

Song of Solomon

Writing Assignment One

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the structure, theme, historical context and authorship of the “Song of Solomon”, which is one of the five poetical books of the Bible. A further purpose is to determine how the book, illustrates the love relationship Christ has for the church; which is revealed in many of the New Testament Scriptures, (e.g. John 13:35; Roman 8:35; Eph 3:18; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 3:16). The “Song of Solomon” becomes a metaphor or allegory in which, the romantic love, Christ has for his beloved, is proven endless. The passage of scripture that supports this great example of love is (John 3:16). The Song of Solomon have its place in, Biblical wisdom literature, which speaks about both love and wisdom as gifts of God, to be received with gratitude and celebration just as the gift of love mentioned above. The Song shares with the love poetry of many cultures its extensive use of highly sensuous and suggestive imagery drawn from nature.

## **Title**

The “Song of Songs” (1:1) is traditionally name the “Song of Solomon” based on the connection with Solomon (1:1). Similar, to the “Most Holy Place” (the” Holy of Holies” in Hebrew) in the tabernacle (Exodus 26:33-34) describe the holies of holy places, so “Song of Songs” describes the best of all songs contributed to Solomon. The book consists of 117 verses of love poetry, most of the verses are dialog between a woman and man who deeply love one another.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The NIV Zondervan Study Bible  
2015 (p.281)

## Authorship

The question has been the same throughout centuries, “Who wrote Song of Songs, the consistency of language, style, tone, perspective and recurring refrains seems to argue for a single author of the book. However, many who have doubted that the Song came from one person, or even from one time or place, rationalizes this consistency by ascribing all the Songs’ part to a single literary tradition, since Near Eastern traditions were very careful to maintain literal consistency. According to Estes (2005), many scholars insist that “Song of Songs” be dated very late in the history of Israel, which would exclude Solomon being its author. Others point out that the book is written about Solomon in the third person rather than by him in the first person (p.394). Even though, scholars disagree about the specific author and time of the book, many reference Solomon as connective by the interpreter.<sup>2</sup> There are six verses in the book that refer to Solomon by name (1:5;3:7,9,11;8:11-12). In conjunction, there is also a similarity between language, vocabulary and syntax between Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes which was also Solomon.

## Theme

The beauty of physical love between man and woman somewhat summarized the theme as the book present a drama with several love scenes, one which involved (Solomon) the King and the (Shulamite). The love of Solomon and the (Shulamite) illustrates the love between Jehovah and His people, this is also seen in many passages of the Bible. Solomon as a lover was a type Christ (Ephesians 5).The voice of love in the Song, like that of wisdom in (Proverbs 8:1-9:12), is that of a woman’s voice, suggesting that love and wisdom draw men powerfully with the restraint and mystery of a woman’s power to entice. The feminine voice in the book

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (2005), p.394

speaks profoundly of love, God intends that such love grossly distorted and abused by both ancient and modern people be a normal part of martial life in his creation. This personal love of Christ is much needed in the Church today, in addition, “Song of Solomon” is filled with metaphors, similes, allegories and images designed to portray God’s view of love and marriage.

### **Interpretation**

Obviously, more interpretations have been proposed for the Song than for any other biblical book. An early popular approach was to interpret the book as an allegory. In Judaism, one interpretation is that the man represents Christ, and the woman symbolizes the church. The absence of any indication of allegory or identification of these symbols and the problematic nature of consistent application argue against the approach. For example, the woman rouses the man (8:5); in what way does the church rouse Christ? Another way of approaching the book is through dramatic interpretation, by adopting this approach suggest that three main characters: the poor, but noble shepherd, the scheming King Solomon, and the virtuous shepherdess. However, several difficulties arise with this interpretation. King Solomon plays no active role; he never speaks. Given the attributes to Solomon in 1:1, why would the Song portray him in such a negative light? Further, there is no agreement on an overall plot for this drama. Many concluded that the interpretation of the Song is not that of a romantic love poetry but is descriptive.<sup>3</sup>

### **Structure**

Although some claim and argue that the “Song of Songs” is a collection of individual love lyrics without any unitary structure (Keel 1994:17), a careful reading of the text suggests a significant measure of conscious artistic design. Estes (2005) suggest, five refrains punctuate the song cycle, emphasizing its major themes and providing its structural framework. As the author

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (2005), p.403

mentioned, in many ways, individual songs function like snapshots in a photo album.

Suggesting the progress in intimacy of two leading characters (Glickman 1976:28-29). The overall development of the relationship is communicated indirectly by the pictorial form, not by precise and detailed data.

The macrostructure of Song of Songs has been plausibly envisioned in several ways that place special significance on the wedding and the sexual consummation of the marriage of Solomon and the Shulamite. Carr (1984:68-69) sees in the book's structure a chiasm focused on the wedding. The chiasmic structure of Song of Songs has been developed in greater detail by Davidson (2003:50-64) and by Garrett (2004:32). Wendland (1995:3546) presents a detailed literary-structural analysis in which he divided the book into eight distinct units that progress towards peaks in the garden scene in 4:16-5:1 and in the song of the supreme value of love in 8:5-7. In a much simpler construction, Glickman (1976) sees the song cycle as an impressionistic drama tracing the progress of the relationship from courtship through wedding and culminating in its growth throughout the marriage relationship into old age.<sup>4</sup>

### **Literary Features**

Without doubt, there should be no question to the artistry of the Songs of poet. The subtle delicacy with which he evokes intense sensuous awareness while avoiding crude titillation is one of the chief marks of achievement. This he accomplishes largely by indirection, by analogy and by bringing to the foreground the sensuous in the world of nature (or in food, drink, cosmetics and jewelry). To liken a lover's enjoyment of his beloved to a gazelle "that browses among the lilies" herself to a "garden filled with choice fruits" inviting the lover to feast (4:12-16); these combine exquisite artistry and fine sensitivity. Whether the Song has the unity of a single dramatic line

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4 Daniel Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (2005), p.402

linking all the subunits into a continuing story is a matter of ongoing debate among interpreters. There does appear to be connected scenes in the love relationship. Virtually, all agree that the literary climax of the Song is found in (8:6-7), where the unsurpassed power and value of love, where the love that draws man and woman together is finally assertedly express. Literary relaxation follows the intenseness of that declaration. A final thought of mutual desire between the lovers brings the Song to an end, suggesting that love goes on. This last segment (8:8-14) is in some sense also a return to the beginning, as references to the beloved's brothers, to her vineyard and to Solomon (the king) line 8:8-12 with 1:2-6 in this song of love where the voice of the beloved is dominant. The Song begins with her wish for the lover's kiss and ends with her urgent invitation to him for love's intimacy.<sup>5</sup>

### **Unity**

It should be noted, that Song of Songs is lyric poetry, and it must be read as such. It is not a historical narrative employing realistic description; rather, it uses poetic imagery to communicate its message through allusion. As poetry, it aims to re-create an experience in the reader rather than simply report the experience. It may well be that Song of Songs was written as a song cycle or lyrical ballad to celebrate love and marriages as God intended it to enrich human life. The related songs suggest a general overall story line, but they do not fill in all the details, perhaps because the original audience was familiar with its narrative. The contemporary reader needs to use imagination to enter the world of Song of Songs. Through this imaginative reading, the reader will vicariously enjoy what the characters in the book experienced. The repetitions in the work would seem to point to the activities of a single compiler, since they serve to bring about a more marked sense of unity of theme than might be expected from an anthology of lyrics

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5 (NIV Study Bible 2008)

issuing from diverse authors over a lengthy period. In view of what appears to be a genuine overall unity of emphasis, namely that of the richness of human love in its variant modes, it would seem that the attempts of those scholars who have fragmentized the book into something like thirty poems are hardly consonant with the emphasis and character of the finished product.<sup>6</sup>

### **Background**

Those who have followed the traditional attribution of the book to Solomon have seen the early monarchy as the background against which the work was composed. The pastoral qualities of the poetic imagery suggest a lengthy interlude of peace in the land during which the sedentary ideals of the Israelites were being realized, and this situation would accord with the “golden age” of David and Solomon very well. The Song contains numerous references to animals and exotic plants, and in view of the tradition which associated botanical lore with Solomon, it has been thought that if the work is a genuine Solomonic product, it would again point to the early monarchy as the period from which it emerged. The various geographical allusions in the book seem to indicate a phase of Hebrew history in which the kingdom had not yet been divided. This, however, means nothing more than that the poetic flights of the author transcended purely localized considerations. In any event, the book shows clearly that the author was familiar with the entire geography of the Pal-Syria area; from the mountains of Lebanon to En-ge-di near the Dead Sea. Although Canticles mentioned the exotic commodities of the Far East, there is no internal evidence which would indicate that the material was written against any other than a strictly Palestinian background.

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (2005), p.395

The Song of Solomon is a metaphorical love book, which provides one of the greatest examples on earth of the love that God had for us in sending His Son, to die for us according to (John 3:16). Though the book is metaphor, it cannot be taken as a series of literal events. The Song nowhere clearly identifies its author or the date of composition. However, the consistency of language, style, tone perspective and recurring refrain seems to argue for a single author, all the evidence ascribe authorship to Solomon. <sup>7</sup>So much can be said regarding the theme of love in the Song, however one of the most important points is the exclusive commitment of the lovers. Again, the focus is on the man and woman who only have eyes for each other.

In addition, the voice of love in the Song, is like that of wisdom, the woman voice, suggesting that love and wisdom draw men powerfully with subtlety and mystery of woman's allurements. It is still a matter of ongoing debate, whether the Song has the unity of a single dramatic line, it still does not appear to be a connected scene in the love relationship. The purpose of the book will solely depend on the viewpoint taken as to the way the book should be interpreted. How can Song of Solomon be used today? Many churches, groups and couples have used the book to convey a spiritual lesson about marriage and loving relationships. As one couple mentioned, the Song of Solomon confronts them with the challenges, not just of literary allegory, but of life allegory. Song of Solomon reminds couples and readers, that romantic love within marriage is one of the good things created by God. It helps to renew marriages and extol the joys of romantic love, which some couples have been desperately longing for from their spouse. In closing, the Song of Solomon has also been traditionally interpreted as showing God's love for His chosen people and as showing Christ's love for His Bride, the Church.

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