

THE LOVE SONGS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Love is the neurosis upon which the civilized world depends



LOVE IS AS STRONG AS DEATH, PASSION CRUEL AS THE GRAVE; IT BLAZES UP LIKE A BLAZING FIRE, FIERCER THAN ANY FLAME. MANY WATERS CANNOT QUENCH LOVE, NO FLOOD CAN SWEEP IT AWAY. SONG OF SONGS (SONG OF SOLOMON) 8:6-7

ALL THE AGES ARE NOT WORTH THE DAY ON WHICH THE SONG OF SONGS WAS GIVEN TO ISRAEL. FOR THE WRITINGS ARE HOLY, BUT THE SONG OF SONGS IS THE HOLY OF HOLIES.

Rabbi Akiba (50-135 AD)

Scripture:

Solomon 1:9-17

- ⁹I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots.
¹⁰Your cheeks are comely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels.
¹¹We will make you ornaments of gold, studded with silver.
¹³My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies upon my chest.
¹⁴My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En-gedi.
¹⁵Ah, you are beautiful, my love; ah, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.
¹⁶Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely. Our couch is green;
¹⁷the beams of our house are cedar, our rafters are pine.



King Solomon, or the "King Solomon administration" is credited with writing three book of the Hebrew scriptures.

PROVERBS

One is called "Proverbs." The complete title is, "*The Proverbs of Solomon.*"

A proverb is a short, generally known sentence that contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorize-able form and which is handed down from generation to generation.

While the proverbs began with the first of the Kings of Israel, the final collection went through several editions and hundreds of years. But Solomon was a very wise man, and the book of Kings says Solomon "Spoke three thousand proverbs - and his songs were a thousand and five."

He spoke of animals, birds, reptiles fish, and people of all nations. The book ends with the praise of a good wife, which we still enjoy reading.

ECCLESIASTES

Solomon is also credited with the creation of *Ecclesiastes*.

The word, "Ecclesiastes" means "to gather." Some also refer to Ecclesiastes as the work of the preacher, who paints a bleak picture of nature and history going round in circles and producing nothing new. Life is unfair, and pleasure does not satisfy, so be realistic. However, Ecclesiastes tends to be too dark, too bitter, and too skeptical for this preacher. To everything there is a season. So enjoy the season you are in.

SONG OF SONGS

The *Song of Songs* (also known as the *Song of Solomon*) is the third of the Solomon books. It is the story of romantic love and marriage. It is a story of courtship and the lust of the body for another. It is probably more than wooing, dating, and making out, but it is certainly not less.

So these are the three books associated with Solomon. I want to take a closer look at the love poems, but first I want to ask a question about all three of them. And you don't need to have read them last night to be qualified to answer.

LOVE IN SPRING TIME

February begins the "love season," and its jewel is Valentine's Day. I hope you gave someone a Valentine this year. In Northern California, February is the prolog to spring, and you know what happens to the sap in all of us when agriculture tells us that it is the time for planting seeds and fertilizing the crops.

The Song of Solomon reminds us that for many people, their first glimpse of the power of God's love comes from the experience of the power of human affection.

Romantic love may be prolog to agape love, that is charitable love and "loving-kindness."

The troubadours are generally believed to be the authors of the first love songs in Europe. They are the 12th-century and 13th-century lyric poets in Southern France, northern Italy, and northern Spain, who composed songs in languages of the people, often about courtly love. I suppose troubadours are the ancestors of modern bluegrass musicians. Bluegrass bands sing songs about love, love on the rise, and love on the rocks. The love songs are the most popular songs we sing.

The title "Song of Songs" is the author's way of saying that the songs of courtship and love are the best songs of all songs -- pure, romantic, embarrassing love songs. Love songs and love stories make the best movies, the best books, and the most popular records. I hope you all have a favorite love song.

WRITTEN IN WHICH ORDER?

So here is my question. When were the love songs written -- in youth, in middle age, in maturity?

Remember that I began by saying there are three books attributed to Solomon. For the sake of argument, let's assume that Solomon wrote at least a part of each of the three books.

In what order did he write them?

Here is a possible sequence.

- The love songs were written first. They describe a romantic love experienced by adolescents and people in their twenties.
- Love songs are followed by the wisdom and anecdotes of the Proverbs,
- and finally the cynical book of Ecclesiastes, written at the end of his life, when Solomon realized that all of life is foolishness, except maybe for the part that relates to the study of God.

Is that the way you are writing the story of your life? From idealistic love, to little tidbits of clichés that you recall, and finally to cynicism about the whole process? Some say that is the story of Solomon and that is the story of human life.

But here's another sequence. Try this:

- The cynicism of youth came first, (foolish cynicism -- Ecclesiastes) and learning then, raging against the world into which you were born.
- Then come some lessons of the Proverbs, (foolish wisdom)

(I remember my friend, Jim Hinton, CEO of Presbyterian Healthcare reminding board members, that "anecdotes are not data.")

- And finally, with maturity, reflections upon love itself -- a window to God. To end the book of life with love for the process, and the hope that it brings.

So are you still writing your love songs, or was that just an early stage to experience, and then move on?

I rather like the second opinion, that the love songs come last.

I'm living the second option. I'm more likely to tear up at a movie now than I was years ago.

I can't really figure it out. But I think I know more about the emotions than I did when they hit me for the first time.

THERE ARE EIGHT CHAPTERS TO THIS LITTLE BOOK:

- **CHAPTERS 1-2** are filled with Mutual praise and longing between the lover and the beloved
- **CHAPTERS 3-6:3** The bride's dream (3:1-5). The groom and his party approach (3:6-11). Praise for the beauty of the bride (4:1-5: 1). Description of the bride's dream (5:2-8). The bride and her friends discuss the groom (5:9-6:3)
- **CHAPTER 6:4-8:14** The groom extols the beauty of his bride (6:4-13). Expressions of praise and longing between the bride and groom (7:1-84) The dream gives way to reality (8:5) Concluding passage (M-14)

All described in "near pornographic" detail.

It has been argued over the centuries that this book has no place in the Bible.

One Bible commentator said:

Readers are ...invariably astonished to discover that such sexually provocative language and imagery can be found in the Bible. Contained in the eight brief chapters of this little-read book are some very titillating romantic speeches, love, passion, desire and longing. They can hardly be matched by classical secular romance writings...in stark contradiction to the portion of the Bible...where human sexuality in general is regarded as requiring careful governing.

And another critic reminds us:

Because the Song of Solomon nowhere makes mention of God or contains any religious or ethical ideas, its position in the Bible has long been debated. It has been the subject of criticism because it deals with human sexuality and dwells sensually on the physical attraction of the human body.

SO WE WONDER: DO POEMS ABOUT LOVE SOUND TERRIBLE TO YOU?

With that kind of bad publicity, are you going to rush right home and read this little bombshell immediately? I want every one of you to read all eight chapters some time this week. Then you can decide for yourself if it belongs in your Bible.

DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING THE CHURCH HAS PRONOUNCED ABOUT LOVE. SOMETIMES THE PIOUS GET IT WRONG

If a person took all the pronouncements of churches, and all the prohibitions of society, and all the scandalous news in the media, and all the stuff printed in magazines that are stashed behind the counters, and assumed that this is what love is all about, that person would come away with a twisted view. And I think the only way we can begin today as we look at the romance of this book, is to recall the first time that love hit you between the eyes like a club, and made you start acting in ways that were so strange that even you didn't understand it.

CONSIDER WHAT THIS SCRIPTURE IS NOT:

- This is not love where there is a victim or a crime. This is not abusive love that works out all kinds of psychological sickness and maladjustment upon some passive victim -- wife, family member or acquaintance.
- This is not rape or violent love.
- This is not physical love that crosses the boundaries between adult and child.
- It's not prostitution nor is it perversion.
- This is not dependency love: "I can't live without you." It is love with affection.

So we ask:

Why should it be easier to talk about murder on the freeway than romantic love at home?

Why should we have more difficulty telling our children where babies come from than telling them not to talk with strangers, and not to answer the door, and to say dad is busy rather than say I am home alone?

Why is it that people are filled with hatred for people who love differently, and why is that worse than crimes against life and property?

ERIC FROMM SAYS: Love is our most fundamental need.

To find oneself caught up in the mystery, the beauty and personality of another person is one of life's most wonderful experiences. And even if you are not caught up in that mystery, just to know it exists can make life worth living. Just to know that it's out there. It is the most powerful force in the world.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO FOR LOVE?

Here are some things I have heard of:

- "I gave up drinking and the use of drugs because my girlfriend wanted me to do it."
- "I'm staying in college and getting my degree. I'm not really into college right now, personally, but I know she's right and I love her."
- "How about we skip tonight's meeting, and have dinner and time together?"
- "I know it's expensive, and we don't have the money, but let's buy the tickets anyway and get our family together for the weekend."

MATURE LOVE REMEMBERS

I remember a woman who told me that she missed her husband. She was a woman well into her retirement years, and we have gone to basketball games with her. Her husband died recently. She told me that he had been crippled, and receiving a variety of medications and therapies in the last five years of his life. But she missed him terribly. She missed the young man with whom she had born children. She missed the guy who had lost some money in Las Vegas, and lost some more money on their first house, and she missed even the hard times with their children. And all of this was more than balanced by the joys of life together. "God, I miss him," she said. It was her mature love that made her miss the romantic love. And in all of this she was so grateful for their life together.

So I wish a Happy Valentine for each of you today. And if no one gave you a Valentine this year, please consider my sermon today a gift from God to you.



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