

Capítulo 2

Sexual Intimacy in the Song of Songs: Implications of the “Eating and Drinking” Motif

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Resumen

Una de las razones por las que algunos estudiosos rechazan una interpretación literal del Cantar de los Cantares es porque observan que “no hay un avance definitivo en la trama, ningún movimiento dramático real. Esta tesis ha llevado a creer que el Cantar es una recopilación de canciones y que la estructura histórica del libro, ya sea cíclica o lineal, no contiene un principio cronológico de intimidad sexual en la relación amorosa de pareja. Como resultado, no se puede encontrar una unidad literaria del libro. Sin embargo, estudios recientes han demostrado acertadamente que hay suficientes evidencias textuales de una unidad literaria del libro, y que el Cantar de los Cantares es una sola pieza, un solo poema. Por lo tanto, este artículo tiene como objetivo examinar si esta unidad también está representada por una estructura literaria progresiva de “Comer y beber”. Específicamente se observará el papel del tema “Comer y beber” en los versículos 4:16 y 5: 1 como el evento central a lo largo del libro..

Este análisis se realizará en dos partes: primero, un análisis gramatical de 4:16 y 5: 1 como texto central, y segundo, un análisis del tema “Comer y beber” a lo largo del libro. Seleccionaré sustantivos y verbos que representen con más frecuencia el tema que se encuentra en 4:16 y 5: 1. Finalmente, sugeriré una teología de la intimidad.

Palabras clave

Comer, beber, Cantar de los Cantares, intimidad sexual.

Abstract

One of the reasons a literal interpretation of the Song of Songs is rejected by some scholars is because they observe that “there is no definitive progress in the plot, no real dramatic movement. This thesis has led to believe that the Song is a collection of songs and that the historical structure of the book, whether cyclical or linear, does not contain a chronological principle of sexual intimacy in the couple loving relationship. As a result no literary unity of the Song can be found. However, recent studies have aptly demonstrated that there are sufficient textual evidences of a literary unity of the Song, and that the Song of Songs is a single piece, one single poem. Thus, this paper aims to examine if this unity is also depicted by a literary progressive imagery of “Eating and Drinking.” I will endeavor to observe the role of the “Eating and Drinking” motif in verses 4:16 and 5:1 as the central event throughout the Song. This analysis will be done in two parts: First, a grammatical analysis of 4:16 and 5:1 as the central text, and second an analysis of the “Eating and Drinking” motif throughout the Song. I will select nouns and verbs which depict with more frequency the theme found in 4:16 and 5:1. Finally, I will suggest a theology of intimacy.

Keywords

Eating, Drinking, Song of Songs, Sexual intimacy.

Introduction

The Song of Songs has been interpreted allegorically throughout many centuries. Modern studies have demonstrated, notwithstanding of constant examinations and reinterpretations, that its literal interpretation offers significant theological implications for the biblical canon. One of the reasons a literal interpretation of the Song of Songs is rejected by some scholars is because they observe that "there is no definitive progress in the plot, no real dramatic movement."³⁷ This thesis has led to believe that the Song is a collection of songs and that the historical structure of the book, whether cyclical or linear, does not contain a chronological principle of sexual intimacy in the couple loving relationship.³⁸ As a result no literary unity of the Song can be found.³⁹

Recent studies have aptly demonstrated that there are sufficient textual evidence of a literary unity of the Song, and that the Song of Songs is a single piece, one single poem.⁴⁰ Thus, this article aims to examine if this unity is also depicted by a literary

37 See Alexander Reid Gordon, *The Poets of the Old Testament* (New York and London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 315. Keel argues that "the Song itself offers no basics of a dramatic interpretation... thanks to its large number of repeated formulas and metaphors, the Song has seemed to many interpreters to be, if not a unified structure, at least the work of a single author. See "Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs*, trans., Frederick J. Gaiser, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 17. Ryken also argues that the rapid shifts, the flashbacks, the lack of a clear progression "push us in the direction of reading the book as a collection of love lyrics." See Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 272.

38 For example, a progression of intimacy of the couple is rejected by Cheryl Exum. She argues that "sexual intimacy may be anticipated or may already have occurred; in the case of double *entendre* it is both not happening and happening at the same time through the suggestiveness or indirection of the language." See J. Cheryl Exum, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Wishing, Dreaming and Double Entendre in the Song of Songs," in *The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation, and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Robert C. Culley et al., The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 78. Thus she later concludes that it is not possible to know if the couple has enjoyed, is enjoying or will enjoy the sexual banquet. Thus, she concludes that "the boundaries between anticipation and experience are already blurred in the temporal slippage of the opening lines, where wishing, experiencing, and anticipating coalesce." See J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 11. The problem that this interpretation poses is very paramount. Such conclusion is preferred by Fox, he says that "while the Song does not assumed that marriage is the prerequisite for sexual relations, it does not seem to deliberate defying strictures on premarital sex." See Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, WS: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 314.

39 I have to admit that the book presents an enigmatic structure; however, we should expect such organization because this poem is the שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים. The good exegete would never conclude that "when the book is read as a collection of lyrics, we can be relaxed about the organization of the book." See Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 273.

40 Roland E. Murphy, "The Unity of the Song of Songs," in *Poetry in the Hebrew Bible: Selected Studies from Vetus Testamentum*, ed. David E. Orton, Brill's Readers in Biblical Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 148-155. Murphy correctly observes that the "shifting views in the history of interpretation of the Song, and of the Bible generally, tell the story of the new generations becoming aware of the hermeneutical limitations of their predecessors." See Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 41. Despite the fact that Cheryl Exum does not observe a temporal marker of intimacy of the poem, she admits that "the further I got into the book, however, the more difficult it became to isolate independent units, on the other hand, and, on the other, to find genuine differences or distinctiveness among the smaller units... I have become increasingly convinced that an inspired poetic vision

progressive imagery of “eating and drinking.” I will endeavor to observe the role of the “eating and drinking” motif in verses 4:16 and 5:1 as the central event throughout the Song. I propose an examination of this motif as a chronological principle of sexual intimacy in the relationship between Solomon and the Shulamamite.

The poetic unity of the Song will be evaluated by selecting one particular motif as found in the Masoretic Text.⁴¹ This analysis will be done in two parts: First, a grammatical analysis of 4:16 and 5:1 as the central text, and second, an analysis of the “eating and drinking” motif throughout the Song. I will select nouns and verbs which depict with more frequency the theme found in 4:16 and 5:1. Finally, I will suggest a theology of intimacy in which the “Eating and Drinking” motif of this poem is intended to portray a divine model for human intimacy.

History of Interpretation

The book Song of Songs basically can be interpreted from two perspectives: allegorically or literally. The history of its interpretation⁴² can be summarized in four stages. First, the early Jewish interpretation; second, early Christian interpretation; third, middle age’s Jewish and Christian interpretations; and fourth modern era.

Early Jewish Interpretation

Generally scholars observe that the interpretation among Jews reflected the allegorical or spiritualizing exposition of the book where the love relationship was between God and Israel.⁴³ This interpretation began probably by the Pharisaic scribes like the Essenes.⁴⁴ However, before the early Christianity the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures appeared. Keel comments that “the Septuagint has no trace of allegorizing or spiritualizing the message... Rabbinic texts of the first or second centuries A.D. show that the natural, literal meaning of the Song was still widespread in Judaism at that time.”⁴⁵

Early Christian Interpretation

Murphy has observed that some early Christian writers suggested that the Song does not portray a relationship between God and the individual soul, rather the book

of love has guided the composition of the Song.” Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 37.

41 I maintain that the Song of Songs is a divine inspired book which contains a transcultural soteriological message. However, this article does not seek to answer questions of authorship or composition. I limit the scope of this study to one theme of the book with no particular detailed structural arrangement of the Song.

42 There are a good number of surveys of the history of interpretation of the Song of Songs. Complete reviews can be found in these commentaries: Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, 11-41. Keel, 1-10. Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 89-228. Christopher Wright Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2003), 451-508.

43 Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, 12.

44 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 7.

45 Ibid., 5, 6.

should be interpreted as "salvation-historical," that is, transitional Solomonic prophecy between the old and new covenant.⁴⁶

Middle Ages

Christianity understood the book during middle ages primarily in its spiritual dimension. It was studied with the purpose of homiletical reflections with the traditional approach of the allegorical view.⁴⁷ However, a number of writers considered that Martin Luther left the traditional view by acknowledging the historical setting of the biblical text in addition to a contemporary message.⁴⁸ Jewish theologians of the middle ages generally followed the main stream of allegorical interpretation.

Modern Era

The literal and natural interpretation appear about the 16th and 18th century with representatives such Hugo Grotius and J. G. Herder.⁴⁹ Pope comments that the exposition of the Song was greatly influenced in this area because of "the recovery of religious literatures of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia which added new and provocative data."⁵⁰ A major work which influenced scholarship was the study of T. J. Meek. He proposed that "both the Psalm 45 and the Song of Songs preserve literary fragments of an ancient Canaanite fertility cult liturgy, which had been adapted by Israelites for use in worship of Yahweh and his consort."⁵¹ In general terms "modern biblical scholarship is almost unanimous in understanding the Song of Songs as referring to human sexual love."⁵²

46 Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, 15.

47 Murphy comments however that there was one alternative approach in this era suggested by Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia 392-428. He rejected the allegorical approach and believed that Solomon wrote the Song as a response to criticism of his marriage with a dark-skinned woman. See *Ibid.*, 23.

48 *Ibid.*

49 Keel, 10.

50 Pope, *Song of Songs*, 112. See also in pages 40-88 a complete discussion about the Song's literary integrity.

51 Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, 40.

52 Roland E. Murphy, "A Biblical Model of Human Intimacy: The Song of Songs," in *The Family in Crisis or in Transition: A Sociological and Theological Perspective*, ed. Andrew M. Greeley, Concilium 121 (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 62.

The Eating and Drinking Motif

The style of the book is the most beautiful poetic writing in the Bible. I believe that there is no other poetry section in the Bible, as Ryken writes, that “uses words that invite sensory and emotional response.”⁵³ I concur with Ryken in the sense that “the style and its lyric content require a sense of abandonment on the reader’s part,”⁵⁴ but I disagree with him when he argues that this approach to love is affective and not analytic. I believe that the love poetry of this poem is both affective and analytic; the fact that the author carefully selects imagery in order to metaphorically allude to love indeed speaks of a great deal of systematic thinking. Perhaps the monumental challenge that Ryken and many other scholars face is that they neglect that “poetry is often valued for the richness of its ambiguities, enabling the reader to find a multiplicity of meaning.”⁵⁵ I will suggest that Solomon methodologically built **שֵׁן הַשִּׁירִים** with an “eating and drinking” motif.

“Eating and Drinking” Motif in 4:16 and 5:1

Hebrew poetry abounds in images, metaphors, and multicolor descriptions. In the Song of Songs this imagery is used to describe the beauty of a loving relationship. Using poetic features such double *entendre*,⁵⁶ *paranomasia*,⁵⁷ the Song of Songs contains allusions to food (2:3), royalty (1:4), animals (1:8), smells (1:12), colors (4:3), celestial bodies (6:10), plants (7:12), weather (2:11), colors (1:5), etc. Among others these items are used to illustrate the relationship between Solomon and the Shulammitte. This relationship is specially illustrated in 4:16 and 5:1. In these verses one of the most significant allusions to intimacy is depicted by a double *entendre* of “Eating and Drinking” motif, as well as its echo throughout the Song.

Let us first observe 4:16.

⁵³ Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 276.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 289.

⁵⁵ Michael D. Goulder, *The Song of Fourteen Songs*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 36 (England: JSOT Press, 1986), 9.

⁵⁶ A double *entendre* is a figure of speech used by poets in which a word, clause or phrase can be understood in either two meanings. Walsh comments that the double *entendre* is a typical device of Bible’s poetry and that “in such a case the reader may feel no need to choose between them and can accept both meanings.” See Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative : A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 73. See also Exum, “In the Eye of the Beholder: Wishing, Dreaming and Double Entendre in the Song of Songs,” 71-86.

⁵⁷ For a complete analysis of *Paranomasia* in the Old Testament see Immanuel M. Casanowicz, “Paronomasia in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 12, no. 2 (1893).

- 4:16 עוֹרִי צִפּוֹן וּבּוֹאִי תִימֹן הַפִּי- Awake north *wind*!⁵⁸ And come south *wind*!
 חִי גַּנִּי יִזְלֹן בְּשִׁמְיוֹ יִבֹּא דוֹדִי- They shall cause to send forth⁵⁹
 לְגִזְיוֹ וַיֵּאכַל פְּרִי מִגְדָּיו- the fragrance of my garden,
 Let flow⁶⁰ its⁶¹ spices,
 Let come my beloved to his garden,⁶² Let eat⁶³ my
 beloved its recent harvested fruits.⁶⁴

This verse contains two series of three verbs: Three imperatives: Awake! (עוֹרִי), Come! (וּבּוֹאִי), Send forth! (יִזְלֹן); and three jussive imperfects: let flow (יִזְלֹן), let come (יִבֹּא), let eat (יֵאכַל). Since in the third imperative the woman is the speaker (*Send forth the fragrance of my garden*), it is likely that this imperative may have a difference nuance. I would propose that in this poetic context the woman is not given commands to the winds, rather it can be expected that the speaker of the first two *qal* imperatives is a different person. Then, I suggest that here the third imperative which is a *hiphil* functions with an imperfective conjugation, since “in poetry the imperative is sometimes equivalent to a future with energetic nuance.” (See 2 Kings 19:29; Ps 110:2; Isa 54:14).⁶⁵

In addition, the imperatives depict a linear intensifying sequence: *Awakening* is surpassed by the *coming*, and the *coming* by the *sending forth*. The *hiphil* in הַפִּיחִי is evidently a response used to depict the causal consequence of the first two imperatives. Similarly, the jussive imperfects verbs depict a linear intensifying sequence: *Flowing* is surpassed by the *coming*, and the *coming* by the *eating*. Note also here that the progression is climaxed by the *eating* which is the causal and final consequence of the first two jussive imperfects. These imperfects are to be interpreted as urgent request, not orders.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ The root verb עוֹר is used 9 times in the Song, especially in the adjurations (2:7; 3:5; 4:16; 5:2; 8:4f, always in reference of love). This *qal* imperative means to be impelled, to call upon, arising from the idea of being excited and moved. Its direct object צִפּוֹן is used once in the Song, evidently in reference to north *wind*. See *A Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon to the Old Testament*, 4 ed, s.v. עוֹר.

⁵⁹ The root verb יִזְלֹן is used 3 times in the Song and it refers to the wind that causes a cooling, which takes place shortly before sunset. In this case the *hiphil* adds the idea to put in motion, to excite to something. See *ibid.* s.v. פוֹחַ. Murphy believes that “the north and south winds would be, respectively, cool and warm, but their function has to do with movement rather than with temperature.” See Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, 157. Note that the interruption of the sequence of *qal* verbs to a *hiphil* verb may indicate that result of the two previous verbs. Thus, for a smooth translation it is added “they shall cause.” Note also that the direct object גַּנִּי my garden possesses a 1st cs suffix which is helpful in the identification of the speaker.

⁶⁰ The root verb נוֹל is used twice meaning flowing of water or spices. See *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. נוֹל.

⁶¹ The 3ms suffix in מִגְדָּיו may refer to גֵּן.

⁶² *Critical Apparatus* of BHS indicates that 2 manuscripts of the LXX have 1st cs suffix, instead of 3ms suffix.

⁶³ The *qal* imperfect verb יֵאכַל is the third of a series of imperfect verbs with jussive meaning. It means to eat, to devour, to consume. See *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. אָכַל.

⁶⁴ The word פְּרִי in genitival relationship with the noun מִגְדָּים qualifies the fruits as excellent, precious and recent harvested. See *Ibid.* s.v. מִגְדָּ.

⁶⁵ See Paul Jouon and T. Maruoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2006), 350. Also Waltke and O'Connor observe that “the imperative, like the jussive, has uses in which its ordinary force is lost. The figure of heterosis involves the exchange of one grammatical form for another; with the imperative, heterosis creates a promise or prediction to be fulfilled in the future, made more emphatic and vivid than would be the case were the prefix conjugation used.” See Bruce Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN; Eisenbrauns, 2004), 572.

⁶⁶ However, in some instances “the jussive’s usual pragmatic force may be lost in poetic contexts or in literary prose. In some cases this loss arises from projecting feelings onto nature.” See Waltke and O'Connor, Bruce

It is important to highlight the verb *to come*, which is transitional stage between the *awakening*, the *sending forth-flowing* and the *eating*. This pattern is probably found as the core flowing of the entire Song.

The central meaning of this verse is mainly observed in two words: the verb **וַיֵּאָכֵל** and the nouns **פֶּרִי מִגְדֵּיו**. The verb **וַיֵּאָכֵל** is the bride's voice grating permission in a form of urgent request to his beloved. It is extremely significant that this root verb appears only in 4:16 and 5:1. No other place in the Song the verb *to eat* is ever used. Thus, it can be inferred that **פֶּרִי מִגְדֵּיו** have not been "eaten". It is precisely in 4:16 that she grants permission to his beloved to do so. If this is correct, the use of the verb **וַיֵּאָכֵל** marks an important shift in the relationship of Solomon and the Shulamamite.

Moreover, the words **פֶּרִי מִגְדֵּיו** (translated as *recent harvested fruits*) are used three times and they emphasize exclusivity. In 4:13 this expression is used in connection to a *garden sealed* (**גִּן נֶעֱלוּ**), and in 7:14 "which I have saved for you" (**שָׁמְרָתִי לָךְ**). Note that in 4:13 the beloved does not have access to **פֶּרִי מִגְדֵּיו**, but in 7:14 it is evident that she confesses her secret which is no longer necessary.

In 5:1 there is a dramatic change.

5:1	בָּאתִי לִגְנִי אֶחָתִי כָּלָה אֶרִיתִי מוֹרִי עִם־ בְּשָׁמִי אֶכְלָתִי יַעֲרִי עִם־דְּבָשִׁי שְׁתִּיתִי יַיִן עִם־חֶלְבִי אֶכְלֹךְ רְעִים שְׁתֵּךְ וְשִׁכְרוֹ דּוֹדִים:	I am coming to my garden ⁶⁷ my sister, oh <i>my</i> Bride! ⁶⁸ I am gathering ⁶⁹ my <i>myrrh</i> with spices, I am <i>eating</i> my honeycomb ⁷⁰ with my <i>honey</i> , I am <i>drinking</i> my <i>wine</i> with my <i>milk</i> , Eat oh friends, Drink deeply oh Lovers!
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The first observation to note is the perfective conjugation of verbs. The root verb **בוא** is used throughout the Song (1:4; 2:4, 8, 3:4, 4:8, 16, 5:1, 8:2, 11). Four times appear as perfect, three as *hiphil* and once here as *qal*, in reference to a recent or present event. In addition, this is the only time that the lover uses the verb **בוא**, moreover, concerning the direct object of this verb (**לִגְנִי**) it is the only time Solomon uses **גֵּן** with 1st cs suffix, probably to indicate possession.⁷¹

The expression **יַעֲרִי עִם־דְּבָשִׁי אֶכְלָתִי** is exceptional in the Song, especially the *qal* perfect verb **אָכַל** used only three times in the Song, once Solomon, once the Shulamamite and once an "unidentified" voice. The use of this verb in 5:1 is clearly a response of the bridegroom. The direct object **יַעֲרִי עִם־דְּבָשִׁי** also indicates possession in the 1st cs suffix.

The expression **יַיִן עִם־חֶלְבִי שְׁתִּיתִי** is even more exceptional because the *qal* perfect verb **שָׁתָה** is used once by Solomon, and the 1st cs suffix attests Solomon's possession.

Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction*, 570.

67 BDB defines this Hebrew word as *garden as enclosure*. See *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. **גֵּן**

68 The expression **כָּלָה אֶחָתִי** (my sister, oh my Bride!) appears to be like a vocative. Interestingly this is the last time **כָּלָה** (Bride) appears in the Song.

69 Meaning *to pluck of the vinestock, to pull in order to gather in*. See *A Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*. s.v. **אָרַח**

70 It is interesting that the three roots word for **יַעֲרִי** (my honeycomb) occurs in 2:13 and it is translated as *forest*. The LXX interprets this term as bread, *ἄρτος*.

71 Keel observes that "this suffix does not express pride of ownership, instead it shows that the man passionately reciprocates the feeling of belonging signaled by the woman." See Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 89.

The direct object **יְיָ עִם-חֶלְבִּי** delineates the most important symbols of drinking in the Song, wine and milk. No other place in the Song these verbs are associated with wine and milk.

The last line is enigmatic but magnificent: **אֲכָלוּ רְעִים שְׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ דוֹדִים**. These two verbal clauses contain three mp imperatives addressed to the couple. These verbs do not have direct or indirect object, yet they have a vocative in **רְעִים** and in **דוֹדִים**. The second clause **שְׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ** literally means: Drink! Drink intensively! It is noteworthy that the second verb **שָׁכַר** means to drink to satisfaction, to drink deeply, to drink intensively a drink that excites cheerfulness, probably a drink with strong concentration of sugar.⁷²

In terms of arrangement this verse also depicts a linear progression structure:⁷³

Coming		בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֶחָתִי כֹלָה
Gathering		אָרִיתִי מוֹרִי עִם-בִּשְׁמִי
Eating		אֲכָלְתִּי יַעֲרִי עִם-דָּבָשִׁי
Drinking		שְׁתִּיתִי יְיָ עִם-חֶלְבִּי
Eat-Drink		אֲכָלוּ רְעִים שְׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ דוֹדִים

To sum up, three observations need attention for the central meaning of this verse. First, the verbs *to eat* and *to drink* are the heart of the verse and perhaps of the book.⁷⁴ Note that all verbs are *fientive qal* and thus they depict actions of movements in which a *proverbial* perfective conjugation is preferable. That is, these verbs describe "a situation occurring at the very instance the expression is being uttered."⁷⁵ It is indeed an *epithalamion*.⁷⁶ In addition, these transitive verbs have as direct object **יַעֲרִי עִם-דָּבָשִׁי** and **יְיָ עִם-חֶלְבִּי** in which Solomon speaks that he is *eating honey and drinking wine and milk*. This language is the highest sensitive moment of the Song because these direct objects in connection with these verbs appear once in the Song, yet the words for wine, milk, honey and others are used throughout the Song.

Second, it is noteworthy that the first common singular suffixes attached to honey, wine, milk are also unique to this verse. Solomon's personal affirmation of ownership strongly suggests a shift in the poetic/theological meaning of the Song.

Third, the three imperatives approve and hearten the eating and drinking of the

⁷² A Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament. s.v. **שָׁכַר**

⁷³ Mitchell comments that the presence and absence of these verbs are significant. He thinks that "the occurrences of these three verbs in 4:16-5:1 seen to be carefully arranged in a kind of ascending order. See Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 850.

⁷⁴ The significant of this verse is explained by Keel when he observes that "the previous song 'honey' as metaphor for the sweetness of love's pleasures, mostly in reference to lips and tongue. But what is surprising here is that the man eats not only the honey but also the honeycomb from which the honey drips... it expresses passion without restraint." See Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 182.

⁷⁵ Grammatically it is also possible a *preterite* perfective or *indefinite* perfective, yet it is evident that the verbal action has already began. See Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction*, 487, 488. Fox has also observe that "the verbs in 5:1a are probably to be taken as present tense, as indicated by the imperatives in 5:1b, which show that he has not finished eating and drinking, compared 1:9; 2:17." Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 139.

⁷⁶ This Song is a poem written specifically for the bride on the way to her marital chamber. This word comes from the Greek *ἐπιθαλάμιον* *epithalamion*, from *ἐπί* *epi* "upon," and *θάλαμος* *thalamos* nuptial chamber. See Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 273.

couple. These imperatives only make sense if they are uttered in relation to a present or future event.⁷⁷ Thus, the identification of the speaker becomes easier. The couple is not speaking since they are the ones *eating* and *drinking*. Less likely the witnesses of the ceremony or daughters of Jerusalem since this moment is the highest intimate experience of the couple.⁷⁸ I concur with Dillow that there is only one eye that can witness, approve and hearten the couple: God.⁷⁹ The context surrounding these imperatives⁸⁰ points to a speaker of higher ascendancy.

“Eating and Drinking” throughout the Song

I will suggest 10 allusions to the theme of “Eating and Drinking”. The rationale for their selection is twofold. First, the selected item depicts an eatable function in the simile or metaphor, regardless of the usage of comparative particles (i.e., *וְ*). Second, verbs which enhance the idea of “Eating and Drinking” motif have been included.⁸¹ In other words, these nouns and verbs encompass the idea that the item mentioned is intended to be literally or metaphorically eaten or drunk.⁸²

1. Vine: 1:2, 4; 2:4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:10; 8:2.
2. Apple (tree): 2:3, 5; 7:9.
3. Fruits: 2:3; 4:13, 16; 8:11.
4. Honey: 4:11; 5:1.
5. Milk: 4:11; 5:1, 12.
6. Palate: 2:3; 5:16; 7:10.
7. Pomegranate: 4:13; 11; 7:13; 8:2.
8. Vine plant: 2:13; 6:11; 7:9, 13.
9. Eat: 4:16; 5:1
10. Drink: 4:16; 5:1.

⁷⁷ Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction*, 570, 571.

⁷⁸ Goulder argues that “such moments are most private in our culture, but in Israel the virginity of the bride and the consummation of the marriage were of public concern (Deut 22:13), and the couple slept together inside a *happa*, a canopy, with only an awning between them and the witnesses.” See Goulder, *The Song of Fourteen Songs*, 39. Although virginity was a concern for both families as can be inferred from Deut 22:13, no text that I am aware up to this moment confirms that sexual intercourse to some extent was publicly accessible. I fully agree with Murphy, he writes that “ancient Near Eastern culture did not encourage an open display of affection,” See Murphy, *A Biblical Model of Human Intimacy: The Song of Songs*, 62. Thus, less likely sexual intercourse.

⁷⁹ Joseph C. Dillow, *Solomon on Sex* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1977), 86. See also Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 822.

⁸⁰ Similarly to Keel's conclusion I may borrow his words to conclude that this imperatives is a call to break loose from *any* (*everyday* originally) restrictions. See Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 184.

⁸¹ There are a more words occurring less frequently which allude to this motif: fig tree (2:13), nuts (6:11), mouth (1:2; 4:3, 8:5), date-palm (6:11, 7:8, 9), mandrakes (7:14).

⁸² See the appendix for the translation and grammatical analysis.

Linguistic Analysis of the Motif

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief examination of the allusions to the "Eating and Drinking" motif. Primarily it will be focused on their syntactical function in the text.

Wine

Wine (יַיִן) appears throughout the Song as a drink (1:2, 4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:10; 8:2). In chapter 1 wine is associated with love with a comparative marker preposition בְּ. In this sense she sees that being loved by him is an experience that surpasses drinking wine. In chapter 4 his response is singing about her love, which is also better than wine. *Love* is to be drunk by the lovers. Up to this point the experience of love is being praised and compared, but no verbs are used, or actions are mentioned. This particular idea changes in chapter 5 where the lover speaks that he is drinking *his* wine. Although no comparison or analogy is made in 5:1, the analogy is carried out from the beginning of the Song and it is implicit through it. Murphy writes that "the basic metaphor has changed once again, now it is a question of eating (not smelling 4:16) the fruits of the garden. The man is present to the woman, enjoying the fruits which are a symbol of herself".⁸³ In chapter 7, however, the comparison is made in reference to the palate (וְהַלֵּבֶּיךָ בַּיַּיִן הַטּוֹב). Here the comparative preposition clearly indicates an analogy, if taken literally with a body part. Also, in chapter 7 it refers with no analogy to the woman's breast as a probable allusion to an actual experience since there is no body parts mentioned before 5:1 in relation to wine. Finally, in chapter 8 wine is given by her to the lover.

Apple Tree

Apple tree or apples (תְּפֹנֶה) appear in the Song as a source of delight and sustainment, (2:3, 5; 7:9). Specifically, chapter 2 she describes her lover as an apple tree using a comparative particle. In 2:5 the analogy seems to be left behind and now she appeals for apple cakes, however, since the analogy was established already in 2:3 the idea of apple cakes could still retain its double *entendre*. It is noteworthy in relation to *apples* that the verbs used up to this point of the Song portray the idea of desire, yet no *apple* is eaten. Finally, in 7:9 the essence of an apple is used by the lover to describe her breath. This fact necessarily implies closeness and intimacy.

Fruits

Fruits (פֵּרוֹת) in the Song are a poetic figure to describe intimacy, (2:3; 4:13, 16; 8:11). The first time the word פֵּרוֹת is used is in reference to the apple tree which is an analogy of Solomon. She explicitly says that she knows that the fruit is מְתוֹק (sweet, pleasant). It is the only time this word is used in the Song, and in other parts of Scripture, this adjective

⁸³ Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, 157.

generally qualifies something as sweet. In this particular context this word occurs in a nominal clause and functions as a complement of יִשְׁבֵּי (I sat down), note that it is not in the context of אָכַל (to eat) or שָׁתָה (to drink). Thus, the translation could be both *sweet* or *pleasant*. Yet, she has somehow experienced its fruit.

This expression appear twice: פֶּרִי מִגְדִּים and 4:13,16) פֶּרִי מִגְדִּיו. In 4:13 Solomon uses the *recent harvested* fruits to describe the Shulammitte and in 4:16 the Shulammitte invites Solomon to eat *his recent harvested* fruits. Thus, the “eating” experience of the couple apparently is restricted before 5:1 where Solomon accepts the Shulammitte’s invitation. However, the couple is not unaware in 2:3 that the *loving* fruits are sweet and pleasant.

Honey and Milk

In 4:11 honey is mentioned twice with two different words. Both words in reference to body parts: her lips (שִׁפָּה) and her tongue (לִשׁוֹן). Milk is also mentioned as part of the description given about the Shulammitte. This metaphor is perhaps an allusion that the couple has kissed each other, or that Solomon imagines the Shulammitte’s kisses because the milk is not drunk, and the honey is not eaten. Yet it is evident that this closeness is also seen in the following expression: *And the essence of your wrapper like an essence of Lebanon*. However, the poet avoids going further in the metaphor writing in the next verse: *A garden locked is my sister*.

The same words *milk* and *honey* are repeated in 5:1. In this case the milk is drunk, and the honey is eaten. There is no room for imagination or desire.

Palate

Palate is mentioned in 2:3; 5:16; 7:10. This body part is used in reference to the sense of taste. It seems that the word טַעַם is better understood if translated literally, however, the objects (wine, fruits) which are tasted generally portray a metaphor.

Pomegranate

Pomegranates are mentioned in 4:13; 6:11; 7:13; 8:2. In 4:13 the word רִמּוֹן is used to describe her שִׁלָּח (dart). In 6:11 Solomon speaks that he went down to the garden to see the pomegranates. In 7:13 the Shulammitte invites Solomon to go together to the garden to see the pomegranates, she insists that there she will give her love to him. Finally, in 8:2 she is willing to give to him the wine of her pomegranates.

Vine Plant

The vine plan is mentioned in 2:13; 6:11; 7:9, 13. The vine plant is described to be in blossom with its fragrance. This metaphor seems to function as a marker of time, the enthusiasm is increased because the time has come. Thus, Solomon invites the Shulammitte to come.

Eating and Drinking

The verbs אָכַל (to eat) or שָׁתָה (to drink) are the highest expression of affection in the Song. These verbs are reserved carefully to express the couple's affirmation of intimacy.⁸⁴ No other place in the Song these verbs are used. The actions of *eating* and *drinking* are the words for love making, (See Prov 5:15, 19). Ryken aptly concludes that "the barrage of metaphors creates a sense of love as an appetite and marriage as a thing that satisfies it".⁸⁵

Intertextuality of the "Eating and Drinking" Motif

Old Testament

"Eating and drinking" has been recognized to depict a double *entendre* in the Old Testament.⁸⁶ We will review some instances where this motif is employed. For example, Rendsburg has observed that the writer of Genesis describes Potiphar saying:

So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. (NAS 39:6).

However, when the writer of Genesis describes Joseph's response to Potiphar's wife sexual insinuation, he says:

But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife." (NAS 39:8, 9).

Rendsburg suggests that "the difference is explained when one realizes that *lehem* 'bread' is a euphemism for 'engage in sexual intercourse'. Most likely the surface meaning of 'bread, food' is intended in verse 6, but the sexual connotation is clear too".⁸⁷

A second example of double *entendre* that Rendsburg proposes is 2 Samuel 11:8. Uriah has returned from the battlefield and David says:

Go down to your house, and wash your feet. (NAS)

⁸⁴ "Eating fruit" appears in the Song as metaphor of erotic pleasures. See Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 181, 184.

⁸⁵ Ryken, 287.

⁸⁶ Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 184. For a comprehensive dissertation of the literary function of "eating and drinking" in the Old Testament see Diane M. Sharon, "The Literary Functions of Eating and Drinking in Hebrew Bible Narrative with References to the Literatures of the Ancient Near East" (Doctoral Dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1995).

⁸⁷ Rendsburg also argues that this interpretation was put forward in the middle ages by Rashi. See Gary A. Rendsburg, "Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection," in *Puns and Pundits*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda, MA: CDL Press, 2000), 150-151.

Rendsburg comments that this instruction is to be taken literally, “but at the same time, David’s goal is to get Uriah to sleep with his wife Bathsheba. The word *regel/reglayim* ‘foot/feet’ means sexual organs elsewhere in the Bible. Accordingly, ‘wash your feet’ also means ‘have intercourse’”.⁸⁸ Rendsburgh believes that this meaning is evident because of Uriah’s response in verse 11:

Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? (NAS)

These two examples may help us to consider that in Hebrew thinking the idea of “eating and drinking” was somehow linked to sexual intimacy. No distinction between illegal or legal sexual intercourse is described by this motif since Uriah and Bathsheba were legally husband and wife, on the other hand Joseph and Potiphar’s wife were not husband and wife. Thus, it is suggested that “eating and drinking” being taken as double *entendre* depicts sexual intimacy within marriage or outside of marriage (see Proverbs 7).⁸⁹

New Testament

One of the connections that perhaps can be suggested between sexual intercourse and “eating and drinking” in the New Testament is found in Matthew 24:38. Jesus said:

For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark. (NAS).

In the pre-flood era “eating and drinking” may be understood literally as gluttons, and it would make sense. However, the following expression about marriage seems to condition the expression “eating and drinking” to be understood as double *entendre* of sexual misconduct. (cf. Luke 17:28).

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:3-6 also seems to connect the idea of marriage (and therefore to sexual intimacy) with “eating and drinking.” The apostle wrote to the church of Corinth:

My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? (NAS).

Paul in his defense argues that marriage was legitimate for him, and it seems that he refers to it as “eating and drinking”. This connection is a possible interpretation that Paul understood from the Old Testament. He again refers to this motif in chapter 10 verses 6-8:

⁸⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁸⁹ I do not reject completely spiritual, ecclesiastical and pastoral applications as Mitchell proposes in his book. I believe that allusions or themes are not to be taken as typological language, neither as apocalyptic genre. I believe, however, that for example in the New Testament the notion of “eating and drinking” is of paramount symbolism, see Matthew 26:29; Mark 10:38; Mark 14:25; Luke 5:30,33; Luke 7:33; Luke 12:19; John 6:54. Especially “drinking” in the sense of salvation: John 7:37; 1 Corinth 11.

Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." Nor let us act immorally, (μηδὲ πορνεύωμεν) as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. (NAS).

In this case Paul urges the Christian to remain sexually pure and to avoid "dwelling" (Greek ἐξάθισεν a rendition from the Hebrew בָּשָׁא) in the immoral acts of "eating and drinking" of Israel, that is, sexual misconduct (See Exod 32:6; cf. Rev 18:3).

Theological Implications

The Literary Structure and the "Eating and Drinking" Motif

Numerous attempts to find unity in a literary structure of the Song have been proposed. Some scholars have found in their studies a linear or narrative progression. For example, while I disagree with Mitchell's cyclical structure, he observes four progressive stages: The longing anticipation of courtship, the excitement and splendor of the wedding ceremony, the bliss of the couple's marriage consummation and the infatuation and delight of enduring married love.⁹⁰

Particularly I suggest that "Eating and Drinking" motif has a central role throughout the Song's theological flow and depicts a literary unity of the Song.⁹¹ However, it is necessary to mention that some commentators do not see a clear distinction between the anticipation and enjoyment of the sexual union.⁹² I maintain that there are temporal distinctions and noticeable language that indicates that the consummation of the couple's love is found in 5:1. Mitchell comments that "the force of that statement, roughly at the midpoint of the book, justifies an overall view that the first half is mainly about the period of time leading up to the wedding and consummation, while the second half is about the period of married love".⁹³

Munro has already observed that

It is not coincidental that the union of the lovers is described in term of a variation of these images, the ripened grapes, harvested, and already made into wine, are frequently an image of love making... an orchard of pomegranates (4:13) awaits the lover who come to his lover's garden to delight in her, and

⁹⁰ He says that these relationship stages "can serve roughly as a chronological time line, but Song's overall structure is more cyclical than it is linearly diachronic." Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 143.

⁹¹ Richard M. Davidson, "The Literary Structure of the Song of Songs Redivivus," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14, no. 2 (2003): 63.

⁹² For example Cheryl Exum argues that "his lovemaking is imaging as something that will be deliciously stimulating or it is known to be. Here at the beginning, as throughout the poem, we cannot disentangle the lover's experience of each other from their wishes and desires." See Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 11.

⁹³ Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 147.

ripened fruits over her door are a token of their intimacy within (7:13). The difference is only in the maturity of the ripening process, the process of the season maps the climate of their love.⁹⁴

This maturity, argues Munro, is also observed by the appearance of mandrakes in the place where she promises to give her lover her love.⁹⁵ Thus, the uniqueness of 5:1 invites the reader to look backward and forward in the Song making it a single poem. Alter observes that “the speaker moves toward the consummation of love intimated in lines 26-29 (4:16-5:1), reflect much more of an orchestration of the semantic fields of the metaphors: fruit, honey, milk, wine”⁹⁶

This theme has been identified by Murphy as a sign of literary unity⁹⁷ and Cosby has observed a unique language almost at the end of the Song which is absent in the first part of it. He comments of 7:12-13 that

Several factors reveal that this is certainly not the first time this loving couple has experienced the sweet fruit of lovemaking. The man, for example, already has an intimate knowledge of her body (7:1-5); and he is extremely forthright in telling her of his intentions to fondle her breasts (7:7-8). Furthermore, the woman alludes to their past experience when she speaks of “choice fruits, new and old”. She is promising that there will be new and fresh aspects to their love as well as repetition of the delights already experienced. They have married for a while.⁹⁸

Thus, the theological structure is divided by the verbal actions in 5:1. I concur with Timothea Elliot when she writes that the Song does not have a structure, it is a structure.⁹⁹ It is precisely this structural Song which points to a *before* and *after* of its linear progression.

Therefore, I would like to propose the following observations:

First, *invitation-acceptance* in 4:16 is a temporal marker of the couple relationship. “Let my beloved come” in 4:16 and “let him kiss me” in 1:2 forms a parallel of the same urgency. The only difference in 4:16 is that the lover responds immediately in 5:1.¹⁰⁰

Second, the words פְּרִי הַגָּדִי (recent harvested fruits) emphasize exclusivity. In 4:13 this expression is used in connection of a garden sealed (גִּן סָגוּר), and in 7:14 (which I have saved for you, לֹא יִפְגַּעְתִּי לָּךְ). No access – access to her fruits delineates the Song.

Third, perfective conjugation of verbs of 5:1 seems to indicate present tense.

94 Jill M. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron: A Study of the Poetic Language of the Song of Songs*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 80.

95 Ibid., 81.

96 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985), 201.

97 Murphy, “The Unity of the Song of Songs,” 150.

98 Michael R. Cosby, *Sex in the Bible: An Introduction to What the Scriptures Teach Us About Sexuality* (New Jersey, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 72.

99 She also observes that “in an organic unity each of the parts functions in virtue of the whole, and without each part, the whole lacks either integral or essential unity” See Timothea Mary Elliott, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle* (Germany: Verlag Peter Lang, 1989), 33. See also Richard M. Davidson, “Theology of Sexuality in the Song of Songs: Returned to Eden,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 27, no. 1 (1989): 17.

100 Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 181.

Fourth, the use of 1st cs suffix indicates particular possession only portrayed in 5:1 (honey, milk, garden).

Fifth, the function of the imperatives in the structure of 4:16-5:1 indicate a powerful voice *Who* commands the winds and pronounces the command *Eat* and *Drink*, verbs which are used only by the couple.

Sixth, words denoting *eating* or *drinking* ideas (apple, wine, pomegranate, milk, honey, etc.) are used in simile, metaphor portraying a double *entendre* of desire and wish. They are only eaten and drunk in 5:1. It is to be noted that these words occurred with no connection to verbs. That is, there are no indications of eating apples, drinking milk or wine, etc.

Seventh, it is observed a sequence of *smelling-eating-drinking*. This progression may suggest a poetic intention to depict a movement of intimacy of the couple.

Eighth, after 5:1 there is a change in the couple's attitude regarding eating and drinking, (pomegranate, wine).

Thus, "Eating and Drinking" motif points to a growth in intimacy of the couple in their love relationship. The Song of Songs is a structure carefully elaborated with "eating and drinking" imagery. Specifically, time marks a linear progression for the appropriate time to eat and drink. Not only does the advent of spring confirm that the time for love has come but it also provides the setting for the lover's meeting. The description of spring comes to a climax in the woman's promise that it is 'there' that she will give her love (7:1). No sooner has spring been invoked and the promised made, than scented mandrakes and delicious fruits appear around the door (7:14).¹⁰¹

Davidson concludes that "it is hardly accidental that these two verses are situated at the exact physical midpoint of the book: there are 111 lines on either side. These verses contain the most intricate and beautiful literary patterns of the Song, epitomizing it entire macrostructure".¹⁰²

Theology of Intimacy

The book of Song of Songs has an exceptional message in the biblical cannon probably as no other book in Scriptures for postmodern audiences. It is all about intimacy.¹⁰³ Intimacy is of paramount importance because "it is the only helpful condition to a deep affection and growth."¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately large segments of our postmodern society consider obsolete the abstinence of sexual relationships before marriage. It is in this respect that Solomon's poem speaks: the exclusivity of intimacy for a marriage couple.

In view that sexual purity is one of the challenges of a post-Christian society, Solomon's Song claims more and more relevance.

¹⁰¹ Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 118.

¹⁰² Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 589.

¹⁰³ What is intimacy? I agree with Kilgallen when he defines intimacy from two perspectives. Firstly, he thinks that intimacy is nearness or proximity; secondly he observes that intimacy refer to a situation of candor and affection, love. It is only experiencing the *first* intimacy that the couple can experience the *second*. See John Kilgallen, "Intimacy and the New Testament," in *The Family in Crisis or in Transition: A Sociological and Theological Perspective*, ed. Andrew M. Greeley, Concilium 121 (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 67.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

God could have used medical terms of slang in speaking of sex. But medical terms cause a sense of awkwardness, and we react negatively to slang. So God avoided both by expressing these delicate things in the language of poetry: symbols. Symbolism says more than medical or slang eve could, but without creating awkwardness or evoking negative reactions.¹⁰⁵

I concur with Ryken that “the symbolic mode of the Song of Songs, in which sexual consummation, for example, is pictured as claiming a sensuous garden, has built a reserve that keeps the poem far from pornography.”¹⁰⁶

In the Song intimacy means marriage. Mitchell observes that “an interpretation of the Song that ignores or denies that the couple is married perverts the book’s depiction of sexuality and ultimately perverts its message about Christology and ecclesiology.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, if marriage is taken away from the Song, the natural consequence is that intimacy is distorted. However, the Song has clear indicators that marriage is the foundational principle for intimacy. Davidson argues against those who reject the marriage in the Song that “they have failed to take seriously the unity of the Song and the testimony of the groom regarding his bride to a garden.”¹⁰⁸ In this sense when this intimacy is experienced outside of the life-long commitment God’s ideal of holistic growth is mired. Mary Durkin writes that

It is only when one is able to make the commitment to concentered affiliations and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifice and compromise that one demonstrates a capacity for intimacy. It is this capacity for intimacy which, in the fidelities and commitments it evokes, reinforces our identity... intimacy requires a love that is more than a feeling love. It must be a mature love in which will is joined to feeling, in which partners give up the tentativeness of former relationships and vow themselves to a constancy which, in effect, acknowledges that some doors to other opportunities will remain forever closed.¹⁰⁹

Fox also comments that the Song of Solomon resembles in many ways the ancient Near Eastern poetry. Although I am not interested in refuting here such idea, which in some aspects it is true, I observe that the concept of intimacy in marriage in today’s society is getting closer to what some of the Israel’s neighbors conceived about marriage. Fox explains that in Egyptian love poetry “marriage is never the focal point of the songs.”¹¹⁰ In contrast, it seems, the Song of Solomon introduces an important aspect of sexual purity. The chronological principle of sexual intimacy in the Song suggests a

¹⁰⁵ Dillow, *Solomon on Sex*, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 287. The Song can also present problems to people who believe that reasons for wanting to marry someone should exclude almost entirely any concern over whether or not a person finds his or her potential mate physically attractive. According to such viewpoint, marriage should be based almost exclusively on the spiritual qualities of the husband or wife. You may well imagine the frustration of people who espouse such view when they read the lengthy description of physical beauty given in the Song. See Cosby, *Sex in the Bible*, 56.

¹⁰⁷ Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 281.

¹⁰⁸ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, 593.

¹⁰⁹ Mary Durkin, “Intimacy and Marriage: Continuing the Mystery of Christ and the Church,” in *The Family in Crisis or in Transition: A Sociological and Theological Perspective*, ed. Andrew M. Greeley, Concilium 121 (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1979), 78, 79.

¹¹⁰ Fox, *The Song of Songs*.

polemic against the ancient Near Eastern view of sexuality, as well as for today's concept of sexual intimacy.

The flow of the Song suggests that "Eating and Drinking" is the highest moment of intimacy. This is demonstrated by the invitation-acceptance pattern found in 4:16-5:1. Davidson observes that "the climatic invitation and acceptance on the part of the virgin bride and groom to 'become one flesh' with each other through sexual intercourse makes the dramatic statement that sexual union is reserved and preserved for husband and wife after marriage".¹¹¹

There is no question about that this is the first sexual encounter of the couple. Scholars who disagree argue that premarital sex is not explicitly or implicitly mentioned. Fox argues that "the Song does assume sexual ethic, but the sexual virtue cherished is not chastity. It is fidelity: unquestioned devotion to one's lover".¹¹² I admit that premarital sexual purity is not explicitly referred because it is depicted in poetry language. Furthermore, the poem unquestionably states that 5:1 is the first sexual encounter of the couple. Specifically, regarding the moral standards of sexual behavior of the woman there is no doubt that she is "a garden sealed" (4:12). However, concerning Solomon's moral standards of sexual purity prior to marriage we can only assume it. We are certain that

Song of Songs describes in 5:1 the first sexual encounter of a young couple on their wedding night. A theology of intimacy clearly indicates that, unlike the experience in chapter 7:1-13, the groom and the bride are looking forward to an exciting new experience. "Here the young man is indeed thrilled with his bride, but much of the thrill for him is due to his anticipation of discovery".¹¹³

Thus, the overall structure of the Song presents a chronological principle of sexual intimacy.¹¹⁴ This principle is referred in the adjurations "do not awaken love until it pleases" in 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4, which seems to be an appeal addressed to the wedding attendees. This principle is described by Mitchell: "Contrary to what the world says, promiscuity actually tends to lessen the enjoyment of conjugal delights by infecting the marriage with recollections of sin, guilt and emotional pain. On the other hand, the preservation of virginity prior to marriage will enhance the marriage and will be conducive to more vigorous and pleasurable marital relations".¹¹⁵ Mitchell contributes greatly to observe that a chronological principle of sexual intimacy necessarily expects virginity. Cosby writes that "with great anticipation the groom announces his desire to enter the garden and taste the fruits and drink from the fountain. Whereas before his bride was a sealed fountain, now she will become for him like a well of living water and stream flowing from the mountains of Lebanon".¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, 594.

¹¹² Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 315.

¹¹³ Cosby, *Sex in the Bible*, 72.

¹¹⁴ David Sedlacek in a lecture titled "A Journey to the Heart of God" proposed a progressive sexuality in the Sanctuary. He observes a progressive intimacy toward a Most Holy place sex. See David Sedlacek, "Sexuality: A Journey to the Heart of God," in *Chapel Lecture at the Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2012), April 12.

¹¹⁵ Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 203.

¹¹⁶ Cosby, *Sex in the Bible*, 74.

In view of a macrostructure of the poem as a chronological principle of sexual intimacy some features of intimacy can be found in the Song:¹¹⁷

1. *Presence/absence*: The yearning for fruits and wine symbols of the couple.¹¹⁸
2. *Mutuality*: Reciprocity of feelings. It is also evident in the use of the genitival relationship in 4:16-5:1 and throughout the Song. The possession of fruits, milk, pomegranate, honey, garden etc, once described as hers it is also described as his.
3. *Sensuousness*: The role of the senses, seeing, hearing, touching and smelling in the encounter of the couple is significant. The wholesome beauty of intimacy was intended to be part of this marriage experience.

Finally, we may conclude that the Song presents a principle of intimacy portrayed by remaining virgin until the wedding. Mitchell observes four directives and promises.¹¹⁹

Those who experience intimacy until marriage will be delivered from suffering: Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.

Those who experience intimacy until marriage will be delivered from contempt: 1:5-6, 8; 5:7; 8:1, 7.

Those who experience intimacy until marriage will receive peace: 8:10.

Those who experience intimacy until marriage will be married to a King (or Queen).

Davidson, similar to Murphy and Mitchell, finds those principles in Gen 2:24 as the theological anchor of marriage in the Bible. In this text three levels are the main constituencies of love:¹²⁰

To leave (יָצָא): Exclusivity

To cleave (דָּבַק): Permanent

To be one flesh (לִבְשָׁר אֶחָד): Intimacy.

117 Murphy, "A Biblical Model of Human Intimacy: The Song of Songs," 63.

118 Words of encouragement are to be given to single men and women to remain sexually pure. One of the instances Jesus mentions Solomon is in Matthew 6:25-34. Jesus's appeal was to contemplate the lilies of the field because "Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one these." These verses are about the anxiousness of *eating and drinking and clothing*. To this Jesus said: "Do not be anxious then... for all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (NAS)

119 Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 204, 205. I have adjusted them by adding the word intimacy.

120 Richard M. Davidson, "Seminar in Biblical Theology/Seminar in Old Testament Theology: Biblical Law," in *Class Lecture on Biblical Law: Jewish Festivals* (Berrien Springs, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Spring, 2012), April 11. Davidson finds 12 kinds of intimacy: Physical, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, creative, recreational, work, crisis, conflict, commitment, spiritual and communication intimacy. See Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, 596, 597, 601, 602. The same conclusion is observed in Shea's analysis of the structure of the book. See William H. Shea, "The Chiastic Structure of the Song of Songs," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92, (1980).

Conclusion

The Song is a chronological principle of sexual intimacy. This principle construes a definitive progress and a real dramatic movement. Verses 4:16 and 5:1 have demonstrated that there are sufficient textual evidences of a literary unity of the Song, and that the Song of Songs is a single piece, one single poem. This thesis leads to believe that the Song is not a collection of songs and that the structure of the book contains a chronological principle of sexual intimacy in the couple loving relationship, Solomon and the Shulamamite. Thus, "Eating and Drinking" is the central event throughout the Song and it portrays the theological implications of a chronological principle of sexual intimacy in a relationships between a man and a woman. The Song presents sexual intercourse as a wholesome and enjoyable part of the marriage relationship and should be a source of joy for both husband and wife.¹²¹ Mitchell correctly observes that "the Song's theme of sexuality depicts the institution of marriage as the sacred context for the lovers' intimacy... therefore whenever the Song alludes to intimacy, the reader should bear in mind the presupposed fact of the marriage".¹²²

Thus, the "eating and drinking" motif of sexual activity between Solomon and the Shulamamite in the poem is set in the context of a monogamous relationship.¹²³ Moreover, this sexual monogamous relationship is preceded by sexual purity. The couple reserves sexual intimacy until marry-age because it is in marry-age that God's protective wall around sexuality can keep it holy.¹²⁴ God is the source for human love.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Cosby, *Sex in the Bible*, 79.

¹²² Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 279.

¹²³ Ibid., 567.

¹²⁴ Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 276.

¹²⁵ Andrews University, *Andrews Study Bible: Light. Depth. Truth* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 855, see Song 8:6.