

SONG OF SONGS: INCREASING APPRECIATION OF AND RESTRAINT IN MATTERS OF LOVE

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The history of interpretation regarding the Song of Songs indicates two primary perspectives: the allegorical, developed as a means of coping with the erotic content of the Song;¹ and the literal, which seeks to do justice to the Song by taking the words at face value.² Moderate views recognize the Song's ability to reflect but not be confined to the relationship between God and his people (cf. Ps 45; Eph 5:23-28), as well as its ability to stir the emotions related to sexual relationships between men and women (Prov 5:19; 1 Cor 7:1-5).

The stanza "I adjure you, Daughters of Jerusalem, by the does or by the gazelles, that you do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases" (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)³ reflects the overall tone of the Song and supports the perspective that the Song of Songs is a beautiful, rich, yet compact presentation of the Bible's teaching on human sexuality.⁴ The purpose of this paper is to examine the details of the stanza, view it in context with the rest of the Song, and compare it with similar language and concepts found elsewhere in Scripture.

¹Martin Luther expressed an opinion against allegorical interpretations, yet suggested his own in the introduction to his commentary *Song of Solomon*: "[W]e take it [Song] up in order that after the absurd opinions which have so far obscured this little book have been rejected, we may demonstrate another, more suitable view, useful for life and for a right appreciation of the good gifts of God. . . . For we shall never agree with those who think it is a love song about the daughter of Pharaoh beloved by Solomon" (in *LW*, ed. Jaroslav Pelkian [St. Louis: Concordia, 1971], 15:94).

²See R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 259-263.

³Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the author.

⁴This "compact" teaching and representation could be called "parabolic," and is described as such by T. E. Fountain: "The parabolic treatment of the Song stands approximately midway between the allegorical and the typical, and regards the various sections of the book as illustrative of spiritual truth without calling undue attention to its details" ("A Parabolic View of the Song of Solomon," *Bulletin of the ETS* 9/2 [1966]: 98). It is interesting to note that scholars who regard Song from an allegorical perspective also see the didactic purpose. For example, A. L. Newton writes: "Distinct lessons of Christian experience are in each case brought before us, divinely adapted to different stages of the Christian life" (*Song of Solomon* [New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1858], 67).

Song of Songs 2:7; 3:5; 8:4

"I Adjure You" (הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי)

The word for "adjure" or "swear" (שבַּע) is used five times in the Song, each time in the hiphil or causative form, meaning that someone is being called upon to take an oath. The word occurs three times in the same formula (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), although in 3:5 it is not preceded by the description of the lover's embrace, and in 8:4 the phrase "by the does or by the gazelles" is not used.

The other two occurrences of שבַּע ("to adjure") are found in 5:8, 9, where the daughters of Jerusalem are admonished not to stir up love, but to swear that they will carry a message to the lover that the beloved is lovesick. In the case of 2:7; 3:5; and 8:4, the admonition "to swear" comes immediately after the lovers are united. In 5:8-9, however, it falls between the invitation to pursue and the consummation (see Appendix A). The lover came to the beloved's door, but the beloved took too long to answer and the lover has gone. The beloved, who pursues her lover, is found by the city watchmen. Whereas in 3:3 she passed the watchmen and immediately found her lover, this time the watchmen abuse her. In a state of distress, the beloved asks the maidens to convey her message of lovesickness to her lover. In response, the maidens ask her to justify her request. After giving an extended description of her lover (5:10-16), the maidens indicate their willingness to help the beloved by offering to search for the lover (6:1). The only remedy for the beloved's lovesickness is the company of her lover (6:2-3).⁵

The five occurrences of שבַּע ("to adjure") in the Song are the same in that the maidens are involved in the life of the beloved and in her relationship with the lover. Further, the overall basis of the admonition "to adjure" is the same in all usages, cautioning the maidens in regard to the perils of love. The occurrences in chapter 5, however, are different from those found in 2:7; 3:5; and 8:4 in that in 5:8, 9, the beloved asks for the maidens' assistance in terms of sympathy and attempted resolution. That the maidens are asked to help is evident from the beloved's request, as well as from the content of their second response: "Where has your Lover gone . . . that we may look for him with you?" (6:1).

Thus there is a dual purpose in the Song. The maidens (and reader) are given reason to wonder why a lover would have such an effect on a beloved. Love is shown to be a powerful force, as the description of

⁵Here one cannot be certain whether the beloved's description is of a desired or a realized state. Either way, she has resolved the condition of her lovesickness in the company of the lover.

the lover demonstrates and as the conclusion of the Song states explicitly: "for love is as strong as death" (8:6). Thus caution and chasteness are to be observed in order to maintain love as a positive force, so that one might not have regrets.

The word *שבע* is used 180 times outside of the Song of Songs.⁶ Only eighteen of those instances occur in the OT poetic books. In each of these instances, the word is never used in a figurative or metaphorical sense.⁷ For example, Ps 89 (vv. 4, 36, 50) records God's swearing to be gracious to Abraham and making promises concerning the seed (savior) of his chosen people to David. In Pss 15:4 and 119:106, faithful, godly, enduring men are described in terms of their swearing to do right regardless of the difficulty or consequences. Thus a consistent nonfigurative, nonmetaphorical usage of *שבע* in the poetic books supports the thesis that the Song has a purpose beyond a merely artistic description of love; there are other aspects of a loving relationship which one must be aware of and equipped to manage.

The particular importance of the hiphil form of *שבע* ("to adjure") may be elucidated by comparing it with imperatives (see Appendix B). While it is obvious that some imperatives are used in a figurative sense (e.g., "come, South wind, blow on my garden," 4:16) and that others may be understood as metaphorical (e.g., "catch us the foxes," 2:15), the majority of imperatives are used in a literal sense. The Song employs imperatives to express real desires (2:10; 7:12) and real cautions (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). It may also be seen that the imperatives, along with the narrative portions of the book, form the framework and help to advance the thought of the figurative/descriptive portions not unlike a romance novel or romantic movie that requires real circumstances and issues to form a meaningful setting for the more artistic portrayals of, for example, love and emotion.⁸ Thus as the reader identifies with the

⁶The LXX consistently translates *שבע* with *ὀρκίζω*, which reflects the sense of causing someone to take an oath. There are three exceptions to this translation: Gen 24:3 (*ἐξορκιῶ*), Josh 2:17, 20 (with the copulative verb and *ὄρκος*), and 1 Sam 20:17 (*ὀμώσω*).

⁷Pss 15:4; 24:4; 63:12; 89:4, 36, 50; 95:11; 102:9; 110:4; 119:106; 132:2, 11; Eccl 9:2; and Song.

⁸For examples of the function of the imperatives in advancing and forming a framework, see Song 1:4ff.; 1:6ff.; 2:8, 10, 14ff.; 4:8, 16ff.; 7:8ff.; 7:11, 12ff.; 8:4ff. Questions also serve this function, as at 5:9ff.; 6:1ff. Robert Alter comments on the subject of "narrative progression" in the Song: "[I]n the Song of Songs there are whole poems in which all semblance of semantic equivalence between versets is put aside for the sake of narrative concatenation from verset to verset and from line to line (*The Art of Biblical Poetry* [New York: Basic, 1985], 187).

lover/beloved or with the daughters of Jerusalem, these imperatives also have an effect on him or her. The imperatives found in 2:7; 3:5; and 8:4 are, like the others, only more striking as they issue a general command of caution rather than a specific one that would apply only if a person were actually (or even imagining oneself) in one of the situations described in the Song.

“Daughters of Jerusalem” (בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם)

Before examining the function of the maidens or “daughters of Jerusalem” (בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם), the occurrence and use of the phrase in the rest of the OT must be evaluated. Three important functions of בָּנוֹת (“daughters of”) may be noted: the phrase may simply describe some of the inhabitants (female) of an area (Isa 49:22); it may have a negative connotation of women who are wayward and would lead others astray (Gen 6:1-2; Isa 3:16-17); and it may literally mean the young eligible maidens of an area (e.g., Judg 21:21, where the men of Benjamin are instructed to catch the young girls of Shiloh and take them as brides).

It seems that the term should be taken literally, unless the context provides a reason for understanding it as a negative representation or as meaning all the inhabitants of, for example, Jerusalem. In the Song, then, the young maidens are friends of the beloved, who participate in her desire for and pursuit of a husband and who are expected to learn from the experience. In fact, one may even see all three aspects of the term בָּנוֹת (“daughters of”) in the Song. First, there are literal maidens who interact with the beloved. Second, the lessons of the Song are to keep them from becoming negative examples of womanhood. Third, every reader is to learn lessons along with the maidens.

The term בָּנוֹת (“daughters of”) is used eleven times in the Song. The function of this group can be described or arranged in various ways. Two possibilities will be presented here.

The first method of arrangement considers most specifically the function of the daughters in the Song. In relation to both lover and beloved, they act as a confirming voice: for the beloved in 1:4 c, d, e, and 3:6-11 (“we rejoice and delight in you, we praise your love more than wine”); for the lover in 1:11, 6:13 (“we will make you earrings of gold with studs of silver”); and possibly in 7:1-7. The daughters also act as a point of comparison: for the beloved in 2:2 (“like a lily among the thorns is my darling among the maidens”); for the lover in 3:10 (“the interior of his coach was lovingly crafted by the daughters of Jerusalem”).

Additionally, the daughters act as a sounding board ("I am dark yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem. . . [D]o not look at me because I am dark," 1:5-7), counselors ("if you do not know, follow the tracks of the sheep," 1:8),⁹ and are students only of the beloved (cf. 2:7; 3:5, 11; 8:4). It is with this last category, as students or objects of a certain lesson, that the reader can most easily identify. This admonition seems most appropriate for a young woman who is becoming interested in the subject of love.¹⁰

A second method of arrangement is according to the intention of the beloved in regard to the daughters. Headings such as "Help me find/pursue/admire my lover!" (e.g., 1:4, 7-8), "Help me manage my feelings for my lover" (e.g., 5:8-9; 6:1), or "Learn from my experiences" (e.g., 2:7; 3:5; 8:4) may be used, with the imperatives acting as a framework for the plot.

The function of the daughters is consistent with a drama, which usually includes a person or group of people who serve two functions. First, they are involved with and learn from the beloved (i.e., the leading lady).¹¹ Second, they represent the audience and provide a means for the author to get his point across. In other words, without the daughters and the *hiphil* שבע ("to adjure") issued to them, the reader would be left alone to discern the lesson that is often hidden behind ambiguous language.¹²

"By the Gazelles or by the Does of the Field"

(בַּצְבָּאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה)

The term "gazelle" (צבי) occurs five times in the Song. It is used as a basis of comparison for the lover (2:9), for the beloved's breasts (4:5;

⁹It could be argued that this instruction is given by the lover since he may have been present when the words of v. 7 were addressed to him.

¹⁰Such an understanding of the intended and proper use of this material is entirely contrary to the thinking of ancient commentators such as Jerome, who wrote to one mother that she should keep this book away from her daughter as long as possible (cited in M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs* [New York: Doubleday, 1977], 119).

¹¹The poetry of the Song provides a vehicle for the writer to explain, comment on, and generalize about various experiences, attempting to establish order and design as a stay against the confusion experienced in life (S. A. Johnson, "A Survey of the Literary Genre Designations of the Song of Songs in the Early Church Fathers and Twentieth Century" [Th.M. thesis, Northwest Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982], 117). Although J. H. Taylor interprets the Song allegorically, he still describes the "daughters of Jerusalem" as people who are urged by the Song to solidify their union with the groom as the beloved has done (*Union and Communion* [London: T. & T. Clark, 1926], 83-84).

¹²The history of interpretation of Song seems to indicate that a vital purpose made explicit in the admonition to the maidens has not often been considered.

7:3), and as a reference in the oath of the stanza of 2:7; 3:5; and 8:4. The particular significance of the gazelle cannot be determined from the Song, which may, in fact, be referring to one aspect in reference to the lover (leaping, bounding, approaching quickly) and in reference to the beloved (firm, soft, supple). Two other OT passages may aid in understanding the significance of the term: 2 Sam 2:18, which describes Asahel "as fleet of foot as a gazelle"; and Prov 6:5, which admonishes the one who has become security for another's debt to deliver himself from that obligation "like a gazelle." The particular significance of "gazelle" in the oath of 2:7; 3:5; and 8:4 is still uncertain.

The term "doe" (אֵילִיָּה) occurs twice in the Song: 2:7 and 3:5. Examples of other OT usage include: Gen 49:21, where Naphtali is described as "a doe let loose, he gives goodly words"; 2 Sam 22:33-34 (cf. Ps 18:33), where David confirms that "God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a doe, and sets me on my high places"; and Hab 3:19, which also affirms that "the Lord is my strength and has made my feet like doe's feet and makes me walk on my high places." It is not immediately apparent what a doe let loose has to do with goodly words (Gen 49:21), but the other references to strength and high places are concepts associated with the doe.

The LXX translates הַקֶּזֶב as ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἰσχύσεσιν τοῦ ἀγροῦ ("by the powers and forces of the field"), which seems to agree with a possible meaning in the contexts examined above and with a biblical principle of oaths.¹³ Hebrews 6:13, 16 refers to the promise God swore to Abraham: "For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, he swore by Himself. . . . For men indeed swear by the greater." This connection of oaths sworn in relation to something greater also appears in Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees (Matt 23:16-22). On the basis of this evidence, it is sensible to suggest that a love poem, which requires an oath for the restraint of "natural" forces (i.e., love), to appeal to something strong, reproductive, and representative of both male (e.g., strength and agility) and female (e.g., shape and tone) as its basis or reference point.¹⁴ Thus the importance of the gazelle and doe to the

¹³One should be cautious of missing the obvious biblical connections because of the evidence of cultic connections in extrabiblical literature and art (Pope, 385-386). Also note that the Ethiopic version of the Song of Songs agrees with the LXX, translating this as "by the strength and force of the plain" (translation cited from H. C. Gleave, *The Ethiopic Version of the Song of Songs* [London: Taylor's, 1951], 8).

¹⁴Perhaps the intended relation to men and women is revealed in the use of

oath would support the thesis that the Song, in fact, intends this admonition to be taken seriously by the reader.

“That You Do Not Stir Up Or Awaken Love”

(אִם־תִּעְרַר וְאִם־תִּעְרַר אֶת־הָאֱהָבָה)

The phrase אִם־תִּעְרַר וְאִם־תִּעְרַר אֶת־הָאֱהָבָה (“that you do not stir up or awaken love”) is an interesting construction, consisting of אִם followed by the polel imperfect of עָרַר. M. H. Pope describes this construction as a “regular use of oath formulae, the positive condition introduces a negative oath, the sanction or curse attendant on the violation of the condition being usually suppressed.”¹⁵ Thus, after an oath, אִם becomes an emphatic negative and in connection with adjurations means “that not.”¹⁶

“Until It Pleases” (עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ)

The phrase עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ (“until it pleases”) consists of the preposition עַד, followed by the relative pronoun prefixed to the qal imperfect of חָפַץ. There is disagreement about the subject and overall meaning of this verb, but, to take it in the simplest way, “love” would be the subject, meaning “do not stir up or awaken love until the natural course/expression of love can be a pleasing thing.”¹⁷ In this way, those heeding this message will avoid all the troublesome things described in the “frustration” motifs, such as the missed union and terrible consequences described in 5:2-8. The phrase is not repeated anywhere else in the OT. While the Targum seems to understand the Song in reference to Israel’s history, it does give the sense of this clause as meaning “when the time is right or favorable,” that is, so things can work out the way they should.¹⁸

“gazelle” in the masculine and “deer” in the feminine (hence, “doe”).

¹⁵Pope, 386.

¹⁶F. Brown, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), 50. Also cf. Gen 21:23; 26:29; 1 Sam 24:22; 1 Kgs 1:51.

¹⁷For a brief look at some of the various proposals of meaning, see T. Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 128.

¹⁸The Targum of the Song of Songs took the refrain at 2:7 as the words of Moses telling the children of Israel not to attempt to enter the land of Canaan until it was favorable to the Lord and all the generations who had rebelled had died (=40 years). At 3:5, the Targum offers no insight. At 8:4, it reads: “The King Messiah will say: I adjure you, my people, the House of Israel, why are you contending with the peoples of earth to get out of exile? . . . Hold yourselves back for a little while until the peoples who have

The phrase may find meaning in two motifs evident in the Song. First, it may be that "until it pleases" means to use restraint in indulging one's emotions until such a time when they may find proper and uninterrupted fulfillment. The motif of frustration can be observed at various places when the beloved is searching for the lover (1:7ff.; 5:2ff.; 5:8; 6:1ff.).¹⁹ It can also be observed in the painful consequences of the lovers' game of hide and seek (5:2-7) and the emotional condition of the beloved after failing to find the lover (5:8).

Second, this phrase may be calling to mind examples of love in Scripture that were indeed "pleasing." For example, the story of Ruth is particularly appropriate as one compares the piety and behavior of a Moabitess to the less than exemplary behavior noticeable among so many and so prominent in Israel.²⁰ The purpose of Ruth's story is defined by the fact that most of four chapters is concerned with her interaction with Boaz and the attendant blessed results (i.e., David's predecessors). What is particularly interesting for this study is the care to protect chaste behavior. In Ruth 2:8-9, Boaz charges Ruth to enter no one else's fields and mentions that he "commanded the young men not to touch [her]." Ruth 3 is entirely concerned with Naomi's advice on how to advance the relationship between Ruth and Boaz ("Blessed are you of the Lord my daughter!") and the desired outcome of security for Ruth in her "redemption" by Boaz.

The Stanza's Place within the Song

Before commenting on the significance of the repetition of this stanza, it should be noted that the Song is replete with words and concepts that occur more than once. In fact, although there are many obscure terms in the Song, there are few terms that are used only once.²¹ Nevertheless, there are at least three important features in regard to the repetition of this stanza.

First, the stanza is unique because it contains the only adjuration addressed to the daughters (and hence to the reader) that is repeated (see Appendix B).

Second, the position of the stanza places it in a climactic position

come in to wage war against Jerusalem are obliterated! After that, the Master of the world will remember on your behalf the love of the righteous; then it shall be favorable before him to liberate you."

¹⁹Alter, 199, refers to this as a "teasing game."

²⁰For example, David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11).

²¹Cf. Armstrong, 168-174, for a list of OT words that occur only in the Song.

rather than in a developmental one.²² If the Song is organized into segments characterized by initial terms describing pursuit and ending with terms of consummation or fulfillment of love, it is remarkable that in all three instances the stanza concludes a section, immediately following the consummation.²³ Of the nine sections observed, three end with this stanza. Two are followed by a return to descriptions of the beloved and lover (1:17ff.; 6:3ff.). Two are concluded by an imperative issued by the beloved for her lover to turn or come away and be, for example, like a gazelle (2:17ff.; 8:12ff.). The other two contain imperatives addressed to the daughters and call upon them to come out and look at Solomon or to eat and drink with the lover and his beloved (3:11ff.; 5:1ff.).

Thus five of the nine sections (or possibly of only seven if 1:17 and 6:3 are understood as high points within longer developments) conclude with admonitions for the daughters or, as this article argues, for the reader. Three times readers are admonished to practice restraint in terms of stirring up love. Twice they are invited to participate in the joy of the united lovers, and twice the reader is turned back into a further development of the Song by means of description. The Song intends to stir up or raise the reader's appreciation for and depth of thought regarding love. It also intends to be complete by describing the reality of frustration and problems associated with love. Therefore, the content of the stanza, its repetition, and its placement at the climax of the development of sections suggests that the admonition is real and intended as an integral purpose of the Song.²⁴ Richard M. Davidson

²²Although Taylor's outline, 26, 36, 69, does not entirely agree with mine (see Appendix C), he does see all three instances of the stanza as climaxes to sections.

²³For a tentative outline of Song, according to this structure, see Appendix C. In comparison of sections 5:2-6:3 with 2:7-3:5, J. C. Exum comments: "In each poem, the account of the man's call to the woman is followed by the motif of seeking-finding, which is resolved in 2:7-3:5 when the woman finds her lover. She holds him and refuses to release him, 3:4. In 5:2-6:3, the woman enlists the aid of the daughters of Jerusalem to find her lover and they engage in the process of finding-by-praise" ("A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs," *ZAW* 85 [1973]: 57). J. W. Jastrow argues on terms of meter that the stanza is really out of place as it stands in the Song, except in the case of 3:5. He concludes that the stanza was added by the commentator to bring about a connection between the songs (*Song of Songs* [Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1921], 228).

²⁴R. E. Murphy notes that the course of the dialogue indicates a change of scene, creating a sense of development. The beloved's "adjuration of the daughters is the climax of the scene, describing the union. . . . This is well brought out by accenting her desolate feelings without him and then, upon finding him, her rapture and determination not to lose him again. The adjuration of the daughters (3:5) is seen now to be also a device used by the author. The formula serves to round off and to close the scene (cf. 2:7; 8:4)" ("The Structure of the Canticle of Canticles," *CBQ* 11 [1949]: 383-387).

summarizes: "A whole book taken up with celebrating the wholesome beauty and enjoyment of human sexual love! . . . It speaks eloquently—perhaps most eloquently of all—of his [God's] love for his creation as it is enjoyed in harmony with the divine intention."²⁵

The Stanza's Place in Relation to All of Scripture

The OT provides a number of examples of occasions when it would have been wise not to have stirred up or awakened love because it could not be (and was not) pleasing. Love of many foreign women was expressly the downfall of Solomon himself (1 Kgs 11:1-2).²⁶ As early as Gen 6:1-2, there is, at least, an occasion for inquiry on the issue of love stirred up when no good can come of it. Regardless of the interpretation of the terms "sons of God" and "daughters of men" (Gen 6:2), it is still evident that no good came of these relations.²⁷ Genesis 34 records the incident with Dinah, in which the inhabitants of an entire city are slaughtered because one of their young men did not wait to pursue love in an appropriate manner. As Simeon and Levi articulated it: "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?" (Gen 34:31).²⁸ Genesis 38 records the death of Judah's son Onan because he "spilled his seed on the ground." While some may hold that God killed him not because of sexual conduct but because he would not raise up an heir for his brother, the law that was later given in regard to this practice argues against this position. Deuteronomy 25:5-10 stipulates what should happen in case a surviving brother does not want to raise up an heir for the one who has died. The penalty is disgrace, not death. It is evident, therefore, that the offense of Onan came in indulging himself in the

²⁵Richard M. Davidson, "Theology of Sexuality in the Song of Songs: Return to Eden," *AUSS* 27 (1989): 17-18.

²⁶On the other hand, Solomon wrote many proverbs of warning on the subject of male and female relationships. Perhaps this is why the Song is dedicated to Solomon since he was both a wise teacher on matters of love, as well as an example of the need for restraint as the Song teaches.

²⁷H. C. Leupold states: "[T]he two streams begin to commingle, and as a result moral distinctions are obliterated and the Sethites, too, become so badly contaminated that the existing world order must be definitely terminated" (*Exposition of Genesis* [Columbus: Wartburg, 1942], 249).

²⁸C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch comment: "Their [Simeon's and Levi's] indignation was justifiable enough; and their seeking revenge, as Absalom avenged the violation of his sister on Amnon (2 Sam. xiii. 2 sqq.), was in accordance with the habits of nomadic tribes. In this way, for example, seduction is still punished by death among the Arabs, and the punishment is generally inflicted by the brothers" (*Commentary on the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 1:315).

physical pleasure of love, while refusing to provide for the duty of love.²⁹ Exodus 32:6 implies that something was quite wrong with the "play" which the Israelites rose up to indulge in;³⁰ levitical law specifically addresses boundaries for male and female relations (Lev 18:1-30).³¹ Samson provides an example of the tragic consequences of stirring up a love that cannot come to any good and of refusing to wake up to the reality of that truth (Judg 16:1-31).³² A final, climatic example is found in 2 Sam 13, which records the incident between David's son Amnon and his daughter Tamar:

Amnon was so distressed over his sister Tamar that he became sick. . . . Now when she had brought them [the food] to him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, "Come lie with me, my sister." And she answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me, for no such thing should be done in Israel. Do not do this disgraceful thing! And I, where could I take my shame? And as for you, you would be like one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you" (2 Sam 13:2, 11-13).

Note the immediate consequence of Amnon's refusal to restrain his sexual desire: "Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her" (2 Sam 13:15). It is also crucial to note the extended

²⁹Leupold, 981, states: "[T]here was palpably involved the sin of a complete perversion of the purpose of marriage, that divine institution. What he [Onan] did is described as 'taking preventive measures.' The original says: 'he destroyed (i.e. the semen) to the ground.' From him the extreme sexual perversion called onanism has its name. The case is revolting enough. But plain speech in this case serves as a healthy warning."

³⁰B. S. Childs provides a note on Exod 32:6, explaining that the verb "*ksaheq* = 'to play' . . . can have a neutral sense (Gen 19:14) or a decidedly sexual connotation (Gen. 26.8; 39.14). The LXX retains a neutral sense, but most modern translations prefer the latter (NEB, NAB). This move had, of course, been long since made by the Targums (*pseudo-Jonathan, Neofiti*) and midrashim" (*The Book of Exodus* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 556).

³¹These rules about sexual activity must be kept in balance by remembering other provisions made in the law for the proper expression of physical love, for example, Deut 24:5, where a newlywed is exempt from military service for an entire year so that he may be free to enjoy his new bride (W. Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspectives* [London: Stodder and Stoughton, 1990], 82-83). Concerning the importance of rules governing the proper expression of sexuality, G. J. Wenham wrote in regard to Lev 18: "There is a strong polemical thrust in these laws. . . . This chapter insists that certain standards of sexual morality are equally decisive marks of religious allegiance" (*The Book of Leviticus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 250).

³²A. E. Cundall evaluated the situation this way: "The man [Samson] whose great strength made him a legend in his own lifetime was completely unable to bridle his own passions and this weakness was to lead to his eventual downfall" (*Judges* [Chicago: InterVarsity, 1968], 173-174).

consequences. It is conceivable that the whole narrative up to 2 Sam 19:23, from Absalom's murder of Amnon and Absalom's exile to David's exile and Absalom's death, had its origin in this incident with Amnon and Tamar, simply because he refused to wait for a time when his desire might be fulfilled in a pleasing way.³³

The OT also provides teaching passages that parallel the message of the Song. For example, the instruction of Proverbs on matters of love finds a positive summary in 5:15-20 (e.g., "rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love," vv. 18b-19).³⁴ Psalm 106:34-39 records the tragic consequences of Israel's failure to heed God's counsel regarding intermarriage. Malachi 2:10-16 provides its own interpretive difficulties, but not to the extent that a clear message concerning male-female relations is indiscernible.³⁵ Verse 14 observes that Israelite men are dealing "treacherously" with the wives of their youth. This treachery has to do with the covenant of marriage, which was to render godly offspring (vv. 14-15), and with violence and divorce (vv. 15-16). It is at least plausible that the actions of Onan and Amnon are illustrative of the situation rebuked by Malachi.

While the NT does not offer many examples of misconduct between males and females, it does provide one clear example and several teaching passages which relate to the Song. For example, 1 Cor 5:1ff. relates an incident in Corinth in which a man was having sexual relations with his stepmother. The urgency with which Paul responds and the nature of the action he prescribes provide clues to the

³³For example, H. P. Smith takes 2 Sam 13:1-14:23 as one section, "The violation of Tamar and the consequences." He does not include 2 Sam 15:1-19:44 under this heading, but he does note that the source of this material is the same as the previous account, thus establishing at least a textual connection (*The Books of Samuel* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951], 327, 339).

³⁴One rabbinic source interprets the stanza as: "The maiden adjures the beautiful and noble women by invoking these graceful animals. While dallying in her Lover's arms she is seized by the fear of losing him to the charms of other women. She therefore adjures all women not to entice her Lover away from her so long as he desires to remain with her and protect her" (R. Abraham b. Isaac ha-Levi Tamakh, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* [Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 1970], 85).

³⁵R. C. Smith states: "[Malachi] 2:10-16 is one of the most important yet most difficult pericopes in the book of Malachi. The debate between the cultic/figurative and the literal interpretations will probably continue for some time. The literal view has a preponderance of evidence on its side. . . . Malachi calls for faithfulness between husbands and wives because as Jews they all had one father—Yahweh; and because God intended for a man and his wife to be one flesh for the benefit of godly offspring" (*Micab—Malachi* [Waco: Word, 1984], 325).

seriousness of the matter.³⁶ Later, in chapter 7, Paul instructs the Corinthians at length on matters of love and sexual conduct. This instruction is particularly related to the purpose of the Song in that it centers on what is pleasing (i.e., good, helpful, and acceptable), with specific details, for example, on when to come together or stay apart, whether to marry or remain engaged. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 addresses, in terms parallel to the Song, issues similar to those found in the examples of Amnon and Malachi.³⁷ Paul admonishes the reader to “abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (vv. 4-5). With a similar tone, Heb 13:4 says: “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”³⁸

Conclusion

The thesis of this paper has been sustained by the meaning of the stanza found in 2:7; 3:5; and 8:4 on the basis of its own terminology, its relation to the whole of the Song, and its relation to the subject as treated generally in Scripture. The Song is undeniably a depiction of a relationship of love between a man and a woman,³⁹ which serves to

³⁶Gordon D. Fee notes the seriousness of the matter: “[T]hey [the Corinthians] are to put this man out of the believing community—a command that is repeated no less than four times. . . . What is at stake is not simply a low view of sin; rather, it is the church itself” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 197). Cf. *ibid.*, 203, where Fee notes that Paul took “decisive action.”

³⁷1 Thess 4:4-5: “[E]ach of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in *passion of lust*, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such” (emphasis added). F. F. Bruce comments: “This injunction to holiness concentrates on the matter of sexual morality. This is not the whole of holiness, but it is an important aspect of it, and one which needed to be especially stressed when converts from Greek paganism were being instructed in the Christian way. The practice of fornication, which the Thessalonian Christians are urged to avoid, meant in the strict sense commerce with prostitutes, but covered many forms of extramarital sexual intercourse. . . . The exhortation to sexual purity, then, is probably to be recognized as the first instance of the writers’ resolve to make good the deficiencies in the faith of their Thessalonian friends (*1 & 2 Thessalonians* [Waco: Word, 1982], 86, 88).

³⁸Here, as in *Song*, the instruction concerning proper sexual relations is taught for the benefit of all, as S. J. Kistemaker notes in regard to this passage: “When marriage is honored in the home, love emanates to society in numerous ways. For this reason the author stresses the necessity of maintaining the sanctity of married life” (*Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 409).

³⁹“The truth of actual human experience as well as varieties of world views are presented for the reader’s contemplation in order that through evaluation the reader

heighten the reader's appreciation of love, as well as to provide a caution about when, where, how, and with whom to pursue love.⁴⁰

The meaning of the stanza on the basis of its own terminology reveals that the eighteen times the word שבע ("to adjure") is used in the OT poetic books demonstrates the seriousness of the oath in the stanza "I adjure you, Daughters of Jerusalem, by the does or by the gazelles, that you do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases" (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The term "daughters of" (בנות) should be taken literally in the Song. Thus the young maidens are friends of the beloved, who participate in her desire for and pursuit of a husband and are expected to learn from the experience. The Song may be described or arranged in various ways: according to function, where the maidens are placed in relation to both the lover and the beloved; and according to the intention of the beloved in regard to the daughters. The usage of the terms "gazelle" (צבאי) and "doe" (אילה) in the OT seem to suggest that it is sensible for a love poem, which requires an oath for the restraint of "natural" forces (love) to appeal to something strong, reproductive, and representative of both male (strength, agility) and female (shape, tone) as its basis or reference point. This would seem to indicate that the oath is to be taken seriously by the reader. The usage of אִם followed by the hiphil imperfect of עור, then a waw consecutive with אִם followed by the polel imperfect of עור in the phrase "that you do not stir up or awaken love," indicates a negative oath. Thus, after an oath, אִם becomes an emphatic negative and in connection with adjurations means "that not." The phrase "until it pleases" seems to indicate two motifs: to use restraint in indulging one's emotions until such a time when they may find proper and uninterrupted fulfillment; and the phrase may be calling to mind examples of love in Scripture that were "pleasing," such as the story of Ruth the Moabitess.

The place of the stanza within the Song has two important features in regard to its repetition: this stanza contains the only adjuration addressed to the daughters (hence to the reader) which is repeated; the position of the stanza places it in a climactic position rather than in a

may exercise and expand his own values and world view" (Johnson, 114).

⁴⁰H. Gollwitzer distinguished between *eros* ("physical, sexual love") and *agape* (a larger concept of "care for and proper conduct toward one another") and commented on the relationship of these two forms of love on the basis of the Song of Songs: "If we take seriously the fact that in the Bible *eros* is allowed to express itself as freely, unreservedly, and openly as it does in the Song of Songs, then we must assume that *eros* and *agape* are not to be considered as mutually exclusive" (*Song of Love* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978], 46-47).

developmental portion. Thus the Song speaks eloquently of the beauty and enjoyment of human sexual love.

The OT provides a number of examples detailing the tragic consequences of love that has been unwisely stirred up or awakened and thus was not and could not be pleasing (e.g., Gen 6:1-2; 34:31; 38; Deut 25:5-10; 1 Kgs 11:1-2). There are also a number of OT passages that parallel the message of the Song (e.g., Ps 106:34-39; Prov 5:15-20; Mal 2:10-16). The NT does not offer many examples of sexual misconduct, but it does provide one clear example (1 Cor 5:1ff.) and several teaching passages (1 Cor 7; 1 Thess 4:3-8) which relate to the Song. Hebrews 13:4 seems to capture the serious essence of the stanza's message: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

Appendix A

Analysis of components of sections, each beginning with a motif of pursuit and concluding with a motif of consummation

This is only a preliminary attempt at such an analysis of the structure of Song and the components of that structure. This appendix is intended to provide a means by which sections can be compared for similarities without artificially forcing a foreign structure on the Song. Note, for example, that none of the sections are particularly equivalent in the sequence of elements, yet they all have certain components in common (e.g., the words of consummation, descriptions of the lover and the beloved, and imperatives and statements that develop the narrative).

Abbreviations in the "Element" column are as follows: "impv" indicates imperatives; "d-M" indicates descriptions of the male lover; "d-F" indicates descriptions of the female beloved; "statement" indicates statements that develop the narrative; "?" indicates interrogatives; and "csm" indicates words of consummation.

Element	Song Reference								
	1:1-13	2:1-7	2:8-17	3:1-5	3:6-11	4:1-5:1	5:2-6:3	6:4-8:4	8:5-14
statement	1								
impv	2		8						
d-M	3		9-11a						
impv			11-13						
d-F			14a, b			1-7		4	
impv	4		14c, d			8		5a, b	
d-F	5		14e, f			9-15	2-7	5c-9	
impv	6					16	8		
?	7				6		9	10	5a, b
stmnt								11-12	5c, e
impv	8				7a			13a, b	6a
?								13c, d	

impv									
impv			15						
d-F	9-10							1-7	
statement	11							8-10	6b-9
d-F	12	1-2							
d-M	13-14	3			7b-10		10-16		
d-F	15			1-4c					10
d-M	16a, b								
?							1		
csm	16c-17	4	16-17	4d, e	11a-	1a-d	2-3	11-2	11-12
impv		5-7	17c-f	5	-11e	1e, f		3-4	13-14

Appendix B

Comparison of Imperatives in The Song⁴¹

Type of Action (Hebrew and English)		Subject of the Verb		
		Lover	Beloved	Daughters of
Movement				
משך	take		1:4	
רוץ	run		1:4	
יצא	go down			1:8; 3:11
קום	arise	2:10, 13*		
הלך	go/come	2:10, 13, 13*	7:12	
סבב	surround	6:5	2:17	
בוא	come		4:16, 16	
שוב	return			7:1, 1, 1, 1
ברח	flee		8:14	
Subtotal		6	7	6
Type of Action (Hebrew and English)		Subject of the Verb		
		Lover	Beloved	Daughters of
Perception				
שוף	stare		1:6	
נגד	tell		1:7	
עור	awaken		2:7, 7; 3:5, 5; 4:16; 8:4, 4	
ראה	see	2:14*		3:11

⁴¹Appendix B provides a comparison of the three main types of action in Song: movement, perception, and action. The reader may compare specific types and frequency of action in each category, as well as frequency of characters (e.g., the beloved), which are subjects of the verbs. The symbol "*" indicates that the beloved is relating what the lover said in direct discourse.

שמע	hear	2:14*; 8:13		
Subtotal		3	10	1
Type of Action (Hebrew and English)		Subject of the Verb		
Other Types of Action		Lover	Beloved	Daughters of
נהגו (check)				
נשק	kiss		1:2	
רעה	shepherd			1:8
סמך	strengthen		2:5	
רפד	support		2:5	
אחז	catch		2:15	
דמה	be like		2:17; 8:14	
פוח	blow		4:16	
אכל	eat	5:1	4:16	
שתח	drink	5:1		
שכר	drink	5:1		
פחה	open	5:2		
שבע	swear		2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4	
שים	put		8:6	
subtotal		4	13	1
Total		13	30	8

Appendix C

Comparison of the Language of Pursuit and Consummation in the Song

Song 1:1-17

Pursuit “Let him kiss me . . . take me away . . . tell me where
to find him”

Consummation “Our bed . . . beams . . . rafters”

Song 2:1-7

Pursuit “He has taken me to the banquet hall”

Consummation “[H]is banner over me is love”

Song 2:8-17

Pursuit “[L]ook he comes”

Consummation “[H]e browses among the lilies”

Song 3:1-5

Pursuit “I looked for the one my heart loves”

Consummation “[W]ould not let him go till I . . . brought him into
my . . . house”

Song 3:6-11

Pursuit “Who is this coming up”

Consummation “[O]n the day of his wedding”

Song 4:1-5:1

Pursuit “Come with me from Lebanon”

Consummation “I have come into my garden”

Song 5:2-6:3

Pursuit “Open to me, my sister”

Consummation “[H]e browses among the lilies”

Song 6:4-8:4

Pursuit “Who is this that appears . . . I went down”

Consummation “I would lead you and bring you to my mother’s house”

Song 8:5-14

Pursuit “Who is this coming up”

Consummation “[M]y own vineyard is mine to give . . . the thousand
shekels are for you, O Solomon”