

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG OF SOLOMON, PART 2

TEXT: SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-17

Introduction:

1. Last week we considered the various ways people interpret the Song of Solomon, and I pointed out the importance of the typical interpretation.
2. Typical interpretation differs from allegorical interpretation because it does not disregard the literal meaning of the Biblical text.
3. By “type” we mean “a person, thing, or event in the Old Testament, designed to represent or prefigure some person, thing, or event in the New Testament” (Fred Hartley Wight, *Devotional Studies of Old Testament Types*).
4. The typical interpretation recognizes that the book is factual, but sees the spiritual meaning behind the story.
5. “A type is an Old Testament institution, event, person, object, or ceremony which has reality and purpose in Biblical history, but which also by divine design foreshadows something yet to be revealed” (Donald K. Campbell, “The Interpretation of Types,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 112, No. 447).
6. For example, our Lord said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14).
7. The serpent of brass was a type of Christ lifted up on the cross, but this does not alter the historical details (Numbers 21:5-9).
8. W. Graham Scroggie wrote, “Our view is that here, as in JONAH, we have allegory emerging from history. As to the *history*, we take the view, influentially held, that in the Song there are not two, but three, chief characters, Solomon, Shulamith, and a shepherd lover” (*Know Your Bible*, Vol. 1).

I. THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

1. Many interpreters of the Song of Solomon see only two main characters – Solomon and the Shulamite woman.
2. However, it appears that there are actually three principal characters, as well as several subsidiary characters.
3. The three main characters are Solomon, the Shulamite woman, and a shepherd (cf. 1:7; 2:7). The shepherd is referred to as “my beloved” (1:13, 14, 16, etc.). King Solomon is the shepherd’s rival, and even though Solomon has far more to offer materially and financially, the

- Shulamite woman prefers the shepherd and remains true to him (cf. 1:4; 2:16; etc.).
4. Other characters in the poem are the daughters of Jerusalem (who function as a background chorus), certain citizens of Jerusalem, the brothers of the Shulamite woman (“my mother’s children” – 1:6), and certain companions of the shepherd.
 5. The story focuses on the Shulamite woman who has given her heart to the shepherd. She loves him and remains true to him despite initial opposition from her brothers, and despite being “imprisoned” in Solomon’s palace (1:4).
 6. The events recorded here no doubt happened, but behind these bare historical facts is an allegory, a wonderful picture of Christ and His beloved.

II. THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SHEPHERD

1. The shepherd represents the Lord Jesus Christ, “the great shepherd of the sheep” (Hebrews 13:20).
2. In I Peter 2:25, Jesus is called “the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”
3. In I Peter 5:4 Jesus is called “the chief Shepherd.”
4. In John 10:14, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd” (cf. Psalm 23).
5. “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1).
6. “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isaiah 40:11).
7. Furthermore, our Lord is described in the New Testament as a bridegroom.
8. In John 3:29, John the Baptist has this to say about the Lord Jesus Christ, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom.”
9. In Ephesians 5, the apostle Paul teaches that the union of Christ with His church underlies the marriage relationship, and affords the pattern for every godly union.
10. Paul also refers to the church as the bride of Christ in II Corinthians 11:2.
11. The marriage of Christ and His bride is referred to in Revelation 19:7-9.
12. Therefore, the shepherd in the Song of Solomon is a picture of Christ. The Shulamite woman pictures the church (or the individual Christian) devoted to Christ. The Shulamite yearns for her shepherd as we wait patiently for ours.

13. In a few of the passages, the shepherd is away and the Shulamite is yearning for his return (cf. 2:8-17), just as we eagerly await the return of our great Shepherd.
14. “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).
15. “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (I Peter 1:8).
16. The Shulamite woman does not marry her Shepherd till the end of the book. Meanwhile the bride of Christ must wait for our Shepherd. Soon He is coming back. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

III. THE TEMPTER

1. King Solomon represents the prince of this world with all his worldly pomp, power, and magnificence (cf. 3:6-11; 6:8; 8:11, 12).
2. Some object to this interpretation and ask how Solomon could write such an unflattering portrait of himself. First of all, the Word of God was not actually written by Solomon (or David, or Moses, et al.) and that is why their failures as well as their victories are accurately recorded. The Bible is the infallible Word of God.
3. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (II Tim. 3:16).
4. That is why we read about Abraham lying to the Egyptians about Sarah, and we see Abraham having a baby with Sarah’s handmaid Hagar.
5. The Bible does not gloss over the sins of men, even the great heroes of the faith like Abraham, Noah, Moses, and David. The Bible shows us Noah getting drunk and it shows us Moses losing his temper. It tells us David committed adultery with Bath-sheba, and then had Bath-sheba’s husband killed.
6. And the Bible tells us that Solomon married many heathen wives and that these wives led him into idolatry.
7. And the Bible tells us that because of King Solomon’s sin, God rent his kingdom in two (see I Kings 11).
8. A few years ago, the former president of the United States, Bill Clinton, came out with his autobiography. I did not care to read it, but from what I understand he glossed over most of his notorious scandals.
9. This is typical for worldly men (especially politicians). But the Bible is different from all books written by men. It does not gloss over the sins of men.

10. Furthermore, let us consider the book of Ecclesiastes, also written by Solomon. We only have to read Ecclesiastes to see how King Solomon, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was willing to put on record his worldliness, his foolishness, and his despair. “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2).
11. Many interpreters teach that Solomon and the shepherd are one and the same. But when was King Solomon ever a shepherd?
12. His father David was a shepherd but Solomon was born into royalty and was destined for the throne from his early childhood. He never worked a day in his life as a shepherd.
13. Some claim King Solomon was a shepherd on the basis of Ecclesiastes 2:7 – “I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me” – but owning livestock does not make a king a shepherd.
14. HA Ironside tried to get around the problem by saying King Solomon disguised himself as a shepherd in order to woo the Shulamite.
15. J Vernon McGee said Dr. Ironside’s position was “the only adequate and satisfying interpretation.”
16. With all due respect for these great Bible teachers, I believe King Solomon is not the shepherd, but his rival.
17. W Graham Scroggie wrote, “If we regard the king in the poem as the world, the shepherd-lover as Christ, and the Shulamite as the individual soul, we shall not fail to be helped” (*Know Your Bible*).
18. Because King Solomon was a sensualist and a polygamist, he could not represent the sinless Lord Jesus Christ in this beautiful love poem.
19. In the Bible, Solomon is never presented as a model of marital purity. How could he be? Solomon was a polygamist from his very early adulthood. His first recorded marriage was to Pharaoh’s daughter (I Kings 3:1).
20. But apparently Solomon had already been married to Naamah, an Ammonitess, the mother of Rehoboam (cf. I Kings 14:21, 31; II Chron. 12:13).
21. “Rehoboam was one and forty years old when he began to reign” (II Chron. 12:13). Therefore, he was born a year before Solomon began his reign of forty years (II Chron. 9:30). Some commentators believe Naamah is the young maiden in the Song of Solomon, and some believe Pharaoh’s daughter is King Solomon’s beloved. However, neither one of these women was a Shulamite (Song of Solomon 6:13).

22. In the Song of Solomon, it is stated that Solomon was already married (3:11; 6:8).
23. But the Shulamite maiden never refers to her beloved as her “husband.”
24. He is always referred to as her “lover” and “friend,” not her husband. The shepherd and his Shulamite are spoken of throughout the Song of Solomon as a betrothed couple eagerly anticipating their wedding.
25. The shepherd refers to the Shulamite as his “spouse” (4:8—5:1), but the term is often used in the Bible in reference to the betrothal period (cf. Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:27; 2:5; II Cor. 11:2).
26. In the Song of Solomon, Solomon represents the tempter, trying to seduce the Shulamite woman (the believer), trying to entice her with all his wealth, charm, and power.
27. And here is our application: today our great Shepherd is away and the devil is trying to lure us away from our devotion to Christ. Just like the Shulamite’s shepherd comes for his bride in the end of the book, our great shepherd will return for us some day – it is recorded for us in the end of the book (of Revelation).

IV. SOLOMON A PICTURE AND TYPE OF CHRIST

1. In Matthew 12:42, our Lord said, “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”
2. On the basis of this Scripture (and others), it is often claimed that King Solomon is a picture and type of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Others note that the emphasis in Matthew 12:42 is really on the zeal of the queen of Sheba, not on King Solomon’s wisdom.
4. In any event, many great expositors insist Solomon is the shepherd lover of the Shulamite. King Solomon is the “King of Peace, and in the glory of his kingdom, is a type of Christ, the Messiah” (AC Gaebelien, *The Annotated Bible*).
5. In his office as the wise king who built the temple, Solomon is set forth as a type of Christ. The glory of his peaceful kingdom foreshadows the glorious millennial kingdom of our coming Prince of Peace.
6. However, in the Song of Solomon, the king is portrayed as a polygamist with “threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number” (6:8).
7. And this was in the early days of King Solomon’s reign! Before he was finished collecting wives, King Solomon had seven hundred

wives and three hundred concubines in his harem (I Kings 11:3). In none of his writings (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Psalm 127) does King Solomon appear as a picture and type of the sinless Son of God.

CONCLUSION:

1. The Shulamite woman remained faithful to her beloved shepherd, and so must we.
2. King Solomon tempted the Shulamite. He flattered her and tried to seduce her. He brought her into his chambers (1:4). In like manner, the devil tries to tempt us and lure us away from our great Shepherd, but like the Shulamite woman we must remain steadfast and true.
3. So these are the three principal characters, and whom they represent. Perhaps I should also mention the women of the king's court. They represent those worldly people who look askance at us for turning our backs upon the world and all it has to offer (cf. 5:9). Let us not pay them any mind.