

The Bible's Big Story



Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon is a distinctive book in the canon because of its candid portrayal of human desire and erotic love. This has led to its neglect in Christian teaching, but its interpretive challenges are not as difficult as they first appear, and its message remains timely and beneficial today.

Introductory Information

Title: The Hebrew and Greek titles both mean “song of songs,” a construction that expresses superlative quality, much like “vanity of vanities” in Ecclesiastes. The title can be paraphrased as “the greatest of all songs.” Most English translations render it “Song of Solomon,” reflecting the association with Solomon in verse 1.

Authorship: The book’s unity of style suggests a single author. Most conservative interpreters take Solomon as both the author and the bridegroom. This is based on the attribution in verse 1 as well as internal evidence such as geography fitting the united monarchy period. Some conservative scholars however question Solomonic authorship, citing the tension between Solomon’s many wives and concubines and the song’s portrait of exclusive fidelity. Common answers to this objection suggest the song describes Solomon’s one true love or was written in his youth. The view taken in this class is that Solomon is the author, writing from the perspective of wisdom and old age. If this is correct then the message of the book is “don’t imitate my love life; emulate theirs.”

Date: As with Ecclesiastes, dating depends on the question of authorship. If Solomon wrote it, the date falls within his reign, 970–930 BC. Regardless, internal evidence supports a date close to the united monarchy period.

Theme & Purpose: The song’s basic theme is the beauty and sanctity of marriage as designed by God. It is addressed to the “daughters of Jerusalem” (2:7; 3:5; 8:4; 5:8), understood as unmarried young women, similar to how Proverbs addresses “my son.” The Song displays the beauty of romantic love while warning against its misuse, carrying the overall message of “patience then passion.” As commentator Douglas O’Donnell notes, the Song functions like attending a beautiful wedding, a promise to the single and a “passion check” for the married.

Theme Summary: The Song is a poetic celebration of romantic love, desire, and physical intimacy between a bride and groom that portrays the beauty, joy, and enduring commitment of marriage—a covenant bond which ultimately points to God’s loving relationship with His people.

Redemption Revealed In Song of Solomon

The Song of Songs is an idealized picture of marriage, which is a type of Christ’s union with the church.

The Song’s redemptive significance comes not from being read as allegory but from the institution of marriage it exalts. Scripture consistently uses marriage to depict the relationship between God and His people, from the prophets’ description of Israel’s idolatry as adultery (Isaiah 54, 62; Jeremiah 2-3; Ezekiel 16; Hosea) to the New Testament’s direct connection between the creation ordinance of marriage and redemption in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7; 21:2). Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 5:28-32 explicitly identifies marriage as a picture of Christ’s union with the church, meaning every rightly functioning marriage points to Christ’s love for His people.

Specific aspects of the couple’s love highlighted in the Song which parallel Christ’s love for his people are:

1. *The Lovers Seeking and Being Sought*

The recurring pattern of the beloved seeking the lover through the city streets (3:1-4; 5:2-8) reflects God’s pursuing love for His people, exemplified in Christ seeking out sinners for redemption.

2. *The Exclusivity of Covenant Devotion*

The lovers’ exclusive devotion, expressed in longing, delight, and security (“I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine,” 6:3), parallels the covenant bond between God and His people — a bond marked not only by the singular devotion His people owe Him, whose violation the prophets described as spiritual adultery, but also by God’s own steadfast devotion to His people, sought and pursued them, and remained faithful to them even in their unfaithfulness.

3. *The Permanence of Covenant Love*

The closing refrain describes their love as strong as death and unquenchable by many waters. Covenant love is not mere feeling but a committed choice to seek another’s good regardless of circumstance, mirroring God’s unshakable redeeming love for those in Christ (John 10:27-28).

Structure of the Song

Title	The Lovers Desire Each Other (Courtship Overtones)	Wedding Poems		The Lovers Desire Each Other (Marriage Overtones)	Conclusion
		Bride	Groom		
1:1	1:2-2:7	2:8-5:1		5:2-8:4	8:5-14

Notes:

How Should We Interpret the Song?

Two objections have historically shaped this discussion: that romantic and erotic love seems an inappropriate topic for Scripture, and that the book lacks overt spiritual content or reference to God. These objections have given rise to three approaches:

Reading the Song as Allegory

Allegory treats characters and plot as entirely symbolic rather than historical. It is valid to recognize the use of allegory in Scripture when the text itself signals it (e.g., Ezekiel 16, Psalm 80, John 10, Galatians 4). This differs from allegorizing, which seeks hidden spiritual meaning apart from the text and tends toward subjectivity. Nothing in the text of Song of Solomon signals that it should be read as an allegory.

Reading the Song Merely as Romantic Poetry

This approach rightly reads the Song as a poetic exploration of romantic and intimate love between husband and wife. It is grounded in the text but, on its own, struggles to explain how the book fits Jesus' statement that all Scripture testifies of Him.

Reading the Song as Romantic Poetry With an Eye for Typology

This approach remains grounded in the text and allows for practical lessons from the historical romance while recognizing marriage as a divinely intended picture pointing to Christ's love for His people. Read this way, the Song benefits the whole church, not only married believers, both by portraying the goodness of marriage and sexual intimacy, and by illustrating God's design for marriage as a picture of His covenant love.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. The lesson argues for reading the song as romantic poetry with an eye for typology. How does understanding marriage itself as the type, rather than searching for hidden meanings within every verse, impact the way you read the Song?
2. The Song repeatedly warns against "stirring up" love before its proper time, yet also portrays desire within marriage as good and something to be enjoyed fully. How do you see these two threads, restraint and enjoyment, working together rather than against each other in your own understanding of romantic love?
3. Paul's language in Ephesians 5 draws a direct line between human marriage and Christ's love for the church. Whether you are married or single, how does seeing your relationships (or your hope for one) through this lens shape the way you think about faithfulness and pursuit in your walk with Christ?
4. The Song closes by describing covenant love as strong as death and unable to be quenched by many waters. How does this picture of relentless, choice-driven love challenge cultural ideas that equate love primarily with fleeting feelings of passion?