

Books of The Bible

A Survey of Song of Solomon

Introduction

Of the sixty-six books of the Bible which have been given bad press, perhaps the Song of Solomon ranks among the top three. This is largely due to the expressions of affection, which when read by a fallen sinful nature, sees this book as nothing more than an erotic manuscript. Some would even dare to say that it ought not to be part of the divine literature! It has been said that only the super spiritual ought to read it, except for chapter 5:9-16. We can be sure that the Holy and morally perfect God would never endorse or inspire that which is vulgar and crude.



To view the book as “unbecoming” is evil for several reasons:

- a) It puts sinful man on a judicial plane questioning the moral character of God in allowing such a book to be part of the scriptures.
- b) God never made anything “dirty” and it is only after He made man and woman do we read the divine comment: “Behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).
- c) The Song of Solomon is part of God’s inspired Word and is part of that which is called: “The scripture of truth” (Dan. 10:21), and is included in the words of Paul: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Thus, the Song of Solomon has an enriching message for humanity.
- d) It presents the experiences of affection with its times of togetherness and separations, and then on a higher level, the relationship between God and Israel, Christ and the church, and the individual believer and the Lord.
- e) It is a series of beautiful observations and recordings of a man and a woman deeply in love, and as a type, demonstrating the affection in reality God had for Israel, and the affection ideally Israel had for God.

There are few books of the Bible which are more complicated, for while some books have individual verses which are difficult, the Song of Solomon is fraught with complexities which are exceedingly hard to understand. One could almost say that all who study it take away a different perspective, for when dealing with love, and in type the love of divine persons, it is easy to understand why it is fraught with complexities.

An interesting feature is that the book does not end as one would expect. Since the theme of the book is love, one would expect it to end with them “riding off into the sunset” in utter bliss, instead it ends with her longing to hear His voice and calling for his hasty return.

- a) If seen as an application of the Lord and the church, or the Lord and an individual saint, it conveys one who has known the sweetness of life with the Lord and not in the dark days of separation (due to not being at home with the Lord) longs to hear his voice (ch. 8:13) and eagerly wait His return (ch. 8:14). Compare this with the words of the bride: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

Another observation is that there is not a single reference to God in the entire book. This is also the case in the book of Esther, and although God is seen in the background, in Esther He is providentially controlling events, but that is not seen here. I suggest the reason for God’s name not to be mentioned in Esther is found in Deut. 31:16-18. His people had forsaken Him and His face was hid from them.

This book is sung each year on the eighth day of the Feast of the Passover.

We are often told that “myrrh” speaks of suffering and bitterness, and rightly so, for that is what the word means. However, this is to ignore two major considerations:

- a) The word is used more often in the Song of Solomon than any other book, and this book is all about love. All one has to do is to review the references to myrrh in the book to see it is associated with tender affection and delightfulness

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- b) Furthermore, God distinctly informs us of its excellence by calling it, “sweet smelling myrrh” (ch. 5:5), and is among the “chief spices” (ch. 4:14). This being so, when we read of myrrh in the types, it indicates the bitter sufferings of the Lord which He bore in love, and which rose as a sweet smelling savour to God.

Key Words

The words and clauses mentioned multiple times are:

- a) Words
- i) Myrrh (ch. 1:13; 3:6; 4:6, 14; 5:1, 5, 13)
 - ii) Beloved (ch. 1:13; 5:1)
 - iii) Garden (ch. 4:12, 16; 5:1; 6:2, 11)
 - iv) Fruits (ch. 4:13, 16; 6:11; 7:13)
- b) Clauses
- i) I am my beloved's (ch. 6:3; 7:10)
 - ii) Awake not my love (ch. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)

Date and Occasion For The Writing

There are no clearly defined hints given as to when or on what occasion the Song of Solomon was written. I suggest, unlike Ecclesiastes and Proverbs which appear to be written when Solomon was an older man having known the experiences of life, I think this would have been more in middle age. He had known multiple wives, many out of political alliances, but clearly this was his true love set in contrast to all others.

The Author

There are those who question the author being Solomon but the expression opening the book settles it for me: “The song of songs, which is Solomon's” (ch. 1:1). There are other references in the book to Solomon (ch. 1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12) and the “King” (ch. 1:4, 12; 3:9, 11; 7:5), but none of these specify him as the author. However, I do see him as one of the two principle persons. Taking Solomon as the author, we observe he was also the author of most of the book of Proverbs (Prov. 1:1; 25:1) and Ecclesiastes (Ecc. 1:1). He was given two names. David called him “Solomon” and Nathan, the prophet, called him “Jedidiah” (II Sam. 12:24, 25). Solomon means “peace” and Jedidiah means “love”. He was referred to twice by the Lord regarding his glory and wisdom (Matt. 6:29; 12:42). He is seen in majestic glory with the delightfulness of deep love and tender affection (ch. 1:2-4; 5:10-16).

It is also suggested that the book is simply a collection of drama's by several writers, but the identical or similar figures of speech preclude such an idea. Furthermore, by the repetition of expressions, the authorship would be more complicated, for the debate then would be, “Which part was written first” and “Who put the book together?” For instance:

- a) “love more than wine” (ch. 1:2; 4:10)
- b) “fragrant perfumes” (ch. 1:3, 12; 3:6; 4:10)
- c) “being brought into” (ch. 1:4; 2:4)
- d) “the beloved's cheeks” (ch. 1:10; 5:13)
- e) “eyes like doves” (ch. 1:15; 4:1)
- f) “teeth like sheep” (ch. 4:2; 6:6)
- g) “until the day break and the shadows flee away” (ch. 2:17; 4:6)
- h) “her charge to the daughters of Jerusalem” (ch. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)
- i) “the lover like a gazelle” (ch. 2:9, 17; 8:14)
- j) “Lebanon” (ch. 3:9; 4:8, 11, 15; 7:4)
- k) “sick of love” (ch. 2:5; 5:8)
- l) “looking forth” (ch. 2:9; 6:10)
- m) “left hand under her head and right hand embracing” (ch. 23:6; 8:3)

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- n) and “my beloved is mine and I am his” (ch. 2:16; 6:3; 7:10)
- o) but observe the change of wording in ch. 6:3; the two night scenes (ch. 3:1-5; 5:2-8), each followed by the encounter with the watchmen (ch. 3:3; 5:7); and concluding with her speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem with a reference to love (ch. 3:5; 5:8).

To my mind, all this and more indicate a single author.

The Principle Persons

On this question there is a split consideration.

- a) There are those who argue that there are five persons or groups: namely, the girl, Solomon, her brothers, the daughters of Jerusalem, and the watchmen.
- b) Others say there are six: namely the girl, Solomon, her brothers, the daughters of Jerusalem and the peasant farmer, and the watchmen.
- c) Still others say there are eight: the girl, Solomon, her brothers, the daughters of Jerusalem, the peasant farmer, and the companions of the shepherd and the watchmen.

My understanding is that there are two principle participants: Solomon the shepherd king, and the young woman. My reason for this is:

- a) If we take Solomon and the Shepherd to be two different people, then the story line necessitates assumptions that have to be made, and the book becomes somewhat like a jigsaw puzzle with pieces from all over the book being fitted together. For instance, when in presenting Solomon and the Shepherd as two people, the storyline goes as follows:
 - i) It begins with ch. 8:8-14 with the girl at home. Then she meets a shepherd (ch. 1:7) but the brothers overheard the invitation and send her to take care of the vineyards (ch. 2:25).
 - ii) She requests the shepherd to meet her in the evening (ch. 3:1) but when he did not come she set out to find him (ch. 3:2-4).
 - iii) One day when entering a garden she came into the presence of the king (ch. 6:6-11) who sought to woo her by conducting her to his royal tent (ch. 1:2-4). There she was encouraged by alluring flatteries to fall in love with him, but it failed (ch. 1:6-11).
 - iv) Being released she sought her beloved (ch. 1:12-2:7). However, Solomon was not giving up yet, and bringing her to his capital, which was Jerusalem, he sought to woo her with splendor (ch. 3:1-11), but her beloved shepherd followed her (ch. 4:1-5) where he met her and she expressed her desire to go back to her own home (ch. 4:6). The shepherd praised her steadfastness (ch. 4:7-16).
 - v) The king tried again to gain her affection (ch. 6:4-7:9) but she refused, being pledged to another (ch. 7:10-8:4). The king dismisses her and she reunites with the Shepherd (ch. 8:5-14).
 - vi) The fact is that this is disorder and seeks to adjust the material to present a viewpoint. With the three persons interpretation the king is not met until chapter 6:6-11, yet she longs for affection from him (ch. 1:1) and knows his character and why the virgins love him (ch. 1:2-4). Surely her fidelity would be questioned if speaking of the shepherd she says: “He shall lie all night between my breasts” (ch. 1:13).
- b) Unless we add “assuming clauses” without Biblical foundation, it would be very strange to find her saying about the shepherd: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (ch. 1:2), and then saying about someone other than he, though this new person is the king: “hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice” (ch. 1:4). Again, to hear her saying to the shepherd: “Thy love is better than wine” (ch. 1:2) and then to Solomon the king: “We will remember thy love more than wine” (ch. 1:4) would be very strange, or speaking of the shepherd saying: “A bundle of myrrh is my well beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts” (ch. 1:13) after having said: “While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof” (ch. 1:12).

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- c) If we take Solomon to be the shepherd then the question is, “Is Solomon a suitable individual to prefigure God or Christ?” The argument is that Solomon, who had a thousand wives and disobeyed God’s laws, was not suitable to represent a divine person. However, we must remember that God is a realist, and while the instrument is not ideal, He will take aspects of their life or will consider the general bent of the life. For instance, God used David who was an adulterer and responsible for the death of a man to be the, “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1). Moses who murdered a man and was exceedingly reluctant to be God’s instrument for delivering the children of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 3:12); yet it was he God used. or what of Jonah who refused to be the missionary God wanted him to be and was angry at the grace of God, yet God used him to be his channel in the greatest evangelistic revival of the scriptures (Jon. 3:2-10), and time fails to consider Abraham, or Samson. If it pleased God to take Solomon and use the man in a shadow of God or Christ, our attitude is to worship the fulness of His grace, for he also uses us failing creatures for His glory.

The Contrast Between Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon

Ecclesiastes	Song of Solomon
Deals with an individual taken up with seeking pleasure and purpose through things	Deals with an individual taken up with seeking pleasure and purpose in a person
That which can never satisfy	That which satisfies
No personal relationship	A personal relationship

Avenues To Consider The Book

The Song of Solomon has throughout the years been the subject of much debating as to its value, spirituality and actuality. There are two main lines of teaching, the erroneous and the true. Beyond this there are multiple applications, but as I understand it, two interpretations.

a) The erroneous teaching:

- i) The Song of Solomon is a book of naturalistic experiences and is void of any spiritual meaning. Many of those who hold this understanding indicate that those who see a higher level have an exaggerated imaginative mind, blended with an imagined spirituality. In response we say that such thoughts are an insult to the activity of the Holy Spirit for we are told: “Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). If this is simply a book of fables then the Holy Spirit becomes the author of deception, and such an attitude is blasphemous.

b) The true teaching in micro:

- i) The Song of Solomon is a book which is historically true but is a type with nationalistic and prophetic perceptions. Since it is in the Old Testament and is the story of affection, I see it on two levels relative to God and Christ.
1. Primarily it is viewing God and Israel. It is seen in the relationship of Israel as the bride of Jehovah, raising her to a place of queenship (Ezek. 16:12) and being His wife (Jer. 3:20). God is the King (1 Sam. 12:12; Psa. 47:6-7; Isa. 44:6) and her Shepherd.
 2. Viewing it as a foreshadow of Christ and Israel, it is seen in the relationship of Christ first presented to Israel as the Shepherd (Matt. 26:31; Jn. 10:16), and after an absence manifested as the King (Psa. 2:6; Isa. 6:1, 5; Zech. 9:9; 14:9, 17; Matt. 25:31).

c) Some of the applications

- i) It is very easy to lose sight of the relationship between a husband and wife being a type of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-32). Therefore, it is easy to see the Song of Solomon as a poetical portrayal of that which Ephesians is teaching. From our vantage view it is evident that the Song of Solomon is, in some ways, an unveiling of the relationship between Christ and the church, and the individual believer and the Lord. As with every type there are shortcomings, for instance:
 1. While the church is spoken of as a bride and wife, the Lord is never referred to as her husband, nor is He ever said to be the King of the church!

- ii) It can be considered evangelistically but observing this song does not begin with the sinner coming to know the Shepherd, but rather the saint in a relationship with the Lord. It conveys the ideal heart the Lord desires in His own for Himself, and the darkness and sorrows when one leaves Him. Throughout the book the Lord speaks of His delight and what He sees in His beloved (the church in this context, and therefore, the individual saint) and the manifestation of His love to those who appreciate and desire the knowledge and experience of it. However, to those who count the consciousness of His presence as unsuitable at the moment (ch. 5:3), He departs. There are those times when He comes back to us for he cannot permit estrangement to be maintained, but there are other times when in the darkness we will have to learn the hard way of self ease. A matter most precious is that when there is the restoration, how quickly He renews His affection for us, and assures us that the beauty He sees in us has not changed (ch. 4:7).

- iii) It can be considered devotionally for it begins with her being brought into his environment and the unfolding of his love for her as is seen by:
 1. His yearnings toward her (ch. 4:8); His delight in her (ch. 4:1); His expressions of her, “My Love” (ch. 1:9, 2:2, 10); “My Fair One” (ch. 2:10); “My dove” (ch. 5:2); “My Spouse” (ch. 4:8, 9, 10, 11, 12; 5:1); and “My Undeiled” (ch. 6:9). This results in a progression of change in her as she in her heart lives in the reality of what he has brought her into, and how he sees her.

Its Broad Plan

The book is for Israel a literary manifestation from God, Israel’s relationship with God, how they fail, and the restoring grace of God toward them. Just as the Pharisees knew the parable spoken by the Lord concerning the two sons, the vineyard, and the stone the builders rejected was against them (Matt. 21:28-45), so Israel would have seen the same in this book.

The Song of Solomon is a series of experiences between a man and a woman in which there is expressed the longings of her heart for a deeper intimacy with her beloved. It begins with her with the king (ch. 1:4) whom she also recognizes as a Shepherd. They are united for the bed is called “our bed” (ch. 1:16). This is followed by separations and reunitions until he comes as the coronated king (ch. 3:11) in the day of his espousals. In this way it becomes a portrayal of Israel related to Jehovah as King, united in a spiritual marriage. There is then the separations when Israel was separated from God and suffered as when sold into the kings of the nations in Judges, and ultimately coming back and received as king in a day to come. Meanwhile, she (representing the remnant) has grown from infancy to womanhood and waits to hear his voice and see Him again (ch. 8:13-14).

God and Israel As Husband and Wife and Shepherd

When we read the giving of the law in Exodus, it was a very austere, intimidating, and frightening experience, yet when God speaks of it in Jeremiah He sees it as the day of espousals: “Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown” (Jer. 2:2). God speaks of being “married” to Israel (Jer. 3:14). Just as the young woman reminisces about the day of her espousals (ch. 4:11), so the Lord reminds Israel of her espousals to Him. However, like the story line in the Song, there were times when the woman was apathetic in responding to the

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Lord's approaching (ch. 5:2-4) and then only, too late, discovered He was gone. How often the Lord called Israel to the renewal of fellowship. The scene changes and there is restoration with Israel, again the wife of Jehovah.

God is also seen as the Shepherd to Israel (Psa. 80:1; Jer. 31:10).

Christ and Israel as Shepherd and King

Just as the man is manifested to the woman as a Shepherd, so our Lord when He came to Bethlehem. Matthew wrote: "Out of thee shall come a Governor" (Matt. 2:6). The word translated "governor" means to shepherd. In John the Lord comes to the fold and enters the door with the porter opening as the Shepherd. Israel rejected Him and He went away, but there is coming a day when He shall come back as the King of Israel, and like the young woman, recognized the king as her Shepherd lover, so Israel will recognize the Lord as such. He did come as King before, but they did not recognize him (Zech. 9:9). He will be the King of the Jews of Israel and will sit on God's holy hill of Zion (Psa. 2:6). He will enter Jerusalem as the mighty victor amid adoring crowds with the glorious cry "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle (Psa. 24:7-8); and what a shepherd victor He is. David wrote concerning Him: "In thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee. Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever" (Psa. 45:6).

What a glorious message, in this the Song of Songs, love desired, hindered, and yet ultimately restored in perfection.

Structure of The Book

- 1) It is just about impossible to read this book without seeing the corresponding thoughts, for instance, the following are a few of the doublets, each with its own presentations of truth.
- 2) The book falls into two major sections:
 - a) The beginning of love (chapters 1-4) and
 - b) The broadening of love (chapters 5-8).

It is generally taken that the wedding takes place after he comes up in all his glory for the day of his espousals (ch. 3:6-11) so that there are now observed to be three sections:

- a) The beginnings of love (ch. 1:2-3:5)
- b) The wedding day (ch. 3:6-11)
- c) The complementary exchanges of affection and love (ch. 4:1-8:14)

In the first section the girl reminisces of the early days when she so in love with Solomon wanted to be with him and being brought to his palace (ch. 1:2-2:7). Recalling that first meeting she mentions it was springtime (ch. 2:8-17). However, joyful as those days were, there had to be separations (ch. 3:1-5) and then the happy time when he came to take her as his bride (ch. 3:6-11). At that occasion he speaks words of admiration and affection (ch. 4:1-15); her response (ch. 4:16); and after the wedding night (ch. 5:1).

But wedding and togetherness are sometimes not as close as they could be and she has a dream in which he seems distant (ch. 5:2), and her reluctance to disturb herself which brings her into sorrow (ch. 5:3-7). The question is given: "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" and she answers in a rich description of what he is and means to her (ch. 5:8-16), and eventually she finds him (ch. 6:1-3). Solomon once again responds assuring her of his love and praising her for her beauty (ch. 6:4-7:9). The fact remains that she is a country girl at heart and longs to revisit her country home (ch. 7:10-8:4). Finally the journey is made, she and her mother together (ch. 8:5) as they express their love for each other, her growing up, and her desire not to be separated from him longer than necessary, and longing to hear his voice (ch. 8-14).

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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