

Song of Solomon

Song of Solomon is a love song written by Solomon (1:1) and abounding in metaphors and oriental imagery. Historically, it depicts the wooing and wedding of a shepherdess by King Solomon, and the joys and heartaches of wedded love.

Allegorically, it pictures Israel as God's espoused bride (see Hosea 2:19-20), and the church as the bride of Christ. As human life finds its highest fulfillment in the love of man and woman, so spiritual life finds its highest fulfillment in the love of God for His people and Christ for His church.

The book is arranged like scenes in a drama with three main speakers: the bride (Shulamite), the king (Solomon), and a chorus (daughters of Jerusalem).

INTRODUCTION

The Song is a unit rather than a collection of songs. It is a dramatic poem built on a dialogue between the same two characters (and an occasional chorus) throughout. There is a continuity of style, imagery, and expression in this unique biblical book. Solomon emphasized the intellect in Ecclesiastes, but the emotions clearly dominate his Song.

Solomon wrote 1,005 songs (1 Kin. 4:32), but this beautiful eulogy of love stood out among them as the "song of songs" (1:1). The great literary value of this song can be seen in its rich use of metaphor and oriental imagery as it extols the purity, beauty, and satisfaction of love. It is never crass, but often intimate, as it explores the dimensions of the relationship between two lovers: attraction, desire, companionship, pleasure, union, separation, faithfulness, and praise. Like Ecclesiastes, this little book is not easily outlined, and various schemes can be used. It abounds with sudden changes of speakers, and they are not identified. The beginning of love is seen first (1:1-5:1), and then the broadening of love (5:2-8:14).

The Hebrew title *Shir Hashirim* comes from chapter 1, verse 1, "The song of songs." This is in the superlative and speaks of Solomon's most exquisite song. Because Solomon is mentioned in chapter 1, verse 1, the book is also known as the Song of Solomon.

AUTHOR

The internal evidence of the book strongly favors the traditional position that Solomon is its author. Solomon is specifically mentioned seven times (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12), and he is identified as the groom. There is evidence of royal luxury and rich imported goods (e.g., 3:6-11). The king by this time also had sixty queens and eighty concubines (6:8). Solomon's harem at its fullest extent reached seven hundred queens and three hundred concubines (1 Kin. 11:3).

DATE & SETTING

This song was written primarily from the point of view of the Shulamite, but Solomon was its author, probably early in his reign, about 965 b.c. There is a problem regarding how a man with a harem of 140 women (6:8) could extol the love of the Shulamite as though she was his only bride. It may be that Solomon's relationship with the Shulamite was the only pure romance he ever experienced. The bulk of his marriages were political arrangements. It is significant that the Shulamite was a vineyard keeper of no great means.

This book was also written before Solomon plunged into gross immorality and idolatry. "For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God" (1 Kin. 11:4).