

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 5-20-12 PM NOTES
SONG OF SOLOMON
#24 in Series, "The Glory of God in the Old Testament"

"In this [sexual] revolution simple changes instigated profound effects. Contraception replaced conception, and the 'price' of sexual activity seemingly dropped dramatically. Pleasure was separated from responsibility. Contraceptive devices and abortion clinics replaced schools and orphanages. It was as if a license was given out, legitimizing the bending of every part of our lives around serving ourselves. Since that time, divorce, remarriage, abortion, pre- and extramarital sex, and even homosexuality have been accepted by increasing percentages of the public. The boundaries that once seemed fixed now appear less secure."

—Mark Dever

Three Approaches to Interpreting Song of Solomon:

1. Allegory—a work in which the characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper, often spiritual, moral, or political meaning. An allegory is the symbolic expression of a deeper meaning through a story or scene acted out by human, animal, or mythical characters [Encarta Dictionary].
2. The Typical Approach—the account is factual but pictures or typifies spiritual truth.
3. The Literal Approach—Song of Solomon is a poetic account of historical events.

"[T]he Bible does not present the lone hermit as the model for human existence. God did not create us to be alone, as He told Adam in the Garden. That does not mean it is never good for people to be alone, but that is the general rule. We were made to know and to be known. And in Song of Songs, we should not see merely physical attraction. Behind the unembarrassed, even rapturous descriptions of physical attraction, each partner clearly desires a real and full interpersonal relationship. They possess not only the physical desire to have and be had, but the personal desire to know and be known."

—Mark Dever

Introduction (1:1)

Genesis 2:24 (NKJV) "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

- I. The Courtship: An Illustration of Leaving (1:2-3:5)
 - A. Remembrances (1:2-2:7)

Song of Songs 4:2 (HCSB) "Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn [sheep] coming up from washing, each one having a twin, and not one missing."

B. Reciprocal Love Expressed (2:8-3:5)

II. The Wedding: An Illustration of Cleaving (3:6-5:1)

A. The Bridegroom (3:6-11)

B. The Wedding (4:1-5:1a)

Song of Songs 4:7 (HCSB) “You are absolutely beautiful, my darling, with no imperfection in you.”

C. God’s Approval (5:1b)

III. The Marriage: An Illustration of Weaving (5:2-8:14)

Genesis 2:24 (NKJV) “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother [leaving] and be joined to his wife [Cleaving], and they shall become one flesh [weaving together of two lives].”

A. Disagreement (5:2-6:3)

B. Restoration (6:4-8:4)

C. Growth (8:5-14)

1. Genuine Love Is Strong—**Song of Songs 8:6b (NKJV)** “For love *is* as strong as death.”
2. Genuine Love Is Intense—**Song of Songs 8:6c (HCSB)** “...ardent love is as unrelenting as Sheol. Love’s flames are fiery flames— the fiercest of all.”
3. Genuine Love Is Unquenchable—**Song of Songs 8:7a (NKJV)** “Many waters cannot

quench love, nor can the floods drown it.”

4. Genuine Love Is Priceless—**Song of Songs 8:7b (NKJV)** “If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised.”

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I believe that when historians look back on the twentieth century in America, they will record that the greatest revolution our nation experienced was the sexual revolution. I believe history will record that more dramatic changes came about as a result of the sexual revolution than any other motivator of change. Mark Dever summarized these changes: “In this [sexual] revolution simple changes instigated profound effects. Contraception replaced conception, and the ‘price’ of sexual activity seemingly dropped dramatically. Pleasure was separated from responsibility. Contraceptive devices and abortion clinics replaced schools and orphanages. It was as if a license was given out, legitimizing the bending of every part of our lives around serving ourselves. Since that time, divorce, remarriage, abortion, pre- and extramarital sex, and even homosexuality have been accepted by increasing percentages of the public. The boundaries that once seemed fixed now appear less secure” [Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, Page 547]. The message of the Biblical book, Song of Solomon desperately needs to be heard in this century that is now reaping the sexual sowing of the 20th century.

The title of this book in the Hebrew Bible is “Song of Songs”. In 1 Kings 4 we read that Solomon wrote 1005 songs and this one is the best of them all. That is the sense of “Song of Songs”. Of all the songs Solomon wrote, this is the best of them all – the Song of Songs. In some Bibles the book is called “Song of Solomon” reflecting the first verse in the book. I will switch back and forth between the two titles.

Song of Solomon is one of if not the most obscure book of the Bible. Why do we hear so little about this book? I think that there are at least two reasons:

- 1) The difficulty of interpreting the book. This book is not easy to understand! It can be difficult to discern who is speaking in any passage and whether the author is experiencing what is recorded or whether it is a dream. Complicating the task of interpreting this book is how many different approaches are taken to the interpretation of the book (as we will see in just a moment).
- 2) The sexual content of much of the book. I am going to be very tactful (at least as tactful as possible and not distort the text) as I open this book up for you, but the Hebrew text is rather graphic in places. In fact, it is so graphic that in Old Testament times a young man was not allowed to even read the book of Song of Solomon until he passed his 30th birthday!

Throughout history there have been several approaches to how this book is to be interpreted. We can divide these approaches into three categories and some of the

categories can be broken down into sub-categories. Let me give you the three categories and share the approach we will be taking to this book.

1) The Allegorical Approach – In an allegory most every detail in the text is a picture of some truth. Here is a formal definition of an allegory - a work in which the characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper, often spiritual, moral, or political meaning. An allegory is the symbolic expression of a deeper meaning through a story or scene acted out by human, animal, or mythical characters [Encarta Dictionary]. The best known allegory in English literature is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan's story was fictional and was used to represent the basic truths of Christianity. I don't believe that The Song of Solomon is an allegory. It seems to me to be a poetic book rooted in factual people and events.

2) The Typical Approach – This view accepts the events described as historical and factual, but they also serve as a type or picture of spiritual truth. An example of a type in the Bible is the Passover Lambs that were a type of Christ whom John described in **John 1:29b (NKJV)** as “**The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**” Still another example is how marriage is a type or picture of the relationship between Christ and the church in Ephesians 5:22-33.

3) The Literal Approach – This view interprets Song of Solomon as a poem about the greatest intimacy between a man and a woman that takes place in the confines of a covenant marriage.

The approach that we will be taking is mostly a literal approach that recognizes that there are some types or pictures in this historical account that points to the relationship and intimacy of Christ and those who are His.

Let me zero in on a word that I have used already several times. I am speaking of the word “intimacy”. Intimacy can be defined as a detailed knowledge resulting from a close or long association or study. The very word “intimacy causes a lot of people (especially men) to cringe a little. Sometimes the embarrassment associated with this word is that some use it as a synonym for sex and they don't feel comfortable discussing that. Intimacy is much broader than that. In fact, I am convinced that God created us for intimacy. We need it whether we think we do or not! We need social intimacy with friends, marital intimacy with our spouse, and spiritual intimacy with God. Mark Dever enlarges on this need for intimacy in all of our lives: “[T]he Bible does not present the lone hermit as the model for human existence. God did not create us to be alone, as He told Adam in the Garden. That does not mean it is never good for people to be alone, but that is the general rule. We were made to know and to be known. And in Song of Songs, we should not see merely physical attraction. Behind the unembarrassed, even rapturous descriptions of physical attraction, each partner clearly desires a real and full interpersonal relationship. They possess not only the physical desire to have and be had, but the personal desire to know and be known” [Dever, Page 557].

Introduction (1:1)

If you approach Song of Solomon like you do the book of Romans, you will miss much of what God intends for you to get from the book. This is a poem, a love poem, and you don't approach a poem like you do a theological treatise like Romans. That certainly isn't meant to imply that Song of Solomon is any less inspired than Romans or any other book of the Bible for that matter; it is simply saying that different books of the Bible are different kinds of literature.

The two main characters in this poem are Solomon (called the beloved) and his bride (called the Shulamite) The Shulamite was likely from the city of Shunem in lower Galilee. Some secondary characters that speak are the daughters of Jerusalem (friends of the bride), the bride's brothers, and possibly another voice or two that we are not sure of the identity. I hope you have a Bible that where the translators have added headings that tell us who is speaking. Otherwise, it can get a little confusing. While these headings telling us who is speaking are not a part of the inspired text, they are often helpful.

There is also another matter we have to deal with before we get into the text. If you were present for the last study in Ecclesiastes then you may be wondering how this same Solomon who had 700 wives and who turned into a cynical, pessimistic, man who left God out of his life could have such intimacy with this Shulamite woman and love so deeply this one woman. This problem has motivated some Bible teachers to say that the beloved wasn't Solomon at all, but an unknown shepherd. They say that Solomon was almost the villain who wanted the Shulamite in his harem while she longed for her shepherd whom she loved. I find no evidence for this third main character. Remember in our study of Ecclesiastes that we saw that Solomon walked with God purposefully and loved God passionately in his early days. It was later in mid-life that he turned away his heart from God and became the cynical man depicted in much of the book of Ecclesiastes. The logical explanation for this seeming discrepancy is that the Shulamite woman was his first love and his first wife. It has been speculated that perhaps she died shortly after they were married and that could be what drove Solomon to so many other wives and why he felt so empty. It seems that many if not most of his wives were for the purpose of making political alliances. If you marry a neighboring king's daughter, he is not likely to attack you!

The outline for the book is based around **Genesis 2:24 (NKJV)** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." We see a leaving, a cleaving, and a weaving together of two lives so much that the two become one flesh.

I. The Courtship: An Illustration of Leaving (1:2-3:5)

A. Remembrances (1:2-2:7)

In this section of the book, 32 out of 39 verses are spoken by the Shulamite woman. This section records her looking back on the early days when she and the beloved met and began to fall in love. [Read 1:2-3]. You can see right away that isn't the book of Leviticus! She unashamedly expresses her desire for this man who would become her husband. Someone alliterated this passage and said that she was attracted to his lips, his love, his lotion (ointments), and his lifestyle. His name included his character and much sweeter smelling than his cologne was his inner character.

We learn a little more about this Shulamite in 1:5-6 [Read]. In that day, being tanned by the sun was not desirable for a woman. The Shulamite seems to be the Cinderella of her family and was forced to work out in the sun with the flocks and in the vineyards by her brothers and sisters. Solomon however saw the true beauty of this country girl.

One of the things that we see throughout this book is the importance of verbal affirmation in fueling romance. Put downs of one's spouse can do irreparable damage to romantic love. [Read 1:8] The word "fairest" is translated "most beautiful" in most other translations. As a humorous side track here, some of the compliments are really strange to us. That is because in an agricultural setting, what is considered beautiful may not

communicate that today. Here are some examples: 1:9 [Read]; **Song of Songs 4:2 (HCSB)** “Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn [sheep] coming up from washing, each one having a twin, and not one missing”, 7:2, 4 [Read]. I would recommend that before you use these as compliments that you update them to today’s culture.

B. Reciprocal Love Expressed (2:8-3:5)

They can’t get enough of telling each other their admiration and joy in being together. In verses 11-13 the Shulamite tells her beloved that even the seasons changing reminds her of the love she has for him. As their wedding day approaches, the Shulamite woman’s anticipation began to rise. What is recorded in 3:1-4 is probably a dream [Read 3:1-4]. In chapter 3:5, the Shulamite woman is charging her friends to keep her accountable to stay pure until the marriage [Read].

II. The Wedding: an Illustration of Cleaving (3:6-5:1)

In this section, the King returns for his bride and they return to Jerusalem for the wedding.

A. The Bridegroom (3:6-11) [Read 6-11]

This section is probably the daughters of Jerusalem speaking instead of the Shulamite. We understand better what was happening here when we better understand Jewish wedding customs. The first stage of the wedding was the betrothal period where the couple did not come together sexually, but were bound so strong that a divorce was required to break the betrothal. During the betrothal the groom would prepare the home for the bride. The bride would make all the preparations for the wedding and wait for the groom to come. At the time of his choosing the groom would come for the bride and they would go together to the great marriage feast and celebration. We see how this custom is a type, a picture of the return of Christ for His bride, the church. He comes at a time we do not know, but we are to always be ready and when He comes, He takes us to the great marriage supper to eventually live in the mansion He has prepared for us in the Father’s house. This section of Scripture is the return of Solomon for his bride.

B. The Wedding (4:1-5:1a)

When Solomon receives his bride he marvels at her beauty and tells her so [read 4:1].

Song of Songs 4:7 (HCSB) “You are absolutely beautiful, my darling, with no imperfection in you.” It seems that the wedding occurred between 4:7 & 8. In verse 8, Solomon calls her “my spouse” or “bride” in most translations. This is the first time he has addressed her this way. The language of 4:9-5:1 describes their honeymoon in poetic language. I will let you read that for yourself. It is symbolic language but I think you’ll get it!

C. God’s Approval (5:1b)

I believe that this is God speaking. Because of the private nature of what is described in the previous verses, it would be hard to picture anyone but God Himself saying this. Let me take a break here to deal with some horrible and damaging misconceptions concerning sexual matters that some have about God and marriage. In the Middle Ages, there were many false views taught by the church that still affect people. Some church leaders even taught that God leaves the room during the physical act of marriage. The idea of the celibacy of the priesthood communicates that abstaining from marriage and sexual activity in some way makes one more holy. How wrong this is. God created mankind with sexual desires and sexual desire was not a part of the curse for sin coming into the world. God’s plan is that we fulfill these desires, but He has put a boundary around them. That

boundary is marriage. All of God's boundaries are for our good and not to deprive us of good. While there is temporary pleasure in sex outside a covenant marriage, the long term effects are devastating.

III. The Marriage: an Illustration of Weaving (5:2-8:14)

We read in **Genesis 2:24 (NKJV)** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother [leaving] and be joined to his wife [Cleaving], and they shall become one flesh [weaving together of two lives]." What we see in this section of the book is a deepening of the marriage as they go through conflict and growth.

A. Disagreement (5:2-6:3)

Discord comes into every marriage. One man said, "My wife and I have never had an argument, but we have gone several weeks without speaking to one another". The question is not whether there will be conflict; the question is how will you handle the discord that will come? The first conflict is when the bride acted selfishly and hurt her husband.

B. Restoration (6:4-8:4)

There are not a lot of details from which we can draw out "formulas for overcoming conflict", but we can see that they worked through the conflict. The main thing I see is that the wife who had wronged her husband took the initiative to reconcile and the husband forgave her and refused to hold a grudge. Bitterness and a failure to forgive destroy more marriages than any other sin. This section is filled with more poetic language as they deepen in their oneness.

C. Growth (8:5-14)

Some of the most beautiful verses of the whole book are 8:6-7 [Read]. This is the Old Testament 1 Corinthians 13 that describes true love. The bride gives four qualities of love. First, genuine love is strong (**Song of Songs 8:6b (NKJV)** "For love *is as* strong as death"). Love is as unyielding in marriage as death is in life. Second, love is intense (**Song of Songs 8:6c (HCSB)** "...ardent love is as unrelenting as Sheol. Love's flames are fiery flames— the fiercest of all.") Third, Love is unquenchable. (**Song of Songs 8:7a (NKJV)** "Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it"). Even when the floods of trials, stress, and all out enemy attacks come – love is unquenchable and cannot be drowned out. Fourth, love is so priceless that it cannot be bought or given away (**Song of Songs 8:7b (NKJV)** "If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised.") What a description of biblical love!

CONCLUSION

While I believe that this book is primarily to be interpreted literally and applied to the expression of married love, I do believe that it is a type of our intimacy, our love for the Lord who has saved us and made us the very bride of Christ. As we praise Him and spend time with Him and listen to Him He becomes more and more precious and our relationship matures and deepens and takes us through life's trials and disappointments.

If you are married, ask God to give you genuine romantic type love for your spouse. Cultivate it; work hard at it, never hold an unforgiving spirit in you, and never fail to ask forgiveness when you are wrong. If you are single and involved in a sexual relationship, let me exhort you to repent and turn away from this sin that will continue damaging you and destroying your potential for married joy in the future. Repent from this sin of abusing and misusing this precious gift that God commands you to save for marriage. Repent from the sin that has made genuine intimacy with God impossible for you. Don't

miss all that God has for you as you walk in obedience to His plan. (3057)