

Introduction to the Song of Songs

I. INTRODUCTION

A. In this session, we will give introductory information about the Song of Solomon and principles of interpretation. This will give us a road map so as to understand the big picture of the Song.

B. King Solomon authored this 8 chapter love song in approximately 900 BC. It was probably written before his spiritual decline (1 Kgs 11:3-4).

C. The two primary sections of the Song are Song 1-4 and Song 5-8.

1. The first four chapters of the Song focus on the Bride understanding and enjoying her inheritance in Christ. These chapters emphasise how God views and desires her.

2. The last four chapters focus on Jesus' inheritance in the Bride. We seek something from Him, but He also seeks something from us. He wants us to love Him with all our heart. (Mt. 22:37).

The focus of the book completely shifts in the middle (4:16-5:1).

II. THE SONG REVEALS THE PATTERN OF HOLY PASSION

A. This Song reveals God's pattern for how we grow in passion for Jesus. It touches the significant principles and practical realities needed to develop mature love for God.

B. Understanding this Song helps us identify the issues that God is specifically dealing with in our lives. It equips us to discern what God is doing in the different seasons in our lives. Through our life, we ebb and flow in and out of the testing and blessing described throughout the Song.

People often find themselves in two different places in this Song in the seasons of their life. I re-visit the same place in the Song again and again.

III. HOW TO INTERPRET THE SONG OF SOLOMON

A. **Natural interpretation:** This view depicts a natural love story between King Solomon and his bride, the Shulamite maiden. It emphasises biblical principles that honour the beauty of love within marriage. This view has grown in popularity in the last 100 years and has many good commentaries. There are two basic story lines when interpreting the Song as a natural love story.

1. The first tells of a Shulamite maiden who was wooed by the handsome and wealthy King Solomon, who progressively wins her heart as the storyline unfolds.

2. The second is the story of a godly Shulamite maiden who deeply loves a poor shepherd in her home town (Shunem). King Solomon passed through her town and noticed her working in a vineyard. He was struck by her extraordinary beauty. Thus, he sought to steal her heart away from the poor shepherd that she loved. She

remained loyal to the poor shepherd in the midst of the temptations of King Solomon's wealth and power.

B. *Spiritual interpretation*: This is a symbolic interpretation to reveal spiritual truths in our relationship with Jesus behind the natural love story. This is the approach I will use in our study. We study the Song to gain deeper understanding of our relationship with Jesus. This is the most common interpretation over the last 3,000 years (since Solomon wrote this Song).

1. Jesus is exalted in the Song. He spoke of Himself from all the Scriptures to the disciples on the Emmaus road. He went through all 39 books of the OT to speak of Himself.

He expounded...in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. (Lk. 24:27)

2. The Spirit inspired all Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16) and exalts Jesus in all that He does. **"He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."** (Jn. 16:14)

3. The Spirit has deep friendship with Jesus and a fierce loyalty to fill people with love for Jesus. They have been together from eternity past. Thus, it is inconceivable that the Spirit would inspire a book in the Bible without Jesus being the predominant theme.

IV. THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION: THREE COMMON APPROACHES

A. First, the relationship between Jesus and the individual believer. This approach gives spiritual principles that aid us in our progression of holy passion. This is the way we approach this study.

B. Second, the relationship between Jesus and His corporate Church throughout history.

C. Third, the relationship between God as the Bridegroom and ethnic Israel as His Bride (Jer. 2:2; Hos. 2:16-20; Ezek. 16:8-14, 20-21, 32, 38; Isa. 54:5-6). This was the primary approach of the scribes in OT times, and is the approach of Jewish rabbis today.

D. We bless different interpretations as long as they exhort others to grow in love for Jesus.

V. ALL BELIEVERS ARE INCLUDED IN THE BRIDE

A. Theologically, all believers on earth are betrothed (engaged) to Jesus. In Hebrew tradition, an engaged couple was legally married and needed to be divorced if they broke their engagement.

For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:2)

The consummation of the marriage relationship occurs in the age to come (Rev. 19:7).

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and

His wife has made herself ready.” (Rev. 19:7)

A working definition of the Bride is one that includes all those who are mature in love. I believe that the Bride of Christ is the entire Church from history, filled with mature love. In the resurrection, the Spirit will bring God's work to completion in the whole Church. In other words, every believer will experience a mature bridal relationship with Jesus.

First, the maturity of the Bride is ultimately the fruit of Jesus' work on the cross.

If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:31-32)

Second, in heaven there will be only one unified people, rather than two classes of believers. Jesus prayed that His people would be unified like the Father and the Son.

...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You...” (Jn. 17:21)

Third, we will be like Jesus when we see Him in glory. The impact of seeing God will release great power that will transform all believers in the age to come.

When He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 Jn. 3:2)

Fourth, the Bride's destiny is ensured by God's ravished heart for her. His heart is ravished for all of His people. God's heart is ravished for all the redeemed, not just for those who are spiritually mature during their brief time on the earth. Jesus is not more ravished for one group in the Church than He is for another group.

you have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse... (Song 4:9).

Summary: The maturity of the Bride is based primarily upon Jesus' work on the cross, His

intercession, the revelation of His glory, and His ravished heart for us.

VI. THE THREE MAIN CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK

A. **King Solomon**: In the spiritual interpretation, he is a picture of the triumphant, resurrected Jesus Christ who is King of kings.

B. **Shulamite maiden**: In the spiritual interpretation, she is a picture of the Bride of Christ. She is introduced as a young maiden who grows up to become a Bride in mature partnership with King Jesus. The Shulamite is mentioned once by name (6:13). She lived in Shunam (north of Jezreel).

C. **Daughters of Jerusalem**: In the spiritual interpretation, they speak of sincere, yet spiritually immature, believers. They look to the Shulamite for answers on how to grow close to the King.

They are not an actual group that we can identify in history (they personify immature believers).

VIII. COMPARING ECCLESIASTES AND SONG OF SONGS

A. Solomon wrote three books in the Old Testament: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. It was common for the Jewish fathers to relate the three books of Solomon to the temple he built.

1. They related the book of Proverbs to the **outer court** of Solomon's temple.

2. They related the book of Ecclesiastes to the **inner court** of Solomon's temple.

3. They related the Song to the **Holy of Holies** in Solomon's temple.

B. In Ecclesiastes, he wrote, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." This book proclaims that life without obedience to God is vanity. Therefore, it is impossible to be satisfied with even the most desirable circumstances. This book speaks of man's endless wanderings until he finds rest in God. We can have everything, but if we lack reality with God, we actually have nothing.

C. In the Song of Solomon, Solomon shows forth the joy of life that can be attained without regard to how our circumstances are going. In this book, the Holy Spirit is calling us to make intimacy with God the goal of our life. The Song highlights how full our life is when our consuming passion is to love and know Jesus. Even with hard circumstances, our spirit can be alive in God.

D. Ecclesiastes teaches us that no matter how great our accomplishments are in man's eyes, they will not ultimately have any value if they are not pleasing to God. When Ecclesiastes is understood it awakens us to the fervency that begins the journey in Song 1:5. So Ecclesiastes prepares us to understand the Song of Solomon.

E. The philosophy in Ecclesiastes tells us to "assert ourselves to gain more worldly experience as the way to enjoy life." Song of Solomon speaks of entering fulfillment through humility, obedience, and the impartation of God's love.

F. Ecclesiastes speaks of the vanity of pursuing the best things found in earthly life, while Song of Solomon speaks of the spiritual pleasure of pursuing the best things found in heavenly life.

IX. THE CANTICLES: A SERIES OF SONGS

A. The Song of Songs is sometimes referred to as the Canticles. The Latin noun *canticum* means "a song."

"*Canticles* means a series of songs.

B. The Vulgate was a popular Bible translation written in the fourth century by Jerome; he translated the Scripture into Latin so that common people could understand it.

C. In the Vulgate, the Song of Solomon is called the Canticles. The following references may be rightfully used: Cant. 4:9, Song 4:9, SS 4:9, or SOS 4:9.

X. ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION

But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the free woman through promise, ²⁴which things are symbolic [figurative in NIV; allegorically speaking in NASB]. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—for this Hagar is Mount Sinai...and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

(Gal. 4:23-26)

- A. The allegorical interpretation has been used in different ways through history. Paul's treatment of the Hagar-Sarah story is translated as *symbolic* by the NKJV, as *figurative* by the NIV, and *allegorical* by the NASB.
- B. Paul's use of the Hagar-Sarah story in Galatians 4:21-31 is more figurative (typology) than allegorical. Paul's use of allegory differed greatly from Alexandrian allegory (first-century Philo, as well as third- and fourth-century Origen and Chrysostom).
- C. The Alexandrians used allegory in a way that ignored its historical context and meaning. In 1 Corinthians 9:9-10, Paul used an allegorical interpretation of the "muzzled ox" (Deut. 25:4) to apply to the full-time workers in the gospel receiving finances.
- D. An allegory is a fictional story with symbolic meaning, with no basis in historical facts. This type of an allegory is seen in the book, *The Chronicles of Narnia*.
- E. An allegory is a literary form where people or objects symbolically represent truths. Allegories illustrate truths to make them easier to understand. Our primary interpretation of Scripture must be historical grammatical, taking the Scripture at face value. We approach the Scripture this way unless the Scripture indicates otherwise
(Gal. 4:24; Jn. 15:1-6; Rev. 11:8; Isa. 5:1-7; Hos. 2:1-14; Ezek. 16; Dan. 7:2-8, 16).
- F. Allegorical interpretations are helpful if we only use them to illustrate truths that are clearly established throughout the New Testament.