

**Old Testament Survey**  
**Lesson 22 – Song of Solomon**  
**Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School**  
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**Review**

In the first book of the Bible (Genesis) is the record of the creation and the fall of man. God creates everything in 6 days including man in His own image. The man and his wife lived in paradise, but they sinned by disobeying God. The consequence of their sin is that they are cast out of the garden and sin and death enter the world. In the midst of the “curse”, God provided the promise of a redeemer. The story continues with God’s plan of redemption. Humans multiplied and filled the earth, but were extremely wicked. God punished sin by destroying the world by a flood. All people died except Noah, his sons and their wives who were saved on the ark. People continued to multiply, but tried to build the Tower of Babel and God confused them by giving different languages and separating the peoples.

The story continues with Abram whom God chose and promised that he would be the father of many nations. The story of Job happened. Abram left his homeland and followed God’s direction together with his nephew, Lot who settled in a city named Sodom. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of the extreme wickedness of sin there. God changed Abram’s name to Abraham. Abraham had two sons: Ishmael (the father of Arabs) and Isaac (the promised son). Isaac had twin sons: Esau (the first born, who sold his birthright to his brother for a bowl of stew) and Jacob (who believed God and was renamed Israel). Jacob had 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. Joseph, his favorite son, was sold into slavery in Egypt by his jealous brothers and became the next-in-command to Pharaoh in Egypt. God gave Joseph the meaning of Pharaoh’s dream, foretelling of a famine to come and Joseph prepared for it. God saved his people from the famine and from the influence of the idol worshipping Canaanites by moving them to Egypt. Their descendants became slaves in Egypt and stayed there for 400 years.

Moses was chosen by God to lead the people out of slavery and to the Promised Land (in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). He received the Ten Commandments and taught God’s law to the people. The people sinned multiple times, but finally sinned by failing to enter the Promised Land and were judged and punished to wander for 40 years in the wilderness. Moses died and Joshua took over leadership of the Jews and lead the people into the land (in the book of Joshua). The land was divided among the 12 tribes who were led by judges the last of whom is Samuel (in the book of Judges). Next was the first king of Israel, Saul and then David. Throughout we saw David’s fame and shame and then his son Solomon’s fame and shame (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles and also Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon). During Solomon’s reign the nation of Israel enjoyed its largest borders and a period of peace but after his death, the nation was divided into two parts, each with their own king. The northern kingdom was called Israel and the southern kingdom (which included Jerusalem) Judah.

Next was the period of the Kings (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles), all bad in the north and many bad ones and a few good ones in the south. During this period we have most of the “major” and “minor” prophets. Both nations were eventually defeated, the north first then the south, and Judah became slaves to the Babylonians. During this time Daniel served the king of Babylon and then Persia. A group of Jews returned to Jerusalem under Ezra and then Nehemiah and they re-established the worship in the temple. The nation was never established again and it goes on from captivity to captivity until the Romans.

## **Introduction**

The Song of Solomon is one of (or perhaps the most) difficult books to study and understand. Great Bible scholars, even experts in the Old Testament, seem to be afraid of it. Dr. James Gray, for instance, introduces Song of Solomon in his Bible survey book, *Synthetic Bible Studies*, by saying, "*Of all the books of the Old Testament, I feel myself least competent to speak of the Canticles, or the Song of Solomon. I am not ignorant of what others have taught and written about the book, but I personally have not grasped its contents as I have with some of the other books.*"

Jewish historians tell us that ancient Jews forbade the reading of Song of Solomon until a man was 30 years old. Even today, the Jews still discourage early reading because hormones and the influences of our sex-crazed society tend to warp a young person's understanding. The fear of this book is so strong that few Jewish scholars are willing to take the book as literally or historically representing Solomon's human experience with physical love. Rosenmueller says, "*...on the supposition that it (Song of Solomon) describes merely human love... it would have been positively objectionable, and never would have been inserted in the Holy canon.*"

In the Hebrew Bible the Song of Solomon is placed directly after the Pentateuch. It is read aloud, to adult audiences, at Passover. Jews universally reject the literal reading of Song of Solomon and accept only the allegorical reading. Many find here an allegorical picture of the love of God for His bride, Israel, or the typical picture of the love of Christ for His bride, Church. Then there is the literal interpretation.

**Literal** – An historic account of an actual marriage (Solomon and wife). We can read it plainly, seeing marriage as a vitally important part of God's plan and applying it to our own lives. The book is given by God to illustrate His ideal for romance and beauty within a marriage as He intended. We need not "figure it out" or stretch it. God created marriage as the cornerstone of human relationships and, unlike the pagans around them, the Jewish home was one where love and tenderness (even romance) lived. God made marriage a building block of His society as evidenced in Old Testament teaching.

**Allegorical** – Treats an account as purely figurative and mythical with characters and events representing something else. Whenever we use this method of interpretation we have to speculate as to how far to take the analogy. If Solomon represents God and the bride represents Israel, how do we apply all the events (i.e. when He leaves, etc.)?

**Typical** – Treats account as historical fact but transfers them into the region of poetry for instruction or religious purposes. The Song of Solomon is never referred to in the NT so, even though the Church is referred to as the bride of Christ in the NT, we can only speculate as to the accuracy of this parallel of the book to the relationship of Christ to church.

We (VBC) believe the plain, literal, grammatical, historical approach is the proper method of interpretation – just like the rest of Scripture. This method takes the plain literal sense while understanding the historical, immediate, and wider contexts and the uses of figures of speech. This approach makes: Solomon, the king; Shulammitte woman, the bride and wife; daughters of Jerusalem, wife's sisters, friends (virgins), perhaps staff; friends, the king's buddies; brothers, wife's older siblings.

Also, this is not so much a true romantic story or expose but a love song, a lyrical expression of a pure romantic love between a couple who meet, fall in love, and marry. It is written to convey the grandeur and glory and the passion and beauty of love which God intended in marriage – the cornerstone of society. The Bible is not silent on physical intimacy in marriage – the Song of Solomon being the lengthiest passage.

<sup>18</sup>May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. <sup>19</sup>A loving doe, a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. Prov 5:15-19 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup>Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Eccl 9:9 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup>But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. <sup>3</sup>The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup>The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 1 Cor 7:2-4

It was Jewish tradition to name their books by using the first several words of the text. Following that principle they called this one “The Song of Songs.” The repeating of a word in Hebrew always adds emphasis and importance to the word and often means the subject is the best of the best, i.e. Holy of Holies, King of Kings. This fit in well with their belief that this was, in fact, the best of the 1005 songs written by Solomon. Since the translation of this book from Hebrew into Greek, the Septuagint, the title has been expanded to include all the facts in verse 1 and is, in all modern translations, *The Song of Solomon*.

The only debate over the authorship of the book is whether Solomon wrote it or, if possibly, it was written by another about him since verse 1 can be translated, *"The Song of Songs which is concerning Solomon."* The language and form, similar to Egyptian love poetry, was well known to Solomon and the geographical locations correspond to his early kingdom meaning it was probably written by him or, at least, during his time. It could have been written any time during Solomon's reign, 971-931 BC., but its tone indicates it was written when young love was at its peak. The mention of two springs indicates that it happened over the period of at least a year, and that fits in with the Jewish custom of exempting young men from duties of work and war for the first year of marriage.

Some speculate that Shulammitte woman was Solomon's first wife (his Eccl 9:9 wife perhaps?) before he disobeyed God and sinned by adding another 699 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3).

### **The story of the song**

The poetry takes the form of a dialogue between a husband (the king) and his wife (the Shulammitte). In the mountains above Ephraim, King Solomon owned a vineyard (chap 11) which he leased to sharecroppers. There was a mother, at least two sons (chap 1), and at least two daughters (chap 1 and 8). The oldest was the Shulammitte, our heroine.

The boys did not really appreciate their sister, or step-sister perhaps, and made her work outside the home. They were angry with their sister her caretaker of the vineyards and flocks. This made it impossible for her to take care of her own vineyard or pasture her own flock. This meant she did not have time to take care of herself, to fix her hair, to beautify herself.

One day she is out caring for the flock and looks up to see a tall, dark, handsome shepherd she has never seen before staring at her. She's so embarrassed she says, *"Do not look at me because I am dark, for the sun has burned me."* (1:5). She babbles on, but he replies, *"If you yourself do not know, most beautiful among women,"* (1:8) then go check out the other women. In fact, he continues, *"You are like my beautiful Egyptian mare and your complexion is perfect, "Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of beads."* What a line...

With that "chance meeting" came a friendship that blossomed into love. It was very romantic (1:11-2:15), but then he was gone with the promise that he will return. She waited. She looked for him. She dreams of him, "*On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves.*" (3:1). She searches, "*I sought him but did not find him.*" (3:2-4). He was gone a long time... but she waited. She despairs of his return.

Then one day there was a huge cloud of dust (3:6). It is the king himself, King Solomon, with his entire entourage of bodyguards surrounding a royal sedan chair (3:6-10). She is not interested and takes no further notice until word is brought to her that King Solomon wants to see her. He comes to her tent. He stops at her door. When she looks up, it is the king, but it is also her shepherd, who had won her heart. He hasn't changed, "*How beautiful you are, my darling, How beautiful you are!*" And now it is he who rambles on and on. (Chap 4)

As the marriage matures, the husband and wife go through a difficult time. But as the song ends, both the husband and wife are confident and secure in their love, they sing of the lasting nature of true love, and they yearn to be in each other's presence.

## **Outline**

### **I. The Superscription (Chapters 1:1)**

<sup>1</sup>The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

"Song of Songs" is the Hebrew way of saying best of the best of Solomon's 1005 songs. Sometimes the book is referred to as "Song of Songs" or "Song of Solomon" or the Canticles (series of songs).

### **II. The Courtship: "Leaving" (Chapters 1:2-3:5)**

True love, culminating in marriage, entails bringing him home to mother (3:4) and then marrying him and going to his home. The first section of the book is composed of a series of scenes showing the deepening relationship between the bride and bridegroom. From time to time a chorus breaks in.

#### **A. Lover's Remembrances (1:2-2:7)**

"True love" includes a great backlog of romantic memories. The Shulammitte reviews in her mind the meeting with the shepherd (Solomon). Here we see the beginning of love with the longing of the Shulammitte for her beloved, her insecurity, and her beloved's praise. Then the growth of love with mutual admiration

#### **B. Lover's Expression of Reciprocal Love (2:8-3:5)**

"True love" communicates in romantic language. Separation brings increased longing and pain.

### **III. The Wedding: "Cleaving" (Chapters 3:6-5:1)**

In the true Eastern and Jewish tradition, the bridegroom comes expecting a waiting bride. He knows she loves him, so there is no risk. The wedding is performed and the lovers are pledged to belong to each other for life.

#### **A. The Kingly Bridegroom (3:6-11)**

He comes to her as a king, but treats her as his lover, "*On the day of his gladness of heart.*" (3:11) Solomon in all his glory enters Jerusalem with his bride.

#### **B. The Wedding and First Night Together (4:1-5:1a)**

The wedding is consummated and both are satisfied.

### **C. God's Approval (5:1b)**

Most scholars see this as a benediction of blessing from God.

## **IV. The Marriage: "Weaving" (Chapters 5:2-8:4)**

It is exciting and relatively easy for two lovers to leave their families and to cleave to each other. In fact, cleaving is fun. But, when the honeymoon is over, and the reality of living with another person 24/7 sets in, *that's a challenge!*

### **A. The First Major Disagreement (5:2-6:3)**

This passage seems to recount the lover's first fight. Apparently, Solomon sees no problem and comes to bed as usual, expecting her to respond as if there is nothing wrong. She won't let him into the bedroom, so he just leaves. She is sorry for him and goes to look for him, but all she finds is perfume on the door post, a sign that he had been there. After wandering around and getting arrested in the process, she goes to her friends for sympathy and help in finding him. She, remembers only how fine Solomon is and that he is her friend (5:16). When Solomon returns, all is forgiven.

### **B. The Restoration (6:4-8:4)**

This passage describes the making up – he does the talking. The rest describes the deepening relationship as they live and love together. Love gets better with age... and romance never ends.

### **C. Growing in Grace (8:5-14)**

As love matures, the memories of it are constant reminders of how good it is, culminating in the wife's great poem (TRUE LOVE IS PRICELESS!):

<sup>7</sup>"Many waters cannot quench love,  
Nor will rivers overflow it;  
If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love,  
It would be utterly despised." Song 8:7

## **Lesson**

1. The Song of Solomon sets for the heart of the satisfied husband and a devoted wife.
2. The Bible deals with every aspect of life. Since God created marriage as His building block for society, concentrated teaching on love, marriage, and sex is apropos.
3. It deals with important issues:
  - Sex is introduced within marriage.
  - Verbal communication is vital, not just physical expression.
  - Real love matures, while losing none of its excitement.
  - Love is to last for life regardless of circumstances
3. The Song of Solomon explodes the myth that followers of God look on sex as something dirty or evil. Even in our fallen world, sex within marriage is ultimately good, holy and beautiful.

## **Homework**

Then next class is Nov 29. Read Isaiah.