

SONG OF SOLOMON

SONG OF SOLOMON — INTRODUCTION

Internal evidence confirms the voice of antiquity that Solomon wrote this book (see ^{<100>}1 Kings 4:32). As it is called the Song of Songs, the title carries the idea that it is the best of all his songs. Moreover, although it is not quoted in the New Testament, yet it always formed part of the Old as far as we have record, and was in the canon of sacred Scripture which Jesus and His apostles recognized as such.

When it was written is not known, but its imagery seems drawn from the marriage of Solomon either with Pharaoh's daughter, or some native of Palestine espoused some years later of noble birth, though inferior to her husband. For the first idea compare ^{<100>}1 Kings 3:1; 7:8; 9:24, with ^{<200>}Song of Solomon 1:9 and 6:12, and for the second, look at ^{<300>}Song of Solomon 2:1; 7:1; and 1:6.

There are two characters who speak and act throughout — Shelomoh, a masculine name, meaning "peaceful," and Shulamith, a feminine form of the same name (see 1:6; 3:11; 6:13; 8:12). There is also a chorus of virgins, daughters of Jerusalem (2:7; 3:5; 5:8-9).

Towards the close two brothers of Shulamith appear (8:8-9). (See also 1:6.) As in most Hebrew poetry, and indeed all ancient poems, there are no breaks to indicate change of scene or speakers, which is determined partly by the sense, but chiefly by the use of the original of the feminine and masculine pronouns.

The book is a description of wedded love; and yet, of course, it has a higher aim. It is noticeable that there is a sudden change from the singular to the plural in 1:4, which seems to indicate in the judgment of Angus, that Shulamith must be taken collectively; a fact which, put with others gives credence to the idea that the story should be applied to the history of God's chosen people and their relation to Him. Every reader of the Bible knows that the union of Jehovah with Israel, and that Christ and His church are presented under the same figure of marriage. (See such passages as

Psalm 45; Isaiah 54:5-6; Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 2:14-23;
 Matthew 9:15; John 3:29; Ephesians 5:23-27, etc.)

Outline of the Book

1. Opening dialogue.

- a. Shulamith speaks, 1:2-6; then in dialogue with Shelomoh;
- b. Shulamith, 1:7;
- c. Shelomoh, 1:8-11;
- d. Shulamith, 1:12-14;
- e. Shelomoh, 1:15;
- f. Shulamith, 1:16-2:1;
- g. Shelomoh, 2:2;
- h. Shulamith, 2:3.

2. Shulamith now rests, sleeps and dreams (Shelomoh addressing the daughters of Jerusalem and charging them not to wake her, 2:7; 3:5; 2:4-6; 8-3:4).

3. The daughters of Jerusalem see a nuptial procession approaching, 3:6-11.

4. Dialogue between Shelomoh and Shulamith.

- a. Shelomoh speaks 4:1-16 (as far as "flow out");
- b. Shulamith, 4:16;
- c. Shelomoh, 5:1.

5. A night scene; Shulamith, seeking Shelomoh, meets and converses with the daughters of Jerusalem;

- a. Shulamith, 5:2-8;
- b. daughters of Jerusalem, 5-9;
- c. Shulamith, 5:10-16;
- d. daughters of Jerusalem, 6:1;
- e. Shulamith, 6:2-3.

- 6.** Morning scene; Shelomoh visits his garden early, and meets Shulamith;
- a. Shelomoh, 6:4-10;
 - b. Shulamith, 6:11-12;
 - c. the dialogue continuing to 8:8.
- 7.** The brothers of Shulamith are introduced;
- a. the brothers speak 8:8-9;
 - b. Shulamith answers them, 8:10-12;
 - c. Shelomoh speaks, 8:13;
 - d. Shulamith answers, closing the scene, 8:14.

SONG OF SOLOMON 1-2

For the following we are indebted to "An Exposition and Vindication of Solomon's Song" by James Strong, S. T. D., who combines the literal and allegorical modes of interpretation — the idea that the poem celebrates the royal marriage, and is also symbolic of the relation of Jehovah and His people in both dispensations. The details apply to the former, while the spiritual conceptions are foreshadowed in the latter.

Hebrew wedding festivities usually lasted a week, the marriage being consummated at the close of the first day, but here the nuptials seemed to have been postponed till the last day. The description, therefore, is not that of the honeymoon, but the wooing.

Strong distributes the drama into six acts corresponding to as many days — not extending into the Sabbath — and subdivides each into two scenes, morning and evening.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

This subsection comprises ~~21MP~~ Song of Solomon 1:2-8. The bride is an Egyptian princess, whose train of attendants has reached the royal portico at Jerusalem and is met by the Israelitish maids of honor. Her thoughts are busy with anticipation of the greeting from her intended, and she expresses

them, almost unconsciously, in the words, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (vv. 1-2). The ladies respond to the close of verse 3.

The bride orders the attendants to proceed (she being carried in a palanquin, a covered conveyance borne on the shoulders of men), and she exclaims, "Draw me," or "Bear me forward." The ladies respond, "We will run after thee!" Passing within the palace, she says, "The king hath brought me into his chambers," and the ladies respond, to the close of verse 4.

The bride disparages her charms in verse 5, and a dialogue ensues between her and the ladies to the end of verse 8, where she is left awaiting the bridegroom in an anti-room.

If we seek the spiritual application of this, it is found in the expectant desire of true believers for the second coming of Christ.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

This scene runs from 1:9 to 2:6, and describes the introduction of the lovers to each other, in one of the interior reception chambers, in presence of the attendants.

The bridegroom expresses his admiration of the bride (vv. 9-10), and the attendants respond, verse 11. Probably the bride speaks (vv. 12-14), her observations inspired by a glimpse of the nosegay ("spikenard") at her bosom. Compliments are passed between her and the bridegroom (1:15-2:3), and probably the symbolic language is suggested by the garden and its fountains that lie before them.

The bridegroom and his attendants retire, but the bride continues addressing the ladies (vv. 4-6). Overpowered with emotion at her lover's favor toward her, she begs restoratives from them, although she sighs for his personal support to keep her from sinking.

The scene is emblematic of the church's rapturous contemplation of her glorified state with Christ. And there is that in it which suggests the declaration of John the Baptist: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom which standeth and heareth, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice" (~~ARR~~ John 3:29).

ACT 2, SCENE 1

This scene (2:7-17) opens on the next morning, and represents the royal lover starting on a hunting trip. He serenades his sweetheart beneath her chamber window, urging her maidens not to awaken her (v. 7). Her quick ear detects his voice, and she calls to her maidens concerning him (vv. 8-10), and repeats his song (vv. 10-14). A rougher voice, that of the gardener, is heard (v. 15). Meanwhile the bride, having finished her toilet, is at the window acknowledging the song (vv. 16-17).

SONG OF SOLOMON 3-5**ACT 2, SCENE 2**

This scene embraces the first four verses of chapter 2, and is a soliloquy of the bride in the nature of a troubled dream — troubled because of anxiety for her lover's safety in the chase. It is emblematical of the temporary interruption experienced in the fellowship of Christ's people with their Lord.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

We are here dealing with the events of verses 5-11 of this same chapter, and which are supposed to have occurred on the third morning. The royal procession advances, bearing the spoils of the preceding day's excursion. Solomon again sends a caution to the bride's maids against breaking her slumber (v. 5). She is alert, however, and exclaims to her attendants as in verse 6, who reply in verses 7-8. She recognizes the palanquin (v. 9), and the maidens tell her of its construction (v. 10). The latter are then permitted by her to make a closer inspection (v. 11).

ACT 3, SCENE 2

We are now in the fourth chapter to which may be added the first verse of chapter five. Solomon has left the palanquin, and approaching the window of his bride, sings the praises of her person, which a partly drawn veil discloses (vv. 1-7). "His thoughts running upon his favorite rural haunts, he proposes future excursions to these spots, especially his garden, with which he compares his beloved in her gorgeous and perfumed attire" (vv. 8-16).

She receives these ecomiums with modest silence, and then suggests that he do not wait for her to share his enchanting retreat. This observation he turns into another compliment that she herself, her presence, is his garden, whereupon, turning to his companions, he bids them share with him the luxury of the moment (v. 1).

There is a term occurring (1:2, 4; 4:10; 7:12) which Strong translates "loves" or "love tokens," and which, he says, cannot mean kisses, or other fond endearments as some have interpreted them; but as the contexts show, the cosmetic odors, perhaps from a love-charm casket which the bride may have worn on the occasion. That no erotic sentiment is couched under the figures of this scene is shown by the closing invitation of the lover to his companions. From which we may conclude that no double meaning is intended by the similar metaphors in 7:7-9, and following.

Compare corresponding passages of the Bible which express God's favor for His people and the love they should show towards Him (^{<2316>}Isaiah 62:5; ^{<3160>}Ezekiel 16:10-13; ^{<3134>}Zephaniah 3:14, 17; ^{<4025>}Ephesians 5:25-27).

ACT 4, SCENE 1

The morning scene of the fourth day (5:2-6:3) contains the recital of a nightmare illusion of the bride addressed to the ladies in her private apartment. In the opinion of Strong, verse 15 is to be interpreted of the snowy linen leggings, in contrast with the gilt sandals worn by Solomon. His knocking at the door for admission is borrowed in the Savior's address to the church of Laodicea (^{<4030>}Revelation 3:20). The description of the bridegroom's person is in keeping with the manifestations of the Redeemer in both Testaments (^{<3006>}Ezekiel 1:26-27; ^{<2705>}Daniel 10:5-6; ^{<4013>}Revelation 1:13-15).

SONG OF SOLOMON 6-8

ACT 4, SCENE 2

This subsection corresponds to the afternoon of the fourth day, and carries us through chapter 6. The occasion looks like a formal visit of the bridegroom, with his courtiers, to the bride and her maids of honor. The place is a room in her future palace. Solomon begins his praises (6:4-12),

when the bride rises to retire, but the courtiers beg her to remain (v. 13). The ladies inquire, "What will ye see in the Shulamite?" or "Why do ye desire her to tarry longer?"

ACT 5, SCENE 1

On this, the morning of the fifth day, the bridesmaids are describing the nuptial wardrobe as they assist the bride in her toilet (7:1-6). Compare the wardrobe in ~~2386~~ Isaiah 3:16-24. See also a parallel in ~~1951~~ Psalm 45.

ACT 5, SCENE 2

The afternoon of the same day (7:7-8:3), is a representation of a more private interview between the two, when they avow their attachment for each other. As the week advances they are thus gradually brought into closer acquaintance with one another and their affection increases. The bridegroom begins the conversation (7:7-9), and the bride responds in an undertone (v. 10), but subsequently reverts to the rural haunts of her maternal home, whither she would invite him (vv. 12-13 and continuing into the next chapter).

The warmth of these expressions seem to many too amatory for spiritual interpretation, but following Strong, we keep two considerations before us:

- (1) It is the bride who speaks in the most ardent terms, not the bridegroom, and it is only right to assume a pure and refined nature behind them appropriate to her sex and innocence; and
- (2) It is no cold "platonic" love which the Bible employs as the emblem of Christ's feeling for His church, but something very different. See ~~4185~~ Ephesians 5:28-33.

ACT 6, SCENE 1

This is the wedding day. ~~2184~~ Song of Solomon 8:4-7 may be taken as corresponding to the formal espousal in the presence of witnesses after the manner of the Hebrews.

Solomon arrives early (v. 4), but the bride soon joins him, and then the guests are represented as asking the question in verse 5.

The bride is pointing out to the bridegroom the scene of their earliest acquaintance (vv. 5-7). (See the Revised Version for an improved rendering of this and other passages referred to.) Compare ~~amp~~ Jeremiah 2:2 for Jehovah's reference to the warmth of the early zeal of His people toward Him.

ACT 6, SCENE 2

This synchronizes with the afternoon of the sixth day, and gives an account of the dower portion of the bride. The matter is negotiated by her brothers, who, in their deliberations aside, speak depreciatingly of her as they had been accustomed to do ever since her tender age. It is they who speak in verse 8. When they say, "If she be a wall" (v. 9), they refer to her external appearance suggesting to them the blank and unadorned structure facing the street in oriental houses.

The bride overhears, and interrupts indignantly in verse 10, reminding them that she has found favor in the eyes of her beloved. She then takes the negotiation into her own hands, settling the income of her private estate upon the bridegroom (vv. 11-12).

The bridegroom now calls to her in verse 14 and she responds in the closing verse, which has been compared with the final invocation of the Apocalypse to the Lord Jesus, "Even so, come!"

ANSWERS TO CRITICISM AND OBJECTIONS

At the close of Strong's exposition there follows his vindication of the book in which he deals with criticism and objections, some of the answers to which are here in a condensed form.

There are those who speak of the song as indecent, but this is explained by ignorance of the plot and its language. Even the bare outline of the plot largely disproves this, to say nothing of the better translation which accompanies it and which space does not permit us to give except a word here and there. There is a profound and hallowed instinct at the foundation of the marriage state, and where no sin is, it may be alluded to by lips of purity.

Some object that it is purely a love song, nothing more, and therefore unworthy of a place in holy writ; but Jews and Christians in all the ages

have maintained its spiritual interpretation. They may have differed in the details of its application, but they have seen in it a foreshadowing of the relation of Jehovah to Israel, or Christ to His church.

Of course, a love scene is the ground of the song, but its final import is of a higher significance. Figurative language has a two-fold application, the literal and the symbolic, a present physical scene which is the type of a distant event or a spiritual principle. The physical is usually depicted with particularity, but it is not proper to pursue the parallel into all the minuteness of the application. A parable does not run on all fours.

A third class have considered the book irreverent, and deprecated addressing God in such familiar intimacy as its dialogues involve when considered symbolically. But the answer is first, that the language is not thought of as used by individuals in their personal capacity, but by the Jewish nation collectively, or the church considered as the bride of Christ. Charles Wesley, and other hymn writers, employ the same sentiments in their lyrics intended for public worship. Secondly, the bridegroom typified here, is not God in His sovereign capacity, but the Redeemer in His revealed relation as partaker of our human nature. Moreover, the bride is not the church in her present weak and defective life and experience, but as presented unto Him, "not having spot, or wrinkle or any such thing" (~~417~~ Ephesians 5:27).

A fourth class speak of the book as unedifying, which they think is justified by the fact that it is so little used. But there are other parts of the Bible of which the same might be said, and yet they are inspired, and "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (~~516~~ Timothy 3:16), even though not as much so as other Scriptures. Strong maintains that the fault in this case lies largely in our poor version of the Song — poor not only in translation but arrangement. This is true not only of the King James Version but of more modern ones in English. The foregoing exposition furnishes a hint as to the possibilities in the book, if it had a better literary form.