

SONG OF SONGS

6-WEEK STUDY GUIDE

Theological Focus

Song of Songs is one of the most unique books in the Bible, characterized by its passionate and poetic language written in the genre of lyrical poetry. The name “Song of Songs” in the original Hebrew implies a superlative meaning: “The Greatest Song.”

This book is, as some say, a collection of song lyrics originally written to be sung at wedding feasts. Others view it as a single, unified song, akin to a play. In any case, it celebrates humanity’s desire for intimacy and speaks openly about the passion between a man and a woman as something to be cherished. This work also points to a love that transcends human love and to humanity’s ultimate purpose: to be united with God and His wisdom.^{1,2}

Several key themes addressed in this book are:

- The longing, seeking, passion, and power of love³,
- Mutuality and exclusivity in love^{4,5}, and
- The beauty, purity, and sanctity of love at its consummation^{2,6}.

Background

The genre of Song of Songs is ancient Israelite love poetry, and it is classified as wisdom literature within the Hebrew Bible. Wisdom literature provides a divine perspective on the good and righteous life, and this book specifically hones in on love, portraying an ideal of human love between a man and a woman. A Bible commentator, Constable, notes that this book reveals the foundation, strength, practice, and fruits of love.⁵

A characteristic of this book is its numerous graphic references that are foreign to our culture, making it both captivating and confusing to study. In addition, like most poetry, this book is full of repetition and metaphors. Due to its style and genre, this book has likely received more varied interpretations than any other book in the Bible, with some writers believing it presents the “greatest hermeneutical challenge” in the Old Testament.⁵

1. The Bible Project, “Song of Songs Summary,” <https://bibleproject.com/videos/song-songs>.

2. Navigators, *Song of Solomon*.

3. The Bible Project, “Song of Songs,” <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-song-of-songs>.

4. Longman and Garland, *Proverbs-Isaiah*.

5. Thomas L. Constable, “Song of Solomon,” <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/song/song.htm>.

6. John MacArthur, “Song of Songs,” https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/macarthur_john/bible-introductions/songofsongs-intro.cfm.

Authorship: Despite the superscription in Song of Songs 1:1 mentioning “Solomon’s Song of Songs,” the actual authorship by Solomon cannot be fully confirmed. This phrase can mean “The Song of Songs which is ‘to,’ ‘for,’ or ‘concerning’ Solomon.”

Canonicity: Song of Songs has been recognized as canonical* since ancient times as part of the Wisdom Literature in the Jewish Scriptures (*Tanakh*), although there is no mention of God and its authorship remains unclear. While there were some debates about its inclusion due to its sensual themes, it was ultimately accepted and is often interpreted allegorically.

*Canonical = included in the list of sacred books officially accepted as genuine.

Characters: There are three main characters in this collection of songs, namely:

- **She** = A beautiful, Shulammite woman (6:13). The most notable character in the lyrics, where her personality and passions are depicted vividly.
- **He** = A handsome, well-off shepherd (1:18), also occasionally referred to as a “king.” She might be speaking figuratively—he is to her like a king, or like a shepherd.
- **Friends** = A choir that reacts to them. These united voices resemble the chorus in an ancient Greek play, providing commentary on the actions of the bride and groom.

These three characters could be identified and were added as headings in our modern Bible by translators based on the gender of the Hebrew forms in the original text. The characters in the Song may or may not represent real individuals, such as Solomon. There are also various interpretations regarding the role and characteristics of the male figure—whether he is a third person (like a competitor) or the one pursuing the female figure.

Interpretative Approaches

Literal

Allegorical



“It is what it says”

“It means something more”

Literal Approach: This interpretation views Song of Songs as a love poem that expresses and celebrates human love, relationships, and sexual intimacy, an approach more commonly used since the last century. It suggests that the book primarily reflects what love should be as created by God and what it will become when He restores everything. A common pitfall of this approach is downplaying divine perspectives.

Allegorical Approach: This interpretation sees Song of Songs as depicting the relationship between God and Israel in Judaism or between Christ and the Church in Christianity. This approach was more prevalent in the early church and gained popularity toward the end of the first century; it seeks rich and profound truth in every word of the Bible, often assigning specific meanings to images and figures through typology.

Much like our modern interpretation of poetry or song lyrics, there are multiple ways to interpret Song of Songs. Therefore, to ensure a smooth Bible study experience, one should stick to one method.

Key Verses

Song of Songs 2:6, 8:3

His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me.

Song of Songs 2:7, 3:5, 8:4

Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you (by the gazelles and by the does of the field): Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

Song of Songs 2:16 “My beloved is mine and I am his...”

Song of Songs 6:3 “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine...”

Song of Songs 7:10 “I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me.”

Song of Songs 4:1

How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead.

Song of Songs 5:12

His eyes are like doves by the water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels.

Song of Songs 8:6-7

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one’s house for love, it would be utterly scorned.

Guidelines and Principles

In this guide, we will take a literal approach, viewing this literary work as a collection of love songs that primarily reflect human love and intimacy. This study will assume that the songs are organized to show a progression in the intensity of love and anticipation as the two lovers seek satisfaction in love, but not necessarily a plot or storyline.

Due to differing translation philosophies that require translators to make interpretive decisions, it is strongly encouraged to stick to one translation for consistency in study and familiarity with the text. This study is based on the New International Version (NIV), while vignette or section titles are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

All studies should be grounded in the truths and principles outlined in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, where Paul, keeping the Old Testament in view, states that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. In these studies, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit will guide all discussions and teach us the truths we need to learn.