

## Song of Songs (July 15)

### Reading Song of Songs

Song of Songs begins with the highest note of passionate excitement, with the bride entering the king's chamber. This is not where the relationship between the main characters began. Song of Songs does not move in chronological order but cycles among the themes of courtship, wedding, and consummation. Much of the text describes the couple's longing for each other, which includes vivid imagery from God's creation and beautiful landmarks from throughout Israel and the nations Israel dominated during Solomon's reign.

Song of Songs is not mere erotic literature, as many critics argue. It wrestles with the tension between the beauty and sensuality of the human body and the wisdom of reserving the body for marriage and genuine love. For these reasons, Song of Songs fits naturally with Old Testament wisdom literature. Interpreters have long recognized allusions to the Lord's love for and governance of his people. The prophets regarded Israel as the Lord's bride, a theme that always describes God's gracious relationship with his people, who inherit his blessings. In this way, Song of Songs anticipates the New Testament teaching that the Church is Christ's beloved bride and family. He seals and purifies her through holy baptism and graciously governs her.

### Author

Verse 1 appears to ascribe authorship to Solomon. Solomon is referred to seven times, and several verses speak of the "king," but whether he was the author remains an open question. Consistency of language, style, tone, perspective, and recurring refrains seems to argue for a single author. However, many who have doubted that the Song came from one pen, or even from one time or place, explain this consistency by ascribing all the Song's parts to a single literary tradition, since Near Eastern traditions were very careful to maintain stylistic uniformity.

### Theme and Theology

In ancient Israel everything human came to expression in words: reverence, gratitude, anger, sorrow, suffering, trust, friendship, commitment, loyalty, hope, wisdom, moral outrage, repentance. In the Song, it is love that finds words – inspired words that disclose its exquisite charm and beauty as one of God's choicest gifts. The voice of love in the Song, like that of wisdom in Proverbs, is a woman's voice, suggesting that love and wisdom draw men powerfully with the subtlety and mystery of a woman's allurements.

The feminine voice speaks profoundly of love. She portrays its beauty and delights. She claims its exclusiveness and insists on the necessity of its pure spontaneity. She also proclaims its overwhelming power – it rivals that of the fearsome enemy, death; it burns with the intensity of a blazing fire; it is unquenchable even by the ocean depths. She affirms its preciousness: all a man's possessions cannot purchase it, nor (alternatively) should they be exchanged for it. She hints, without saying so explicitly, that it is a gift of the Lord to man. God intends that such love – grossly distorted and abused by both ancient and modern people – be a normal part of marital life in his good creation.

In this song of love the voice of the beloved is dominant. It is her experience of love, both as the one who loves and as the one who is loved, that is most clearly expressed. The Song begins with her wish for the lover's kiss and ends with her urgent invitation to him for love's intimacy.

### Blessings for Readers

Song of Songs is not the first book people should study from the Old Testament. Nor is it the chief book for establishing Christian doctrine. Nonetheless, it is essential reading for God's people because life is more than precepts. God created us beautiful and passionate. To celebrate these blessings is to celebrate our Creator and his passionate love for us. As you read Song of Songs, consider this: if earthly love and life are so wondrous and stirring, how much more wonderful will eternal love and life be?