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22001 Commentary on the Song of Songs Introduction

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The Song of Songs is the 22nd book out of 66 in the Bible. It is a collection of Hebrew poems and is part of the Old Testament's group of poetic books with Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

In general, poetry is a form of literature that may artistically condense complex ideas to form more concise and neat sentences by the use of similes and metaphors. However, to fully appreciate a Hebrew poem, general knowledge about poetry is not enough. The reader must also be familiar with the writing conventions, idioms, and customs of Israel, all of which are discussed in this commentary on the Song of Songs.

There are various opinions and interpretations on the purpose of the Song of Songs in the Bible. However, most agree that although God is never mentioned in the Song of Songs, it is still considered the Living Word of God. For example, the Israelites still sing the Song of Songs on the night of the Passover to this day [1]. They see the book as an allegory for when God rescued them out of the land of Egypt and declared Himself as their husband:

“For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.” (Isaiah 54:5).

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD...” (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

On the other hand, some biblical commentators living in the time of the New Testament conclude that the Song of Songs is a parable of the love between Christ and the Church based on a statement by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:25-32:

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

However, the Song of Songs is not a parable of God's love for Israel nor is it a parable of Christ's love for the Church. Instead, the book primarily explores the love of a couple in God from engagement to marriage.

To avoid misinterpreting the Bible, it is important to remember the basic principles of biblical interpretation [2], one of which is that the Bible must be interpreted literally unless context indicates that the passage should be interpreted figuratively. Parables appear frequently in the Bible, and in each instance the Bible makes it clear if a passage should be interpreted as one. A passage that is not affirmed by the Bible to be a parable should be interpreted literally. For example, the Lord's description about hell in Luke 16:19-31 was intended to be a literal depiction because He did not specify that it was a parable. Therefore, the Song of Songs is to be interpreted literally because there is no implication in the Bible that the poems are parables.

To begin studying the Song of Songs, it is important to recognize its context through the title, author, and setting. A brief overview of the topic and plot of the Song of Songs will be followed by an examination of its purpose in the Bible.

Title

According to the first verse of the Song of Songs, the title of the book in Biblical Hebrew is "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." The title signifies that this book contains the best song of all songs by Solomon, similar to how Christ is called the King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords! I Kings 4:32 records that King Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs and wrote 1,005 songs. Thus, the Song of Songs is the greatest song out of Solomon's 1,005 songs.

Author

There is some dispute among commentators about who authored the Song of Songs. Despite the title indicating that Solomon is the author, some commentators think otherwise. They come to this conclusion based on the fact that King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines with the majority of them being gentile women (I Kings 11:3). Additionally, it seemed that Solomon's first wife was an Egyptian princess (I Kings 3:1). Therefore, some believe it is improbable for Solomon to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to write these love poems about one woman. However, there are some points to consider that support Solomon as the author of the Song of Songs:

- King Solomon was loved by *God and was given the gift of wisdom beyond all of his contemporaries. With that wisdom, Solomon was able to perceive, feel, and express true love between a man and a woman.

- It is possible that Song of Songs was written by Solomon when he was newly appointed as king and had not yet fallen into sin. This timing would allow Solomon to still be inspired by the Holy Spirit to write a book of the Living Word.
- It is ultimately *God's decision to deem Solomon fit to teach humanity through the Song of Songs just as He inspired him to write Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Furthermore, these three books are some of the most treasured out of the Bible, and they are considered paramount to our ability to live a peaceful and joyful life. It was up to *God to determine that no one else was more suitable than Solomon to teach His people about male and female love; who are we to question His will?

Considering these points, let us accept that the author of the Song of Songs was King Solomon as the Bible itself proclaimed.

Side note: When reading Bible commentaries, it is necessary to pay attention to the commentators' style of interpretation. If commentators overlook what the Bible itself proclaims to instead rely on human logic, and knowledge, then they are unreliable since they did not put their trust in the Word; their interpretation is marred by their own will and wisdom of the flesh, unguided by the Holy Spirit.

Also, we should not read Bible commentaries from people who do not believe that God created the whole physical world in six 24 hour days consisting of the morning and evening. We also should not read any commentaries on the Song of Solomon if the author does not recognize *God's practical lesson about love, marriage, and sex between a man and woman.

Finally, keep in mind that even the best Bible commentaries that are truly inspired by the Holy Spirit cover only general and basic principles for the Church. To have a deeper understanding and connection to the Word of God, all of His children must read and meditate on the Bible on their own to seek the teachings of the Holy Spirit. We also encourage you to write down and share what you learn with others whether that be in person or online through social media. After documenting your studies for at least three months, we believe that you will see incredible progress of your understanding of the Word of God and improved fellowship with Him. After a year, you will become pillars in the Church.

Setting

Solomon was born in Jerusalem to King David. He became king of Israel in 970 BCE and reigned for 40 years before he died in 930 BCE [3]. Solomon's age when he became king is still unknown. One can speculate that he was perhaps younger than 20 years old at the time; according to the Bible, an adult is considered to be a person who is 20 years old, but King Solomon proclaimed himself to be a child during his prayer to the Lord recorded in I Kings 3:1-7. Although he already married Pharaoh's daughter as king, it is still possible that he was quite young. Also, before turning the kingship over to Solomon, King David told the whole court that Solomon was still young and tender in I Chronicles 29:1. These hints support the fact that Solomon could have been a young man at the time of his kingship, but a definitive conclusion of his exact age cannot be made. What we do know is that the book was written after Solomon became king because he was referred to as king in the Song of Songs 3:9,11.

The book was most likely written in Jerusalem over a period of a few years before or after Solomon completed the construction of God's temple and his palace. Assuming that Solomon was 19 years old in 970 BCE when he became king, he would have been 30 years old in 959

BCE when he finished building God's temple. The construction of the temple occurred over seven years from 966 BCE to 959 BCE. The Song of Songs could have been written between the years 964 BCE and 954 BCE when Solomon was about 25 to 35 years old.

When Solomon fell into sin, he lost God's favor and inspiration from the Holy Spirit; he could not have written Song of Solomon after succumbing to sin. While we do not know when Solomon began to fall into sin, we can say with confidence it happened sometime after he was 30 years old because his prayer to dedicate the temple to God in 959 BCE was still accepted by Him.

Topic

The Song of Songs is a book about love, marriage, and sexual intimacy between a man and woman. The following passage reveals the main theme of the poems:

“Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.” (The Song of Songs 8:6-7).

Plot

The Song of Songs is a type of Israeli literature that can be sung [4] and a repartee between a man and woman; it is a love story between King Solomon and a country girl named Shulamite.

Solomon occasionally herded sheep in his vineyards even though he was a king, perhaps as a hobby. Despite being a country girl, Shulamite was the daughter of a noble family. A noble family in Israel's society at that time was considered a wealthy and famous family. Often, the elders of these noble families held royal offices. Shulamite's elder brothers were the gardeners of Solomon's vineyards and would send her to assist with garden care. Perhaps Solomon met Shulamite in the garden and fell in love.

The Song of Songs starts when Solomon and Shulamite are engaged and is divided into seven acts, which are summarized below:

Act 1 (1:2-11): The song begins with Shulamite's yearning for Solomon after he invites her to visit the palace. Perhaps Shulamite was taken into a special area in the city to prepare for the wedding during this time. Typically, wedding preparations lasts about a year according to Israelite and Middle Eastern customs at that time (cf. Esther 2:12). In the song, Shulamite wishes to be kissed by her lover when she visits him. She wonders when her lover herded his flock of sheep and where he took his lunch breaks so she could come visit him. Next, Solomon and Shulamite give each other compliments about their beauty.

Act 2 (1:12-2:7): They go to the cedar forest together and continue complimenting each other. In the afternoon, Solomon brings Shulamite into the palace's dining room for a meal. During the meal, Shulamite dreams of affection between the two.

Act 3 (2:8-3:5): The seasons change from winter to spring. The engagement reached a full year and the love between Solomon and Shulamite was ripe for marriage. However,

Shulamite has a nightmare before the wedding day. She dreams that Solomon was not by her side and she looks for him. When she finds him, she brings him to her mother's house.

Act 4 (3:6-5:1): On their wedding day, King Solomon appears luxurious and majestic in the bridal procession. Solomon observes and is in awe of Shulamite's beauty on their wedding night. Shulamite invites Solomon to make love with her. He answers, and they consummate the marriage.

Act 5 (5:2-6:3): Although Shulamite loved her husband dearly, there was a time she was not devoted to Solomon. Once in the middle of the night when she was sleeping, Solomon came and knocked on the door of her room. Shulamite did not answer him because she did not want to be inconvenienced with dressing and dirtying her feet again. However, she was moved when Solomon attempted to open the door latch, prompting her to rise up and open the door for him. He was no longer there. Solomon was nowhere to be seen even after Shulamite rushed outside to find him. When she asked the watchmen about the whereabouts of her husband, they physically beat her after probably mistaking her for a prostitute. When Shulamite asked Solomon's concubines about his whereabouts, she was mocked by them. However, she did not care for their sarcasm and earnestly praised her husband. Later, she searched for and found Solomon in his garden.

Act 6 (6:4-7:9): When Solomon saw Shulamite coming to him in the garden, he did not rebuke her for what happened earlier that day. Instead, he praised her and assured her that she was his only lover out of his 60 queens, 80 concubines, and countless virgins.

Act 7 (7:10-8:14): Their love keeps growing and is stable over time. They visit the countryside and his mother's house where they loved each other passionately, assuring each other that their love would never change.

Outline

Song of Songs can be outlined as follows:

I. Engagement period (1:2-3:5)

A. Love for each other (1:2-2:7)

B. Love is ripe (2:8-3:5)

II. Marriage (3:6-5:1)

A. Scene of bridal procession (3:6-11)

B. Wedding night (4:1-5:1)

III. Married life (5:2-8:14)

A. Small mistake in love (5:2-6:3)

B. Love does not resent the mistakes of others (6:4-7:9)

C. Love grows stronger over time (7:10-8:14)

Purpose

Love, marriage, and sexual intimacy of a husband and wife compose a vital part of humanity's foundation. Due to the importance of such a topic, it is not unusual for *God to dedicate a

whole book in the Bible to teach us about it. If *God decided to include lessons in the Bible on even the most basic activities of daily life such as digging a pit to cover our feces and washing our hands after touching impure things, then it is not impossible that *God would teach us about greater things such as love, marriage, and sexual intimacy.

The Song of Songs teaches the people of God the following aspects of married life:

- Love between a man and woman is one of life's greatest and most mysterious emotions. Love must be faithful, devoted, and marriage oriented to persist and grow. Faithfulness means to love your partner forever without wavering. Devotion means to direct love towards, wholeheartedly serve, and be willing to sacrifice for the one you love. When two lovers are faithful and devoted, they will be ready to unite in marriage.
- Being fond of your lover's outer beauty does not conflict with the Bible. Therefore, it is not against the Bible to preserve and cultivate your own beauty unless you become vain and place beauty above God; avoid imitating godless people who are over the top with their appearance or wear revealing attire to provoke sexual arousal publicly or in someone that is not your spouse.
- Spouses should often give each other compliments to edify the relationship.
- True love forgives and does not resent mistakes from others. Moreover, you must also admit to and immediately correct your mistakes.
- The desire for sexual pleasure with someone you love is legitimate, but the act is legitimate in marriage. Husbands and wives should frankly tell each other their sexual desire for each other.
- Sexual gratification is God's gift; sexual relations must be within the framework of God's law which can only take place in a conjugal relationship between a man and woman. Intercourse to unite the couple physically and spiritually can only be done after the wedding.
- Sexual pleasure is not limited to the genitals. Other members of the body can arouse an emotional and sexual response. In other words, even though the genitals play a main role in sexual reproduction, they are not the only parts of the body that can evoke sexual pleasure. For example, the eyes, nose, cheeks, mouth, neck, chest, arms, thighs, etc. can all contribute to building sexual pleasure.

Furthermore, although the Song of Songs is not a parable of Christ's love for the Church as mentioned previously, it does have implications of Christ since He is the main subject in the Bible:

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27).

Through marital love, we can come to a better understanding of God's love for His chosen, especially Christ's love for the Church. Of course, the relationship between God and mankind is not of a sexual nature, but through the love, sexual intimacy, and joy of a husband and wife, God intends to reveal some of the following aspects of His love for mankind:

- The love and unity between God and mankind will bring absolute, marvelous, and everlasting joy. The love, sexual intimacy, and joy of a husband and wife give just a glimpse of what is waiting for us at our eternal home.

- Although God loves all His Creations, His love for humanity is the greatest. This sentiment is made obvious through His sacrifice for mankind. God also wants us to return that love by giving ourselves to Him and putting Him above all things. All who suffered and died for God's name are the ones who proved that their love for God was complete.
- The ideal life for mankind is to live in absolute joy in God's love.

Couples in the Lord should regularly read and meditate on the Song of Songs together to nurture each other's love. When couples practice dedicating and maintaining their healthy and godly marriage, they will progressively appreciate Christ's love for the Church, His wife.

Let us be ever so thankful to God for teaching us about love and about a holy marriage in Him through the Song of Songs. May the Holy Spirit guide us all to the truths of the Word of God in the Song of Songs. Amen!

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Notes:

[1] https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1708/jewish/The-Song-of-Songs.htm

[2] <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-6-principles-biblical-interpretation>

[3] <http://www.biblestudy.org/prophecy/israel-kings.html>

[4] Listen to the Israelite singing the Song of Songs 2:10-17 in Hebrew here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFPMIVi90lc>