



A STUDY GUIDE ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON

THE SONG OF SONGS

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BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Author:

Solomon is credited with writing three books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs/Song of Solomon) in addition to a few psalms (**Psalms 72, 127**). Solomon wrote many more psalms according to **I Kings 4:29-32**. With Solomon, the creation of psalms began to decline, and they transitioned into “the age of the proverb.” From a biblical perspective, only twice after this did the psalms rise to any height, and then only for a short period: under Jehoshaphat (875 BC) and again under Hezekiah (725 BC). For the most part these psalms were it for many years. That also helps us to date this particular book.

Date:

Solomon wrote this book sometime during his reign (it is speculated between 970-930 BC). It is a story of a bridegroom who is in love with his bride, therefore, it must be connected to one of his many brides. Speculation around which bride is discussed below.

Theme:

This book is about courtship, romance, dating, marriage and sex. The story significantly emphasizes the sanctity of marriage and that it is designed, ordained, blessed, and consecrated in the eyes of the Lord. This is a book in which we can learn the depths of God’s authentic love for us and the sacredness of marriage. It helps us to interpret this song when we look at prophetic, wisdom and apocalyptic passages of Scripture, as well as ancient Egyptian and Babylonian love songs, traditional Semitic wedding songs and songs of the Mesopotamian fertility religions.

Audience:

The audience would have been Israel. The purpose of the song is that the readers see a picture of true love. First, between two lovers. Second, God’s love for His people. Remember that this book is in the Bible for a good reason, God created sex! It is meant to be studied, and practiced, according to His own Holy and Divine will. Readers need to see God’s view on these subjects.

Literary Notes:

The book of Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs) is a large love poem. It is filled with smaller poems of different kinds, but is clearly poetic and offers little historical value to the reader. The key personalities are King Solomon, the Shulammite girl (which we assume is Abishag), and some of her family and friends.

The book could be viewed as a three act play.... 1) The Courtship - In chapters 1-3, Solomon writes of the courtship and engagement of the Beloved (Solomon) and the Lover (Shulamite girl), *"My beloved responded and said to me, 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along'"* (2:10). 2) The Wedding - In chapters 3-4, we read of the marriage ceremony of the bride to the bridegroom, *"Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding"* (3:11). 3) The Marriage - In chapters 5-8, are the relationship between the husband and wife and the power of their love, *"Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it; if a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, it would be utterly despised"* (8:7).

Theatrical Plays:

There is no direct evidence of theater directly in Israel, but with Solomon's accumulation of wisdom, cultures (and wives) he would have access to many nations' cultural riches. However, there is evidence of a "Passion" play in Egypt possibly as early as 2000 BC and according to **I Kings 3:1, 7:8, 9:16, 24, 11:1, II Chronicles 8:11** one of his first wives as the Pharaoh's daughter (she brought that culture with her).

The king was very articulate and well-cultured. Solomon's contact with the Queen of Sheba was of major historical significance. It proves he was educated and had quite a unique grasp of culture, poetry, and the arts. There are at least 50 words in this book found in no other Scripture (a possible indication of outside influence – helping to make it a play).

The Shulamite Girl & The King:

The Shulamite is probably Abishag, King David's nurse in **I Kings 1:1-4, 2:13-25**. Both the Shulamite and Abishag were contemporaries of Solomon and knew him personally, both in an emotionally charged situation involving marriage. Both were outsiders brought into the court. Both were virgins (**I Kings 1:4, Song of Solomon 8:10-12**). They both were from the same area of Shunem. Both were brought in to serve kings. Allegorically, the king the Shulamite loved was the shepherd/king (of course looking forward we can see Jesus of Nazareth). Abishag actually served the shepherd/king, David.

Shulamites/Shunammmites are the inhabitants of Shunem in Issachar, the Valley of Jezreel. Shunem is a city and the surrounding area. It was the Vineyard area described by Joshua (**Joshua 19:18**) with trees and forests, mountains and foot hills (Mt. Gilboa). This was a fruit growing area with moderate rainfall. The area was very near to Jesus' home town of Nazareth. The Philistines camped at Shunem before defeating the Israelites at Mt. Gilboa (**I Samuel 28:4**), and later we will see that Elisha frequently stopped at this town in his travels and a woman there provided him with quarters. In return Elisha's promise of a son was fulfilled and later Elisha revived him from death (**II Kings 4**).

The relationship between the Shulamite and her beloved is the key. Both of them looked at each other in every step: the love each other physically, spiritually, and emotionally. The physical attraction is often automatic... but the emotional and spiritual attraction takes more time. However, one must use prudence and discernment. There is also a great lesson in this about choosing the right mate. You need quality time for the dating and courtship, you need mutual respect for one another.

Key Verses:

Song of Solomon 2:4, 2:7, 3:5, 4:7, 5:1, 7:10, 8:6-7

Outline of the Book:

- I. *The Courtship of the Shulamite Girl & The King (1:1-3:5)*
- II. *The Wedding of the Shulamite Girl & The King (3:6-5:1)*
- III. *The Marriage of the Shulamite Girl & The King (5:2-8:14)*

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Lesson 1: The Courtship of the Shulamite Girl & The King (1:1-3:5)

I. The Discovery of Love (1:1-7)

The Shulamite delights in love (vs.1-3).

The Shulamite is taken into the king's private chambers (v.4)

Nothing dirty takes place here, just like Esther and the king, it was a formality.

The Shulamite addresses the daughters of Jerusalem (vs.5-6).

Then she addresses Solomon (vs. 7) – this reveals the fact that there were other women in the harem associated with Solomon (more is revealed later in the book).

We are given a few details about the Shulamite..... King Solomon has a vineyard in the country of the Shulam (**Song of Solomon 6:13, 8:11**).

He knew she worked with her brothers in that vineyard with her brothers (**Song of Solomon 1:6; 8:11-12**).... Which gives us a better idea of how she is associated with Abishag who was presented to David and acquainted with Bathsheba.

II. The Description of Love (1:8-2:7)

She wonders how she so dark, rugged, and plain, could catch Solomon's eye so he answers her and compliments her (vs.8-11) saying she is "fairest among women" (1:6-8).

This much like a line that Walt Disney would use in his films.

The storyline speeds up a little more in vs.8-10, then she says to him I want you to lay your head between my breasts and rest there all night (v.13).

This part of the Shulamite's daydream (vs.12-14) and this is where she dreams of the king making love to her in the forest.

Of course, Solomon is captivated, both by her and the love she returns for him (vs.15-2:2) so he continues to reveal details of their mutual love.

The problem is that the Shulamite is lovesick (2:3-7).

The story reveals that when Solomon visited the area of her homeland, he won her heart she was elated that he would choose to take her to the palace in Jerusalem and even more so he would ask her to be His bride (BANNER – 2:4).

These expressions of mutual love take place in the banquet hall in the palace near the king's quarters (1:9-2:7), in a public place (like a Jumbotron).

III. The Development of Love (2:8-3:5)

In this section, the story speeds up very quickly because she hears his voice as he comes as a shepherd to her room (2:8-17).

She longs to be with him like a sheep longs to be with the shepherd.

We realize that the Shulamite is lovesick, but Solomon equally overwhelmed.

He begins to woo her, court her, and she tells those around her like a teenage girl at a sleepover.

You can clearly see the ancient Near Eastern flavor as it is written when extravagant metaphors.

You have illustrations of a gazelle or a stag skipping through the forest (2:9).

We also have another dream, almost a nightmare, where the Shulamite dreams of separation from her beloved (3:1-5) and she feels lost!

She's dreamt about him, graphically, vividly, longingly, then she wakes up and want to see him, or maybe to tell him about the dream, but he is gone.

She panics and longs to find him.... She will find him and that's the next section.... As you can almost see the curtain fall with her frantically looking for her beloved.

A Bible Study on the Song of Solomon

THE SONG OF SONGS

Ray Reynolds Rap Publications

Lesson 2: The Wedding of the Shulamite Girl & The King (3:6-5:1)

I. *The Celebration of Love (3:6-11)*

Solomon finds out she is looking for him and comes to her quickly (3:6-11, 5:1).

He longs to be with her when he hears her voice.

What follows is an ornate wedding procession from the bride's home to Jerusalem (3:6-11).

Solomon was busy making wedding preparations, that is why he could not be found.

The wedding ceremony was clearly a spectacle, but more time is spent in this book surrounding the bed and the bedroom, not the ceremony.

According to 3:6-8 he had decorated the bedchambers with spices, powders, probably along with flowers (she was his lily, his rose – 2:1), and guarded so that no one would bother them when the consummated the marriage.

II. *The Cultivation of Love (4:1-15).*

This section is absolutely beautiful.

Every couple should read 4:1-15 to see what love is really about.

Solomon doesn't carry her to his quarters, rip her clothes off, like the filth of Hollywood film.

Look at what he does.... Solomon describes his intense longing for her (4:1-15).

She slowly undresses in front of him and he describes all of her features while she does it... complimenting her.... Longing to touch her.

Basically from 4:1-5:1 he praises his bride from head to foot with a fabulous chain of similes and metaphors, preparing her for sex before it takes place.

Notice that her virginity is compared to a "garden enclosed" (4:12).

The garden is entered when the marriage is consummated (4:1 -5:1), he does not compromise her purity... this is a special moment... they took their time!

III. *The Consummation of Love (4:16-5:1)*

After they have taken some time... she invites him to come and enjoy love (4:16).

Notice 5:1 and how she describes herself, she full and ready to be emptied.

She sweetly summons him to enter her and enjoy all that she has to offer.

If one is reading this section as one play, this might be a good place for the intermission.

Maybe we should pause here and wipe some sweat.... take a 10 min break.... and then move forward with the rest of the story.

We need to see how the romance between these lovers goes way beyond the wedding night.

Remember this is really about LOVE.... The word "ahav" means "love," as in the sense of the

Greek "agape" (the inclination of the mind; God's love) and it occurs 18 times in this book.

The word "dodem" is found 36 times and means delight or affection, akin to "phileo."

Together, they are found 54 times, six times per chapter. This is the crux of the book... LOVE.

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THE SONG OF SONGS

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Lesson 3: The Marriage of the Shulamite Girl & The King (5:2-8:14)

I. *The Anxiety of Love (5:2-6:3)*

Sometime after the wedding, when the cake is gone, the parties have ended, and things are returning to normal... the honeymoon ends.

The Shulamite has a troubled dream (5:20 says in the palace while Solomon is away).

In her dream Solomon comes to her door, but she answers too late—he is gone.

She panics and searches for him late at night in Jerusalem (anyone see a pattern?).

Today we have many prescription medications that offer that as a dangerous side effect (maybe it was the wine, the spices, or something else – but she has a prob).

This is accelerated by the fact that they didn't sleep in the same quarters all the time.

By this time he already had 60 queens and 80 concubines (6:8).

We know from I Kings that Solomon's harem at its fullest had: 700 queens, and 300 concubines (1,000 women he had to visit).

So keep in mind.... at this time he still had 640 queens and 220 concubines to go, which means that this poor girl, while she was courted properly and loved, still had a husband that was too busy to spend time with her!

II. *The Allegiance of Love (6:4-7:9)*

Upon his return, Solomon assures her of his love and praises her beauty (6:4-7:9).

Basically the first part of this section (vs.5-7) are similar to that of 4:1-3 where Solomon is basically saying he only has eyes for her and how conquering her was greater than seeing his troops in battle with the banners waving high.

This is where we can relate to marriage because the wife has heard it all before.

So, of course, he doesn't get to finish as she interrupts him and talks about how she loves him more (anyone else have that debate?) and how he needs to prove his love.

This reaches a climax as we finish out the book (7:10).

III. *The Authenticity of Love (7:10-8:14)*

What happens when the wife is unhappy early on in the marriage? She threatens to go home!

The Shulamite begins to think of her country home and she is obviously homesick and lonely.

She eventually tries to persuade her beloved to return there with her (7:11-8:4).

Guess what? It works. So I guess the lesson is that when your wife threatens to leave... pack her bags for her! BUT... then you should go with her!

The journey takes place in 8:5-7 and her family sees her coming home.

Imagine the joy of the family! Most of the haram didn't return home!

Their relationship continues to deepen and their love will not be overthrown by jealousy.

At her homecoming (8:8-14) the Shulamite reflects on her brothers' care in youth (8:8-9).

This is when we can recall the story of Rebekah (**Genesis 24:55-59**) and the story of Dinah (**Genesis 34:13-17**) how families took care of each other.

At first glance you might think they are being disrespectful or hateful by saying she has no breasts and that she should be locked up, but that's not the case.

It was a sign of how concerned they were for their little sister.... She was young when she left their home... now she returns with royalty and she remains virtuous ("I am a wall." - 8:10)

She is now in a position to look out for her brothers' welfare (8:11-12).

Then the book concludes with a duel invitation of the two lovers to make love again.

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CONCLUSION

I realize that this strange book, different from any other in the Bible, ends abruptly, but you can use your imagination as to what happened after the story concluded. Obviously this is a book about love between a man and a woman—one of God’s most mysterious and satisfying gifts to mankind. And, Solomon using his unique lyrical talents shows how true love can conquer all. It’s no wonder that his songs became popular. As I have stated before, **I Kings 4:32** reveals that Solomon wrote over 1,000 songs. If they are as graphic as this one, you can see why they didn’t make it into the canon of Scripture.

What we do know about this particular book is that Solomon had intimate knowledge of the plant and animal world. This greatest of his songs alludes to: 21 species of plants, 15 species of animals. It also refers to fifteen geographical locations from Lebanon in the north to Egypt in the south.

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|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Kedar (1:5) | 6. Lebanon (3:9) | 11. Tirzah (6:4) |
| 2. Egypt (1:9) | 7. Mount Gilead (4:1) | 12. Heshbon (7:4) |
| 3. En Gedi (1:14) | 8. Amana (4:8) | 13. Damascus (7:4) |
| 4. Sharon (2:1) | 9. Senir (4:8) | 14. Carmel (7:5) |
| 5. Jerusalem (2:7) | 10. Hermon (4:8) | 15. Baal-Hamon (8:11) |

The lesson for couples in reading this book would be that if you want to keep the home fires burning you need a little fuel. **Song of Solomon 8:7** says, *“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can all the floods drown it.”* Wouldn’t you like to have that kind of passion in your marriage? Maybe you already have that.... But if you don’t be creative in your approach. Keep romance alive. Don’t try to copy what you read in a book. Don’t try to live out something you see in a movie. Just be yourself. Be creative and artistic and adventurous.

Remember that **Hebrews 13:4** says, *“Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled.”* I don’t know what’s going on in your bedrooms.... AND I don’t want to know.... But God knows. And, it is His will that you enjoy your spouse in every way possible. May God bless our relationships, our marriages, and our homes!