

Old Testament Survey

Song of Solomon: The Blessing of Marriage & Sexual Intimacy

Date: November 21, 2021; Teacher: Rev. David Senters
New Covenant Presbyterian Church, Richmond Hill, GA

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 21. *Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?* The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ,^a who, being the eternal Son of God,^b became man,^c and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.^d

Theological Significance:

1. God has chosen only one way for his elect to be redeemed.
2. The Redeemer is the second person of the Trinity, who is himself eternally God.
3. Only God could redeem the elect. Only a man could redeem the elect.
4. Jesus is the God-man forever.

DQ: Why is the Song of Solomon in the Bible? Is it Hebrew poetic allegory that celebrates marriage and sexual intimacy? Is it a typology of God's love for Israel and/or Christ's love for the Church?

Song of Solomon – Typology or Poetic Allegory?

How would you interpret this passage, typology or poetic allegory? “While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi. Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves (SS 1:12-15).”

- The decision to interpret Song of Solomon as typology or poetic allegory will significantly impact interpretation.
 - Tom Gledhill: “The capacity to delight in physical beauty, to be attracted by members of the opposite sex, the desire to form secure and intimate relationships, and to express love and affection in demonstrably physical ways – these are all a very fundamental part of our common humanity. The Song of Songs is an unabashed celebration of these deeply rooted urges (Gledhill, 13).”
 - Martin Luther: “...I think it is a song in which Solomon honors God with his praises; he gives Him thanks for his divinely established and confirmed kingdom and government; he prays for the preservation and extension of this his kingdom, and at the same time he encourages the inhabitants and citizens of his realm to be of good cheer in their trials and adversities and to trust in God, who is always ready to defend and rescue those who call upon Him (Luther, 191).”

^aJohn 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5-6

^bPs 2:7; Matt 3:17; 17:5; John 1:18

^cIsa 9:6; Matt 1:23; John 1:14; Gal 4:4

^dActs 1:11; Heb 7:24-25

- James Luther Mays: “They (*the readers*) will find neither ethical-theological reflection as in Job, nor exemplification of that fear of the Lord which is wisdom, as in the Psalms, nor the dicta of sages as in Proverbs or Ecclesiastes—and assuredly not history of salvation or torah or prophecy as in the rest of the Old Testament. Instead, they will find explicit, though never quite pornographic, poetry of physical love. Sexual yearning and fulfillment are sung without reticence, moral judgment, or great deference to legal or social constraints (Mays, xi-1).”
- Theodoret of Cyrus: “Let us, therefore, understand the church as the bride, and Christ as the bridegroom, and as the young girls attending the bride souls that are pious and youthful, who have not yet attained the virtue of the bride and been accorded perfection—hence their attending on the bride but not being called brides (Wright, 288).”
- Validity to the typological approach.
 - The Bible uses the metaphor of marriage to illustrate the relationship between God and his people. We find such metaphors in Ezekiel, Hosea, Ephesians, and Revelation.
 - “It is argued with some justification that reflection on human love and intimacy leads inevitably to reflection on the ways of God with humankind (Gledhill, 33).”
- Caution for a strict typological approach.
 - “...the believer’s relationship with Christ is never at an erotic level (Gledhill, 33).”
 - The strict typological approach can be a backlash against the explicit sexual language in the Song.
 - We must be careful not to allow the typological analogies to “...blossom into the uncontrolled extravaganza of extreme allegorism (Gledhill, 34).”
 - We must remember God created the sexual union of husband and wife, and it is not sinful or shameful.
- Caution for a strict poetic allegorical approach.
 - We must remember all love derives its fullest meaning and realization in the God the Father’s love, revealed through God the Son, and applied by the God the Holy Spirit.
 - We should not be salacious, disrespectful, or explicit in our handling of the text, especially of cultural euphemisms which appear strange to us and *double entendres*.
 - We should remember it is not didactic; it does not teach us about human relationships, per se.

Authorship and Title

SS 1:1, “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.”

- Hebrew idiom for a superlative: “X(singular) of X(plural).” Like “Lord of Lords” or “King of Kings.” Therefore, some prefer the title Song of Songs.
- Solomon is mentioned (7x). It could be a reference to authorship, dedication, subject matter, or style (Mays, 2). Therefore, some prefer the title Song of Solomon.

- Is Solomon the author, writing as an act of repentance? Is he the hero of the Song? The villain of a love triangle (called the Shepherd Hypothesis)? Is Solomon the antitype to love that is pure and sincere, instead of superficial and transactional (see 1 Kings 11:1-8)?

Purpose, Characters, Outline, and Poetic Features

- **Purpose:** To celebrate in song the love of any man or woman living in an agrarian culture. Perhaps it is a collection of songs sung in the long wedding celebrations in ancient Israel. “Here (*i.e., in the Song of Solomon*) the Bible comes very close to expressing what nuptial love would be like in a world devoid of sin (ESV, Systematic Theology Study Bible, 773-4).”
- **Characters**
 1. My Love (aka the Shulammitte bride)
 - a. “I compare you, **my love**, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots. Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels (1:9-10).”
 - b. “As a lily among brambles, so is **my love** among the young women (2:2).”
 - c. “Behold, you are beautiful, **my love**, behold you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead (4:1).”
 2. My Beloved (the groom)
 - a. “As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is **my beloved** among the young men. With great delight I sat in his window, and his fruit was sweet to my taste (2:3).”
 - b. “**My beloved** is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, **my beloved**, be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains (2:16-17).”
 - c. “Let **my beloved** come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits (4:16b).”
 3. Other unnamed people who observe and comment on the romance.
- **Outline** – Six Major Units, or Cycles, After the Prologue (1:1)
 - Iain M. Duguid’s Outline
 1. Prologue (1:2-2:7)
 - Expressions of passionate longings
 2. Before the Wedding (2:8-3:5)
 - Expressions of great anticipation
 3. The Wedding (3:6-5:1)
 - Expressions of admiration and consummation (see 4:16b-5:1)
 4. After the Wedding (5:2-6:3)
 - Expressions of longings when separated
 5. Contemplation and Renewed Consummation (6:4-8:4)
 - Expressions of continued admiration and consummation
 6. Epilogue (8:5-14)
 - Expressions of being secure in marital love

Poetic Features

1. The Value and Security of Love (8:6-7)
2. The Public Celebration of Love (1:4b, 11; 5:1b)
3. Agrarian Analogies of Beauty (4:1-5; 5:10-16)

4. Beauty Despite Insecurities (contrast 1:5-6a with 4:7)
5. *Double Entendres* to Celebrate the Sexual Union (5:4-5; 6:2-3; 7:6-9)

DQ: Throughout history, how has the Church struggled with erroneous views of marriage and sex? How does Song of Solomon help to correct these errors?

Song of Solomon and the Gospel

1. Intimacy in Christian marriage is marked by joyful reciprocity.
 - 1 Cor 7:4, “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” This attitude reflected in SS 2:16a; 6:3; 7:10.
2. As fulfilling as intimacy in marriage is, what awaits us in the resurrection will be more fulfilling.
 - Matt 22:30, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”
3. Marriage is a picture of God’s love for Israel.
 - Ezek 16:8, “When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine.”
 - See also the book of Hosea
4. Marriage is a picture of Christ’s love for the church.
 - Eph 5:31-32, “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”
5. The gathering of the saints is pictured as a marriage supper (Rev 19:6-10).
6. In the resurrection, our bodies will be redeemed (1 Cor 15:35-49). We aren’t Gnostics!

Sources Used

Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs* (TBST; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1994), 13.

Martin Luther, [*Luther’s Works, Vol. 15: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Last Words of David, 2 Samuel 23:1-7*](#), ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 15 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 191.

James Luther Mays, [*Song of Songs*](#), Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2005), xi–1.

J. Robert Wright, ed., [*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*](#), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 288.

Iain M. Duguid, *Song of Songs*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg/New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2016), xxi-xxii.