

The Song of Solomon

I. Background on the Song of Solomon

A. This book is known by three different names: The Song of Solomon, Canticles, and the Song of Songs. The Hebrew lends itself in this way: “*The Song of Songs* (i.e. the finest of songs) *which is Solomon’s*”. It is one of five books that comprise the *Megilloth* which are read at various Jewish holidays. These include Ruth (Pentecost), Song of Solomon (Passover), Ecclesiastes (Feast of Tabernacles), Lamentations (anniversary of the fall of Jerusalem), and Esther (Purim).

B. There are those that suggest that this song was written *for* Solomon, rather than *by* Solomon, given the way the Hebrew is written. However, the style in which the Song is written lends itself very favorably in supporting that it was written by Solomon. The style of language is similar to that of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. It is written in the Egyptian Poetic form, and very few in Israel, other than Solomon, would have been familiar enough with this style to write a song in this manner. In addition, we have a Biblical basis to understand that Solomon regularly wrote songs (I Kings 4:32-33). We also find that the text supports the dating of Solomon’s time. There are references to great luxury, as well as cities and towns that existed when Israel was still united.

II. Song of Solomon in the rest of the Bible

A. None

III. Interpretations of Song of Solomon

A. Allegorical Interpretation:

1. The love between Christ and the Church (some Christian commentators)
2. Solomonic praise for Israel’s deliverance (Martin Luther)
3. The depiction of time from David to Christ, and from Christ to His return (Targum, Brightman)
4. The lady of the Song as Mary, mother of Jesus (Roman Catholic)
 - a) There is no evidence of allegory being used in the Song of Solomon. In fact, most examples of allegory include fantastic imagery or obvious allusions, and no such devices exist with this Song. It is man that finds and attributes allegorical interpretation within this book as opposed to taking it for what it is.
 - b) The strongest evidence that contradicts allegorical interpretation is the full extent of sexual language that is used. As we read 5:1, 7:7-8 and others, it would be wholly inappropriate to attribute Christ’s love for the Church in this manner. Even though the Church is likened as the Bride or wife of Christ in the New Testament, it is done so to express the deep love of one for the other, not the “eros” (sexual, romantic) form of love that the Song of Solomon expresses.

B. Dramatic Interpretation:

1. The two-character drama: The story of mutual love between Solomon and the Shulammitte girl
2. The three-character drama: A story in which Solomon attempts to woo the Shulammitte girl away from her true love, the “shepherd lover”
 - a) This interpretation suggests that the Song of Solomon were as a script to a play or a romance novel. There is no evidence to support this. First, no such writings have ever been found that show that this was even a genre of writing in ancient times. This would make Song of Solomon the first and only of its kind with no contemporary proof to show that this interpretation is accurate. Secondly, one must read a great deal into the text to make it work, to the point that you add even more to the text than with the allegorical interpretation. Thirdly, all “dramatic” works have conflict or obstacles to be overcome. Simply put, the Song of Solomon has no story to give it a dramatic leaning. In fact, there is no real dialogue between the two parties. It is more like a duet, in which one speaks, and then the other, separately, speaks.

C. Other interpretations of note:

1. The Historical interpretation – this is an actual account of Solomon attempting to woo a girl away from her love
2. The Cultic Interpretation – It is erotic literature designed and written for a particular group of people that find pleasure in reading such material; some variations of this include an interpretation of the two people in the Song as idols...a god and goddess, such as Baal and Ashtaroth
3. The Wedding Interpretation – the entire book is an elaborate record of Solomon’s marriage to a Shulammite girl

D. The Love Song Interpretation:

1. The best way to view the Song of Solomon is simply for what it is – a love song, sung by a woman, a man, and, at times, their friends. Whether or not this is an actual recording of a real love of Solomon, or if Solomon is using literary license to teach about love, we cannot be 100% certain. While there are points in the Song that sound as if it could be a real event in Solomon’s life, Solomon was not known for his “true love” style, nor is any “special person” ever mentioned in the reign of Solomon. However, regardless of its real or fictional nature, lessons can certainly be gained by the love being shown.

IV. Purpose of the song

- A. While it may seem strange to some that the Bible should contain love poetry, we must understand that Solomon taught concerning how to live (Proverbs), and how to enjoy life (Ecclesiastes). It makes sense that he would write something concerning how to love, especially if he was towards the end of his life and is considering mistakes that he had made over the course of his life.
- B. While the marriage relationship is meant to be a partnership and friendship, that does not mean that the sexual and emotional aspects of love are not worthy of attention, or that they do not even have Biblical attention. In fact, many of Paul’s letters contain specific instructions regarding the sexual relationship between a husband and a wife.

V. Some lessons to be learned:

- A. While certain sexual relationships are condemned, “the marriage bed is undefiled” (Heb. 13:4). It is important to understand that sexuality is a good thing protected by marriage, not an evil thing made permissible by marriage. We often have a very taboo mentality regarding sex, much to the detriment of our children, and even ourselves. God created man and woman for purposes, for roles, and yes, even for enjoyment, sexual or otherwise. (See Genesis 2:24, Matt. 19:5, I Cor. 6:15-17)
- B. The Song teaches us that sexual and physical love should be enjoyed and celebrated within the proper relationship that God has blessed.
- C. While there is no part of Song of Solomon quoted in the New Testament, several of our hymns do take inspiration from Song of Solomon, such as “Lily of the Valley” and “Jesus, Rose of Sharon” (See Song. 2:1) which suggest either certain references in Song of Solomon as being about Christ, or that these references can be attributed to Christ. This is incorrect. However, this does not make these hymns unscriptural; we should simply take note of the actual meanings of these references.

VI. Brief Outline of Song of Solomon

- A. The Song is much like a real song, a duet, with a soprano, a tenor, and a chorus. There are little means of outlining the Song as the point of the Song is simply to express the deep affection and love of one for the other.