

Route 66

Song of Solomon: Love Talk

Part 22 – November 1, 2009

The “Song of Solomon” is unique in all the Bible. It is a wedding song like none I’ve ever heard at a modern-day ceremony! It begins with the bride (“beloved”) singing her anticipation of gratified physical love, in front of her rejoicing girlfriends:



Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth – for your love is more delightful than wine. ... Take me away with you – let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers. - *Song of Solomon 1:2;4a NIV*

Those “kisses of his mouth” are a little different than the kisses of his lips (they’re “French” kisses!). And the reference to “wine” speaks of the intoxicating nature of romantic passion. And then, “Take me away”, “Let us hurry”, “into his chambers”, she’s saying: “Get out of our way! We’re *consummating* this thing!”

We don’t sing about this stuff at modern-day ceremonies! But, we do have the couple seal the covenant with a public kiss. And as witnesses, we acknowledge the sexual tension by “hooting”.

Significantly, this song makes no reference to procreation. It praises the physical expression of love for love's sake alone. And this fills a vacuum in the scriptures. God’s primary purpose in inspiring this book seems to be to help us to realize that physical intimacy, in its healthiest sense, honors the Lord, and should be celebrated as a gift from God.



First Kings (4:32) says that Solomon wrote 1005 songs - and only one survived. But according to the first verse, it contains his *best* material:

Solomon’s Song of Songs. - *Song of Solomon 1:1 NIV*

The phrase, “Song of Songs” is a Hebrew superlative (a way of indicating when something has no equal). Other examples would be: “King of Kings”, “Lord of Lords”, and “holy of holies”.

In other words, this unashamed, graphic expression of the loving passion between a man and woman is the greatest type of song that one human can sing to another.

The words aren’t obscene, but they are frank and explicit, and some are embarrassing to read in a modern, public setting.

So much so, that many Christians treat the song as a picture of Christ's love for His bride (the church); and they replace all the sensual aspects with spiritual and allegorical meanings. Now, it's okay to draw our own parallels, but it's not okay to misrepresent the author's inspired intent. Theologians almost universally agree that there is no hint of allegory here. Can you imagine an allegory where Jesus says to His church:



Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. I said, "I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit." - *Song of Solomon 7:7-8 NIV*

That's plainly a *man* about to ravish his *wife*!



And she's only too happy to comply:

Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom – there I will give you my love. - *Song of Solomon 7:12 NIV*

This song isn't a story as much as it's a love-struck couple singing their adorations and fantasies. (And by the way, the making love in a vineyard - that'll get you arrested!)

And they also sing about protecting their passion:

Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom. - *Song of Solomon 2:15 NIV*

Just as the little foxes gnaw at the roots of grape vines, the problems of life can gnaw away at the passion in a relationship.

Bible translations differ on exactly who sings what, because the text doesn't specify. It's like having only the *words* of an opera transcribed and not which character sings them. So, each translation does its best to assign the singing parts.

Some believe the song is true, some believe it's fiction.

Some believe Solomon wrote it when he was young, before he had violated God's Word and built up a harem of 1000 foreign women (700 wives, 300 concubines) who then led him astray.

The bride is called a "Shulamite" (6:13) which is synonymous with "Shunammite" (Shulem and Shunem are the same place). Remember when Solomon's father, David, was old, and they scoured the land for a beautiful virgin to serve him as a living "hot water bottle"? She was "Abishag the Shunammite" (1 Kings 1:1-3). Some think Abishag is the bride in the song. And that's part of the reason Solomon had his brother Adonijah [ad-oh-NIGH-juh] killed (after David died), when Adonijah asked to marry Abishag.

Others argue that it was written when Solomon was old and filled with regret for having squandered his opportunity for true love.

Among Solomon's regrets in Ecclesiastes, he says:



I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all. - *Ecclesiastes 7:28b NIV*

Obviously this is a reference to his 1000 *failed* relationships!

And he offers this conclusion:

Enjoy life with your wife [not "wives"], whom you love ... - *Ecclesiastes 9:9a NIV*

But in the big picture, it doesn't matter who sings which parts, or if it's truth or fiction, or when Solomon wrote it, or what motive was behind it; the same inspired truth emerges: This song embraces, endorses, and extols the consummation of love within marriage as an experience whose intensity has no parallel in this world (and points to a *greater* love beyond it).



As powerful as passion is, it *must* be subject to God. Look at this passage sung by the bridegroom:

You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. - *Song of Solomon 4:12 NIV*

Her purity is a statement of reverence for God that supersedes her burning desire for her lover. In fact, three times in the song she makes the same declaration of chastity:

Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field:
Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. - *Song of Solomon 3:5 NIV*

That is, at the proper and appropriate time within marriage. It is sin and selfishness that causes physical love to be expressed at the wrong time, in the wrong place, with the wrong person.

While Proverbs exhorts young men to sexual purity, the Song of Solomon addresses its warnings to young women. Here's the thing: I will love my spouse best when I love God most.

Romance has become an idol in our society because it's the *next best* thing. But, it'll end up sabotaging a relationship if it's elevated to the place that only God can occupy and fulfill. No matter how in love we are, the honeymoon eventually ends.

And even this is reflected in Solomon's song. The bride sings:

I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking: "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night." I have taken off my robe – must I put it on again? I have washed my feet – must I soil them again? - *Song of Solomon 5:2-3 NIV*

Uh-oh; one of those "little foxes" is in the vineyard!

It's not clear if she dreams this whole thing or if he wakes her up with his knocking. But either way, she refuses to get out of her warm bed and put on her robe and wash her feet again. Maybe they've had a fight, maybe not; but his head is drenched and he's cold, and she's putting *her* needs above *his* needs.



The first way to deal with the foxes is: You trap them!

We must identify the trails where the foxes usually run, so we can be ready for them when they try to sneak in.

Years ago, I made a list of the most common arguments Shar and I would have, to figure out how to eliminate them. For instance, with two young teens and their friends, there was "never" a clean fork in the drawer. So, I went online, bought two boxes of forks in our pattern, and hid them. And every time there wasn't a clean fork in the drawer, I introduced a new one to the "system". I ended up ordering more – but I found the saturation point! I did something very similar with my underwear. However, most of my solutions involved me learning to help out around the house more than I had been.

When the Shulamite bride said that she didn't want to have to wash her feet again, he *could've* replied [angrily], "Well if you'd mop the floor once in a while ...!" And *another* fox would've run in. And she could've said, "You're the one who tracks in the mud!" And he could've said, "On my *work* shoes!" And she could've said, "You don't appreciate anything I do!"

But, apparently he was ready for the "fox". So, instead of engaging and raging, he pours perfume on the door handle as a token of his love, and he quietly leaves her to her thoughts.

My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him. I arose to open for my lover, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure. - *Song of Solomon 5:4-6a NIV*



The second way to deal with the foxes is:

You chase the ones that get past the traps!

And this is exactly what she tries to do.

I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer. The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak ... - *Song of Solomon 5:6b-7a NIV*

The watchmen mistake her for a harlot because she's out late, by herself, in her bedroom clothes, and dripping with perfume.



Don't underestimate how deadly those little foxes are.

If we carelessly let those foxes in: We will later be filled with regret. We might not get back what we've lost. And we'll be left with pain and suffering.

In the song, she then sings his praises to her girlfriends until the two of them are reunited; and then *he* sings *her* praises ... and then they're off to that vineyard!

But she's learned that love is not an emotion, but a covenant. And in the last chapter she sings the summation of the song:

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. - *Song of Solomon 8:6-7a NIV*