

Song of Songs Overview



Song of Songs was written by Solomon around 900 BC (971-931BC), probably before his spiritual decline after his 700 wives and 300 concubines led him astray (1 Kgs 11:3-4). There are no superlatives in Hebrew, so 'Song of Songs' means 'the most beautiful song of all'. It is the most important song out of Solomon's 1005 songs. (1 Kg 4:32) In Latin Vulgate it is called, 'Canticles' – series of songs.

1. TWO Primary Sections

- a. **Chapters 1-4:** Bride's Inheritance in Christ. The focus is the bride - how the bridegroom views the bride despite her shortcomings.

Chapters 5-8: Bridegroom's Inheritance in the Bride. The focus shifts in the middle of the book (4:16-5:1) The focus now is the bridegroom - what the bridegroom desires.

- b. The book follows the THREE phases in the movement of the Shulamite's heart:

(i) *'My beloved is mine, and I am His.'* (2:16)

(ii) *'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.'* (6:3)

(iii) *'I am my beloved's, and His desire is towards me.'* (7:10)

2. Challenges in Studying the Song of Songs

- a. It is difficult to understand the storyline. There are 3 main voices in the song: (i) The bridegroom (Solomon), (ii) the Shulamite, and (iii) the daughters of Jerusalem.

But the watchmen & the Shulamite's brothers? Who are these? Who is singing when? The context settles these questions. There are also difficulties with the symbols - perfumes, myrrh, henna bloom, lilies, dove's eyes, the pool of Heshbon, etc. This song at times uses 'veiled languages' as many songs do.

- b. Song of Songs has a more varied interpretation than any other book in the Bible. Which one is right? This song poses the *'greatest hermeneutical challenge in the Old Testament'* (Andre LaCocque). But the worst we can do is to destroy its poetic beauty by arguing on the one true meaning.

(i) Natural Interpretation – The song celebrates the beauty of human love within marriage. This view was popular in the last 100 years. The Shulamite girl who is despised by her own family, falls in love with King Solomon, who comes disguised as a poor shepherd boy. But upon confirming their love, his royal identity is revealed on the day of their wedding.

(Alternative reading - A poor shepherd boy and Solomon are two different people, and the Shulamite is caught in a dilemma, but in the end, she chooses the poor shepherd boy out of love.)

(ii) Spiritual interpretation – It is about the beauty of love between Christ and His people. This was the main interpretation for the last 3,000 years. This song was highly esteemed by the 'spiritual mystics' - E.g., Madame Guyon, St. Barnard of Clair, Francis Metcalfe, etc. It was traditionally read during each Passover celebration by the Jewish worshippers as God's love for His people.

'...all the Scriptures concerning Himself.' (Luke 24:27) *'This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.'* (Eph 5:32, c.f. Hos 3:1) – C.f. Typology, Gal 4:21-31.

- c. The book is emotionally confronting, especially for men. *'It is an embarrassing book'*. Daniel Lim (IHOP-KC) - Two books are imperative for the church to study in the end time, but they cause great offense! These are the book of Revelation and Song of Songs. Between the two books, Song of Songs is causing even greater offense because of the misconception some espouses, e.g., 'Jesus-is-my-boyfriend' concept. We must not desecrate the holiness of God's love with sensual overtone. It is a deeply spiritual book, and we must approach it with the purity of heart (c.f. 2 Cor 11:2).

3. Benefits of Studying Song of Songs

- a. One of the greatest needs in the church today is to deeply understand and experience Jesus' love. This

song explores the beauty of God's love for us, and helps us to understand the spiritual principles on growing in God's love (Eph 4:13-19; John 17:26).

- b. The song helps us to understand the ebb and flow of different seasons in our lives and the issues God deals with us in each season. We all need refreshing from the Lord. The best way to study the Song of Songs is that we turn the song into a personal song of meditation & dialogue with God and not merely a subject of study to master. E.g., read in more than 1 translation, journal our thoughts and prayers.

4. Solomon's THREE Writings (according to many Jewish fathers)

- a. Proverbs (Outer court) – observation of the universe and how life works best.
- b. Ecclesiastes (Inner court) – philosophical approach to the vanity of pursuing earthly life 'under the sun.' *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!* It is about endless human wandering until we find rest in God.
- c. Song of Songs (Holy of holies) – spiritual pleasure and fulfilment of pursuing intimacy, humility and obedience to the Lord. It is about the holy goal of pursuing love – this is true life 'above the sun.'

5. Basic Storyline: Chronological Storyline is followed

- a. The Bride's Life Vision Clarified (1:1-4) – The Bride's cry for intimacy, '*Draw me away, we will run after you.*' (1:4)
- b. Journey Begins with the Paradox of Grace (1:5-11) – '*I am dark [in heart], but lovely [to God] ... my own vineyard [heart] I have not kept.*' (1:5-6)
- c. Understanding Her Spiritual Identity (1:12-2:7) – '*Behold, You are handsome [beautiful], my Beloved! ... I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys ... I sat down in His shade with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste.*' (1:16-2:3)
- d. Comfort Zone Challenged (2:8-17) – '*My Beloved spoke, 'Rise up, My love...and come away... Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved.'*' (2:10-17)
- e. The Glorious Bridegroom during the Time of Divine Discipline (3:1-11) – '*By night on my bed I sought the One I love [in the city] ... but I did not find Him. I will rise now ... I will seek the one I love ... I found the one I love. I held Him and would not let Him go...*' (3:1-4)
- f. The Brides' Response and the Ravished Heart of God (4:1-5:1) – '*Behold, you are fair [beautiful], My love! Behold, you are fair.*' (4:1) *The Lord praises our 8 budding virtues. 'I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh.'* (4:6) '*Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my Beloved come to His garden and eat its pleasant fruits.*' (4:16)
- g. Two Tests of Maturity in Love (5:2-6:3) – '*The voice of my Beloved! He knocks, saying, 'Open for Me...My love...My perfect one; for My head is covered with dew, My locks with the drops of the night.'*' (5:2) '*I opened for my Beloved, but my Beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart heaped up when He spoke. I sought Him, but I could not find Him...He gave me no answer.*' (5:6) '*The watchmen ...struct me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me.*' (5:7) '*O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved...tell Him I am lovesick!*' (5:8) - 10 descriptions of Jesus' beauty.
- h. The Bridegroom's Response of Praise (6:4-10) – '*O My love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners! Turn your eyes away from Me, for they have overcome Me.*' (6:4-5) '*Who is she who looks for as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners!*' (6:10)
- i. The Bride's Vindication and Mature Partnership with Jesus (6:11-8:4) – '*How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights!*' (7:6) '*I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.*' (7:10)
- j. The Seal of Love and Bride's Last Intercession (8:5-8:14) – '*Set Me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy is as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised.*' (8:6-7)