



Overview for Song of Solomon

Purpose: To portray the physical and emotional nature of true love between a man and a woman—a love which remains faithful in spite of all temptations to infidelity.

Author: Solomon is mentioned in the opening verse and in six other places throughout the book. Though he is commonly accepted to be the author, the book may have been written by someone *about* Solomon.

Date Written: Probably between 971 and 931 B.C. during the early years of Solomon’s life, based on the style of Hebrew used by the writer. References to geographical locations throughout the kingdom of Israel also suggest that the book was composed prior to 930 B.C. when the nation was divided into the northern and southern kingdoms.

Key People: King Solomon, the Shulamite maiden, the shepherd, the woman’s brothers, and the young women of Jerusalem.

Setting: The garden at the summer home of the king, and the king’s palace. Shulam, where the maiden was from, is thought by many historians to have been Shunem, a farming community about sixty miles north of Jerusalem.

Special Features: The Song of Solomon is one of the shortest books in the Bible, consisting of only 117 verses. Considered by many to be the greatest love song ever penned, it is comprised of seven poems (not necessarily in chronological order), which are examples of Hebrew lyric poetry—a type of verse that has no established rhyme or meter. In the original language, the lines were arranged to express a single thought in several ways through repetition, amplification, and/or contrast. The metaphors and descriptive language portraying the intimate relationship between a man and a woman were drawn from both country and urban life.

Interpretation: The book has been interpreted in a variety of ways:

Allegorical or Rabbinical view. From the time of the Talmud, Jewish tradition regarded the book as an allegorical picture of the love of God for Israel. However, accepting this approach would allow the possibility of deeming other portions of Scripture that were not clearly historical as being allegorical as well.

Typical View. This viewpoint interprets the Song of Solomon as a type of the love that Christ, the Bridegroom, has for the Church, His Bride. Since faithful earthly love is our most precious human relationship, it is understandable that some would see this beautiful description of a human love relationship as being symbolic of the much greater love that exists in the divine/human relationship. Taking this approach, however, could allow other Scriptural passages to be identified as a type, even in the absence of textual content that would suggest such an interpretation.

Lyrical View. Some commentators suggest that the book is a collection of love lyrics composed for use at weddings, or as a means for a person to express affection toward his beloved. However, this view fails to explain the sense of narrative and the evidences of unity throughout the book.

Literal or Dramatic View. Many Bible scholars support this interpretation, which views the book as a factual narrative. Adam Clarke suggests that the book concerns Solomon and his bride, who was the daughter of Pharaoh; this interpretation provides a framework for the passages which present intimate details of the physical relationship between a man and a woman. Another prominent holiness commentary views the narrative as a description of Solomon falling in love with a Shulamite maiden who had already given her heart to a young shepherd. In this approach, the intimate passages are considered to be the Shulamite’s dreams of her beloved. This approach is the one presented in the outline of *Daybreak and Discovery*.

In view of the wide range of explanations of this book, a dogmatic position as to its interpretation should not be taken. As Adam Clarke states, “Each of these opinions has its powerful supporters, and each of these has reasons to offer for the support of the opinion which is espoused; and nothing but a direct revelation from God can show us which of these opinions is the correct one, or whether any of them are correct. . . . It is much better, therefore, if [the book is] explained or illustrated at all, to take it in its literal meaning, and explain it in its general sense. I say general sense, because there are many passages in it which should not be explained, if taken literally, the references being too delicate; and Eastern phraseology on such subjects is too vivid for European imaginations.”¹

History: This book is called *Shir Hashshirim* in Hebrew, which means “The Song of Songs.” Jewish worshipers cherished the Song and used it as a part of their ritual on the eighth day of the Passover, in memory of the Exodus when God, the Bridegroom, espoused Israel as His bride.

Summary: A young woman of Shunem fell in love with a shepherd and they were betrothed. King Solomon, on a visit to the area, saw the Shulamite maiden and was attracted to her beauty and grace. He took her to his palace and sought to win her love. However, his gifts, splendor, and the promise of

prestige failed to extinguish the Shulamite’s devotion to her beloved shepherd. Finally, recognizing that she would not be swayed, Solomon released her from his court and allowed her to return home to her betrothed.

One challenge in understanding the Song of Solomon is that there are no indicators within the narrative which identify the speaker of each portion of text, so decisions as to who is speaking are subjective. However, the outline in *Daybreak* and *Discovery* is based upon divisions generally agreed upon by Bible scholars who accept the three-character interpretation.

1. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/clarke/sol000.htm>

Outline

Note: This is our complete amplified outline of this book, compiled from various sources.

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. The Shulamite’s longing for her beloved (1:2-4a)
- III. The initial meetings (1:4b—2:7)
 - A. Meeting of the Shulamite and the daughters of Jerusalem (1:4b-8)
 - B. Meeting of the Shulamite and the king (1:9—2:7)
 1. The king’s compliments (1:9-11)
 2. The Shulamite’s refusal (1:12-14)
 3. The king presses his case (1:15—2:2)
 4. The Shulamite references her true love (2:3-4)
 - C. The Shulamite’s plea to the daughters of Jerusalem (2:5-7)
- IV. Memories of the shepherd’s visit (2:8-17)
 - A. His approach (2:8-9)
 - B. His appeal (2:10-14)
 - C. Her response (2:15-17)
- V. The Shulamite’s dream of her beloved (3:1-5)
- VI. The king comes again (3:6—5:1)
 - A. The regal procession (3:6-11)
 - B. The second royal proposal (4:1—5:1)
- VII. A song of the beloved (5:2—6:3)
 - A. The Shulamite’s second dream (5:2-8)
 - B. The Shulamite’s description of her beloved (5:9—6:3)
- VIII. The king’s final approach (6:4—8:4)
 - A. His praise (6:4-7)
 - B. His invitation (6:8-10)
 - C. The Shulamite’s refusal (6:11-12)
 - D. The appeal of the daughters of Jerusalem (6:13—7:5)
 - E. The king’s final proposal (7:6-9)
 - F. The Shulamite declares her devotion to the shepherd (7:10—8:4)
- IX. Reunion of the Shulamite and the Shepherd (8:5-14)
 - A. The setting (8:5)
 - B. The Shulamite’s song (8:6-7)
 - C. The brothers’ interjection (8:8-9)
 - D. The Shulamite’s response (8:10-12)
 - E. The reward of love (8:13-14)