

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 40: The Book, Song of Solomon

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Introduction

When I mentioned to people that we have come to this book, Song of Solomon, the reaction was virtually always, "Good Luck," or "How are you going to do that one," or "I wouldn't touch that book with a ten foot pole."

Great Bible scholars, even experts in the Old Testament, seem to be afraid of it. Dr. James Gray, for instance, introduces Song of Solomon in his Bible survey book, *Synthetic Bible Studies*, by saying,

"Of all the books of the Old Testament, I feel myself least competent to speak of the Canticles, or the Song of Solomon. I am not ignorant of what others have taught and written about the book, but I personally have not grasped its contents as I have with some of the other books."

Jewish historians tell us that ancient Jews forbade the reading of Song of Solomon until a man was thirty years old. My Rabbi acquaintance told me they still discourage early reading because the hormones and the influences of our sex-crazed society tend to warp a young persons understanding. (Jews, even orthodox, are not prudes regarding sex.)

John Phillips concurs, *"The man with impure mind will never understand this book...There is no sin, therefore no shame"*

In fact, the fear of this book is so strong that I found no Jewish scholar willing to take the book literally, or historically as representing Solomon's human experience with physical love. Rosenmueller says, *"...on the supposition that it (Song of Solomon) describes merely human love,...it would have been positively objectionable, and never would have been inserted in the Holy canon."*

And yet it is acclaimed as one of the greatest poems ever written and, by many, as the greatest book in the Bible. Jewish writers often make a comparison like this:

Proverbs is like the court of the Temple, practical advice for all.

Ecclesiastes is like the Holy Place, deeper truth for the maturing

Song of Solomon is like the Holy of Holies, coming face to face with God.

In the Hebrew Bible it is placed directly after the Pentateuch. It is read aloud, to adult audiences, at Passover because of its national significance.

As you can see, Jews universally reject the literal reading of Song of Solomon and accept only the allegorical reading. I disagree with that approach. The message is, I believe, given by God to illustrate His ideal for romance and beauty within a marriage as He intended.

A human life finds its highest fulfillment in the love between a husband and wife, but it is true that many find here an allegorical picture of the love of God for His bride, Israel, or the typical picture

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of the love of Christ for His bride, Church. Feel free... But I prefer to find its value in a literal reading and understanding.

Advantages and disadvantages of the views:

Literal--*a historic account of an actual marriage (Solomon and wife).*

Strengths--We can read it plainly, seeing marriage as a vitally important part of God's plan and applying it to our own lives. We need not "figure it out" or stretch it.

Weaknesses--Why is it in the canon and why in the Old Testament? God created marriage as the cornerstone of human relationships and, unlike the pagans around them, the Jewish home was one where love and tenderness (even romance) lived. God made marriage a building block of His society as evidenced in Old Testament teaching.

Allegorical--*treats an account as purely figurative and mythical with characters and events representing something else.*

Strengths--This makes the story apply to a wider audience, the entire nation of Israel in this case, and thus gives it a reason for being in the Old Testament.

Weaknesses--Whenever we use this method of interpretation we have to speculate as to how far to take the analogy. If Solomon represents God and the bride represents Israel, how do we apply all the events (i.e. when He leaves, etc.).

Typical--*treats account as historical fact but transfers them into the region of poetry for instruction or religious purposes.*

Strengths--This makes the story more applicable to our time and position beyond just our personal marriages. If Solomon represents Christ and the bride is the Church then we can accept the teaching on a corporate level.

Weaknesses--The Song of Solomon is never referred to in the New Testament so, even though the Church is referred to as the bride of Christ in the N. T., we can only speculate as to the accuracy of this parallel of the book to the relationship of Christ to church.

Again, I have chosen to take a literal approach, not just because there are evangelical scholars who I admire who also do, but perhaps because its the easiest way to do the survey. This approach makes:

Solomon, the king; Shulamite woman, the bride and wife; daughters of Jerusalem, wife's sisters, friends (virgins), perhaps staff; friends, the kings buddies; brothers, wife's older siblings.

I also believe that this is not so much a *True Romances* story or exposŽ but a LOVE SONG, a lyrical expression of a pure romantic love between a couple who meet, fall in love, and marry. It is, I believe written to convey the grandeur and glory and the passion and beauty of love which God intended as the cornerstone of society. "*Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth.*" (Proverbs 5:18)

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This does not mean I don't recognize the imagery of the bridegroom and his bride and husband and wife in the Scripture representing the spiritual union of God to Israel and Jesus to the Church. That is rife throughout . I just don't know if it is necessary to make it here.

Title

As we saw early on, it was the Jewish tradition to name their books by using the first several words of the text. Following that principle they called this one *The Song of Songs*..

The repeating of a word in Hebrew always adds emphasis and importance to the word and often means the subject is the best of the best, i.e. Holy of Holies, King of Kings. This fit in well with their belief that this was, in fact, the best of the 1005 songs written by Solomon.

Since the translation of this book from Hebrew into Greek, the Septuagint, the title has been expanded to include all the facts in verse 1 and is, in all modern translations, *The Song of Solomon*.

Author

The only debate over the authorship of the book is whether Solomon wrote it or, if possibly, it was written by another about him since verse 1 can be translated, "*The Song of Songs which is concerning Solomon.*"

The language and form, similar to Egyptian love poetry, was well known to Solomon and the geographical locations correspond to his early kingdom meaning it was probably written by him or, at least, during his time.

It could have been written any time during Solomon's reign, 971-931 BC., but its tone indicates it was written when young love was at its peak. The mention of two Springs indicates that it happened over the period of at least a year, and that fits in with the Jewish custom of exempting young men from duties of work and war for the first year of marriage.

If I must speculate, the Shulamite woman was probably Solomon's first wife (His Ecclesiastes 9:9 wife perhaps?) before he disobeyed God and sinned adding another 699 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3).

When we were at Grace Community Church and John MacArthur came across Scripture dealing with marriage he always said the same thing: Marriage consists of leaving, cleaving, and weaving. It was short, simple and easy to remember. So, for the first time, and probably the last, I am going to borrow a book outline from John MacArthur.

OUTLINE OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Introduction

This outline is so simple and sweet, I can't improve on it. It also emphasizes the nature of the book, since I believe it is a love song, glorifying marriage, rather than an allegory of type of the relationship between God and Israel and/or Christ and the Church.

As I read the Song of Solomon over and over, I tried to reconstruct the order of events that are related in a very free-flowing poetic form.

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This is the story of the song.

In the mountains above Ephraim, King Solomon owned a vineyard (ch 11) which he leased to sharecroppers. There was a mother, at least two sons (sh 1), and at least two daughters (chs 1 and 8). The oldest was the Shulamite, our heroine.

The boys did not really appreciate their sister, or step-sister perhaps, and made her work outside the home, "*My mother's sons were angry with me; and made me caretaker of the vineyards and flocks,*" This makes it impossible for her to "*take care of her own vineyard,...or pasture her own flock,*" (1:6-7).

This meant, she didn't have time to take care of herself, to fix her hair, to beautify herself, "*For why should I be like one who vails herself beside the flocks of your companions?*" You Disney fans will recognize Cinderella here.

One day she's out caring for the flock and looks up to see a tall, dark, handsome shepherd she's never seen before staring at her. She's so embarrassed she says, "*Do not look at me because I am dark, for the sun has burned me.*" (1:5) She babbles on, but he replies, "*If you yourself do not know, most beautiful among women,*" (1:8) then go check out the other women.

In fact, he continues, "You are like my beautiful Egyptian mare and your complexion is perfect, "*Your cheeks like ornaments, your neck with strings of beads.*" **What a line,...but it worked!**

With that "chance meeting" came a friendship that blossomed into love.

It was all very romantic (chs. 1:11-2:15), but then he was gone. But, he knew, and she knew, he would return to her. IT WAS "TRUE LOVE."

She waited (Just like the *Princess Bride*.) She looked for him, *He pastures his flocks among the lilies ...*" (2:16) She dreams of him, "*On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves.*" (3:1) She searches, "*I sought him but did not find him.*" (3:2-4) He was gone a long time...but she waited.

Then one day there was a huge cloud of dust (3:6) It is the king himself, King Solomon, with his entire entourage of bodyguards surrounding a royal sedan chair. (3:6-10) And he comes to her tent. And he stops at her door.

And when she looks up, it is the king, but it is also her shepherd, who had won her heart. And he hasn't changed, "*How beautiful you are, my darling, How beautiful you are!*" And now it's he who rambles on and on. (Chapter 4)

I. THE COURTSHIP: "LEAVING" (Chapters 1:2-3:5)

These entire first two points of the outline were covered in our story.

True love, culminating in marriage, entails bringing him home to mother (3:4) and then marrying him and going to his home.

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A. Lover's Remembrances (1:2-2:7)

"True love" includes a great backlog of romantic memories.

B. Lover's Expression of Reciprocal Love (2:8-3:5)

"True love" communicates in romantic language.

II. THE WEDDING: "CLEAVING" (Chapters 3:6-5:1)

In the true Eastern and Jewish tradition, the bridegroom comes expecting a waiting bride. He knows she loves him, so there is no risk. The wedding is performed and the lovers are pledged to belong to each other for life.

A. The Kingly Bridegroom (3:6-11)

He comes to her as a king, but treats her as his lover, *"On the day of his gladness of heart."* (3:11)

B. The Wedding and First Night Together (4:1-5:1a)

The wedding is consummated and both are satisfied.

C. God's Approval (5:1b)

Most scholars see this as a benediction of blessing from God.

III. THE MARRIAGE: "WEAVING" (Chapters 5:2-8:14)

It is exciting and relatively easy for two lovers to leave their families and to cleave to each other. In fact, cleaving is fun. But, when the honeymoon is over, and the reality of living with another person 24/7 sets in, *that's a challenge!*

A. The First Major Disagreement (5:2-6:3)

This passage seems to recount the lover's first fight.

He, like all men, is a jerk and sees no problem. He just comes to bed as usual, expecting her to respond as if there is nothing wrong. She won't let him into the bedroom. So, like all men, the jerk just leaves.

She, like all women, is sorry for him and goes to look for him, but all she finds is perfume on the door post, a sign that he had been there, if only she wanted him.

She, like all women, goes out looking for him. Women love jerks.

After wandering around and getting arrested in the process, she goes to her friends for sympathy and help in finding him.

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She, like all women, remembers only how fine the jerk is.

This is great for her husband because when he returns, all is forgiven.

B. The Restoration (6:4-8:4)

Some people say making up after a fight is the best part of marriage. I think we should just skip the fight and do the making up.

The passage describes the making up. Notice, he does the talking. Have we figured that out yet, guys? The rest describes the deepening relationship as they live and love together. Love gets better and better with age... and romance never ends.

C. Growing in Grace (8:5-14)

As love matures, the memories of it are constant reminders of how good it is, culminating in the wife's great poem:

"Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it; If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, it would be utterly despised." TRUE LOVE IS PRICELESS!

Lesson

One reason that men are drawn to allegory or type in looking at *Song of Solomon* is the belief that there is not enough there, if taken literally, to justify its inclusion in the canon of Scripture. I beg to differ:

1. The Bible deals with every aspect of life. Since God created marriage as His building block for society, concentrated teaching on love, marriage, and sex is apropos.

2. It certainly deals with important issues:

Sex is introduced within marriage.

Verbal communication is vital, not just physical expression.

Real love matures, while losing none of its excitement.

Love is to last for life regardless of circumstances

3. The Song of Solomon explodes the myth that followers of God look on sex as something dirty or evil. Even in our fallen world, sex within marriage is ultimately good, holy and beautiful.

Homework:

Read: Begin to read the Bible Book: Isaiah