

Book of Song of Solomon Explained

Title:

Several titles have been suggested for the book, all taken from the first verse: “The Song of Songs”, “the Song of Solomon”, or “Canticles”.

The first title is a Hebrew way of expressing the superlative: “The Most Excellent Song”; the second denotes authorship; and the third means “Songs”, being taken from the Latin translation.

Authorship:

The first verse of the book may be taken to mean the song written by Solomon or the song about Solomon.

However, the Old Testament states that Solomon composed 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), so one might expect him to be the author.

Also, internal evidence points to Solomonic authorship: the geographical locations mentioned in the book imply a unified monarchy, and some details fit well with Solomon’s reign (compare the reference to the horses in Pharaoh’s chariots at 1:9 with 1 Kings 10:28-29).

Finally, there is no good reason to reject the traditional view that assigns the book to Solomon.

Date: The book was probably written by Solomon early in his reign, near the middle of the tenth century B.C.

Background – Setting:

This book has been done in the allegorical view and not the literal view (see description below).

I was taken back when if in the literal sense this is about the Shulamite, then why wasn’t the Shulamite mentioned until 75% of the book was completed (SOS 6:13 in the KJV)?

I see Solomon as a type of Christ in his wisdom and wealth, and in the largeness and peacefulness of his kingdom (in SOS 3:7).

And he reigned 40 years in peace did he not?

This is an interesting book as you read it, as no two people will get the exact same thing out of it.

But let the Holy Spirit lead and guide you as you read this and it can be an amazing experience and fill you with peace and enjoyment.

And please, don't email me and try to give me your interpretation of what a particular verse or part of a verse may mean.

I could spend the rest of my life going back and forth on this book alone.

This is poetry and thus will affect each person in a different way, and that is a good thing.

Definition of Views/Interpretations:

Allegorical interpretation is an interpretive method (exegesis), which assumes that the Bible has various levels of meaning and tends to focus on the spiritual sense (which includes the allegorical sense).

The moral or topological, relating to, or involving biblical interpretation stressing moral metaphor sense, and the anagogical sense.

A method of symbolic interpretation of spiritual statements or events, especially scriptural exegesis that detects allusions to the afterlife, as opposed to the literal sense.

Christian Allegorical View (Primary Model):

Christian commentators applied a similar allegorical method in their interpretation of the Song, viewing the bridegroom as Jesus Christ and the bride as His church.

This has been the dominant Christian view for most of church history, although it has lost support in the last century or two.

Exactly when this view was first embraced by Christians is not known.

All one can say is that evidence of it exists as early as Hippolytus (ca. A.D. 200), though only fragments of his commentary have survived.

Interpretations of the details of the Song have been quite varied, but the following examples suffice to give the general sense of how the text was treated.

The one who is brought into the king's chambers is said to be those whom Christ had wedded and brought into His church.

The breasts (in 4:5), are taken to be the Old and New Covenants, and the "hill of frankincense" (in 4:6), is said to speak of the eminence to which those who crucify fleshly desires are exalted.

Not surprisingly, Origen became the grand champion of the allegorical interpretation of Song of Songs.

In addition to a series of homilies, he produced a ten-volume commentary on the book.

Origen was influenced by the Jewish interpretation and by his elder contemporary Hippolytus, but he was also a product of several philosophical forces at work in his day, namely, asceticism and Gnostic tendencies that viewed the material world as evil.

Origen combined the Platonic and Gnostic attitudes toward sexuality to denature the Canticle and transform it into a spiritual drama free from all carnality.

The reader was admonished to mortify the flesh and to take nothing predicated of the Song with reference to bodily functions, but rather to apply everything toward the apprehension of the divine senses of the inner man.

Undoubtedly this diminished view of human sexuality, so prevalent in that day, fanned the flames of the allegorical interpretation of the Song.

There were few dissenting voices over the years, and even the greatest Christian leaders succumbed to this approach.

As Glickman points out, "No less a theologian than Augustine fell into this error, genuinely espousing the view that the only purpose for intercourse is the bearing of children and that before the fall of Adam it was not necessary even for that."

Jerome (331-420), who produced the Latin Vulgate, praised Origen and embraced most of his views.

As a result, he was instrumental in introducing the allegorical interpretation into the Western churches.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), preached eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs, covering only the first two chapters.

He was given to obsessive allegorical interpretation in an attempt to purge it of any suggestion of "carnal lust."

Many others throughout church history approached the book allegorically, including John Wesley, Matthew Henry, E. W. Hengstenberg, C. F. Keil, and H. A. Ironside.

Song of Solomon Commentary:

All scripture, we are sure, is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for the support and advancement of the interests of his kingdom among men, and it is never the less so for there being found in it some things dark and hard to be understood, which those that are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction.

In our belief, both of the divine extraction and of the spiritual exposition of this book, we are confirmed by the ancient, constant, and concurring testimony both of the church of the Jews.

To whom were committed the oracles of God, and who never made any doubt of the authority of this book.

And of the Christian church, which happily succeeds them in that trust and honor.

(1).

It must be confessed, on the one hand, that if he who barely reads this book be asked, as the eunuch was “Understandest thou what thou readest”?

He will have more reason than he had to say, “How can I, except some man shall guide me?”

The books of scripture-history and prophecy are very much like one another, but this Song of Solomon's is very much unlike the songs of his father David.

Here is not the name of God in it; it is never quoted in the New Testament.

We find not in it any expressions of natural religion or pious devotion, no, nor is it introduced by vision, or any of the marks of immediate revelation.

It seems as hard as any part of scripture to be made a savor of life unto life.

Nay, and to those who come to the reading of it with carnal minds and corrupt affections, it is in danger of being made a savor of death unto death; it is a flower out of which they extract poison.

And therefore, the Jewish doctors advised their young people not to read it till they were thirty years old.

Lest by the abuse of that which is most pure and sacred (*horrendum dictum*, “horrible to say”), the flames of lust should be kindled with fire from heaven, which is intended for the altar only.

(2).

But It must be confessed, on the other hand, that with the help of the many faithful guides we have for the understanding of this book it appears to be a very bright and powerful ray of heavenly light.

Admirable fitted to excite pious and devout affections in holy souls, to draw out their desires towards God.

To increase their delight in him, and improve their acquaintance and communion with him.

It is an allegory, the letter of which kills those who rest in that and look no further, but the spirit of which gives life, (2 Cor. 3:6; John 6:63).

It is a parable, which makes divine things more difficult to those who do not love them, but more plain and pleasant to those who do (Matt. 13:14, 16).

Experienced Christians here find a counterpart of their experiences, and to them it is intelligible, while those neither understand it nor relish it who have no part nor lot in the matter.

It is a song celebrating a marriage, or nuptial song, wherein, by the expressions of love between a bridegroom and his bride, are set forth and illustrated the mutual affections that pass between God and a distinguished remnant of mankind.

It is a pastoral; the bride and bridegroom, for the livelier representation of humility and innocence, are brought in as a shepherd and his shepherdess.

Now;

(3).

This song might easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Jewish church, for whose use it was first composed, and was so taken, as appears by the Chaldee-Paraphrase and the most ancient Jewish expositors.

God betrothed the people of Israel to himself; he entered into covenant with them, and it was a marriage-covenant.

He had given abundant proofs of his love to them, and required of them that they should love him with all their heart and soul.

Idolatry was often spoken of as spiritual adultery, and doting upon idols, to prevent that for which this song was penned, representing the satisfaction which God took in Israel and which Israel ought to take in God.

And encouraging them to continue faithful to him, though he might seem sometimes to withdraw and hide himself from them, and to wait for the further manifestation of himself in the promised Messiah.

(4).

It may more easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Christian church, because the condescension and communications of divine love appear more rich and free under the gospel than they did under the law, and the communion between heaven and earth more familiar.

God sometimes spoke of himself as the husband of the Jewish church (Isa. 54:5, Hosea 2:16, 19), and rejoiced in it as his bride (Isa. 62:4-5).

But more frequently is Christ represented as the bridegroom of his church (Matt. 25:1; Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32), and the church as the bride, the Lamb's wife, (Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9).

Pursuant to this metaphor Christ and the church in general, Christ and particular believers, are here discoursing with abundance of mutual esteem and endearment.

The best key to this book is the 45th Psalm, which we find applied to Christ in the New Testament, and therefore this ought to be so too.

It requires some pains to find out what may, probably, be the meaning of the Holy Spirit in the several parts of this book.

As David's songs are many of them level to the capacity of the meanest, and there are shallows in them learned, and there are depths in it in which an elephant may swim.

But, when the meaning is found out, it will be of admirable use to excite pious and devout affections in us.

And the same truths which are plainly laid down in other scriptures when they are extracted out of this come to the soul with a more pleasing power.

When we apply ourselves to the study of this book we must not only, with Moses and Joshua, "put off our shoe from off our foot", and even forget that we have bodies, because "the place where we stand is holy ground".

But we must, with John, "come up hither", must spread our wings, take a noble flight, and soar upwards, till by faith and holy love we "enter into the holiest".

For “this is no other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven”.

Historical – Theological Themes:

In contrast to the two distorted extremes of ascetic abstinence and lustful perversion outside of marriage, Solomon’s ancient love song exalts the purity of marital affection and romance.

It parallels and enhances other portions of Scripture which portray God’s plan for marriage, including the beauty and sanctity of sexual intimacy between husband and wife.

The Song rightfully stands alongside other classic Scripture passages which expand on this theme (e.g., Gen. 2:24; Psalm 45; Prov. 5:15-23; 1 Cor 7:1-5; 13:1-8; Eph. 5:18-33; Col. 3:18-19; and 1 Peter 3:1-7).

(Hebrews 13:4), captures the heart of this song, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge”.