

Love Song

Song of Songs
1:1-4

Solomon's Song of Songs 
The Grand Drama of Love

Introduction: The Drama of Love

1 The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

[The Bride Confesses Her Love]

She

² Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!

For your love is better than wine;

³ your anointing oils are fragrant;

your name is oil poured out;

therefore virgins love you.

⁴ Draw me after you; let us run.

The king has brought me into his chambers.

Others

We will exult and rejoice in you;

we will extol your love more than wine;

rightly do they love you.

- Song of Songs 1:1-4

The Structure of the Song of Songs

The language of the Song of Songs is difficult. It contains many *hapax legomena* (Hebrew words that are only found in this book and in no other Biblical text). Its intended structure has long been a mystery, and in the final analysis it may need to remain so. Scholars suggest that the book is made up of as many as 42 separate poems/songs and as few as nine. An initial read-through reveals little more than a jumble of thoughts without logical connections, of unrelated poems stuck together in eight apparently arbitrary chapter divisions. Whatever logic the book contains, whatever plot it presents, is thin and hard to follow. As a result, there is no lack of alternative and conflicting theories of how the Song of Songs is put together and of what its author was trying to say.

There are allegorical interpretations, Jewish and Christian. There are three-character dramatic

Guiding Principles for Song of Solomon:

1. THE TRINITARIAN PRINCIPLE

Ultimate Reality Is Relational. God is forever a dynamic love relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2. THE ANTI-PRINCIPLE PRINCIPLE

Ultimate Reality is Relational. To live as though things essentially boil down to Principles (like "Natural Properties" or "Our Rules" or "The Law") is to be essentially misguided and impoverished.

3. THE CONNECTION PRINCIPLE

Ultimate Reality is Relational. To live as though things essentially boil down to things (like "Me" or "You" or "The Force") is to be essentially misguided and impoverished.

4. THE OWNERSHIP PRINCIPLE

Love, Sex and Marriage are from God and to God because they, like us and like all creation, belong to God.

5. THE BELONGING PRINCIPLE

We Truly Belong to One Another, & We Can Truly & Rightly & Beautifully say "Mine" of Another Person because God Says "Mine" to Us. My spouse belongs to me because and after he/she/we belongs to God.

6. THE UBI CARITAS PRINCIPLE

Ubi Caritas et Amor Deus Ibi Est... "Where Love Is, There Is God"... Where God is seen, acknowledged, turned toward, trusted in and followed, real Love in all its manifestations can flourish. Where God is denied, turned away from and/or disobeyed, real Love withers.

7. THE CHORUS PRINCIPLE

When Eros (Possessive/Sexual) Love is Exclusive, within the Bounds Given by God, There Is Inclusive Community-Wide Agape Love & Joy & Health... When Eros Love is Inclusive, without boundaries, there is community-wide deadly & excluding hatreds & jealousies & restlessness & pain.

8. THE EROS-AGAPE PRINCIPLE

When Eros Love is Connected to Agape Love (God's Love... Self-Giving Love... Others-Oriented Love...), Sex is Sacred, Significantly Beautiful and Life-Giving. When Eros Love is divorced from Agape Love, Sex is profane, tragically trivial, ugly and life-sapping.

9. THE ANTHROPOSEXUAL PRINCIPLE

When Sex is Sacred/Holy/Special, People Are Precious Made-in-God's-Image Human Beings. When Sex is profane/common/trivial, people are cheap and disposable things.

interpretations (Where the imaginative plot presents King Solomon trying to add another young Israelite girl to his harem and using insincere protestations of love to manipulate her affections away from her true love, a local shepherd boy to whom she escapes in the end). There are two-character dramatic interpretations (Telling the story of King Solomon and his devotion to his one true love). There are cultic interpretations (Suggesting the Song is a sanitized version of a mythic fertility cult poem telling of the rise and fall of Baal or some other god by whom the land is made fruitful again). There are wedding interpretations (The Song is a prescribed set of love songs to be performed throughout the course of a Syrian/Jewish wedding ceremony). There are funerary interpretations (like the wedding interpretation but for a funeral instead of a wedding). There are feminist interpretations (in which the Song functions as a declaration of female equality and empowerment, against patriarchal assumptions, etc.). There are subversive text interpretations (where the Song functions primarily as a rejection of the prevailing theology and ethics as presented by Israel's prophets).

In the midst of this array of possibilities, I have found a treasure of fruitful, Biblical and evangelical sanity in the interpretation of Dr. Duane Garrett of Gordon Conwell Seminary (Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs*, Word Biblical Commentary, v.23Ba).

Dr. Garrett in his extensive commentary, sees the Song of Songs as a collection of **Lyric Love Poems**. As a "lyric poem" it reflects upon the meaning of a story without necessarily telling a story itself (see the "Characteristics of Lyric Poetry" on the back page). Thus, we are free to

cease vainly attempting to "fill in the gaps" of the plot and instead to invest our energy thinking about the deeper realities the Song illustrates and illuminates. As a *collection* of lyric poems, it may well have been intended to be sung (like an oratorio, Handel's *Messiah* for example) with parts for a male soloist, a female soloist and a choir as suggested in the text. The central reality presented and illuminated in the Song is the dramatic transformation of the Song's protagonist, the bride (see the back page article "The Plot of the Song").

This collection, by Dr. Garrett's analysis, consists of 13 individual songs organized in an all-encompassing chiasmic structure (Chiasm comes from the Greek letter Chi – "X" – and indicates a basic symmetrical structure where the outer parts match and point to what is in the center) with the dramatic center found in the song of the dramatic sexual union between the man and the woman found at 4:16-5:1. Dr. Garrett points out that the Song has 400 lines of poetry & that 4:16 begins with line 200.

Here is his chiasmic structure for the Song of Songs:

Superscript (1:1)		
A	1. Chorus and soprano: the entrance	(1:2-4)
B	2. Soprano: the virgin's education I	(1:5-6)
C	3. Soprano and chorus: finding the beloved	(1:7-8)
D	4. Tenor, chorus, and soprano: the first song of mutual love	(1:9-2:7)
E	5. Soprano and tenor: the invitation to depart	(2:8-17)
F	6. Three wedding-night songs	
Fa	a. Soprano: bride's anxiety	(3:1-5)
Fb	b. Chorus: bride comes to the groom	(3:6-11)
Fc	c. Tenor: the flawless bride	(4:1-15)
G	7. Soprano, tenor & chorus: the consummation	(4:16-5:1)
F'	8. Three wedding-night songs	
Fa'	a. Soprano, tenor, and chorus: bride's pain	(5:2-8)
Fb'	b. Chorus & soprano: bride recovers the groom	(5:9-6:3)
Fc'	c. Tenor and chorus: the flawless bride II *	(6:4-10)
E'	9. Soprano, chorus, and tenor: leaving girlhood behind	(6:11-13)
D'	10. Tenor and soprano: the second song of mutual love	(7:1-8:4)
C'	11. Chorus and soprano: claiming the beloved	(8:5-7)
B'	12. Chorus and soprano: the virgin's education II	(8:8-12)
A'	13. Tenor, chorus, and soprano: the farewell	(8:13-14)

* [Note: Same words after consummation – fears unfounded, his love for her is undiminished]

Notes on Song of Songs 1:1-4

Summary... At the outset of Solomon's Song, we see this is going to be, as the listening boy in the Princess Bride movie complains, "a kissing book." It is going to be a book about "true love" in all its fullness including pulse-racing desire, mind-numbing attraction, intoxicating touch and breath-taking union. Though it is definitely about kissing, we will also see that this book is a grand adventure story about the frightening challenges and noble risks of love as well as its private and less-dramatic rewards. As part of our God's blessed and holy revelation to us, The Song will serve as a valuable guide to love not just in the context of marriage and intimate physical expression but in every kind of healthy relationship we enjoy with others. It will help us understand the character and will of the God who made us and knows us and loves us and redeems us in Jesus Christ our Lord who calls us to live lives of love. The corporate value of a couple's healthy personal love (see Principle #7 on page 1) is suggested by the immediate appearance of the Chorus of Friends (called "Others" in the ESV and identified by most scholars as the "maidens of Jerusalem" mentioned in verse 3) who join the song celebrating the gift of love these two enjoy and praising the giver (and the Giver).

Verse 1 - **Song of songs...** simply means "the greatest of songs" (like "King of kings" or "Show of shows")... This is a song said to transcend all other earthly musical expressions... **of Solomon...** this could mean it is a song *by, for, or about* Solomon... Solomon's name is mentioned seven times (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12) and we hear of a "king" several times (1:4, 12; 7:5), but the work could have been composed by someone else for or about Solomon himself. Nothing in the book suggests it could not have been written in the 10th century B.C. during Solomon's reign of unprecedented prosperity in Israel...

Verse 2 - **She...** As indicated by the pronouns used in various sections, the speakers along the way will be identified as *She* (the Bride who is the main character in this drama), *He* (the Lover/Solomon) and *Others* (the Chorus probably of the Girls of Jerusalem)... **him, his, your...** all referring to the same person (Solomon)... **kisses of his mouth...** these are real lip-smacking kisses and not merely symbols of something else...

Verse 3 - the Hebrew word for **name** and **anointing oils/perfume** sound similar... The Bride's desire is such that the mere mention of her beloved is like filling the air with pungent aroma...

Verse 4 - **Draw me after you** (take me away with you!)... This is the call of love... **let us run!**... And it is made with urgent passion... **We will exult and rejoice in you...** The Chorus of Friends responds... "you" is masculine singular (indicating the Lover/Solomon... but also perhaps pointing to the Ultimate Giver of Love)... **extol your love more than wine...** the love this man gives is treasured, and the Friends rejoice in it even though none of them are its rightful object (see above)...

Read & Reflect - Chapters 1-8 & 1:1-4

First Reading/First Impression: Read all the way through Solomon's Song of Songs and check the box below that best describes your initial reaction to it...

- Why is this in the Bible? I'm not sure what this has to do with me
 Some beautiful thoughts but hard to follow Pretty racy stuff.
 My husband/wife could learn something from this book.
 Ain't love grand! Other _____

Second Reading/Entrance - 1:1-4 - Based on this introduction, what are a couple of questions you have about the wisdom this book has to share?

Search

Verse 1 - What about this book makes you agree with the assessment of its author that it is "The Song of Songs"? Why might you disagree?

v. 2-3 - How are "wine" and "kisses, etc." similar? Why do you think the Bride says the love of her man is *better* than wine?

v. 4 - Where does the Bride say she wants to go? Who can take her there?

What is the response of the observers in the Bride's community? Why is their positive input significant and important to her?

Marriage Builder's Corner

Challenge: As a married couple, will you commit to reading the weekly portions of this book out loud together & talking with each other about what you hear as part of our church-wide study?

Question: What does the Song of Songs suggest to you about the importance of these things in your marriage... 1. The positive regard you hold & express for each other? 2. The way you uniquely express your love for each other in physical actions? 3. The respect and support offered and expressed by your community for your marriage?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, You are the source of all life and all love. Thank You for the love we share as husband and wife joined in Your holy bond of marriage. We, our bodies and our marriage, belong to You. Strengthen our love for each other and for You so we, by our honor and joy will bring joy to Your heart and honor to Your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Teaching the Word of God

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The Plot of the Song

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figures, she is initially anxious and hesitant (2:5-7; 3:1-5), must leave familiar circumstances, faces fearful opposition (5:2-8), & receives significant help and encouragement from others (recurring chorus of friends).

The basic dilemma for our Heroine Bride is quite domestic: She must move from her undesired state as an unmarried maiden (virginity) to the desired state of being united in marriage to the man she loves (non-virgin). Such a move, though, involves great risk. She cannot maintain control over all the realities such a change will produce. And once she loses her virginity there is no going back. She must trust. She must risk. She must love.

And so in her quest, the Bride becomes an archetype for women (and men) in the basic human experience of marrying, having sexual relations and ending one's virginity. In addition, she reveals something of the nature of love in general as "virginity" is to "non-virginity" as "autonomy" is to "love." She has no intimate relations with a man and is thus sexually autonomous; she is the locked garden and the sealed wall. Her autonomy is that no man has access to her body. Ironically, however, her autonomy is not freedom but the antithesis of freedom... Her only relationship with men is with her brothers, who regard her as an outsider, or even as a servant. Although sexually autonomous, she has no liberty to nurture her life, joy, or significance, nor can she give and receive love. Virginity is both a protection and a prison. She longs to be free of it but is terrified to leave her domain. The pain of the loss of virginity is both physical and emotional. She fears that the loss of virginity will mean her death (that is, the destruction of her identity as well as the physical trauma).

She cannot resolve this dilemma by her own agency, that is, through promiscuity. Doing this she would lose the virginity without gaining the intimacy, joy, or significance she seeks. She cannot force her way into the desired situation "non-virgin" and become an agent controlling that sphere of existence. Ironically, true freedom in sexuality only exists when one man has exclusive claim to her sexual pleasures and she has exclusive claim to his desire, as in her refrain, "I belong to my beloved and his desire is for me" (7:10). In promiscuity, freedom and intimacy would be further from her than ever before. She would emotionally still be behind the walls of virginity while physically not a virgin. She would be in effect not free but a promiscuous virgin, with *virgin* here meaning, "unloved by a man." This is the prostitute's dilemma, that she is sexually active but alone and without love. Thus, the woman of the Song repeatedly tells the girls of Jerusalem not to awaken or arouse sexual desire until the time is right (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Her message is that virginity is the key to attaining sexual freedom—a freedom found not simply in the ability to have sex but in the attainment of joy and intimacy in the sexual relationship.

The man of the Song is the mediator or redeemer figure. He is at the same time in the "unhappy situation" and the "desired situation." He is both a virgin (sexually inexperienced) and a non-female-virgin (a male). Being the "other," a man, he is able to help effect her desired change in status (just as she is the enabling "other" for him).

The man & the love he gives mediate the transition of the woman from isolated virgin to the status of being free, loving, loved, & at peace.

She begins the song as an outsider. She has the dark skin of a peasant and is treated like a servant by her family with no freedom to pursue her own interests (1:5-6). She desires to be with her lover but is fearful of men (1:7). It is his passion for her that allows her to confront the power of sex and the loss of her virginity, even though the prospect makes her swoon (2:5). He calls her away to love (2:8-17). She has her "night of terror" where she seeks her lover but finds instead the guardians of the walls—her virginity. Suddenly the groom appears and she makes the determined decision to take him to "her mother's house" = to end her virginity with him. A marriage ceremony follows (3:6-11).

He woos her with tender seduction (4:1-15) giving her strength to open up her "locked garden" (4:12) and let her lover into his feast (4:16-5:1). Her transformation is completed in two stages: (1) She reflects on how wonderful her lover is—that is, on how much she loves him (5:9-16). (2) He comes to her again and makes it clear that his desire and admiration of her is unchanged (6:1-9).

So the woman's body becomes the domain of love. The protagonist woman has become the sphere of existence of the desired reality, love. As all can see, she is the garden, the embodiment of love, pleasure, and life (6:9-13) The lover's desire is for her. Love, intimacy, and sexual pleasure have their true place in her person (7:1-10). She has not simply lost her virginity: She has taken her man into herself. This does not mean that she has lost her identity or her self. To the contrary she has found true sexual freedom. She delights in her lover's body (5:10-16). She understands the meaning of love, and she has become the true interpreter and guide to love (8:6-7).

"Her freedom did not come by promiscuity (she did not awaken love before it was ready) or by rejection of the male (perpetual virginity) but by the transformation that made her the domain of love." (Garrett, p.114)

A Back Page Thought -----

----- from Pastor Jay

A helpful way of seeing the dramatic movement of Song of Songs is as a highly poetic Heroic Quest on the part of the Bride (see Garrett, *Song of Songs*) who is the hero/protagonist. This is highly unusual as classic questing heroes are almost always male (like Gilgamesh, Odysseus & Luke Skywalker). Like these classic

Characteristics of Lyric Love Poetry

(see Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry*)

1. It is often enigmatic by nature
 - a. It demands effort, mental and even emotional energy, from the reader/listener who wants to understand it
 - b. It communicates but it is essentially a word of art that the reader is expected to investigate and appreciate and not merely comprehend.
 - c. So some training, patience and practice is required
2. It does have a specific meaning that the poet intended (contrary to modern notions of "intentional fallacy" and deconstructionism)
3. It is highly allusive (which makes it also elusive!... one needs a basic understanding of its "code")
4. It is highly compact (so, often quite dense)
5. Paradoxically, it may explore an event in great detail even when the event itself could be described in a few words
 - a. see Herman Melville's "The March into Virginia" – which says essentially "Young Union soldiers cheerfully marched off to do battle at Manassas; most died, but those who survived became grim" but in a much more artful way, describing in detail the gleeful atmosphere and so brings out the enlightening reality of the ensuing battle).
 - b. Song of Songs says this: "A young woman in love marries and loses her virginity" but in a way that brings out the real significance of the woman's transformation.
6. "Poems have their origins in life, especially in the formal or informal ceremonies that occur at crucial moments or phases in a single private life—birth, adolescence, marriage, death—or at public moments when we collectively commemorate a war, a religious feast, a holiday." (Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry*, p.3)... The Song of Songs investigates and celebrates the emotional journey of a woman into marriage. (Garrett, p.94)
7. Lyric poems not only explore the significance of life-events but *arrange* them as well.
 - a. Ex. the Chiasmus of 13 cantos of the Song of Songs connote the marriage of the man and woman as a fulfillment of a purpose in life.
 - b. Note: the moment of their union is found at the center of the chiasm, and is the 7th canto from both the beginning and the end of the opus.
 - c. Marriage is midway between birth and death, and looked at from either end it is regarded as the high point
8. Lyric poetry does not *tell* a story but *draws out the meaning* of a story.