

Old Testament Survey

Song of Solomon

The Title and Theme of the Song of Solomon

The Hebrew title is *Sir hassirim* or "The Song of Songs." The theme of the book is the love of Solomon for his Shulamite bride.

An Outline of Song of Solomon

- I. Mutual Affection of the Lovers - Song of Solomon 1:2-2:7
- II. Mutual Seeking and Finding of the Lovers - Song of Solomon 2:8-3:5
- III. Fetching of the Bride and the Marriage - Song of Solomon 3:6-5:1
- IV. Love Scorned But Won Again - Song of Solomon 5:2-6:9
- V. The Shulamite as the Attractively Fair but Humble Princess - Song of Solomon 6:10-8:4
- VI. Ratification of the Love Covenant in Her Home - Song of Solomon 8:5-14

Authorship and Date of Song of Solomon

1. The first verse of the Book attributes the authorship to Solomon. The word *le* is best understood to ascribe the authorship to Solomon rather than the dedication of the book being by Solomon.
2. The uniform tradition of the church assigns the authorship of this book to Solomon.
3. Similarities in language between Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes would point to a single authorship.
4. The author shows an interest in natural history. Solomon was an expert in the area of botany (1 Kings 4:33). In fact, the Song of Solomon contains 21 varieties of plants and fifteen species of animals.
5. The Song of Solomon contains many references to expensive luxuries, something that only a king could afford.
6. Geographical references point to a pre-930 B.C. date as there are copious references to both Northern and Southern places. Additionally, there is no hint of a split between the Northern and Southern kingdoms.

Critical Theories as to the Authorship and Date of Song of Solomon

Liberal critics almost universally assign most of Song of Solomon to a time considerably later than the tenth century B.C.

1. Since the Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes are very similar linguistically, and since Ecclesiastes is universally denied to have been written by Solomon, therefore the Song of Solomon could not have been written by Solomon as well.

This presupposes Ecclesiastes was not written by Solomon.

2. The usage of *se* instead of *aser* as the relative pronoun is often used to prove the book was authored very late.

However, it was acceptable to substitute se for aser in Hebrew poetic literature. Also, the common use of aser later may be the result of its use during the tenth century.

3. The usage of alleged Aramaisms, *natar* for *nasar* “guard, watch over” and *berot* for *beros* “cypress” are used to prove a late date.

However, there is nothing to prove these “aramaisms” were not used in Solomon’s time and may indicate a Northern-Israel dialect. Also, it may be the case that the Shulamite bride came from Shunem, an area in the northern tribe of Issachar.

4. The book contains two Greek words, *appiryon* or *palanquin* from the Greek *phoreion*, and *pardes* meaning “orchard” from the Greek *paradeisos* meaning “enclosure.”

These just as well could have been words known to Solomon from his many contacts with foreign lands as they can be just as easily derived from Sanskrit.

The Canoncity of the Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon was one of the five antilegomena. It was questioned due to its lack of religious value and apparent sensuous overtones. It is not quoted in the New Testament, and was hotly debated at the Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90. However, its place has been secured in the Bible through the supervision of the Holy Spirit.

Theories of Interpretation

1. **Allegorical** - the Song of Solomon is an allegorical picture of the relationship between God and Israel.

It is true that the relationship between God and Israel is often seen in terms of a marriage covenant, yet the Song of Solomon apparently speaks of an historical event in the life of Solomon. Furthermore, it is difficult to equate Solomon with his many wives to Jehovah with his singular love for Israel.

2. **Literal** - the Song of Solomon is a love poem intended to convey the beauty of the love of a man for his wife.

The problem here is equating the love between Solomon and the Shulamite with his subsequent life. If Solomon loved the Shulamite so well, then why would he have had seven-hundred wives and three-hundred concubines? Some have answered this by seeing another figure in the Song, that being the fiance of the Shulamite from back home. However, it is better to see the figure of the male lover as being the same throughout the book.

3. **Typical** - the Song of Solomon typifies the purity of marital love and is taken from an actual event in the life of Solomon.

This intepretation sees the Shulamite woman as teaching Solomon the true value of monogamous love, at least for a short time. Taken further, this “pure” love is seen as a picture of God’s love for Israel.