Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Song of Solomon
Scripture: Song of Solomon
Code: MSB22

Title

The Greek Septuagint (LXX) and Latin Vulgate (Vg.) versions follow the Hebrew (Masoretic Text) with literal translations of the first two words in 1:1—"Song of Songs." Several English versions read "The Song of Solomon," thus giving the fuller sense of 1:1. The superlative, "Song of Songs" (cf. "Holy of Holies" in Ex. 26:33, 34 and "King of Kings" in Rev. 19:16), indicates that this song is the best among Solomon's 1,005 musical works (1 Kin. 4:32). The word translated "song" frequently refers to music that honors the Lord (cf. 1 Chr. 6:31, 32; Pss. 33:3; 40:3; 144:9).

Author and Date

Solomon, who reigned over the united kingdom 40 years (971–931 B.C.), appears 7 times by name in this book (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12). In view of his writing skills, musical giftedness (1 Kin. 4:32), and the authorial, not dedicatory, sense of 1:1, this piece of Scripture could have been penned at any time during Solomon's reign. Since cities to the north and to the south are spoken of in Solomon's descriptions and travels, both the period depicted and the time of actual writing point to the united kingdom before it divided after Solomon's reign ended. Knowing that this portion of Scripture comprises one song by one author, it is best taken as a unified piece of poetic, Wisdom literature rather than a series of love poems without a common theme or author.

Background and Setting

Two people dominate this true-life, dramatic love song. Solomon, whose kingship is mentioned 5 times (1:4, 12; 3:9, 11; 7:5), appears as "the beloved." The Shulamite maiden (6:13) remains obscure; most likely she was a resident of Shunem, 3 mi. N of Jezreel in lower Galilee. Some suggest she is Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kin. 3:1), although the Song provides no evidence for this conclusion. Others favor Abishag, the Shunammite who cared for King David (1 Kin. 1:1–4, 15). An unknown maiden from Shunem, whose family had possibly beenemployed by Solomon (8:11), seems most reasonable. She would have been Solomon's first wife (Eccl. 9:9), before he sinned by adding 699 other wives and 300 concubines (1 Kin. 11:3).

Minor roles feature several different groups in this book. First, note the not infrequent commentary by "the daughters of Jerusalem" (1:5; 2:7; 3:5; 5:8, 16; 8:4), who might be part of Solomon's household

staff (cf. 3:10). Second, Solomon's friends join in at 3:6–11; and third, so do the Shulamite's brothers (8:8, 9). The affirmation of 5:1b would most likely be God's blessing on the couple's union. One can follow the narrative by noticing the suggested parts as indicated in headings throughout the song. Where possible variations are reasonable, they will be recognized in the study notes.

The setting combines both rural and urban scenes. Portions take place in the hill country north of Jerusalem, where the Shulamite lived (6:13) and where Solomon enjoyed prominence as a vinegrower and shepherd (Eccl. 2:4–7). The city section includes the wedding and time afterward at Solomon's abode in Jerusalem (3:6–7:13).

The first spring appears in 2:11–13 and the second in 7:12. Assuming a chronology without gaps, the Song of Solomon took place over a period of time at least one year in length, but probably no longer than two years.

Historical and Theological Themes

All 117 verses in Solomon's Song have been recognized by the Jews as a part of their sacred writings. Along with Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations, it is included among the OT books of the Megilloth, or "five scrolls." The Jews read this song at Passover, calling it "the Holy of Holies." Surprisingly, God is not mentioned explicitly except possibly in 8:6. No formal theological themes emerge. The NT never quotes Solomon's Song directly (nor Esther, Obadiah, and Nahum).

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; Ps. 45; Prov. 5:15–23; 1 Cor. 7:1–5; 13:1–8; Eph. 5:18–33; Col. 3:18, 19; and 1 Pet. 3:1–7. Hebrews 13:4 captures the heart of this song, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

Interpretive Challenges

The Song has suffered strained interpretations over the centuries by those who use the "allegorical" method of interpretation, claiming that this song has no actual historical basis, but rather that it depicts God's love for Israel and/or Christ's love for the church. The misleading idea from hymnology that Christ is the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys results from this method (2:1). The "typological" variation admits the historical reality, but concludes that it ultimately pictures Christ's bridegroom love for His bride the church.

A more satisfying way to approach Solomon's Song is to take it at face value and interpret it in the normal historical sense, understanding the frequent use of poetic imagery to depict reality. To do so understands that Solomon recounts 1) his own days of courtship, 2) the early days of his first marriage, followed by 3) the maturing of this royal couple through the good and bad days of life. The Song of Solomon expands on the ancient marriage instructions of Gen. 2:24, thus providing spiritual music for a lifetime of marital harmony. It is given by God to demonstrate His intention for the romance and loveliness of marriage, the most precious of human relations and "the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7).

Outline

I. The Courtship: "Leaving" (1:2–3:5)

A. The Lovers' Remembrances (1:2–2:7)

B. The Lovers' Expression of Reciprocal Love (2:8–3:5)

II. The Wedding: "Cleaving" (3:6–5:1)

A. The Kingly Bridegroom (3:6–11)

B. The Wedding and First Night Together (4:1–5:1a)

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

III. The Marriage: "Weaving" (5:2–8:14)

A. The First Major Disagreement (5:2–6:3)

B. The Restoration (6:4–8:4)

C. Growing in Grace (8:5–14)

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