

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Angus assigns this book of Scripture to B.C. 1001. The universal voice of antiquity ascribes it to Solomon, and internal evidence confirms this testimony. His songs were a thousand and five, I Kings 4:32; and this is called the “**Song of songs**,” because the best of them all.

Key word, “**Beloved**”; key verse, 6, 3.

Origen and Jerome tell us that the Jews forbade it to be read by any until he was thirty years old. It certainly needs a degree of spiritual maturity to enter aright into the holy mystery of love which it celebrates. It is possible to read the song amiss; but to such as have attained spiritual maturity, of what age soever, it is one of the most edifying of the sacred writings.

Love to Jesus Christ becomes, through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, the strongest passion which can sway the human heart. Avarice, ambition, love of power may have more of the unnatural vigor attending fever; this carries with it the quiet, enduring energy of health that brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Those alone who have experienced the power of this love in its intensity are competent judges whether any language used in expressing it may be exaggerated. If the love of God to us is as incomprehensible as is His eternity and omnipresence, it is not surprising that the love of a grateful heart should struggle and strive to declare itself by appealing to the tenderest ties, by using the boldest imagery; for the love of a believer is but a dim reflection of the measureless love of God.

1. *The form of the song is somewhat difficult to determine.*

A drama it certainly is not, although it has been thus described. It presents little or nothing of the features belonging to the drama. While dialogue is found in it, still it is not of a very sustained kind, nor is it very marked. The feature chiefly lacking is a climax, the culminating finis with which the drama is expected to close.

Its form seems to be that of a pastoral poem, with characters presenting quasi-dramatic action. The personages introduced into it are the bridegroom and king; the bride, or spouse; the daughters of Jerusalem, or the court ladies of Solomon’s palace.

There is scarcely traceable any plot, nor dramatic unity, although the poem is one. Most of the addresses, instead of being dialogues, are soliloquies, apostrophes, or monologues. It has changing scenes. Sometimes the scene is laid in a garden; at others in the palace; then in the country amid pastoral quiet and beauty; and in Jerusalem amidst the noise of a great city. This much may be confidently asserted, that it is a song of love in Oriental language and imagery, with rests and pauses and varying scenery and conversation.

2. *The design of the song.*

There are three interpretations of the poem advanced by as many schools of expositors. Each of these may be briefly mentioned.

The first view is that of the merely *literal and erotic*.

That is, it is held that the poem celebrates the love of Solomon for a young shepherdess who was a member of an agricultural family consisting of a widowed mother and several sons, who lived at Shulem. (The name of the place is derived from the spouse, viz., Shulamite).

The young woman, in the course of her pastoral duties, met with a shepherd to whom, in due time, she became espoused. Her brothers violently opposed the union. She was invited by her lover to accompany him to the fields; but her brothers, to prevent the meeting, sent her to take care of the vineyards. Here, she one day encountered King Solomon, who, assisted by his court ladies, endeavored to win her love. But she remained steadfast to her affianced.

The king carried her to the city, made her large promises and sought to overcome her scruples by princely presents; but without avail; and her fidelity was finally rewarded by her marriage with the shepherd and gifts from her reconciled brothers.

According to this theory the scope of the book is to give us an "example of virtue in a young woman who encountered and conquered great temptations, and was eventually rewarded." If this is all, belief in its inspiration must be dismissed; and it has no better right to a place in the Bible than a tale from the Arabian Nights, or the sonnets from Shakespeare. Against this theory there are strong objections:

(1) It has been doubted whether there was such a place as Shulem whence the spouse derived her name of the Shulamite.

(2) It seems obvious that if we accept this view of the book as true, then we must renounce the belief in Solomon's being the author; for it is altogether unlikely that he could have written so manifest an account of his own defeat.

(3) The vast majority of Bible students see no ground or foundation for the story detailed above. They find no shepherd in it; no betrothal of the Shulamite with a shepherd; no effort on the part of the king to supplant another in her affections and steal her from him. In short, the story on which this view rests is pure fiction.

(4) If it be no more than a love-poem celebrating one of Solomon's amours it is incredible that it should have been incorporated with the other books of the Bible, and for so many centuries held its place with the other inspired books as one of them. It was in the Old Testament canon when the Septuagint version was made, two hundred and fifty years before the advent of the Saviour; it has kept its place there ever since. If it is only a "dissolute love song." God would have found a way to cast it out of His Book ages ago, like the Apocryphal books.

(5) The strange and strong hold it has had upon some of the most spiritually minded men the world has ever seen—men like Rutherford, McCheyne, Gill, Moody, Stuart, John and Thomas Goodwin—is inexplicable if the song be nothing more than this hypothesis offers. We must reject this theory.

The second view we mention which has been put forward as an explanation of the design of the book is called the *moral*.

The song is regarded as a description of wedded love in the exercise of its highest and purest affections. In this interpretation no spiritual sense is attached to the poem. The great moral sentiments relating to the holy estate of marriage alone are intended to be inculcated. The foundation for this opinion rests on the union of Solomon with the daughter of Pharaoh. It is held that the poem sings the praises of that princess, and celebrates the happiness the king enjoyed in union with her.

There are very grave objections which may be urged against this theory. We may safely assert that the Egyptian princess is not meant at all nor can be meant by the Shulamite. Some of the difficulties that lie against it may be stated.

- The delicate daughter of the haughty Pharaoh could not in any supposable manner have ever been the sun-burnt keeper of the vineyards, as the spouse is described to have been, ch. 1:6.
- She could not have been unveiled and beaten by the watchman of Jerusalem, 5:7.
- She could not have come from the snowy heights of Lebanon when she had no occasion to be within one hundred and twenty miles of its base, 4:8.
- It is very unlikely that she conducted Solomon into her mother's house, which was in Egypt, 3:4.

Moreover, on this theory it is impossible to account for the remarkable situation of the spouse. She is found wandering through the streets of the great city by night; is smitten by watchmen; her veil is torn rudely from her face, the gravest insult that could be offered an Eastern woman. In fact, her whole conduct is utterly irreconcilable with the Oriental ideas of womanly seclusion and modesty. If this spouse is a veritable woman, having the experience here ascribed to her, then her character is altogether incompatible with Eastern habits of decorum, and is questionable.

The third view is that the song is an allegory, that under the guise of human love, the love which passes between two loyal and faithful hearts, is set forth the intimate, tender relationship existing between Christ and His people.

The frame, we may reverently say, is human conjugal affection. But through this thin, skillfully carved lattice-work there glance out upon us the joy and bliss, the rapture and ecstasy, the strange, tender wondrous play of the deep abiding love of Jesus for His own, and reciprocally, theirs for Him.

The Chaldee Targum, the oldest Jewish commentary on the book, entitles it, “The Songs and Hymns which Solomon the Prophet, King of Israel, Delivered by the Spirit of Prophecy, before Jehovah, the Lord of the Whole Earth.”

The great body of Christians have always regarded it as a symbolical exhibition of the relations subsisting between the Lord and His people. From first to last, orthodox believers hold it bears the stamp of the allegory. In support of this view the following arguments may be urged:

- (1) It best accounts for the position of the book in the canon of Scripture.
- (2) It accords with the instincts of the spiritually-minded.
- (3) The names of its principal characters indicate that it is an allegory—

Shalomoh, Solomon, the peaceful one, the prince of peace, and *Shulamith*, also the peaceful one, but feminine—the daughter of peace. These names are believed to be as suggestive, as significant, as Bunyan’s “Christian” and “Christiana,” or “Faithful” and “Hopeful.” Read in this light, we perceive how appropriately the book represents Jesus as the peaceful one, the peace-bringer, and His people as the sharers of His peace, those to whom He gives peace.

- (4) The fancifulness of some of the scenes and situations render a literal interpretation absurd and impossible. See, for example, 2:14-17; 3:1-4; 6:4-7; 4:8.

The Shulamite is in the clefts of the rock, in the concealments of the precipices; the bridegroom is in the garden, beyond the mountains, in the distant fields. The bride sleeps, the lover knocks at her door in the stillness of the night—withdraws when he receives no answer to his call. She in her remorse arises and wanders about the streets of the city. The rapid transitions, the remarkable situations indicate that the poem is an allegory.

- (5) This interpretation harmonizes best with the Old Testament representations of the relation between God and His people.

This relation is often set forth as one of wedlock. The prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, in particular, make the marriage covenant existing between the Lord and Israel the ground of their passionate appeals.

Nor is the New Testament silent as to this relation. The union and reciprocal love of Christ and the church are described in language closely akin to that of the song, “**He is the Bridegroom who hath the Bride.**” They rejoice in each other. Their delights are mutual, identical, Matthew 9:15; John 3:29; II Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:7-27.

The sudden pronominal changes indicate that the song is an allegory.

- **“Draw me, we will run after thee.”**
- **“The King hath brought me into His chambers; we will be glad and rejoice in thee,”** 1:4.

The bride’s name is not that of a single individual, but is collective. She is the 1 daughter of Zion.”

3. The teaching of the Song we hold is the following:

- (1) The bridegroom is the Messiah, the Redeemer.
- (2) The bride, His people.
- (3) The daughters of Jerusalem, are the friends of both, John 3, 29.
- (4) The Song describes the love which exists between them. The fountain of all love for Christ is His love to us. To know His love is to love Him in return, I John 4:19.

The time when the Song has its fulfillment is always. But it is believed that it will have a peculiar accomplishment in that day when the Jews are again restored to God’s favor and fellowship—and for the second time the marriage bond is ratified and sealed, never again to be violated, Hosea 1:2; Romans 11:26-29.

(6) Traits of Christ’s love.

- It is unconditional, chap, 1:2-6; comp. Romans 5:8.
- It is irresistible, 2:8; comp. I John 4:10.
- It is intense, 2:9, 10; comp. John 14:1-3.
- It is sheltering and protective, 2:14, 15; comp. Psalm 91:1-6.
- It is exacting, 5:2; comp. Ephesians 5:1, 2.
- It is jealous, 5:6; comp. Revelation 3:20.

(7) Traits of a believer’s love.

- It is self-depreciating, 1:5.
- It is eager for communion, 2:1-7.
- It is sometimes interrupted, 3:1.
- It is sorrowful, 5:6, 7.
- It is intermittent, 5:1, 2.
- It is self sacrificing, 3:2, 3.

4. Structure and summary of contents: (Moody Stewart).

Canto One.—Subject, the bride seeking and finding the king.

1. The king sought, chap, 1:2-8.
2. The king found, 1:9; 2, 7.

Canto Two. Subject, the sleeping bride awakened.

1. Call to meet the bridegroom, 2:8-15.
2. Response of the bride, 16; 3:2, 5.

Canto Three. Subject, the bridegroom with the bride.

The king in his bridal chariot, 3:6-11
The beauty of the bride, 4:1-7.
Garden of spices, 4:8; 5:2.

Canto Four. Subject, bridegroom's withdrawal and reappearance.

1. Sleep and sorrow, 5:3; 6, 3.
2. Bridegroom's return, 6:4-10.
3. Glory of the bride, 6:11; 7:10.
4. Garden in the fields, 7:11; 8:4.

Canto Five. Subject, the little sister, 8:5-14

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