

SONG OF SOLOMON

Study Guide

AUTHOR & DATE

The text lends much support for **King Solomon** as the author. Solomon is specifically referred to seven times (1:1,5; 3:7,9,11; 8:11-12) and other verses mention the “king” (1:4,12; 7:5). Within the text is evidence of the groom’s wealth, luxury, and military protection (3:6-11), as well as mention of a harem (6:8). At the height of Solomon’s power, his harem consisted of 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs 11:3). Still, there are scholars who challenge Solomon’s authorship and believe it to be a later work attributed to Solomon due to his extensive writings of psalms and proverbs – after all, Solomon wrote 1,005 songs (1 Kgs 4:32).

Descriptions of the king’s opulence, locations mentioned in the text, and poetic language similar to Proverbs 1-9 all further point to Solomon writing this song during his reign, probably early in his monarchy. It can safely be assumed that Song of Solomon was written between 970-930 B.C., but likely closer to **965-960 B.C.**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This book is known by three different titles: **Song of Solomon**, **Song of Songs**, or **Canticles**. The first verse of the book mentions Solomon’s “song of songs,” meaning the greatest of his songs. Similar comparisons and emphases can be found elsewhere in the Bible, such as “God of gods and Lord of lords” (Deut. 10:17) or “King of kings” (1 Tim. 6:15).

This book has also been hotly debated regarding its purpose in the Bible. Why is a work with such sexual undertones granted a position in the Word of God?

The Bible itself would be incomplete if it only spoke of sexuality in terms of prohibitions and did not give positive instruction to enable the reader to discover the joy of healthy love. Certainly, love between man and woman is not the whole of life or even its highest good. The Bible elsewhere emphasizes the vertical relationship between a man or a woman and God as more important than any other. Even so, to regard Song of Songs as unworthy of canonization unless it is allegorized or turned into a historical drama is to deny the crucial importance of cherishing and understanding this area of life. It also reflects a failure to appreciate the place of wisdom literature as a guide to healthy and happy behavior in this world.

-- Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, *The New American Commentary*

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It may also come as a surprise that Jews include the Song of Solomon as read as part of the Passover celebration. Some attribute this to the setting of Song of Solomon and Passover both in the spring, however, there is far deeper meaning when one considers that:

A key distinction between the Israelite and pagan portrayals of Divine love is that no pagan culture spoke of a god as a husband or a lover of his *people*. Israelite religion, in its radical monotheism, demanded the people’s absolute fidelity to the One God. In human terms, there was only one relationship that reflected that kind of fidelity and that was a woman’s vow of loyalty to her husband. From Amos to Ezekiel, the prophets described infidelity to God as adultery, promiscuity, sexual laxity, and prostitution. Israel, in its covenant with God made on Mt. Sinai, was “married” to God. God, as the husband, was explicitly jealous of any infidelity on the part of His wife. Religious fidelity is described in the terms of marital fidelity.

-- Benjamin Edidin Scolnic, “Why Do We Sing the Song of Songs on Passover?”

LITERARY STRUCTURE

Is this a song reflecting on the emotional and psychological elements of love? A poem glorifying love? A drama between two lovers? Scholars can’t agree on the genre. Additionally, the interchange between the bride, groom, and chorus can be hard to follow. Hopefully one of the outlines below will help you follow the main points of the Song.

A PROGRESSIVE STORYLINE

Part 1: The Beginning of Love	Part 1: Love’s Beginning
A. Falling in Love (1:1-3:5) B. United in Love (3:6-5:1)	A. The Crush (1:1-17) B. The Dance (2:1-17) C. The Longing (3:1-5)
	Part 2: Love’s Uniting A. The Wedding (3:6-11) B. The Consummation (4:1-5:1)
Part 2: Broadening of Love A. Struggling in Love (5:2-7:10) B. Growing in Love (7:11-8:14) <i>By Dean Niforatos</i>	Part 3: Love’s Testing and Commitment A. The Test (5:2-16) B. Love Reconciled (6:1-7:10) C. Love’s Deepening (7:11-8:14) <i>By Shannon Coenen</i>

A CHIASTIC (MIRROR) STRUCTURE

By David A. Dorsey

"The Literary Structure of the Old Testament"

- A. Opening words of **mutual love and desire** (1:2-2:7)
- . . . B. Young man's **invitation** to the young woman to join him **in the countryside** (2:8-17)
- C. Young **woman's nighttime search** for the young man (3:1-5)
- D. **CENTER: The wedding day** (3:6-5:1)
- C¹ Young **woman's nighttime search** for the young man & their speeches of admiration and longing (**5:2-7:11**)
- . . . B¹ Young woman's **invitation** to the young man to join her **in the countryside** (7:12-8:4)
- A¹ Closing words of **mutual love and desire** (8:5-14)

INTERPRETING THE SONG OF SOLOMON

There are several ways in which people have sought to interpret this book. Here are a few important options:

- **Literal View** – Taking the text as a literal expression of human romantic love within the marital context as intended by God (a literal human love poem).
- **Typological View** – recognizing the actual history involved (King Solomon and his bride), but finding connecting points to Divine love (acknowledging the couple's mutual love and finding analogies of the main points of the story for spiritual meaning)
- **Allegorical View** – the book as a poem describing the relationship between God & Israel and Christ & the Church

Which option is best? A bit of all of them! Song of Solomon is a book of wisdom –how to order priorities and properly act as a believer in a fallen world. That said, human love is a key part of life and much can be learned about human love through this literal couple and their experiences (literal view). But, we must not forget that Paul describes Christ's relationship to the Church as a marriage (Eph. 5:21-32) and God initiated a faithful and loving covenant relationship with His people, Israel (allegorical view). The Song of Solomon provides a spiritual lesson in human love between a man and woman, intimacy, and joy within a covenantal relationship (typological view). Lessons learned in this book can be applied both to human sexuality and one's relationship with the Lord!

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OBSERVATION WORDS

Look for and mark the following observation words. Make note of what you LEARN ABOUT THEM.

- **Love** (not as part of a title such as “my love”)
- **“Do not awaken/arouse love”**
- **Lover / beloved** (how is he described / talked of?)
- **My darling** (how is she described / talked of?)

Also, be aware of how the Trinity is represented.

- **God**
- **Jesus**
- **Holy Spirit**

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did the **Lord teach YOU** through what you read & how will you apply it in your life?
- What do you think the repeated phrase “do not awaken love...” (2:7, 3:5, 8:4) means? Why is this important?
- What do you learn about love, both humanly and spiritually, from 2:14?
- What are the “little foxes” (2:15) which hinder:
 - Human Relationships:
 - Relationship with the Lord:
- Read 5:1-6 again. What do you learn from this passage?
 - What is happening?
 - Why are each reacting the way they are?

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- What lesson do you need to learn from this passage?
- How will you apply that lesson in your daily life?
- In what ways does the Beloved/Groom speak to (or of) the Bride capture you most?
 - What insights does this give you of your Lord?
 - How can you apply such things in your human relationships?
- How does the Bride speak of her Beloved/Groom which captures you?
 - How does this impact your relationship with the Lord?
 - How can you apply this in human relationships?
- What do you learn about God's design for marriage, emotional intimacy, and human sexuality?
- **Key Word** (condense the book into a word or short phrase):
- **Key Verse** (a main thought or something that spoke to you):
- **Key Chapter** (significant points, turning point, etc.):
- How was **God** seen in the book?
- How was **Jesus** represented in the book?
- How was the **Holy Spirit** represented in the book?