



The Shulammite's Eyes of Memory: The Shepherd's Proposal for Marriage Gives Clues to the Time of Their Tryst

24. Verse 10 is the Shulammite's recall of her late-night rendezvous with the Shepherd as he comes to the back wall of the family estate and makes his way to her window.
25. These secret trysts are required because the father is dead and supervision of the sister has been delegated to her two brothers who disapprove of their charge's relationship with the Shepherd. Nevertheless, the things she remembers are these romantic times when he came to her window. She could see him coming and she heard his voice and she responded.
26. The Shulammite now recalls and then relates the conversation she had one evening with the Shepherd. The Shulammite quotes the Shepherd but nevertheless we will interpret the passage as if the Shepherd were in the scene:

SOS 2:10a - [SW] "My beloved responded and said to me,

SOS 2:10b - [SL] "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along.

v. 11 - [SL] 'For behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

v. 12 - [SL] 'The flowers have already appeared in the land; the time has arrived for pruning the vines, and the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land.

v. 13 - [SL] 'The fig tree has ripened its figs, and the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance. Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along!"

1. Notice how the Shepherd addresses the Shulammite in verse 10. He refers to her as "my darling," and "my beautiful one." These are terms of endearment but they do not imply possessiveness.
2. It is important for young men to understand that they are privileged to enjoy the company of a young woman. And even when the two come to the point of right man-right woman identification the concept of possession can be assumed but should not be stated directly.
3. A movie that does a great job showing the development of the right man-right woman relationship is *The Man from Snowy River*. This film stars Tom Burlinson as Jim Craig, the suitor of Sigrid Thornton's character, Jessica Harrison, and Kirk Douglas as her father. The story is loosely based on the poem of the same name by A. B. "Banjo" Paterson, a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australian journalist and poet who also composed "Waltzing Matilda" in 1917, the unofficial Aussie national anthem. This is a family movie and was nominated in 1983 for a Golden Globe as Best Foreign Film.
4. The last line in the movie is the best. It is spoken by Jim Craig to Mr. Harrison, "There are a dozen good brood mares in that mob. I'll be back for them ... and for whatever else is mine." This comment reveals Craig's conclusion that Jessica is his right woman while her father doesn't think he is financially stable enough or sophisticated enough to court his daughter let alone marry her.
5. A man can identify his right woman and conclude that she is the one God has given to him. But he must never assert to her that you are "my wife" until this becomes a reality.
6. Solomon took this leap of faith and referred to the Shulammite on six occasions as "my bride," **כַּלָּה** **kallah**, in Song of Solomon 4:8-12 and 5:1. This word is best translated "wife" or "spouse."
7. Solomon is arrogant. He has been so successful in luring women into his harem that it never crosses his mind that any woman would turn down his proposal for marriage.
8. The Shepherd can legitimately claim her as "his bride" since they have both come to the status of soul rapport and identified each other as the right person.



9. But he doesn't verbalize this to her thus respecting not only her volition but the principle that he doesn't yet have the right to refer to her in this way. The context of this tryst occurred some time ago at the Shunem estate before she was banished to the vineyards.
10. The attitude that a young man should have, once he identifies his right woman, should be grace orientation. His response should not only include unconditional love for the woman but reciprocal love to God for so great a gift.
11. Here the Shepherd pursues his romance with the Shulammite but he is forced to do so under the cover of darkness. He entreats her to come to him so they can enjoy each other's company.
12. He does identify her as his right woman by referring to her as "my love" and compliments her by calling her "my beautiful one." These are legitimate terms of endearment. Although they have possessive pronouns they do not imply ownership but identification and affection.
13. The Shepherd then makes reference to the arrival of spring. It is the time of new life mentioned in verses 11 and 12: the flowers appear and the latter rains are gone. This "weather forecast" indicates that the time of year this conversation occurs in mid to late April:

Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Dictionary*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 908-909:

Rain. The ruling feature of the climate of Syria is the division of the year into a rainy and a dry season. Toward the end of October heavy rains begin to fall, at intervals, for a day or several days at a time. These are what the Bible calls the *early* or *former* rains. It opens the agricultural year. The soil, hardened and cracked by the long summer, is loosed, and the farmer begins plowing. Till the end of November the average rainfall is not large, but it increases through December, January, and February, begins to abate in March, and is practically over by the middle of April. The *latter rains*, of Scripture are the heavy showers of March and April. Coming as they do before the harvest and the long summer drought, they are of far more importance to the country than all the rains of the winter months, and that is why these are passed over in Scripture, and emphasis is laid alone on the *early* and *latter rains*. This has given most people to believe that there are only two intervals of rain in the Syrian year, at the vernal and autumnal equinox; but the whole of the winter is the rainy season, as indeed we are told in the well-known lines of the Songs of Songs: 'Lo, the winter is past / The rain is over and gone.'

13. With the latter rains came the blossoming of flowers throughout the countryside and in addition a time for singing. The New American Standard Bible translates the middle line of verse 12 "The time has arrived for pruning *the vines*."
14. The word "pruning" is translated "singing *of birds*" in the King James, "singing has come" in the NIV, and "pruning and singing has come" in the NET Bible. The italicized words "*the vines*" are added to the New American Standard translation in an attempt to define what is being pruned. The words "*of birds*" are added to the King James to identify what is doing the singing.
15. So which is it? Are vines being pruned or are birds singing? The etymology of the word in question here is important. It is the masculine noun זָמִיר *zamir*. Its root definition does refer to the pruning of grapevines but its derivatives later took on the idea of singing accompanied by the plucking of stringed instruments.
16. The NET Bible's detailed **translator's note** number 6 (p. 1201) presents the idea that both definitions are used by Solomon as a poetic parallelism thus imputing both of these meanings to the same word, thus its translation "the time for pruning and singing has come."
17. In the context this idea has merit. "In the early spring the plants must be pruned by cutting off dead and fruitless branches which are gathered and burned. As the grapes ripen they must be watched to keep off jackals and foxes" (ISBE, 4:3050).
18. The Shulammite's family vineyard is in blossom. The vines are about to be the object of constant daily care and attention. Pruning is one of the most important of viticultural duties and there are two major types that occur:



Derickson, Gary and Earl Radmacher. *The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus*. (Portland: Charis Press, 2001), 155; 164; 178; 326; 328:

Basically two kinds of pruning occurred in the vineyard, dormant pruning in the late fall and then that accomplished during the growing season. Dormant pruning removed unwanted material from the branches which were to be kept till the following season, including all remaining leaves, as well as unwanted branches and water sprouts. Spring pruning removed succulent sprigs from the fruiting branches, dead and diseased wood, adventitious buds on the trunk of the vine, but *not all* non-fruiting branches. Some non-fruiting branches were kept on the vine. (p. 155)

... serious pruning is not done during the spring growth, flowering, and fruit production. (p. 164)

Sprigs that sprout from buds along the fruiting branch are cleaned from the branches or trunk of the vine in the Spring. (p. 178)

Blooming occurred in late spring to early summer. From mid-July to mid-August when most people were involved with threshing and winnowing the grain harvest, the elderly and children cared for the vineyards. (p. 326)

The spring removal of shoots reflects the process of insuring that the plant is not allowed to grow too slowly by spreading its energy among the large number of suckers and water sprouts which appear on the main trunk as well as the fruiting branches. (p. 328)

19. How this applies to our verse has to do with its historical setting. We have established that the time is spring, probably mid to late April and this event occurred before the Shulammitte was sent by her brothers up to the vineyard to drive off foxes.
20. It is during the early summer that the grapes begin to ripen and are threatened by such predators as jackals and foxes.
21. The Shepherd describes the time of year as being perfect for elopement: The flowers are in bloom, the time has arrived for the pruning of the vines, and for singing.
22. Remember that the word זָמִיר *zamir* can be translated “pruning” or “singing.” The Shepherd is apparently adept on a stringed instrument and wishes to serenade his chosen one with a romantic ballad. He also mentions how the birds or “turtledoves” have begun their spring serenades.
23. He then notes the fig trees. The New American Standard claims they have ripened but the adjective defining the figs is פָּגַי *pag* and means a “green” fig, another piece of information that helps us determine the time of year that the events remembered by the Shulammitte take place.