

OUR EXPERIENCE OF LOVE'S INVINCIBILITY (8:5–7)

In the view I am adopting here, there is no description of an actual wedding found in the Song of Songs. There are only the vows of love couples make to each other that usually lead to marriage. But now the final scene has been reached.

In a chorus, made up apparently of the villagers of Shunem with its country folk and neighbors, they together sing this inquiry: “Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover?” (v. 5). The answer, of course, is the Shulammitte maiden.

It all goes back to the “apple tree,” or citron tree, where the shepherd had first awakened this girl’s heart (v. 5c). It is not, therefore, a foolish sentiment to cherish and retain those memories of such secluded spots, where lovers have enjoyed sweet and private conversation. Such memories are to be stored up and brought to mind from time to time lest the freshness of marriage wears thin and becomes forgotten.

As we continue working through the text, we discover that marital love has five qualities: it is intimate, intense, indestructible, invaluable, and ineluctable.

First, such love is *intimate*. The maiden earnestly desires to be indelibly imprinted on her lover’s heart. She refers to it as a “seal,” which in that culture consisted of a small cylinder worn around the neck on a chain or on a beaded string of some sort as a form of personal identification. This identification seal could be rolled out on wet clay, or a ring could be pressed down on wet clay as equivalent to a personal signature. Both the seal and the ring were deeply engraved with characters or pictures that functioned as the identity or authorization of the person represented, much like a signature in our day on a check or an important document (cf. [Gen. 38:18](#); [41:42](#); [Jer. 22:24](#); [Job 38:14](#); [Esther 3:12](#); [8:8](#); [Dan. 6:17](#); [Hag. 2:23](#)). Thus the seal was fully equated with the person himself or herself. No one else could carry that seal or identity. This, therefore, is a key sign as to how intimate and distinctive a couple’s love for each other is.

True marital love such as this is also *intense*, for “love is as strong as death” ([8:6b](#)). This is not to say that such love manifests an immature possessiveness or that it insists on having its own way, but it nevertheless has an extremely deep bonding with such a strong intensity that there are few things that adequately compete with it. It wants to protect, guard, preserve, and give one’s self to the other person. In fact, it has a “jealousy,” or “zeal,” that is as tenacious in its grip as the grave. That is how constant real love is—it defeats every attempt to suppress it or to overthrow it. Its intensity can hardly be measured! It is deathly strong!

A third quality of true marital love is that it is *indestructible* (v. [7a](#)), for nothing can extinguish it. There is no amount of water, nor are there any rivers or floods that can wash away genuine love that God has placed in a marriage as defined in the Bible. This kind of love will persevere despite all the waves of adversity, suffering, or trials that can possibly arise in a marriage. Little, if anything, can destroy this love that God has given to a couple!

This type of marital love is also *invaluable* (v. [7b](#)), for no amount of money or other types of gifts can ever purchase or divert this kind of love away from its object. Solomon with all the riches of his palace and empire had tried as hard as he could to attract the Shulammitte’s attention and favor. Nev-

ertheless, even though he tried to win her and decisively lost, he was moved by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to record how he had loved this maiden, but eventually lost her to a lowly shepherd boy because he tried to substitute things in place of himself, whereas this couple only wanted to be exclusively with each other. Love will not tolerate the substitution of stuff, wealth, and riches as an alternative for the giving of one's self to another person. A love that tries to give all the stuff of this world in place of giving one's self is cheap and valueless and eventually harmful to a real marriage. It is not the love God gives as his gift; instead, it is an artificial substitute!

Finally, true marital love is *ineluctable* (v. 6e). The passionate call of this love cannot be evaded or escaped. Its flames are the very flames from Yahweh himself. This is the only place in the book where God's name appears. This love will blaze into full strength, but it is a flame that is not artificial—it is a “flame” from “Yahweh” (v. 6e–f). Since the flame is lit by God, there is little chance of it being extinguished unless that love is not tended and guarded with care!

To summarize, this love must be passionate, personal, persevering, persistent, and priceless. It is a special gift from God to all who recognize him as their Savior and Lord. Who said biblical marriages are not made in heaven? They were wrong! Such a marriage as described here surely is made in heaven!

OUR APPRECIATION OF LOVE'S GUARDIANS (8:8–14)

These final verses pose two options. They may indicate a time in the past when the Shulammite's family cared for her when she was very young and her family wanted to discipline and preserve her for the future. Or they depict the Shulammite's sister, or perhaps even one of the shepherd's sisters. Now that the Shulammite and the shepherd are married, she is a sister to both of them and needs special care to make sure she is kept as pure and chaste for her future husband as the Shulammite had been preserved for her shepherd during their courtship.

A “wall” (v. 10) serves as a good metaphor or symbol of stability and protection. Everyone watches over this girl to make sure she firmly resists all improper or immoral suggestions of potential suitors. If she, on the one hand, proves to have the attitude of a “door” (v. 9c), which here functions as a figure of speech for one who is too open and too accessible to the seductiveness of any who approach her, then her family will “enclose her with panels of cedar” (v. 9d). This means that her brothers will restrict her freedom for her own protection if she seems to be too easy going and too susceptible to all and any who might attempt to woo her.

But, on the other hand, if she is as solidly reliable as a “wall,” then they will “build towers of silver on her” (v. 9b). This must mean that she will have a worthy dowry given her when she marries if she acts properly during those days, as she comes into a time of maturing and seeking a spouse. The reward for the brothers' efforts, and the patience of this sister, is that this young lady will experience contentment and peace (v. 10d)—a type of joy that also comes only from the Lord.

Meanwhile, the contrast with Solomon's harem is enormous, to say the least, for he has a “vineyard in Baal Hamon” (v. 11a). The past-tense verb is used to explain this. His vineyard is called symbolically the “lord of a multitude,” or the “lord of confusion.” Thus, while the possession of a vineyard

was usually a sign of opulence in agricultural terms, yet in Solomon's case, if this stands figuratively for his harem, it then is also a place of great turmoil and loud noisy murmuring among all these women with all their intrigues and infighting for position and favor in the royal court.

Solomon's "vineyard" (read: harem) strongly contrasts with the maiden's "vineyard" (meaning: her own person) in verse 12. Of course, her own "person" (read: vineyard) is of much humbler circumstance and without all the frills of the palace. However, she will now find pleasure in tending and cultivating the development of her own person (read: vineyard) and being all she can be in the interests of her beloved boyfriend. Yes, the second line of verse 11 literally reads: "The thousand be to you, O Solomon, and the two hundred to those getting fruit." This probably means: "You, Solomon, are welcome to your retinue of wives, your entire harem, along with all your revenue, and the long list of your tenants, who work all your fields, but I am content with what I have in my shepherd-lover. I will share my 'vineyard' only with him."

In verse 13 the maiden is no longer in Jerusalem, but is now in the country where she feels she belongs and so earnestly wanted to return as soon as she could. There with her friends, she is also most content to live with her husband, that is, her shepherd-lover. We can almost hear a cheer go up for her courageous stand and for the joy she now experiences. She has found her lover!

The book ends with verse 14, giving us words that at first appear to be unrelated to what has just taken place. But this is not so. The maiden's appeal reflects the call in 2:17 to "Come away, my lover," for now this invitation comes with new energy and emphasis. Now she exalts with abandon, for as she recalls how she was invited previously to downgrade that anticipated joy for all the glitter and glamor of the court-life she had seen, the contrast to what she now sees is enormous. For it was an even greater delight to go with her real lover at the speed of a fleeing gazelle, or to get away with him at the speed of a young stag. The story ends with the newly wedded couple riding off into the sunset, experiencing the joy and happiness given by God for marriages that covenant fidelity with each other and covenant abiding trust in the Lord.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The marital love God gives to couples who trust him and who make him part of their covenant vows is a joyous and an abiding love.
2. Such love cannot be traded or exchanged for any other person or gift, for God will make that marriage like a round seal written over one's heart with its hold on the two of them continuing to be as strong as death, yet one with unbounded joy and happiness.
3. Marriage, as God's gift, is intimate, intense, indestructible, invaluable, ineluctable, invincible, and inextinguishable, as well as personal, possessive (in the good sense), persistent, priceless, and princely.
4. And to the unmarried, Solomon under inspiration of the Holy Spirit urges that they be a "wall," steadfast in their resolve to remain pure, and not to act as a "swinging door," too easily persuaded when they should not have been convinced at all.

STUDY QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. In what sense are marriages between believers made in heaven? What tends to fracture such an arrangement?
2. How does this new couple take up the challenge of looking out for their younger sister? In what ways should we also show the same regard for those in our family or among our associates who are younger than us, but who are approaching the age of marriage?
3. What, out of all possible gifts, did this couple find to be the most basic one they sought through their marriage? How realistic do you think this choice is for us in our day? What would you say is highest on your list of priorities for your marriage (already or the one you transpose?)
4. What characteristics mentioned here are as true of this marriage as you think they are also true of your marriage or the way you aspire to behave? What action or attitudes have you seen in other marriages that you wish were not there and that are inhibiting full joy and blessing from God on those marriages?
5. How important is a good theology and doctrine of marriage to the stability of a nation? Will nations that take a lesser or more secular view of marriage risk collapse of their economy, social fabric, influence, and military ventures? If so, why and what can be done to forestall such a tragic conclusion to such a culture?