

Song of Songs

Purpose: To teach us the purity and sanctity of that estate of marriage which God himself has established.

Outline: 1:1-2:7 – The bride longs for the bridegroom

2:8-3:5 – Their love increases

3:6-5:1 – This passage contains the espousal and praise of the bride

5:2-6:9 – The bride longs for her beloved and sings his praises while he is gone

6:10-8:4 – The beauty of the bride is described

8:5-14 – Here the beauty of love is shown

(Purpose and Outline are from Edward J. Young)

Author: Solomon

Date: The Song was written in the tenth century during the reign of King Solomon.

Highlights:

This has been, for commentators and scholars, one of the most difficult books in the bible to interpret. In part due to the fact that many are embarrassed by it; and in part because of the many possible interpretations.

There are several interpretive approaches:

Dramatic – This approach understands the Song as an ancient Hebrew play.

Typological – The traditional type-antitype fulfillment is read as God's relationship with Israel (or Christ's relationship with the Church).

Cultic – This approach views the Song as a Hebrew adaptation of foreign fertility cult liturgy.

Wedding Cycle – This approach assumes the Song is a mixture of wedding ceremonies.

Allegorical – This is the oldest and most popular approach. Similar to typological approach.

Didactic – This view interprets the poem as a vehicle for instruction.

Literal – The literal, or natural, view takes the Song at face value and interprets the love poetry for what it appears to be – a sensual, even erotic, expression of emotions and passion as two young lovers voice their desire for each other.

There is one other dilemma:

Two-Character Drama – A Shulammitte bride and a shepherd bridegroom (or Solomon)

Three-Character Drama – A Shulammitte maiden, a shepherd lover, and King Solomon

In the three-character view, the maiden is a part of Solomon's harem (1:1-2:2), who seeks her absent lover (2:3-3:5). Solomon then tries to woo the maiden with two proposals (3:6-5:8 and 5:9-7:9). The maiden rejects King Solomon (7:10-8:4) and the maiden and shepherd lover are reunited (8:5-14).

I tend to interpret the Song as a love story with two characters, in a literal-historical approach with elements of the didactic. In other words I tend to think that there is a bride and bridegroom who are teaching us what godly sexual love is through their story.

The title "Song of Songs" is an expression meaning "The best song." The alternative name, "Canticles" is derived from the Latin Vulgate version (CanticumCanticorum – Song of Songs).

The phraseology of the first verse may be understood as "of/to/for/about Solomon" though many also call this "The Song of Solomon."

Solomon was known to have written many proverbs, and songs: "He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five" (1 Kings 4:32). This is the greatest of his songs.

Though it should be noted that the New Testament nowhere quotes from or even alludes to the Song.

The book begins and ends with the beloved/maiden asking the lover/shepherd (or Solomon) to take her away with him.

The friends (or daughters of Jerusalem, or maidens in Solomon's harem) respond to the beloved's opening words in 1:4b.

The beloved makes apologies for not being darkened by the sun, because she had to work in the vineyard.

Much of the exchange between the man and maiden contain similes and metaphors comparing the physical features of the lovers to exotic flora and fauna. While this seems kind of humorous and uncomplimentary to modern Western readers, it fits the historical and literary backdrop of that time.

Most of the action of the story takes place outdoors in fields or gardens.

Some often repeated lines are:

"How beautiful you are, my darling!" (1:15; 4:1,7)

"My lover is mine" (2:16; 6:3)

"Who is this?" (3:6; 6:10; 8:5)

"My sister, my bride" (4:9,12; 5:1)

"Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you" (2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4)

"Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (2:7; 3:5; 8:4)

We come across some famous phrases in chapter two: "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys" (2:1). "He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love" (2:4).

Chapter three would seem to be a dream sequence in which the maiden goes out searching for her lover during the night. It is unclear where the dream ends.

Chapter four shows us the lover giving a description of the beloved from head down. In chapter seven there is a similar description but it starts from the feet and goes up.

5:2 gives us another indication of a dream state.

8:6-7 give us four great wisdom statements characterizing marital love as the strongest, most unyielding, invincible force of unsurpassed worth in human experience.

The thing that I would most desire for people to get out of the Song is the realization that it is a book of the Bible and is no less important than anything else in Scripture. We do a great disservice if we don't teach a godly view of sex in our churches. The worldly view of sex will be believed in the absence of biblical teaching on sex and marriage.