Ecclesiastes 3:1 - Song of Songs 8:14 (The Message)

Ecclesiastes 3 - Song of Solomon 8

There’s a Right Time for Everything

3 There’s an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:

2-8 A right time for birth and another for death,
A right time to plant and another to reap,
A right time to kill and another to heal,
A right time to destroy and another to construct,
A right time to cry and another to laugh,
A right time to lament and another to cheer,
A right time to make love and another to abstain,
A right time to embrace and another to part,
A right time to search and another to count your losses,
A right time to hold on and another to let go,
A right time to rip out and another to mend,
A right time to shut up and another to speak up,
A right time to love and another to hate,
A right time to wage war and another to make peace.

9-13 But in the end, does it really make a difference what anyone does? I’ve had a good look at what God has given us to do—busywork, mostly. True, God made everything beautiful in itself and in its time—but he’s left us in the dark, so we can never know what God is up to, whether he’s coming or going. I’ve decided that there’s nothing better to do than go ahead and have a good time and get the most we can out of life. That’s it—eat, drink, and make the most of your job. It’s God’s gift.

14 I’ve also concluded that whatever God does, that’s the way it’s going to be, always. No addition, no subtraction. God’s done it and that’s it. That’s so we’ll quit asking questions and simply worship in holy fear.

15 Whatever was, is.
Whatever will be, is.
That’s how it always is with God.

God’s Testing Us

16-18 I took another good look at what’s going on: The very place of judgment—corrupt! The place of righteousness—corrupt! I said to myself,
“God will judge righteous and wicked.” There’s a right time for every thing, every deed—and there’s no getting around it. I said to myself regarding the human race, “God’s testing the lot of us, showing us up as nothing but animals.”

19-22 Humans and animals come to the same end—humans die, animals die. We all breathe the same air. So there’s really no advantage in being human. None. Everything’s smoke. We all end up in the same place—we all came from dust, we all end up as dust. Nobody knows for sure that the human spirit rises to heaven or that the animal spirit sinks into the earth. So I made up my mind that there’s nothing better for us men and women than to have a good time in whatever we do—that’s our lot. Who knows if there’s anything else to life?

**Slow Suicide**

4 1-3 Next I turned my attention to all the outrageous violence that takes place on this planet—the tears of the victims, no one to comfort them; the iron grip of oppressors, no one to rescue the victims from them. So I congratulated the dead who are already dead instead of the living who are still alive. But luckier than the dead or the living is the person who has never even been, who has never seen the bad business that takes place on this earth.

4 Then I observed all the work and ambition motivated by envy. What a waste! Smoke. And spitting into the wind.

5 The fool sits back and takes it easy,
His sloth is slow suicide.
6 One handful of peaceful repose
Is better than two fistfuls of worried work—
More spitting into the wind.

**Why Am I Working Like a Dog?**

7-8 I turned my head and saw yet another wisp of smoke on its way to nothingness: a solitary person, completely alone—no children, no family, no friends—yet working obsessively late into the night, compulsively greedy for more and more, never bothering to ask, “Why am I working like a dog, never having any fun? And who cares?” More smoke. A bad business.

9-10 It’s better to have a partner than go it alone.
Share the work, share the wealth.
And if one falls down, the other helps,
But if there’s no one to help, tough!

11 Two in a bed warm each other.
    Alone, you shiver all night.
12 By yourself you’re unprotected.
    With a friend you can face the worst.
    Can you round up a third?
    A three-stranded rope isn’t easily snapped.

13-16 A poor youngster with some wisdom is better off than an old but foolish
    king who doesn’t know which end is up. I saw a youth just like this start with
    nothing and go from rags to riches, and I saw everyone rally to the rule of
    this young successor to the king. Even so, the excitement died quickly, the
    throngs of people soon lost interest. Can’t you see it’s only smoke? And
    spitting into the wind?

God’s in Charge, Not You

5 Watch your step when you enter God’s house.
   Enter to learn. That’s far better than mindlessly offering a sacrifice,
       Doing more harm than good.
2 Don’t shoot off your mouth, or speak before you think.
    Don’t be too quick to tell God what you think he wants to hear.
    God’s in charge, not you—the less you speak, the better.
3 Overwork makes for restless sleep.
    Overtalk shows you up as a fool.
4-5 When you tell God you’ll do something, do it—now.
    God takes no pleasure in foolish gabble. Vow it, then do it.
    Far better not to vow in the first place than to vow and not pay up.
6 Don’t let your mouth make a total sinner of you.
    When called to account, you won’t get by with
       “Sorry, I didn’t mean it.”
    Why risk provoking God to angry retaliation?
7 But against all illusion and fantasy and empty talk
    There’s always this rock foundation: Fear God!

A Salary of Smoke

8-9 Don’t be too upset when you see the poor kicked around, and justice and
    right violated all over the place. Exploitation filters down from one petty
    official to another. There’s no end to it, and nothing can be done about it.
    But the good earth doesn’t cheat anyone—even a bad king is honestly
    served by a field.
The one who loves money is never satisfied with money,
Nor the one who loves wealth with big profits. More smoke.
The more loot you get, the more looters show up.
And what fun is that—to be robbed in broad daylight?
Hard and honest work earns a good night’s sleep,
Whether supper is beans or steak.
But a rich man’s belly gives him insomnia.
Here’s a piece of bad luck I’ve seen happen:
A man hoards far more wealth than is good for him
And then loses it all in a bad business deal.
He fathered a child but hasn’t a cent left to give him.
He arrived naked from the womb of his mother;
He’ll leave in the same condition—with nothing.
This is bad luck, for sure—naked he came, naked he went.
So what was the point of working for a salary of smoke?
All for a miserable life spent in the dark?

Make the Most of What God Gives

After looking at the way things are on this earth, here’s what I’ve
decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and
make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life.
And that’s about it. That’s the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of
what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting
what’s given and delighting in the work. It’s God’s gift! God deals out joy in
the present, the now. It’s useless to brood over how long we might live.

Things Are Bad

I looked long and hard at what goes on around here, and let me tell
you, things are bad. And people feel it. There are people, for instance, on
whom God showers everything—money, property, reputation—all they ever
wanted or dreamed of. And then God doesn’t let them enjoy it. Some
stranger comes along and has all the fun. It’s more of what I’m
calling smoke. A bad business.

Say a couple have scores of children and live a long, long life but never
enjoy themselves—even though they end up with a big funeral! I’d say that
a stillborn baby gets the better deal. It gets its start in a mist and ends up in
the dark—unnamed. It sees nothing and knows nothing, but is better off by
far than anyone living.
Even if someone lived a thousand years—make it two thousand!—but didn’t enjoy anything, what’s the point? Doesn’t everyone end up in the same place?

We work to feed our appetites; Meanwhile our souls go hungry.

So what advantage has a sage over a fool, or over some poor wretch who barely gets by? Just grab whatever you can while you can; don’t assume something better might turn up by and by. All it amounts to anyway is smoke. And spitting into the wind.

Whatever happens, happens. Its destiny is fixed. You can’t argue with fate.

The more words that are spoken, the more smoke there is in the air. And who is any better off? And who knows what’s best for us as we live out our meager smoke-and-shadow lives? And who can tell any of us the next chapter of our lives?

Don’t Take Anything for Granted

A good reputation is better than a fat bank account. Your death date tells more than your birth date.

You learn more at a funeral than at a feast—After all, that’s where we’ll end up. We might discover something from it.

Crying is better than laughing. It blotches the face but it scources the heart.

Sages invest themselves in hurt and grieving. Fools waste their lives in fun and games.

You’ll get more from the rebuke of a sage Than from the song and dance of fools.

The giggles of fools are like the crackling of twigs Under the cooking pot. And like smoke.

Brutality stupefies even the wise And destroys the strongest heart.

Endings are better than beginnings. Sticking to it is better than standing out.

Don’t be quick to fly off the handle. Anger boomerangs. You can spot a fool by the lumps on his head.

Don’t always be asking, “Where are the good old days?” Wise folks don’t ask questions like that.
Wisdom is better when it’s paired with money,
Especially if you get both while you’re still living.
Double protection: wisdom and wealth!
Plus this bonus: Wisdom energizes its owner.
Take a good look at God’s work.
Who could simplify and reduce Creation’s curves and angles
To a plain straight line?
On a good day, enjoy yourself;
On a bad day, examine your conscience.
God arranges for both kinds of days
So that we won’t take anything for granted.

Stay in Touch with Both Sides

I’ve seen it all in my brief and pointless life—here a good person cut
down in the middle of doing good, there a bad person living a long life of
sheer evil. So don’t knock yourself out being good, and don’t go overboard
being wise. Believe me, you won’t get anything out of it. But don’t press
your luck by being bad, either. And don’t be reckless. Why die needlessly?

It’s best to stay in touch with both sides of an issue. A person who fears
God deals responsibly with all of reality, not just a piece of it.

Wisdom puts more strength in one wise person
Than ten strong men give to a city.
There’s not one totally good person on earth,
Not one who is truly pure and sinless.
Don’t eavesdrop on the conversation of others.
What if the gossip’s about you and you’d rather not hear it?
You’ve done that a few times, haven’t you—said things
Behind someone’s back you wouldn’t say to his face?

How to Interpret the Meaning of Life

I tested everything in my search for wisdom. I set out to be wise, but it
was beyond me, far beyond me, and deep—oh so deep! Does anyone ever
find it? I concentrated with all my might, studying and exploring and seeking
wisdom—the meaning of life. I also wanted to identify evil and stupidity,
foolishness and craziness.

One discovery: A woman can be a bitter pill to swallow, full of seductive
scheming and grasping. The lucky escape her; the undiscerning get caught.
At least this is my experience—what I, the Quester, have pieced together as
I’ve tried to make sense of life. But the wisdom I’ve looked for I haven’t
found. I didn’t find one man or woman in a thousand worth my while. Yet I did spot one ray of light in this murk: God made men and women true and upright; we’re the ones who’ve made a mess of things.

8 There’s nothing better than being wise, Knowing how to interpret the meaning of life. 
   Wisdom puts light in the eyes, 
   And gives gentleness to words and manners.

No One Can Control the Wind

2-7 Do what your king commands; you gave a sacred oath of obedience. Don’t worryingly second-guess your orders or try to back out when the task is unpleasant. You’re serving his pleasure, not yours. The king has the last word. Who dares say to him, “What are you doing?” Carrying out orders won’t hurt you a bit; the wise person obeys promptly and accurately. Yes, there’s a right time and way for everything, even though, unfortunately, we miss it for the most part. It’s true that no one knows what’s going to happen, or when. Who’s around to tell us?

8 No one can control the wind or lock it in a box. No one has any say-so regarding the day of death. No one can stop a battle in its tracks. No one who does evil can be saved by evil.

9 All this I observed as I tried my best to understand all that’s going on in this world. As long as men and women have the power to hurt each other, this is the way it is.

One Fate for Everybody

10 One time I saw wicked men given a solemn burial in holy ground. When the people returned to the city, they delivered flowery eulogies—and in the very place where wicked acts were done by those very men! More smoke. Indeed.

11 Because the sentence against evil deeds is so long in coming, people in general think they can get by with murder.

12-13 Even though a person sins and gets by with it hundreds of times throughout a long life, I’m still convinced that the good life is reserved for the person who fears God, who lives reverently in his presence, and that the evil person will not experience a “good” life. No matter how many days he
lives, they’ll all be as flat and colorless as a shadow—because he doesn’t fear God.

14 Here’s something that happens all the time and makes no sense at all: Good people get what’s coming to the wicked, and bad people get what’s coming to the good. I tell you, this makes no sense. It’s smoke.

15 So, I’m all for just going ahead and having a good time—the best possible. The only earthly good men and women can look forward to is to eat and drink well and have a good time—compensation for the struggle for survival these few years God gives us on earth.

16-17 When I determined to load up on wisdom and examine everything taking place on earth, I realized that if you keep your eyes open day and night without even blinking, you’ll still never figure out the meaning of what God is doing on this earth. Search as hard as you like, you’re not going to make sense of it. No matter how smart you are, you won’t get to the bottom of it.

9 1-3 Well, I took all this in and thought it through, inside and out. Here’s what I understood: The good, the wise, and all that they do are in God’s hands—but, day by day, whether it’s love or hate they’re dealing with, they don’t know.

Anything’s possible. It’s one fate for everybody—righteous and wicked, good people, bad people, the nice and the nasty, worshipers and non-worshipers, committed and uncommitted. I find this outrageous—the worst thing about living on this earth—that everyone’s lumped together in one fate. Is it any wonder that so many people are obsessed with evil? Is it any wonder that people go crazy right and left? Life leads to death. That’s it.

Seize Life!

4-6 Still, anyone selected out for life has hope, for, as they say, “A living dog is better than a dead lion.” The living at least know something, even if it’s only that they’re going to die. But the dead know nothing and get nothing. They’re a minus that no one remembers. Their loves, their hates, yes, even their dreams, are long gone. There’s not a trace of them left in the affairs of this earth.

7-10 Seize life! Eat bread with gusto,
Drink wine with a robust heart.
Oh yes—God takes pleasure in your pleasure!
Dress festively every morning.
Don’t skimp on colors and scarves.
Relish life with the spouse you love
Each and every day of your precarious life.
Each day is God’s gift. It’s all you get in exchange
For the hard work of staying alive.
Make the most of each one!
Whatever turns up, grab it and do it. And heartily!
This is your last and only chance at it,
For there’s neither work to do nor thoughts to think
In the company of the dead, where you’re most certainly headed.

I took another walk around the neighborhood and realized that on this earth as it is—

The race is not always to the swift,
Nor the battle to the strong,
Nor satisfaction to the wise,
Nor riches to the smart,
Nor grace to the learned.
Sooner or later bad luck hits us all.

No one can predict misfortune.
Like fish caught in a cruel net or birds in a trap,
So men and women are caught
By accidents evil and sudden.

Wisdom Is Better than Muscle

One day as I was observing how wisdom fares on this earth, I saw something that made me sit up and take notice. There was a small town with only a few people in it. A strong king came and mounted an attack, building trenches and attack posts around it. There was a poor but wise man in that town whose wisdom saved the town, but he was promptly forgotten. (He was only a poor man, after all.)

All the same, I still say that wisdom is better than muscle, even though the wise poor man was treated with contempt and soon forgotten.

The quiet words of the wise are more effective
Than the ranting of a king of fools.
Wisdom is better than warheads,
But one hothead can ruin the good earth.

Dead flies in perfume make it stink,
And a little foolishness decomposes much wisdom.
Wise thinking leads to right living;
Stupid thinking leads to wrong living.
Fools on the road have no sense of direction. The way they walk tells the story: “There goes the fool again!”

If a ruler loses his temper against you, don’t panic; A calm disposition quiets intemperate rage.

Here’s a piece of bad business I’ve seen on this earth, An error that can be blamed on whoever is in charge: Immaturity is given a place of prominence, While maturity is made to take a backseat. I’ve seen unproven upstarts riding in style, While experienced veterans are put out to pasture.

Caution: The trap you set might catch you. Warning: Your accomplice in crime might double-cross you.

Safe: Quarrying stones is dangerous. Be alert: Felling trees is hazardous.

Remember: The dullest the ax the harder the work; Use your head: The more brains, the less muscle.

If the snake bites before it’s been charmed, What’s the point in then sending for the charmer?

The words of a wise person are gracious. The talk of a fool self-destroys— He starts out talking nonsense And ends up spouting insanity and evil.

Fools talk way too much, Chattering stuff they know nothing about.

A decent day’s work so fatigues fools That they can’t find their way back to town.

Unlucky the land whose king is a young pup, And whose princes party all night. Lucky the land whose king is mature, Where the princes behave themselves And don’t drink themselves silly.

A shiftless man lives in a tumbledown shack; A lazy woman ends up with a leaky roof.

Laughter and bread go together, And wine gives sparkle to life— But it’s money that makes the world go around.

Don’t bad-mouth your leaders, not even under your breath, And don’t abuse your betters, even in the privacy of your home. Loose talk has a way of getting picked up and spread around. Little birds drop the crumbs of your gossip far and wide.

Be generous: Invest in acts of charity. Charity yields high returns.

Don’t hoard your goods; spread them around. Be a blessing to others. This could be your last night.
When the clouds are full of water, it rains.
When the wind blows down a tree, it lies where it falls.
Don’t sit there watching the wind. Do your own work.
Don’t stare at the clouds. Get on with your life.

Just as you’ll never understand
the mystery of life forming in a pregnant woman,
So you’ll never understand
the mystery at work in all that God does.

Go to work in the morning
and stick to it until evening without watching the clock.
You never know from moment to moment
how your work will turn out in the end.

Before the Years Take Their Toll

Oh, how sweet the light of day,
And how wonderful to live in the sunshine!
Even if you live a long time, don’t take a single day for granted.
Take delight in each light-filled hour,
Remembering that there will also be many dark days
And that most of what comes your way is smoke.

You who are young, make the most of your youth.
Relish your youthful vigor.
Follow the impulses of your heart.
If something looks good to you, pursue it.
But know also that not just anything goes;
You have to answer to God for every last bit of it.

Live footloose and fancy-free—
You won’t be young forever.
Youth lasts about as long as smoke.

Honor and enjoy your Creator while you’re still young,
Before the years take their toll and your vigor wanes,
Before your vision dims and the world blurs
And the winter years keep you close to the fire.

In old age, your body no longer serves you so well.
Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen.
The shades are pulled down on the world.
You can’t come and go at will. Things grind to a halt.
The hum of the household fades away.
You are wakened now by bird-song.
Hikes to the mountains are a thing of the past.
Even a stroll down the road has its terrors.
Your hair turns apple-blossom white,
Adorning a fragile and impotent matchstick body.
Yes, you’re well on your way to eternal rest,
While your friends make plans for your funeral.

Life, lovely while it lasts, is soon over.
Life as we know it, precious and beautiful, ends.
The body is put back in the same ground it came from.
The spirit returns to God, who first breathed it.

It’s all smoke, nothing but smoke.
The Quester says that everything’s smoke.

The Final Word

Besides being wise himself, the Quester also taught others knowledge. He weighed, examined, and arranged many proverbs. The Quester did his best to find the right words and write the plain truth.

The words of the wise prod us to live well.
They’re like nails hammered home, holding life together.
They are given by God, the one Shepherd.

But regarding anything beyond this, dear friend, go easy. There’s no end to the publishing of books, and constant study wears you out so you’re no good for anything else. The last and final word is this:

Fear God.
Do what he tells you.

And that’s it. Eventually God will bring everything that we do out into the open and judge it according to its hidden intent, whether it’s good or evil.

1 The Song—best of all songs—Solomon’s song!

The Woman

Kiss me—full on the mouth!
Yes! For your love is better than wine,
headier than your aromatic oils.
The syllables of your name murmur like a meadow brook.
No wonder everyone loves to say your name!

Take me away with you! Let’s run off together!
An elopement with my King-Lover!
We’ll celebrate, we’ll sing,
we’ll make great music.
Yes! For your love is better than vintage wine.
Everyone loves you—of course! And why not?
I am weathered but still elegant,  
    oh, dear sisters in Jerusalem,  
Weather-darkened like Kedar desert tents,  
    time-softened like Solomon’s Temple hangings.  
Don’t look down on me because I’m dark,  
    darkened by the sun’s harsh rays.  
My brothers ridiculed me and sent me to work in the fields.  
    They made me care for the face of the earth,  
    but I had no time to care for my own face.  
Tell me where you’re working  
    —I love you so much—  
Tell me where you’re tending your flocks,  
    where you let them rest at noontime.  
Why should I be the one left out,  
    outside the orbit of your tender care?

The Man
If you can’t find me, loveliest of all women,  
    it’s all right. Stay with your flocks.  
Lead your lambs to good pasture.  
    Stay with your shepherd neighbors.  
You remind me of Pharaoh’s  
    well-groomed and satiny mares.  
Pendant earrings line the elegance of your cheeks;  
    strands of jewels illumine the curve of your throat.  
I’m making jewelry for you, gold and silver jewelry  
    that will mark and accent your beauty.

The Woman
When my King-Lover lay down beside me,  
    my fragrance filled the room.  
His head resting between my breasts—  
    the head of my lover was a sachet of sweet myrrh.  
My beloved is a bouquet of wildflowers  
    picked just for me from the fields of Engedi.

The Man
Oh, my dear friend! You’re so beautiful!  
    And your eyes so beautiful—like doves!

The Woman
And you, my dear lover—you’re so handsome!  
    And the bed we share is like a forest glen.  
We enjoy a canopy of cedars  
    enclosed by cypresses, fragrant and green.
I'm just a wildflower picked from the plains of Sharon,
a lotus blossom from the valley pools.

The Man
A lotus blossoming in a swamp of weeds—
that’s my dear friend among the girls in the village.

The Woman
As an apricot tree stands out in the forest,
my lover stands above the young men in town.
All I want is to sit in his shade,
to taste and savor his delicious love.
He took me home with him for a festive meal,
but his eyes feasted on me!
Oh! Give me something refreshing to eat—and quickly!
Apricots, raisins—anything. I’m about to faint with love!
His left hand cradles my head,
and his right arm encircles my waist!
Oh, let me warn you, sisters in Jerusalem,
by the gazelles, yes, by all the wild deer:
Don’t excite love, don’t stir it up,
until the time is ripe—and you’re ready.
Look! Listen! There’s my lover!
Do you see him coming?
Vaulting the mountains,
leaping the hills.
My lover is like a gazelle, graceful;
like a young stag, virile.
Look at him there, on tiptoe at the gate,
all ears, all eyes—ready!
My lover has arrived
and he’s speaking to me!

The Man
Get up, my dear friend,
fair and beautiful lover—come to me!
Look around you: Winter is over;
the winter rains are over, gone!
Spring flowers are in blossom all over.
The whole world’s a choir—and singing!
Spring warblers are filling the forest
with sweet arpeggios.
Lilacs are exuberantly purple and perfumed,
and cherry trees fragrant with blossoms.
Oh, get up, dear friend,
my fair and beautiful lover—come to me!
Come, my shy and modest dove—
leave your seclusion, come out in the open.
Let me see your face,
let me hear your voice.
For your voice is soothing
and your face is ravishing.

The Woman
15 Then you must protect me from the foxes,
    foxes on the prowl,
Foxes who would like nothing better
    than to get into our flowering garden.
16-17 My lover is mine, and I am his.
    Nightly he strolls in our garden,
Delighting in the flowers
    until dawn breathes its light and night slips away.
Turn to me, dear lover.
    Come like a gazelle.
Leap like a wild stag
    on delectable mountains!

3 Restless in bed and sleepless through the night,
I longed for my lover.
I wanted him desperately. His absence was painful.
So I got up, went out and roved the city,
    hunting through streets and down alleys.
I wanted my lover in the worst way!
I looked high and low, and didn’t find him.
And then the night watchmen found me
    as they patrolled the darkened city.
    “Have you seen my dear lost love?” I asked.
No sooner had I left them than I found him,
    found my dear lost love.
I threw my arms around him and held him tight,
    wouldn’t let him go until I had him home again,
safe at home beside the fire.
5 Oh, let me warn you, sisters in Jerusalem,
    by the gazelles, yes, by all the wild deer:
Don’t excite love, don’t stir it up,
    until the time is ripe—and you’re ready.
6-10 What’s this I see, approaching from the desert,
    raising clouds of dust,
Filling the air with sweet smells
    and pungent aromatics?
Look! It’s Solomon’s carriage, carried and guarded by sixty soldiers, sixty of Israel’s finest,
All of them armed to the teeth, trained for battle, ready for anything, anytime.
King Solomon once had a carriage built from fine-grained Lebanon cedar.
He had it framed with silver and roofed with gold.
The cushions were covered with a purple fabric, the interior lined with tooled leather.

11 Come and look, sisters in Jerusalem.
Oh, sisters of Zion, don’t miss this!
My King-Lover,
dressed and garlanded for his wedding, his heart full, bursting with joy!

**The Man**

4 1-5 You’re so beautiful, my darling, so beautiful, and your dove eyes are veiled
By your hair as it flows and shimmers, like a flock of goats in the distance streaming down a hillside in the sunshine.
Your smile is generous and full—expressive and strong and clean.
Your lips are jewel red, your mouth elegant and inviting, your veiled cheeks soft and radiant.
The smooth, lithe lines of your neck command notice—all heads turn in awe and admiration!
Your breasts are like fawns, twins of a gazelle, grazing among the first spring flowers.
6-7 The sweet, fragrant curves of your body, the soft, spiced contours of your flesh
Invite me, and I come. I stay until dawn breathes its light and night slips away.
You’re beautiful from head to toe, my dear love, beautiful beyond compare, absolutely flawless.

8-15 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride.
Leave Lebanon behind, and come. Leave your high mountain hideaway. Abandon your wilderness seclusion, Where you keep company with lions and panthers guard your safety.
You’ve captured my heart, dear friend.
   You looked at me, and I fell in love.
   One look my way and I was hopelessly in love!
How beautiful your love, dear, dear friend—
   far more pleasing than a fine, rare wine,
   your fragrance more exotic than select spices.
The kisses of your lips are honey, my love,
   every syllable you speak a delicacy to savor.
Your clothes smell like the wild outdoors,
   the ozone scent of high mountains.
Dear lover and friend, you’re a secret garden,
   a private and pure fountain.
Body and soul, you are paradise,
   a whole orchard of succulent fruits—
Ripe apricots and peaches,
   oranges and pears;
Nut trees and cinnamon,
   and all scented woods;
Mint and lavender,
   and all herbs aromatic;
A garden fountain, sparkling and splashing,
   fed by spring waters from the Lebanon mountains.

The Woman
16 Wake up, North Wind,
   get moving, South Wind!
Breathe on my garden,
   fill the air with spice fragrance.
Oh, let my lover enter his garden!
   Yes, let him eat the fine, ripe fruits.

The Man
5 I went to my garden, dear friend, best lover!
   breathed the sweet fragrance.
I ate the fruit and honey,
   I drank the nectar and wine.
Celebrate with me, friends!
   Raise your glasses—"To life! To love!"

The Woman
2 I was sound asleep, but in my dreams I was wide awake.
   Oh, listen! It’s the sound of my lover knocking, calling!
**The Man**
“Let me in, dear companion, dearest friend,
my dove, consummate lover!
I’m soaked with the dampness of the night,
drenched with dew, shivering and cold.”

**The Woman**
3 “But I’m in my nightgown—do you expect me to get dressed?
    I’m bathed and in bed—do you want me to get dirty?”
4-7 But my lover wouldn’t take no for an answer,
    and the longer he knocked, the more excited I became.
I got up to open the door to my lover,
sweetly ready to receive him,
Desiring and expectant
    as I turned the door handle.
But when I opened the door he was gone.
    My loved one had tired of waiting and left.
And I died inside—oh, I felt so bad!
    I ran out looking for him
But he was nowhere to be found.
    I called into the darkness—but no answer.
The night watchmen found me
    as they patrolled the streets of the city.
They slapped and beat and bruised me,
    ripping off my clothes,
These watchmen,
    who were supposed to be guarding the city.
8 I beg you, sisters in Jerusalem—
    if you find my lover,
Please tell him I want him,
    that I’m heartsick with love for him.

**The Chorus**
9 What’s so great about your lover, fair lady?
    What’s so special about him that you beg for our help?

**The Woman**
10-16 My dear lover glows with health—
    red-blooded, radiant!
He’s one in a million.
    There’s no one quite like him!
My golden one, pure and untarnished,
    with raven black curls tumbling across his shoulders.
His eyes are like doves, soft and bright,
    but deep-set, brimming with meaning, like wells of water.
His face is rugged, his beard smells like sage,
    His voice, his words, warm and reassuring.
Fine muscles ripple beneath his skin,
    quiet and beautiful.
His torso is the work of a sculptor,
    hard and smooth as ivory.
He stands tall, like a cedar,
    strong and deep-rooted,
A rugged mountain of a man,
    aromatic with wood and stone.
His words are kisses, his kisses words.
    Everything about him delights me, thrills me
    through and through!
That’s my lover, that’s my man,
    dear Jerusalem sisters.

The Chorus
6 So where has this love of yours gone, fair one?
    Where on earth can he be?
    Can we help you look for him?

The Woman
2-3 Never mind. My lover is already on his way to his garden,
    to browse among the flowers, touching the colors and forms.
I am my lover’s and my lover is mine.
    He caresses the sweet-smelling flowers.

The Man
4-7 Dear, dear friend and lover,
    you’re as beautiful as Tirzah, city of delights,
Lovely as Jerusalem, city of dreams,
    the ravishing visions of my ecstasy.
Your beauty is too much for me—I’m in over my head.
    I’m not used to this! I can’t take it in.
Your hair flows and shimmers
    like a flock of goats in the distance
    streaming down a hillside in the sunshine.
Your smile is generous and full—
    expressive and strong and clean.
Your veiled cheeks
    are soft and radiant.
8-9 There’s no one like her on earth,
    never has been, never will be.
She’s a woman beyond compare.
My dove is perfection,
Pure and innocent as the day she was born,
and cradled in joy by her mother.
Everyone who came by to see her
exclaimed and admired her—
All the fathers and mothers, the neighbors and friends,
blessed and praised her:

10 “Has anyone ever seen anything like this—
dawn-fresh, moon-lovely, sun-radiant,
ravishing as the night sky with its galaxies of stars?”
11-12 One day I went strolling through the orchard,
looking for signs of spring,
Looking for buds about to burst into flower,
anticipating readiness, ripeness.
Before I knew it my heart was raptured,
carried away by lofty thoughts!
13 Dance, dance, dear Shulammite, Angel-Princess!
Dance, and we’ll feast our eyes on your grace!
Everyone wants to see the Shulammite dance
her victory dances of love and peace.

Shapely and graceful your sandaled feet,
and queenly your movement—
Your limbs are lithe and elegant,
the work of a master artist.
Your body is a chalice,
wine-filled.
Your skin is silken and tawny
like a field of wheat touched by the breeze.
Your breasts are like fawns,
twins of a gazelle.
Your neck is carved ivory, curved and slender.
Your eyes are wells of light, deep with mystery.
Quintessentially feminine!
Your profile turns all heads,
commanding attention.
The feelings I get when I see the high mountain ranges
—stirrings of desire, longings for the heights—
Remind me of you,
and I’m spoiled for anyone else!
Your beauty, within and without, is absolute,
dear lover, close companion.
You are tall and supple, like the palm tree,
and your full breasts are like sweet clusters of dates.
I say, “I’m going to climb that palm tree!”
I’m going to caress its fruit!”
Oh yes! Your breasts
will be clusters of sweet fruit to me,
Your breath clean and cool like fresh mint,
your tongue and lips like the best wine.

The Woman
9-12 Yes, and yours are, too—my love’s kisses
flow from his lips to mine.
I am my lover’s.
I’m all he wants. I’m all the world to him!
Come, dear lover—
let’s tramp through the countryside.
Let’s sleep at some wayside inn,
then rise early and listen to bird-song.
Let’s look for wildflowers in bloom,
blackberry bushes blossoming white,
Fruit trees festooned
with cascading flowers.
And there I’ll give myself to you,
my love to your love!
11 Love-apples drench us with fragrance,
fertility surrounds, suffuses us,
Fruits fresh and preserved
that I’ve kept and saved just for you, my love.

8 1-2 I wish you’d been my twin brother,
sharing with me the breasts of my mother,
Playing outside in the street,
kissing in plain view of everyone,
and no one thinking anything of it.
I’d take you by the hand and bring you home
where I was raised by my mother.
You’d drink my wine
and kiss my cheeks.
3-4 Imagine! His left hand cradling my head,
his right arm around my waist!
Oh, let me warn you, sisters in Jerusalem:
Don’t excite love, don’t stir it up,
until the time is ripe—and you’re ready.

The Chorus
5 Who is this I see coming up from the country,
arm in arm with her lover?
The Man
I found you under the apricot tree, 
and woke you up to love. 
Your mother went into labor under that tree, 
and under that very tree she bore you.

The Woman
6-8 Hang my locket around your neck, 
wear my ring on your finger. 
Love is invincible facing danger and death. 
Passion laughs at the terrors of hell. 
The fire of love stops at nothing—
it sweeps everything before it. 
Flood waters can’t drown love, 
torrents of rain can’t put it out. 
Love can’t be bought, love can’t be sold—
it’s not to be found in the marketplace. 
My brothers used to worry about me:
8-9 “Our little sister has no breasts. 
What shall we do with our little sister 
when men come asking for her? 
She’s a virgin and vulnerable, 
and we’ll protect her. 
If they think she’s a wall, we’ll top it with barbed wire. 
If they think she’s a door, we’ll barricade it.”
10 Dear brothers, I’m a walled-in virgin still, 
but my breasts are full—
And when my lover sees me, 
he knows he’ll soon be satisfied.

The Man
11-12 King Solomon may have vast vineyards 
in lush, fertile country, 
Where he hires others to work the ground. 
People pay anything to get in on that bounty. 
But my vineyard is all mine, 
and I’m keeping it to myself. 
You can have your vast vineyards, Solomon, 
you and your greedy guests!
13 Oh, lady of the gardens, 
my friends are with me listening. 
Let me hear your voice!
The Woman

14 Run to me, dear lover.
   Come like a gazelle.
Leap like a wild stag
   on the spice mountains.