay under the apple tree, receiving the wisdom of the lover and resting in his shadow, i.e., protected by his mantle of love. Eating of his wisdom is good and does good to her, it is a true feast; thus, she asks him to take her to the banqueting house (Song of Songs 2: 4), because when we are in communion with the Lord at His table, He shares with us His power and His whole being, all He has. The banner (in NIV, but in the NRSV the word used is ‘intention’ – “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his intention toward me was love”) that is stretched over the beloved symbolizes the dominion of her husband, whom she welcomed with affection. The banner of Christ over His Church is His love, Agape Love.

The beloved tells the other women, probably those of the harem of King Solomon or the ladies of the court, about true love and tells them that sexual intimacy cannot be forced and that love and sensuality are not the same thing (“do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!”). Intimacy with God is not forced; it is the person’s own heart that awakens to a deeper relationship with Him.

In the next verse she describes the lover as a gazelle (‘young stag’) leaping upon the mountains, which means that there is no obstacle that the love of our Savior cannot surpass, and that to Him rocky mountains are like an open plain. The gazelle (young stag) is an animal that climbs hills easily and does not slip; likewise, the true love does not bring stumble or see difficulties that it cannot overcome.

Then, the lover calls his beloved and remembers her that the bad time of her life is gone; flowers and fruit of this love are starting to sprout. The beloved no longer needs to hide as a dove in the clefts of the rocks; on the contrary, the lover asks her to show her face and make him hear her voice, because he finds her beautiful and lovely, and her voice is sweet to him. This refers to the Church that the Lord does not want to see hidden or ashamed, but a Church that needs to stand up and awaken to the Lover in a

full and fervent way through prayer ('voice'), because our voice is sweet to God and our face gets illuminated when we look to Him. With the presence of Jesus, the time of darkness is over; He came to mark a new time for humankind.

The beloved recognized this time but was worried about the foxes that destroy the vineyards. Foxes and the little foxes tend to dig around the vines in flower; it means small and insignificant things that can infiltrate a beautiful marital relationship, corroding it until the vine of love is destroyed. The wife wanted these little things were caught before causing serious damage. In the relationship between God and His bride the same thing occurs, when the works of the flesh, seemly insignificant, suddenly become a sad routine, undermining love and destroying everything that took so long to be built. That's why we must be alert to stay with the fire of the Spirit burning, encouraging us to seek the Lord's presence every day and to take care of this loving relationship as it is done with the spouse.



Beloved

*"Upon my bed at night I sought
him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.
I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.
I sought him, but found him not.
The sentinels found me, as they went about in the city.
Have you seen him whom my soul loves?
Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him
whom my soul loves. I held him,
and would not let him go" (Song of Songs 3: 1-4a).*

Perhaps, a dream at night or something happened in their relationship ("foxes") that left the beloved insecure because she did not see the lover on her side and she tried desperately to find him. When she found him, she held him and didn't let him go. Many times God allows us to feel His absence so that we can be aware of the importance of His presence with us constantly. Without Him, we feel lost and without direction, without a reason to live.

Beloved

*"Until the day breathes [NIV, breaks]
and the shadows flee, I will hasten to the
mountain of myrrh and
the hill of frankincense."*

Lover

*"You are altogether beautiful, my love;
there is no flaw in you.
Come with me from Lebanon, my bride;
come with me from Lebanon.
Depart from the peak of Amana,
from the peak of Senir and Hermon,
from the dens of lions, from the
mountains of leopards.
You have ravished my heart, my sister,
my bride, you have ravished my heart
with a glance of your eyes, with
one jewel of your necklace.
How sweet is your love, my sister,
my bride! how much better is
your love than wine,
and 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.
A garden locked is my sister, my bride,
a garden locked, a fountain sealed.
Your channel [NIV, plants; ARA: sprouts]
is an orchard of pomegranates
with all choicest fruits, henna with nard,
nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,
with all trees of frankincense, myrrh
and aloes, with all chief spices –
a garden fountain, a well of living water,
and flowing streams from Lebanon!"*

Beloved

*"Awake, O north wind, and come,
O south wind! Blow upon my garden*

*that its fragrance may be wafted abroad.
Let my beloved come to his garden,
and eat its choicest fruits!" (Song of Songs 4: 6-16).*

In verse 6, the beloved says that before the day breaks (it means 'before the day ends', for at night there are no shadows), that is, in the cool of the day (when God spoke to Adam and Eve), in the early evening, at the very beginning of our problems, when everything starts to become less clear, it is time to seek healing, liberation and changing of life (myrrh) through prayer (incense) so that things do not get worse. Our prayer puts us in a greater level of intimacy with God where the transformation of our soul becomes possible and the knowledge of ourselves through His eyes heals us from wounds and the deformities of human thought.

Therefore, the lover says, "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you." He made us pure and it is with clean eyes that He sees us, covered by the blood of His Son. The human being influenced by the devil distorted the initial creation, preventing himself from living the fullness of God and enjoy His blessings. In other words, covered by the blood of Jesus we are perfect, because we become like Him; therefore, by being treated and healed by the Lord, our spiritual and emotional clothes are clean and without blemish.

In verse 8, the lover invites us to climb the heights with Him, to the hills, from where our vision is clearer and from where we can see the land that God gives us and is ready to the conquest of love that manifests and declares itself (v. 9-10). He first says, "Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards." It seems that the beloved lived with the family amid the vineyards to the north of Israel near Lebanon. Amana is one of the peaks in the Anti-Lebanon mountain range [a mountain range that extends from southeast to northeast of Lebanon about 93 miles length, being the eastern range and parallel to the massif of Mount Lebanon, which is to the west facing the Mediterranean Sea. It covers Lebanon, Syria and Israel]. Amana means firmness, treaty; in Hebrew: Amanah, symbolizing faith and trust (emunah). Hermon means sacred mountain, sanctuary (hermôn), and is the southern peak of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range with about three-thousand and seventy-seven yards high, probably the highest of them. The snow almost never disappears from its peak during the whole year, causing abundant dews in sharp contrast to the dry land of the region (Ps. 133: 3), while the melt is one of the main feeding sources of the Jordan River. Most likely, it was in the Hermon where the episode of the transfiguration of Jesus occurred, near Caesarea of Philippi. The Hermon is also called Senir (S^enir, hauberk = a long coat of mail, often sleeveless) by the Amorites, and Saniru by the Assyrians. It also called, in Deut. 4: 48, Sihon (lofty or Holy Mountain) [in NIV; in NRSV it is written Sirion (breastplate) as it was called by Sidonians and Syrians]. When the bible speaks of the 'dens of the lions' and the 'mountains of the leopards', the Jewish tradition assigns it to Sihon (king of Heshbon) and Og (king of Bashan), who had the arrogance and the power of the lions. They both were Amorites, the inhabitants of north and northeast of Israel. Thus, the lover calls his beloved to come with him to the high mountains, for the view from above is clear and allows them to see the whole land. Likewise, Jesus calls His Church to see things 'from above', to have the spiritual vision, not carnal, so that the beloved can look more clearly the heritage that He left to her. The Church can be sure of the power that was delegate to it, and of the abundance and fertility of the land which belongs to it by divine right. It is from the top

of Hermon, from the sanctuary, the sacred, that the living waters flow to nourish our land.

From verse 11, some quotations are made about fragrances and spices and are relevant to the kind of attitude that the Lord expects of His bride, the Church.

The anointing is like a shield that covers us completely so that the evil has no power to touch us. The word 'anointed' and the act of anointing with oil (Mashach) refers to the custom of anointing with oil to consecrate and sanctify things or people. The anointing oil represents the Holy Spirit (Ruach haKodesh) or the Spirit of God (Ruach Elohim). Mashach gives origin to Mashiach (Messiah), the Anointed One. Ruach means 'spirit', 'wind'. 'Holy' or 'Saint' (Hagios, Greek) means 'sacred, pure, blameless, consecrated, set apart, worthy of being honored, to be like God, to have the inmost nature of God, be separated and reserved to God and for His service'. He wants to see this characteristic in us, so He says, "Be holy because I am holy." Just as He is clear and convey us security, because He is faithful to what He says, He wants us to be like Him, so that others can see Him through us.

In verse 11 the lover says, "Your lips distill nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon." Honey speaks of healing and love, sweetness. It means that in our tongue, in our mouth, the Lord expects word of healing and love to raise who is wounded and fallen. Milk speaks of food and abundance. Likewise, the word of God in our mouth should be abundant food for the hungry. Our spiritual clothes should have the fragrance of the cedars and spices of Lebanon. It is famous because of its covering of dense forest. Ample rainfall from November to March and the mountains of limestone give rise to many wellsprings and streams. To the south of the mountains there are cultivation of gardens, olive groves, vineyards and orchards of fruit (mulberries, figs, apples, apricots, walnuts) and small fields of wheat. The forest vegetation is of myrtle, conifers and huge cedars; therefore, Lebanon is a symbol of fertility and of taking benefit and enjoyment of life and of a plantation, of taking advantage of the fruit. The fragrance of the dresses of the beloved is presented to the lover as the smell of the forests and of the fruit of the orchards. Symbolically, our garments must show the joy, the scent of Jesus and God's prosperity wherever we go.

In verse 13 he speaks that our plants, that is, what sprouts in our lives should be like an orchard of pomegranates. The pomegranate fruit is very well known and popular in the East and it becomes syrup, juice and astringent remedy. This means that our attitudes and our words should serve as a remedy for diseased hearts.

Henna is used as a cosmetic to dye hair and paint nails. So, our words and our testimony of life must beautify the lives of everyone.

Nard means: God's presence with us every day, worship to the Lord, strengthening. It was with nard that Mary the sister of Lazarus anointed Jesus in Bethany (Jn. 12: 1-8). Jesus wants to be with us every day, so that others may also know Him.

Saffron is therapeutic, besides of dyeing food. As therapy it is antispasmodic, that is, it takes away the cramps and spasms. The Egyptians used saffron to color the shrouds of mummies. What does this mean for us? It means that the word of God in our mouth takes away the pain and paints the lives of those who are "blue" and have no reason to exist.

Calamus (Greek, Kalamos) means cane, slender reed. It is a root known as 'Sweet Flag.' It only exudes perfume when the root is broken. It was of Calamus (reed) the basket of Moses, when he was placed as a baby in the river Nile. It represents the price that Jesus paid for our redemption, reverence to the Lord, return to the roots, renewal of alliances, humility. It means that we must depend on the Lord as children that need to

grow and be taught; that from time to time, we need to renew our covenant of loyalty and commitment with Him. The anointing of calamus also means that we must be “broken” by God, be worked by Him in our interior so that His essence can be exuded through us. It is part of the holy anointing oil of the priests.

Cinnamon is the bark of a trunk that is restored every season. It’s the same family as the laurel tree and cassia. It means fear of God, ransom, restoration of personal things and not to make again the same mistakes of the past. The cinnamon is like a bush, coming from the Far East. As it is macerated (peel and seeds) into powder, it is a prophetic picture of the acceptance of Jesus Christ in His death and cross. It represents our approach to Jesus in humility, stripping us of our flesh, making us more like Him, as well as peace and love at home. Cassia, along with aloe and myrrh (Ps. 45: 7-8), composes the oil of joy. Aloe should have at least thirty years of age to produce oil, and to be extracted, its trunk needs to be bruised or torn. It means ‘to hurt oneself’ as well as joy and position of glory. Therefore, to win the anointing of joy, first we must strip ourselves of the ego and be hurt by the hands of the Lord in order to remove from us what it’s not useful anymore, and extracting His precious oil from within us, that is, the best we have. Cassia means potential, nobility.

Myrrh means deliverance, healing, purification, life changing, as was also used to anoint the royal robes of marriage, as mentioned before. It was used to prepare Esther for six months, and after this, more six months with other ointments and perfumes to take her to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes, Est. 2: 12-13). Myrrh is a shrub that grows in desert regions, especially in Africa (native to Somalia and eastern parts of Ethiopia) and the Middle East. It is also the name given to the oily resin of reddish-brown color obtained from the dried sap of this tree (*Commiphora myrrha* or *Balsamodendron myrrha*). The word originates from the Hebrew, *maror* or *murr*, which means bitter, so it’s bitter and often used in the bible as a synonym for gall or poison. It has the power to anaesthetize and take away the pain, so it was offered to Jesus on the cross. In Prov. 31: 6-7 it is written, “Give strong drink to one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.” The strong drink refers to the wine of high alcohol content mixed with myrrh given by Jewish women to the sentenced to cross so that they could withstand the punishment and suffering. In Ps. 69: 21, a prophetic psalm of David, there is another reference to the myrrh: “They gave me poison [NIV, gall] for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

Myrrh, Calamus, Cassia, Cinnamon and olive oil (= anointing and God’s provision for a purpose), are part of the holy anointing oil with which only the priests were anointed (Ex. 30: 22-33). This means that the Lord has anointed us with joy, love, nobility, purpose and humility, fear of the Lord and redemption, deliverance and healing so that we may be balm and soothe the pains of the afflicted and the hopeless, lifting them to a new level.

In Song of Songs 4: 15 the poet says, “a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.” The Church is the fountain of life, carrying the renewing waters of the Spirit, a locked garden and a sealed fountain (v.12) where no impurity enters, only the holiness of God through which the Spirit works in us.

In v.16 the poet mentions the north wind and the south wind. The north wind cleans the air, it is fresh and humid, it has beneficial qualities. The south wind is the one that heats and ripens the crops. The Bible also mentions in other books the west wind (Ex. 10: 19 – the locusts), which brings heavy rain; and the eastern wind or east wind (Hos. 12: 1), which is very dry, causes the herbs to wrinkle and wither. “Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be wafted

abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits” (Song of Songs 4: 16).



Beloved

*“I slept, but my heart was awake.
Listen! my beloved is knocking.”*

Lover

*“Open to me, my sister,
my love, my dove, my perfect one;
for my head is wet with dew,
my locks with the drops of the night.”*

Beloved

*“I had put off my garment;
how could I put it on again?
I had bathed my feet;
how could I soil them?
My beloved thrust his hand into the opening,
and my inmost being yearned for him.
I arose to open to my beloved,
and my hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers with liquid myrrh,
upon the handles of the bolt.
I opened to my beloved, but
my beloved had turned and was gone.
My soul failed me when he spoke.
I sought him, but did not find him;
I called him, but he gave no answer.
Making their rounds in the city
the sentinels found me;*

*they beat me, they wounded me,
they took away my mantle,
those sentinels of the walls.
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
if you find my beloved, tell him this:
I am faint with love" (Song 5: 2-8).*

Even the passions and delights of love cannot protect the lovers from the pains of life. When passion decreases, disappointment may come and brings coldness in the relationship; to be healthy, it needs to be continually nourished. Probably there was a separation and he came looking for her again, but she was so sleepy (it may mean a normal sleep or she was oblivious to what was happening) that she did not respond to him; then he was gone and now it was her turn to go to him again. The beloved, in this case, may be reporting a dream she had, or talking about something that truly separated them, turning her life into a nightmare. Without the security of the lover on her side, everything was distorted and she felt affronted and abused.

Likewise, what Jesus tells us is that we need to nourish our relationship with Him and not let anything cool down this love, because if He is away and we're oblivious to His presence trying reconciliation, we can let Him escape again, for He feels unrequited. So, it will be our turn to seek Him to resume the relationship. Without the assurance of His love with us or with hurt or resentment in our hearts, things become distorted in our minds and we begin to see 'ghosts' or live the violence of Satan, who acts on those who go astray from the paths of the Lord. The beloved demonstrates the desperation of her search and her loneliness, begging for someone to help her to find her beloved again. Hence the brothers in Christ ("Daughters of Jerusalem") are important at this time to lead back the lost to the communion with Jesus, in love and compassion for the suffering of the other.



Friends

*"Where has your beloved gone,
O fairest among women?
Which way has your beloved turned,
that we may seek him with you?"*

Beloved

*"My beloved has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,
to pasture his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine;
he pastures his flock among the lilies."*

Lover

*"You are beautiful as Tirzah,
my love, comely [NIV, lovely] as Jerusalem,
terrible [NIV, majestic] as an army with banners" (Song of Songs 6: 1-4).*

Here is an encounter again, because the daughters of Jerusalem were willing to help the beloved. In fact, she knows where to find him; she remembered the garden where the lover often tends the sheep and she reaffirms her fidelity to him. She says, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." She does not deny her salvation in Christ; she knows that, even if they were temporarily away from each other, she will always be His and nothing can separate them again. The lover's response shows his willingness to always love and forgive, because he calls her beautiful and lovely, even if it was she that had made a mistake in the couple relationship. The Lord is always ready to welcome us back and He wants us to always be sure that we are His. We cannot let ourselves be deceived by what tries to make us feel rejected and separated from Jesus. Lies cannot break the certainty of true love. There is one more thing to be said about this verse. When the beloved says, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine," this also means something for us, that is, after the great battles we face, we must rest to regain our strength. But it's not in any place. Our place is with the lover [the term used by NIV], where there is balm ('spices'), peace and holiness (lily reminds us of purity, simplicity and holiness). Thus, our place is in the heart of God where we find holiness, i.e., where the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin and everything that dirtied our garments in confrontation with the world's wars, in our day by day. The balm heals our wounds and strengthens our faith again. It is in the heart of God that we find not only the forgiveness we need, but the protection against those who want to destroy us. Samson felt this protection in the rock of Etam. In the story of Elijah the prophet, after the victory over the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, he fled the death threat issued by Queen Jezebel and hid in a cave on Mount Horeb, and there God spoke to him and comforted him. All of them and the beloved were renewed after resting in God's presence. This can be compared to the life cycle of the butterfly. After eating a lot and create food reserves, the caterpillar is ready to turn into a chrysalis, i.e., a cocoon which is a covering composed of a material like silk. The cocoon is hung on a leaf, upside down, and during this time the pupae feed themselves on their reserves and supplement their diet by absorbing the nectar of flowers and fruit juices. After a period of time that can vary from two weeks to three months depending on the species, the chrysalis becomes a beautiful butterfly. Comparing with us, even if we have to stay a few days in our cocoon, in the privacy and the protection of God, when we are restored, then we'll be ready to be beautiful butterflies and return to our chores.

Lover

*“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 is like an ivory tower.
 Your eyes are 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!
 You are stately as a palm tree,
 and your breasts are like its clusters.
 I say I will climb the palm tree
 and lay hold of its branches.
 O may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
 and the scent of your breath like apples,*

Beloved

*and your kisses like the best wine
 that goes down smoothly,
 gliding over lips and teeth.
 I am my beloved's,
 and his desire is for me” (Song of Songs 7: 1-10).*

Although this passage is referring physically to the physical attributes of the young woman, there are spiritual lessons behind the poetry. The text above comes shortly after the verse that mentions the dance of Mahanaim (Song of Songs 6: 13). Wedding parties had much music and dancing. It wouldn't be uncommon for guests to observe the bride, the center of attention, dancing at celebrations. In this case, the bride danced for the husband, and he described her graceful shapes. Others seek the original use of the word Mahanaim to show that it can be a dance of angels (Gen. 32: 1-2). Mahanaim (Mah^anayin, in Hebrew) means two camps or two armies. Gilead was the place where Jacob saw the angels of God, before arriving to Peniel and meet Esau.

The lover talks about the beauty of the steps of the young woman with her sandals. This, spiritually, means to walk gracefully, with the wisdom and authority (sandals) of the Lord, with the agility of a maiden who is dancing, that is, God's love is the vehicle that makes the action of the Church graceful in the exercise of authority and wisdom.

Then he praises the rounded thighs of his beloved who dances for him. When she moves and her hips move in circles (like necklaces handled with care, sensibility and perfection by the hands of an artist) this makes him glad. Likewise, our wise, gentle and caring movements in the presence of the Lord, seeking the lost, healing the wounded, feeding the poor and showing our praise to Him spontaneously, bring Him joy.

When He talks about the navel that never lacks mixed wine, symbolically He speaks of cup, the 'vessel of our spirit' filled with the Holy Spirit. He also speaks of our spirit reborn, of the renewal of the covenant, of the new birth, of our new 'umbilical cord' attached to Him, not to things of the flesh anymore.

Then the lover says the belly of the maiden is a heap of wheat. There is something interesting with wheat: it is a very important cereal for feeding humanity. It produces a more delicious bread and better than that produced by any other cereal. It is a very important part of the diet of the children of Israel. Because of its importance as food, it appears in Scripture as a symbol of goodness and provision of God. It was used as a grain offering in worship at the temple. One grain gives rise to many new ears of wheat, demonstrating spiritual fructification. The same way the original grain is consumed, Jesus sets an example (Jn. 12: 24: "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit") that the spiritual fructification has its origin in the death of the self. In the NT the wheat is symbolic of God's children, in contrast to the children of the evil one (Matt. 13: 38 – 'weeds' or 'darnel'). Therefore, the womb of the maiden was seen as fertile, fruitful and able to beget many children. Lilies may symbolize her charm, as well as purity and holiness; thus, her children would be generated in holiness and raised in a pure way.

The lover also says that her two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. If we lead the interpretation to the physical side, we can understand that the fawns of gazelles were soft and warm. So her breasts could symbolize something comfortable. Spiritually speaking, breasts symbolize the source of spiritual and material sustenance, because the Jews relate them to the time of the temple, to the king and the high priest, who ruled the people together with equal authority (twins of gazelle); the king supplying the physical needs, and the priest, the spiritual ones. The Lord provides His bride, materially and spiritually speaking, and expects her to do the same with His children so that the Bridegroom rejoices in her.

As to the neck of the beloved, it is compared to an ivory tower, for the Jews a reference to the sanctuary and the altar that stood straight and tall as an ivory tower, providing spiritual strength and protection.

The girl's eyes are compared to the pools in Heshbon, which reflected a dark and mysterious beauty, for Heshbon was located within the tribe of Reuben, before belonging to the Amorites, the land called "of iron" to be of basalt, therefore, of black and dark color. These natural pools left water with dark and mysterious look, because one could not see what was in the bottom. Therefore, the lover looked at the girl's dark eyes, saw his brightness as the waters of the swimming pools, but acknowledged that there were still some things she had not revealed to him. As Church, our eyes ('the mirror of our souls') should reflect the brightness of the Lord, as well as we show in them the mystery of salvation to be unveiled by those who are still in darkness and need to have His revelation.

Her nose was compared with the tower of Lebanon, meaning that there was elegance in it, as there should be prominent appearance, eminence, elegance on the contours of the tower. As a tower was local of defense and vigilance, symbolizing spiritually our communion with God, who warns us of the strategies and attacks against our lives, the nose can also warn us of something wrong, freeing us from danger like fire or toxic odors, in the same way that enables us to perceive the scent of a delicate flower or enjoyable foods; it allows us to feel spiritually the fragrance of Christ close to us through the brothers.

The girl's hair is like Mount Caramel, that is, her hair was as luxuriant as the abundant vegetation of Mount Caramel. The bride, the Church, should have an attractive and abundant hair, for hair in the bible can be symbol of the spiritual covering of God over our lives, as well as His anointing (see Samson's case).

The lover also praised his beloved's poise, stately like a palm tree. In Hebrew, the word for palm tree is Tāmār which means victory and exultation, grace and elegance. This is what the Lord expects of His church: positioning itself elegantly with strength, victory and joy for its salvation and the power He delegated to it.

The next verses, which poetically convey the idea of a sexual intercourse, give us spiritually, the meaning of to expand ('branches') and fructify, to be a source of supply, joy, prosperity and blessings of God ('clusters'). It is the purpose of Jesus for His bride.

The biblical text written above ends up again, with the declaration of exclusive fidelity and the need to be together: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me" (the word desire may sound like "jealous of me" because the Holy Spirit is jealous of us, as written in the very word of God, "Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, 'God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?'" – Jam. 4: 5).



Lover

*"Under the apple tree I awakened you.
There your mother was in labor with you;
there she who bore you was in labor.*

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death,
passion fierce [NIV, jealousy unyielding] as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame.*

*Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.
If one offered for love all the wealth*

of one's house, it would be utterly scorned."

Friends

"We have a little sister, and she has no breasts.

*What shall we do for our sister,
on the day when she is spoken for?
If she is a wall, we will build upon
her a battlement [NIV, tower] of silver;
but if she is a door, we will enclose
her with boards of cedar."*

Beloved

*"I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers;
then I was in his eyes as one who brings peace
[NIV, like one bringing contentment]" (Song of Songs 8: 5b-10).*

The lover reminds the beloved that He awakened her under the apple tree where his mother was in pain, in labor with her. This means that the Lord reminds us to return 'to mother', to the roots, the origins, from where He redeemed us with His wisdom and infinite love. So we can praise Him for His salvation in our lives. It could also mean the first covenant made with the people on Mount Sinai ('mother'), where they, newly freed of Egypt, still remembered the pain of slavery.

He tells her to set him as a seal upon her heart and upon her arm because her loyalty to him and his mark on her must reach not only her soul, her feelings, but her way to act from then on. Arms speak of embrace, to love, to grab, to win, to reach and release. That's all the Lord expects of His Church: that it knows how to love its fellow men, to comfort the sad, to conquer its land, to grab its blessings, to reach His holy goals for it and to release those who are tied in the chains of impossibilities. God will act through our arms. His Spirit will use our bodies to accomplish His sovereign plans.

The lover mentions the power of love, but underscores the hardness of jealousy as the grave. It means that in a sincere relationship of love and trust there is a great strength, which makes the lovers indestructible; however, where distrust and jealousy are present, there is a chain, an impediment to the flow of love, because jealousy holds them in the chains, in a tomb; jealousy does not let the arms and the hearts free to show love. The Lord wants that in His love we may be strong, but if we act selfishly, our love will not flow, nor His. If we serve other gods or neglect fidelity to Him, provoking Him to jealousy, we'll also experience His wrath instead of His love, and we will find ourselves dead as in a grave. Love is life; hate, jealousy and separation bring death.

Jesus assures us that the waters and the rivers of affliction that the enemy puts in our emotions through discouraging and destructive words cannot ever quench the flame of His love in our hearts, for His love is compared to a raging flame. And if someone wanted to buy His love he would be utterly scorned because His love is priceless, cannot be bought; it is won by the faith of a pure soul and completely surrendered to Him, a soul exclusively faithful and that believes in His sacrifice on the cross.

The friends refer to a sister who has no breasts yet (defenses, supplies). Humanly speaking, it may be a reference to a virgin who had just arrived at the palace to be prepared as a bride or concubine of Solomon (as Esther to Ahasuerus). The bride, on the contrary, by being the king's favorite, feels secure and mature. Spiritually speaking, the 'little sister' may be a reference to an immature church and without defenses. Jesus will come to fetch His Church, that is, all who accept Him as Lord and Savior, and sanctify themselves to Him. The day the 'little sister' is asked (the day of the second coming of Jesus), if it has purity and exclusive separation to Him, it will be built upon her a silver tower. Silver is the second of the noble metals after gold. It does not stain in a pure atmosphere, and can be polished to reflect like a mirror. The refining process can mean obedience to God. The silver tower means greater closeness to God grounded on obedience, reflecting the perfect communion with Him.

So, if the immature Church grew spiritually and is found faithful, separated, unstained (NIV, unpolluted – Jam. 1: 27), its intimacy with God will be full and complete. If it is still a door (it talks about authority, opening, vulnerability and need for protection or defense against the enemy), it will be needed enclose it with boards of cedar. Cedar is a symbol of majesty and power. It is a wood that is appreciated because of its durability. It also symbolizes the stature of a man, because the trees can reach forty meters high. In short, if it remains immature, the Church will still need to be strengthened.

The mature and prepared beloved says she's a wall, that is, she proclaim her loyalty and her exclusive separation; she also says that her breasts are like towers, that is, she watches, she has defenses, she is a fortress, she enjoys close proximity with God, she enjoys His fellowship and He warns her of attacks and gives her strategies. Being so, the lover can trust her and she brings Him contentment and peace.



Beloved

*"My vineyard, my very own, is for myself; you,
O Solomon, may have the thousand,
and the keepers of the fruit two hundred!"*

Lover

*"O you who dwell in the gardens,
my companions are listening for your voice; let me hear it."*

Beloved

*“Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle
or a young stag upon the mountains of spices!” (Song of Songs 8: 12-14).*

The vineyard belonging to the beloved is the inheritance of the kingdom of God, where everything is available to her for being faithful. In this text, Solomon is the figure of Jesus and He will have His reward (thousand pieces) as well as we that keep His vineyard until His coming, we'll have ours. The lover calls the beloved that dwells in the gardens, namely, His Church in every nation on earth, to proclaim the gospel to those who still do not know Him and who are listening to its voice. The wife longs for the coming of the Bridegroom that comes to rescue her where the aroma of His love is present. She compares him again to the gazelle or the young stag (Song of Songs 2: 9) because the true love does not bring stumble nor see difficulties that it cannot overcome. “Mountains of spices” again alludes to Lebanon (where are the mountains mentioned in Song of Songs 4: 8) and the spices (Song of Songs 8: 13-14), that is, the high places where God dwells eternally, where there is perfect communion, where His gifts are present and flow freely and where the beloved, the bride, will be out of reach of the enemy.

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

