

Song of Solomon

The Authorship and Dating

Solomon is mentioned throughout the book (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12) and has been accepted as the author throughout tradition. Although, Solomon's authorship has been questioned, proposals for a different author are inconclusive. Recognizing Solomon as the author promotes a dating of (971-931 BC).

Recipients

While the letter is addressed in a manner for all to learn, the letter *may* carry a specific audience. The warning passages of "awakening love" (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) before its time suggest an unmarried audience. However, if one holds that the book was written for an unmarried audience there remains a difficulty in harmonizing such an unmarried audience with the book's graphic sexual content. It seems most likely to conclude that the book was written for a much broader audience.

The Purpose

The Song of Solomon works to present an ideal and godly view of the marital relationship and sexual purity. This book has the unique goal of providing a godly view of human sexuality. "In so doing, this Scripture shows the joys of physical love within the boundaries of marital commitment."¹ The Song of Solomon works to demonstrate the commitment and loyalty needed to for the idealized marital relationship.² Nowhere else in scripture is the topic of sex so pointedly addressed thus providing godly direction for one of the most fundamental and sacred actions of humanity. The Song also works to give warning. The warning is against sexual involvement before marriage. Three warnings are provided encouraging the reader to avoid sexual love until the proper time (2:7; 3:5; 8:4-14).

The Message

"The Song's structure is notoriously difficult to analyze. Among those who attempt to delineate the book's constituent units there is little agreement in methodology or results."³ Several interpretive methods have been forwarded including allegorical, typical, dramatic, nuptial songs, liturgical songs, funeral rituals and love songs.⁴ There are basically two different approaches to the Song of Solomon. The first is allegorical in nature. This method of interpretation has been advanced by the Jewish Mishnah, Church Fathers as well as many

¹ Paul N. Benware, *The Essential Bible Survey of the Old Testament*(Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003)., 181.

² *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, ed. Ronald B. Allen Earl D. Radmacher, H. Wayne House(Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999)., 793.

³ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament a Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*(Grand Raids: Baker Acedemic, 1999)., 199.

⁴ David Allan Hubbard William Sanford LaSor, Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey the Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, Second ed.(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996). 515-17.

authors today. Archer holds to such a model of interpretation when he makes the following statement.

This love affair is understood to typify the warm, personal relationship which God desires with His spiritual bride, composed of all redeemed believers who have given their hearts to Him. From the Christian perspective, this points to the mutual commitment between Christ and His church and the fullness of fellowship which out to subsist between them.⁵

The second method is literal in nature. All agree that a simple reading of the Song presents a message concerning the physical attractions and intimate love of a man and woman. Despite one's hermeneutical approach, the literal nature of the book is a given element by interpreters. The real question is whether or not one is going to move beyond the plain message into a "secondary" message. I contend that the primary message of the letter is the authorial focus of the document providing a needed commentary concerning a main theme of human existence that is love and sexuality. Other interpretations, which maintain an allegorical interpretive method, work to promote a sexual romanticism between the creator and creature that is foreign to scripture. This is not to say that a loving relationship doesn't exist between the creature and his Savior. It of course does. However, our relationship with the Lord starts short of sexual imagery with which the Song is replete. The Psalms, however, do provide a balanced view of this relationship without incorporating the sexual imagery. Therefore, from a theological point of view (not to mention hermeneutical and systematic reasons), I do not accept the allegorical methods which are used to interpret the Song of Songs. I recognize that this book must be interpreted literally providing instruction concerning the marital relationship.

"The Song then may be viewed in its literal sense as a celebration of love between man and woman, but more than that, the elevation of a love so genuine that it cannot be purchased with royal enticements. It is, like divine love, given freely and unmeritoriously."⁶

"In a world that was strongly patriarchal, where love lyrics often portrayed the man as a "bull" and the woman as something less than his equal, the Song of Songs represents a surprising high view of woman and a remarkable vision of the ideal of equality and delightful reciprocity in the marriage relationship."⁷

The Song has been recognized as having a progressive nature from courtship to marriage.⁸ It is this kind of division that I follow. The first section represents a time of courtship filled with hope. The girl described herself as less attractive who then falls in love and eventually becomes the object of similar passion (1:1-2:6). The author closes this section with a warning concerning premature sexual activity (2:7). The second section indicates a developing love as both grow in their passions for one another (2:8-3:5). Again, a warning is issued concerning sexuality (3:5). In the last section (3:6-8:14), the author demonstrated how the couple married (3:6-11), enjoyed their honeymoon (4:1-5:1) and their subsequent marriage. In

⁵ Gleason L. Jr. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*(Chicago: Moody Press, 1994)., 537.

⁶ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*(Chicago: Moody Press, 1979)., 237.

⁷ Dorsey., 213.

⁸ Jack S. Deere, "Song of Solomon," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck(Wheaton: Victor, 1983).

this section there is a description concerning the intense closeness of their relationship (5:2-6:3). Within their godly marriage there is a desire for one another during separation (6:1-3) as well a continued love for one another after restoration (6:4-8:3). The author closed the book with an expanded warning concerning premature sexual activity (8:4-14).

The Theme

Marital Love

Outline of Song of Solomon

- I. Marital Love Stated 1:1-2:7**
 - A. A Rejected Woman's Desire 1:1-6
 - B. A Receptive Man's Opinion 1:8-11
 - C. The Declaration of their Love 1:12-2:6
 - D. The First Warning Concerning Love 2:7
- II. Marital Love Pursued 2:8-3:5**
 - A. The Invitation to Love 2:8-17
 - B. The Passion of their Love 3:1-5
 - C. The Second Warning Concerning Love 3:5
- III. Marital Love Consummated 3:6-8:14**
 - A. Their Ceremony 3:6-11
 - B. Their Honeymoon 4:1-5:1
 - C. Their Marriage 5:2-8:14
 - 1. Their Desire for Closeness 5:2-6:3
 - 2. Their Longing During Absence 6:1-3
 - 3. Their Love After Restoration 6:4-13
 - 4. Their Continued Desire for Each Other 7:1-8:3
 - D. The Third Warning Concerning Love 8:4-14
 - 1. Love isn't to be started too early 8:4
 - 2. Love can't be stopped 8:5-7
 - 3. Love is to be guarded 8:8-14

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