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Song of Solomon (Overview)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview, Steve Gregg delves into the Song of Solomon, a short but passionate love story between a man and woman in the Bible. The book uses sexually explicit language, metaphorical language, and depicts a monogamous, lifelong, covenanted relationship between the two characters. Although the book's non-linear structure and poetic language may be difficult for modern readers to fully understand, it is still relevant today as it celebrates love and passion between a married couple and reminds us that a properly celebrated sexual relationship can have a spiritual counterpart.

Transcript

We're now going to be looking at the Song of Solomon briefly. The Song of Solomon is a short book, I think 170 verses, only 8 chapters, and yet it's a little bit confusing. There's a lot of people who like the Song of Solomon.

It's a romantic book, and a lot of people like some of the romantic talk in the book, although it certainly is a romantic talk of a different culture than our own. For example, it's largely a dialogue involving two main speakers, the guy and the girl. They're usually talking to each other or about each other, and there's several different passages where they describe each other in detail in terms that are supposed to be very flattering.

Now, if you're a Middle Eastern person with an agrarian mindset, maybe the things they say would work as flattery to you. I know that my wife, if I told her that her belly was like a heap of wheat, I'd be in a heap of trouble. Or if I told her that her nose was like the Tower of Lebanon, I'd probably be spending the night in the doghouse of Lebanon, I think.

I mean, Solomon talked about this girl and she about him in terms that are not quite as easy to appreciate in our modern times. I'm not really sure what a modern person would use for analogies for something like that, but it sounds funny to our ears. It's definitely very removed from us culturally, and yet you definitely get the heat of the passion.

And when I say the heat of the passion, it's very sexually explicit. It's not sexually explicit in the way that pornography is sexually explicit, but it's very graphic. It's just

that sexual behavior is usually spoken of in metaphors.

One of the main metaphors that you find repeatedly is the metaphor of a garden or being injured, or of the enjoyment of certain fruits and grapes from the vineyard or dates from the palm tree and things like that. And yet these are very standard ancient Near Eastern metaphors for a woman's charm, frankly. In fact, in some cases for Genesis, these are in the secular Eastern poetry of the period, you know, a woman's body parts, which are of a sexual nature are represented by this kind of language.

And there's strong evidence that Solomon does the same thing here. Now, it's not always certain if there's a metaphor here, or if it's really talking about eating food. But there is some explicit sexual stuff in it, enough so that, as I understand, the Jews traditionally did not let their children read this book until they were adults, because it was too graphic, it was quite rated R in their Bible.

And it's about a courtship, and a marriage. And it's about passionate love between a man and a woman. It's kind of in a dramatic form.

If you look at your Bible, now, if you don't, if you have the King James Version, what I'm about to observe will not be observable. The King James Version doesn't have this, but all other Bibles do. You'll see if you look at chapter one, for example, just above verse two, it'll say, the Shulamite.

And then if you look at verse seven, just above that says, oh, there's two of them, but verse eight, just above verse eight says, the beloved, which is the guy. Now, this is telling you who's speaking. The Shulamite is the girl.

The beloved is the guy, apparently Solomon. And occasionally, there's some other speakers, like the daughters of Jerusalem, who speak. And once in a while, even the girl's brothers pipe in.

Now, our modern translations have let us know who's speaking by sticking in words like the Shulamite, the beloved, her brothers, the daughters of Jerusalem. It'll actually, it's almost like you're reading a script for a play. Okay, now this person speaks, and then this person says that, and this person says that.

These identifications of the speaker are not in the Hebrew text. They're not there. It's more like the King James.

You read the King James, and you don't see those there. You just see the words that are spoken, but you're not told who's speaking. So if it's not in Hebrew, how do we know? How do the Bible translators know who's speaking? Well, in some cases, it's because of the gender of the words that are in the text in Hebrew.

You wouldn't catch it in English, but in the Hebrew text, sometimes it's obviously a

feminine pronoun or a masculine pronoun, and that kind of gives it away at times. But in many cases, it's simply the content of what is said that gives it away that there's been a change of speaker, and who could be saying these things. So there's a little bit of conjecture as to who's speaking where, but mostly it's pretty trustworthy because there are grammatical considerations in the Hebrew which the translators are aware of, and there's also, of course, content of the statements that would give a lot away.

Now, who are the players in this? Well, the guy is apparently Solomon. There's reference to the king without naming him in verse 4 of chapter 1. The Shulamite speaks and says, the king has brought me into his chambers. Okay, so her lover is a king.

He is named for us in chapter 1 verse 12. No, not 112. Is it 212? What is it? Let's forget that.

Look at chapter 3 verse 9. We'll get it there. It says, the wood of Lebanon, Solomon the king made himself a palanquin, which is a device that a king was carried in when he was traveling. He had his servants carrying him in a palanquin.

So it talks about Solomon the king in this case, and then, of course, in verse 11 it says, go forth, O daughters of Zion, to see King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, which is when he's getting married, or maybe she made it for him when he was being crowned, but espousals would seemingly refer to his engagement to be married, and the day of the gladness of his heart. In chapter 7 in verse 5, it also mentions Solomon or the king, and so we have references to the king and to Solomon throughout, and it's clear that Solomon is getting married. Solomon is the girl's lover, so he's the guy.

He's the beloved in this, but who's the girl? We know that Solomon had a lot of girls, a lot of women. Who is this one? Now the things he says to her give this strong impression that she's his favorite. She is the most beautiful of all women.

She's the fairest, the most perfect of all women. He certainly is talking as if she is his favorite, though maybe he says that to all the girls, you never know. In any case, this apparently was his favorite song, because it's the song of songs.

Now the song of songs, which is Solomon's, is that in the Latin it's called canticles. I think there are translations of how they're called, but canticles, so it's from the Latin Vulgate, but in the Hebrew it's the song of songs, or the song of Solomon. Song of songs is a Hebrew phrase that's similar to the phrase holy of holies, or king of kings, or lord of lords.

Basically, the greatest of the lords, the greatest lord of all lords, the greatest king, the greatest holiest of all holy things, the greatest song of all songs. And Solomon, we remember, wrote a thousand and five songs according to 1 Kings chapter 4. This apparently was his favorite, and written apparently to his favorite girl, at least at the

moment. Now by the way, he mentions in the book there are 60, I think he says there's 80 queens and 60 concubines or something like that, which is a lot smaller number than what he eventually had.

So this may have been one of his early wives before he married so many of them. And whether she remained his favorite or not, who knows. Now we have to remember he's the one writing.

She does a lot of the speaking, and in the speaking she flatters Solomon an awful lot, but this is him writing what he thinks she would be saying. So he obviously thought he was quite the lady's man. He actually thought the girls must really think a lot of him, at least this girl, because he put all this flattering language into her mouth.

She speaks 55 of the verses in there. I said 170, I think there's 117 verses in the book, and 55 of them she speaks. And she's always talking about him.

And the rest of the time he's speaking. It's sort of like when he's formulating her speeches in here, it's like he's saying, well, I've spoken about myself enough, let's hear from you, what do you think of me? Here's what my girl thinks about me, all these things, and that's what he presents. Now there probably was a real girl in this story, most people assume this to be true.

There are some who think it's strictly a fiction, which is one theory we'll have to consider, but most I think would assume that there's an actual real relationship here. This is not a fictional romance, this is a real romance. But the girl is not identified except by the term Shulamite.

That's why the identifying things that the editors put in it, the Shulamites, the Shulamites, the Shulamites, where are they getting that word from? They're getting that from chapter 6, verse 13. And in that place, he says, return, return, oh Shulamite, return, return that we may look upon you. And then she says, what would you see in the Shulamite? As it were, the dance of a double can.

Now, she's the Shulamite. And he wants to look at it, he and his friends want to look at it. This apparently describing when they first met, I'll say more about the plot of the story later on.

But who's the Shulamite? It's an unknown word in the Bible, Shulamite. But it obviously speaks of her origins. She's from Shulam, wherever that is, somewhere in Palestine, apparently.

Now, one theory about this that's very attractive, and I don't know of any alternatives. So even though this theory may not be true, it doesn't have any competitors that I know, identifies her with a girl who in the Bible is called a Shunamite, which would be spelt somewhat similarly. Shunamite, Shulamite could be the same being.

The Shunamite in question is Abishek. You know who she was? In 1 Kings chapter 1, David, in his old age, had gotten sick with a certain sickness that deprived him of his own body heat. And nothing could keep him warm.

The Bible says no amount of blankets on him would keep him warm. So they found a girl to lay in bed, sort of like, you know, shepherds sleep with their dogs to keep warm. The girl, they didn't have sex.

The Bible specifically says he did not have sex with her. But she slept next to him in his bed to keep the bed warm. She was a human bed woman.

Now, they didn't just bring in any woman. He is the king after all. So they made a search for the most beautiful young woman.

And she had to be a virgin because obviously he couldn't sleep with someone else's wife, even if he wasn't having sex with her. It had to be someone who was available to marry him or to be one of his concubines. And yet, he never really consummated because he was old and sick.

But this woman Abishek is called the Shunamite. Now, we don't know much about her except that she is said to be the most beautiful young woman in the kingdom. Solomon speaks that way about the Shunamite too.

Of course, men always say that about, I guess, the woman they're in love with and to them it's true. It doesn't always have to be the same woman because it's not always an objective evaluation. But we do know that Solomon may have been a little possessive of Abishek because after David died, she was available.

She had not had sex. She was still a virgin, but she had been attached to the king's court like any concubine. Now, usually in the Middle East, when a king died, his concubines went to his successor.

That's why when Absalom wanted to prove himself to be the replacement for David, he drove David out of town and then slept publicly with the 10 concubines of David to prove that he had supplanted his father and he was the king now. This was a customary thing in the Middle East. David actually inherited Saul's concubine, the Bible says.

So, Saul is the king before him. The man who has the previous king's concubines has supplanted the king. He's with his women and no one's stopping him.

It means he's in the position the other man had before. Now, after David died, there was one of David's sons, Adonijah, who wanted to be king instead of Solomon. He staged, you know, kind of a self-ordination of himself as king, but it didn't work out because David was still alive when this happened and David said, no, Solomon's the king.

So now, Adonijah, the usurper, the half-brother of Solomon, was now a competitor of Solomon. And usually when men came to power, they eliminated their competitors. This is just the ethics of old monarchy.

A new monarch takes out anybody who might be a competitor, the other family members or whatever. Now, Solomon told Adonijah, if you behave yourself, I'll let you live. So Adonijah was given his life was spared, even though he had tried to supplant Solomon.

But later, Adonijah made a plot trying to get David's wife, Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, to let Adonijah marry Abishek. Now, Solomon saw this as another attempt at the throne. For Adonijah to have what had been technically one of David's concubines would have given him some kind of a priori, you know, position of claim to David's throne.

Solomon recognized that and saw it as an act of treason and had him killed. But there may be some other reasons that Solomon objected to it besides the political power. This was, after all, the most beautiful woman in the kingdom.

And Solomon may well have had designs on her himself. And therefore, it could be that Bathsheba is simply another vocalization, another spelling of the word Shunammite, and a reference to Abishek, who had been David's bed warmer, and now Solomon's. One of Solomon's many women, but spoken of as if she's his favorite.

And she may well have been. So we've got King Solomon as one of the players, then the Shunammite, whoever she is, who could be Abishek as the woman. Then the daughters of Jerusalem speak fairly often.

Now, they are mentioned eight times, seven times, in the book, the daughters of Jerusalem. That is mentioned in the text, in the speeches. For example, in chapter one, in verse five, the Shunammite is speaking to them.

And, no, it's not verse five. I thought it was. I got the wrong reference there.

Okay, here's chapter two, verse seven. Another case. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases.

Now, I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, this is the woman speaking, the Shunammite is speaking. She's speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem. Now, sometimes the daughters of Jerusalem are speaking to her.

We know this only because they use the first person plural feminine pronoun, we. As we see, for example, if you look at chapter one, verse four, we will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than one.

Who are these we? Well, it is assumed throughout, whenever this happens, that this is the daughters of Jerusalem. There's some verbal interaction between the Shunammite and the daughters of Jerusalem, who might have been her bridesmaids, her girlfriends who were participants with her in the wedding, things like that. We don't know exactly who they are, but they have speaking role in this from time to time.

And she speaks to them and refers to them seven times as the daughters of Jerusalem. And then a couple of times, the girl's brothers are speakers. In chapter two, verse one, I'm sorry, verse 15, sorry.

Somebody speaks to her and says, catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes. Now, it doesn't give any indication of who's speaking. However, the woman herself has pointed out in chapter one, and verse six, that her brothers make her tend the vineyard.

She says, do not look upon me, chapter one, verse six, because I'm dark, because the sun is tanning. My mother's sons were angry with me. They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I've not kept.

Now, her brothers were not very friendly to her. They're hard on her. They made her do the work of keeping the grapes safe in the vineyard.

So they'd be the ones talking to her about, hey, get the foxes out of the vineyard. The foxes, here you are daydreaming about your lover, and the foxes are going away with the grapes. Get in there and catch them.

Get them out of the vineyard. That being her brothers speaking to her about her perceived duties being neglected. Also in chapter eight, verse eight and nine, her brothers apparently are speaking.

This apparent, I think this, at this point she's reminiscing to what she overheard them say when she was younger, but she's changed now. She's grown up. This has been her prepubescent time.

Her brother said, we have a little sister and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is spoken for? If she's a wall, we'll build upon her a battlement of silver. If she's a door, we will enclose her with cedars, boards of cedar.

Now she says, and looking back on them saying that, she says, I am a wall and my breasts are like towers. She remembers a time before she was developed, when she was flat chested as a prepubescent, that her brothers were saying, our sister hasn't developed yet. You know, how are we going to find a husband for her? She says, how do you like me now? You know, check me out now.

I have breasts like towers. And by the way, her breasts are mentioned a number of times

throughout the book, Solomon usually speaking. In this case, she's kind of taunting her brothers who thought that she'd be a hard one to find a husband for because she apparently was a late bloomer, but she bloomed.

Apparently. And so now she has no trouble even the king wants her. All right.

So these are the players that you have speaking roles. You've got Solomon, you've got the Shulamite, you've got the daughters of Jerusalem, and you've got her brother speaking occasionally. Now, before we get into the story, and we will talk about the story as in there are different opinions among scholars of what the story really is.

Like what's really going on here? It's not at all evident. When you read through it, it's not evident of a plot line. And I'll tell you why in a moment.

But let me just say that there are four approaches to this that have been taken. All of them have been taken from early church history on. And they all exist today.

One of them is the allegorical approach. Now, an allegorical approach is saying this story has no connection with anything in real life. There's no historical romance here being discussed.

It's not a real romance that Solomon had with the real woman. It's an allegory. Sort of like Pilgrim's Progress is an allegory.

You know, Christian has this burden on his back that represents something. He goes to the cross, it falls off his back. He makes his journey to the Celestial City.

He goes to the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He meets Mr. Worldly Wise Man and Mr. Legalist. He meets all kinds of people.

He goes, he's thrown into prison in Doubting Castle from the giant despair from which he only escapes by finding the key of promise. And so forth. I mean, these are all, it's totally allegorical.

There's no story. There's no real life story here. It's just a made up story to make certain points symbolically.

Some people think this is that kind of story too, the allegorical approach. A more common approach among Christians would be the typological approach. Now that's seen as a type.

You know what a type is? A type is something that really exists in the Old Testament, but it foreshadows something else. It might be a person, it might be an event, it might be a ritual in the Old Testament, but it foreshadows Christ or it foreshadows something about Christ, something spiritual. In this case it's not allegorical because it actually does have a connection in real history.

It really did happen. There really is a real relationship here, but it is seen as a type. Solomon is a type of, well the Jews who are not Christians have seen it that Solomon is a type of God, a picture of God, and his lover is a picture of Israel.

And so the typological view, the Jews held to be a picture of God and Israel. Now Christians have taken the same cue and just modified it for Christianity. Solomon is a picture of Christ and it is the church is his lover.

So the marriage is between Solomon and the woman, but it's a real relationship, but it's a picture of Christ in the church or a picture of God in Israel, depending on which religious group is looking at it this way. Now thousands of sermons have been written and preached on the book of Song of Solomon throughout church history, assuming this view, assuming that when Solomon speaks to the girl it's really Christ speaking to the church. When the girl responds to him that's how the church responds to Christ.

Not everything, but much. This is not denying that this was really a true romance between Solomon and Meshulamite, but only that its importance to us is not anything to do with Solomon and Meshulamite, but rather what it tells us about the relationship between Christ and the church. Is this a correct way to look at this? Let me just say we'll explore that in a moment, but that's the second approach.

It's either some see it as allegorical, in which case it has no connection with historical facts, some see it as typological, where it does have a historical factual basis, but it has symbolic reference to Christ and the church. The third way that it's sometimes taken is drama, and by drama it means that it is written to be performed. It's like the script of a play.

It's a drama. It's not a real story. It might not even be typological of God and Israel or anything like that.

It might just be for entertainment, like a love story. It is a love story after all, and you know a lot of people like romances. A lot of movies are romances.

A lot of popular novels are romances, and some think that this is written to be a romantic drama, and that it's nothing more than that. It's got different speaking roles and so forth. However, if it is, it's a very short one.

It doesn't take 20 minutes to read through it, and so you know it would be a very short play, but it's not impossible. It could be written for that purpose. That's the third approach.

The fourth approach, and this is increasingly popular, I think, among scholars, is what they might call just the natural approach. It's just Solomon talking about his girlfriend or his wife, and it's her talking about him. It's just a romance.

It's nothing more. It has no allegorical meaning. It has no typological meaning.

It has nothing to do with Christ and the church. It's just a romance. It's just Solomon telling us how much he loves his wife and how much she loves him, and portraying for us the raptures of a passionate couple.

Now one might argue, what? Why? Why would you do that? I mean, there's some private stuff here, and I'll tell you, I've often mentioned I don't really enjoy teaching Song of Solomon because reading some of it out loud is like, it's not pornographic, but it's very explicit, and you know, you feel like you're in somebody else's bedroom watching them make love, and I don't need that. I don't need that. I'm not bored with my own love life, so I don't need to entertain myself with somebody else.

That's one reason I've never had a real interest in pornography. Why should I want to watch somebody else do things when I've got my own life, you know? It must be someone who's very unhappy and very bored and thinks they have to do that and watch someone else do stuff to get their kicks, you know? But it's not fun for me to read out loud the book of Song of Solomon because it's very private stuff. I mean, this should be going on behind a door that's shut.

You know, why would a person write all this private stuff if it's just a celebration of his passionate love for his wife? Well, Solomon might do this just because he could do what he wanted. He was not too concerned about propriety. He was the king.

He could do what he wanted. Anyone who didn't like it, that's tough. He knew what he wanted to say about his wife, about his girlfriend, or whatever she was.

But one thing we could say is, even if you just took the natural approach, even if you made no application to Christ and the church or Israel and God, if you didn't have any of these second meanings attached to it, if it's just really a love story between two people, it does play one role in Scripture that is of value. And that is that sexuality is a major part of human life. And the Bible is not shy about sexuality.

It makes it very clear that when God made man before there was a woman, he said, it's not good for man to be alone. I'm going to make a helper for him. And as soon as he made a woman, he says, okay, be fruitful and multiply.

Obviously, God doesn't think sex is a dirty thing. He's not embarrassed about genitals. Neither was Adam and Eve until they sinned.

They were naked and unashamed. They became ashamed once they became tainted. God's not tainted.

He's not embarrassed about genitals. He designed them. They came off of his drawing board.

Okay, so God is not squeamish or prudish. And yet most of what the Bible says about sex is found in moral instructions in the law or in the New Testament. We're talking about moral behavior.

And usually a lot of that is given to forbidding certain kinds of sexual things, adultery, fornication, bestiality, homosexuality, incest. There's more ways to go wrong with sex than to go right with it. In fact, there's a very narrow right way for sex to be properly done, and that's in marriage.

And marriage is a very specific thing. It's a monogamous, lifelong, covenanted relationship between a man and a woman. That's what Jesus defined it as.

That's what the Bible defines it as. Now, within the context of marriage, sex is great. But there's a thousand ways on the outside of marriage that sex might go wrong.

In fact, any place outside of marriage is wrong. So you have a lot more of the Bible forbidding sexual behavior of a certain kind or another than you have celebrating legitimate sexual behavior. And in that sense, a person could read the Bible and get a kind of a negative view of sex, and people did.

There have been many seasons in church history where people felt a little embarrassed about sex. Christians did. It seemed carnal or something like that.

But it's not carnal. It's a... Paul says in Ephesians that the marriage relationship between the man and the woman is like Christ and the church. So even if song or song was not written with the mind of being a picture of Christ and the church, insofar as it is a picture of marriage, it applies to Christ and the church.

Because Paul said, for this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Now, we know that Paul talked about one flesh meaning having sex. Because he said in 1 Corinthians 6 that if a man sleeps with a prostitute, he becomes one flesh with her.

He's talking about becoming one flesh through a sexual union. You're not supposed to do that with a prostitute. But a man is supposed to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh.

It's a sexual relation that God intended. God could have made humans to reproduce asexually, but he's not going to need that. He could have just made Adam capable of splitting into two Adams and then into four, and then he could populate the earth that way.

But that's not what God chose. That would not be a picture, a proper picture of Christ and the church. The linkage between a man and a woman, reproductively, is designed.

And Paul said it's a great mystery. He said in Ephesians 5, the last verse, Ephesians 5, or the second to the last verse, it's a great mystery when I speak of Christ and the church. So, whether it was ever intended that song or psalm should be taken allegorically or typologically or not, even if it's simply a natural love story between a man and a wife, in a sense, it does depict something that is relevant to the relationship of Christ and church only on a spiritual level.

Sex is a very spiritual thing. It's amazing how, you know, it's much more spiritual than eating. Eating and sex are both physical pleasures, and they're both physical pleasures that can be abused.

We all know how easy it is to abuse eating and drinking, and we certainly know how easy it is to abuse sex. But even though there are two physical pleasures that are both capable of being abused, they're not like each other much. If somebody steals my bread off my plate, it's not going to affect me the same way a man steals my wife, or sleeps with my wife.

I mean, it's different. There's a different kind of oneness. There's a connection.

There's a unity there. There's a spiritual connection between a man and wife that's celebrated by copulation. And that being so, it depicts a very spiritual thing.

And again, if you, if normally people think of sex as kind of a dirty thing, a carnal thing, then it might seem horrible to think of comparing that with the relationship of Christ and the church. But that's what the Bible compares it with. Not that anyone has, not that there's sex, but the thing that sex is a picture of the spiritual reality.

The union that is created through sex. The fruitfulness that is created through sex. The reproduction of life.

The perpetuation of life and so forth. This all has spiritual counterpart. And therefore, without the book of Song of Solomon in the Bible, you could definitely get a slant on sexuality in general in the Bible that sounds negative, because you're more often being told what not to do.

Don't sleep with these people. Don't sleep with those people. Don't sleep with anybody, except your husband or wife.

And all the wrong ways to have sex are enumerated again and again. So you get this, what could potentially be a very negative picture of sex. But this book definitely gives a celebration of sex.

And we presume it's within marriage. Now I say we presume it's within marriage. We know the woman and Solomon got married because there's nuptials here.

There's mention of engagement. And so it's not entirely clear whether they stayed pure before the ceremony. Solomon, again, was the king.

He took what he wanted. So did David, remember? David just took the woman next door because he wanted her. We can't be sure that Solomon did things that were always right, morally.

In fact, we can be pretty sure he didn't. But in this case, whether there was sex before the ceremony or not, it's not entirely clear. There was certainly passion before the ceremony.

And there is a ceremony. This is between a man and woman who got married. And therefore, it certainly is an unembarrassed celebration of sexual union.

And in that respect, it may have value, even if it's just a natural love story without anything else intended to it. It kind of counterbalances the more negative aspects of sex that you might derive from reading much of the Scripture. Now, is it a type of Christ in the church? There are some things in the Old Testament that are.

For example, in Psalm 45, Psalm 45 is a king's wedding celebration. It begins by someone celebrating the king at his wedding, addressing him in very flattering terms, then addressing his bride in very flattering terms. It's a short psalm, but it's all about a king's wedding.

Every scholar agrees. Psalm 45 was written for the occasion of a king's wedding. What king? We don't know.

Maybe Solomon. No one knows who's, but someone. Now, the interesting thing is that there's verses in Psalm 45 which are addressed to the king, the bridegroom, in the psalm, which are quoted in the New Testament as if they're spoken to Christ.

That's interesting. If you look at Psalm 45, because this may be parallel to Song of Solomon in terms of applicability, in Psalm 45, it says, my heart is overflowing with a good theme. I recite my composition concerning the king, my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

You're fairer than the sons of men. Grace is poured into your lips. Therefore, God has blessed you forever.

Gird your sword on your thigh, oh mighty one, with your glory and your majesty. And in your majesty, ride prosperously because of the truth, humility, and righteousness. And your right hand shall teach you awesome things.

Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies. The people fall under you. Your throne, oh God, is forever and ever.

This is still speaking to the king. A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness.

Therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions. Now, it goes on and then it starts speaking to the girl in verse 10 and talks to her, to the rest, that is the bride. But notice what is spoken to the king, the bridegroom, in verses six and seven, is quoted in Hebrews chapter one, verses eight and nine, where it says, to the son, meaning Jesus, he says, and then it quotes this, as if God is speaking to Jesus here.

Now, it's not obvious in the psalm, but what I'm saying is you have a royal wedding in Psalm 45, which the New Testament writers take typologically. Yes, it was a real king and a real wedding, but we can see it as suggesting more, suggesting Christ and his wedding, since the bridegroom is spoken of as if he is Christ in Hebrews one, eight through nine. Also, of course, the famous story of Hosea.

Hosea was told to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him, whose name was Gomer. And in the first three chapters of Hosea, we find he marries this woman, she cheats on him, she leaves him, she's with other men, but he is told by God to go and redeem her back. She apparently has run out of money, sort of like the prodigal son, and she is now a slave.

He's supposed to go redeem her out of slavery and marry her again. Now, it's made very clear that God intends Hosea and this relation with his wife to be a picture of God and his relation to Israel, that Israel has cheated on God. She's worshipped other gods, and she's been alienated from God.

She's coming to bondage, that God's going to redeem her and marry her again, which he did, of course, through Christ. Coming and marrying his bride, the remnant of Israel, initially, which became the church. Now, we see then that there's very clear connections that the Bible itself makes between certain marriages in the Old Testament, whether it's the king's marriage in Psalm 45 or Hosea's marriage in Hosea chapter 23.

That's a picture of Christ in the church or God in Israel. So, why not Song of Solomon? Well, yeah, why not? It could be. We can't say for sure that it is because the Bible doesn't ever quote it in that connection.

The New Testament doesn't quote Song of Solomon, but Christians often do. Many of you know that song, His Banner Over Me is Love. I'm my beloved's and he is mine.

His banner is love. That's from Song of Solomon. It's assuming, Christians when they sing it, are assuming that he's the beloved and we're the ones that he loves.

And that, I think people taking it that way may go beyond what the writer intended, but maybe not. Maybe it is intended, but if it's not intended, it's still not totally inappropriate

because marriage itself is a picture of Christ in the church and therefore the raptures of the husband and wife can be seen to depict what marriage is always supposed to depict and that's the relationship with Christ in the church. Now, what is the backstory? What's the story in this book? What's going on here? Well, it's not all that clear.

Different preachers have different opinions because frankly, you can see it more than one way. One popular way is to see it's a story about a girl who's being courted by two men. One of those men is Solomon.

The other is a humble shepherd. From time to time, she's talking to a shepherd boy that she's in love with and he's in love with her. She's a keeper of a vineyard.

She's a farm girl. He's a farm boy. He's a shepherd boy.

These are rustic peasants in Palestine and they're in love with each other, but then King Solomon spots her and because she's the most beautiful woman anywhere, he wants to win her heart. And so some people think that the story is a competition between Solomon on the one hand and the shepherd peasant boy both trying to win the heart of the same girl. And some would say this is like the church being courted by Christ, the humble shepherd, and by Solomon who represents the world.

The world in all its tension and glory and wealth and all the things trying to lure her away from her shepherd lover. And some people like to read the story that way and so you can kind of piece the puzzle pieces together in a way to understand it that way because sometimes the lover, the male lover, is clearly Solomon. Other times the male lover seems to be a shepherd which Solomon was not.

He's a herder of sheep. She's asking, where do you keep your sheep? Oh, just follow the flocks and you'll find them, he says. Now that's one way of looking at it, that there's this competition for the same girl by two men, one of them being Solomon.

A different scenario that appeals to me more, I can't say it's right, but it appeals to me more and it certainly fits wonderfully into the picture of Christ and the church if we wish to find it. And this is what some people have thought is going on here, is that Solomon is the only lover. He's also the shepherd, but here's how this works.

As the king, he visits one of his vineyards and happens to see this beautiful young girl working in the vineyards and he's smitten. Now by the way, this could still be Abishek. If so, she had had her time with David, but after his death perhaps went back to her farm.

Maybe, maybe that's unlikely, but it's not impossible. Maybe after David died, he didn't need a bed warmer anymore and she really was still a virgin, so she didn't have to stay around the palace. She could go home back to her duties as a vineyard keeper, maybe.

But this may not even be Abishek. The point is, the idea is that Solomon is visiting one of

his vineyards in Lebanon, which he ruled over, and there he sees this beautiful girl. He's smitten and he wants her.

He calls her and says, hey, come over here, I want to look at you. And she's very shy. She's intimidated.

He's got his whole retinue with him. He's got his bodyguards, his soldiers around him. He's in his palanquin.

He's all dressed in his royal robes. She's nothing. He's everything.

She's intimidated. So she runs off. She says, why do you want to look at me? And she runs off and he realizes he can't win her heart that way.

So he goes back to Jerusalem and this could be entirely a fiction that Solomon made up, but he may have done it. He comes back disguised as a peasant so that he doesn't scare her off. He realizes that she's too intimidated by him when she knows him to be the mighty king.

But if he comes back more on her level, he might not scare her off. And so he disguises himself as a peasant, as a shepherd. And we find her asking him questions about, where's your flock and all that.

But it doesn't really happen. He answers really basically. He doesn't give her any straight answers, but he woos her and wins her heart.

And he keeps kind of coming and going because he still has to go back to the palace and run things. But whenever he comes back to the vineyard, he's dressed like the shepherd. But from time to time he goes back to run the country too, you know.

And so she has these dreams. Is he at the door? I think he's at the door. I went out.

Oh, he's gone again. You know, he's coming and going. But she's in love with him and he proposes marriage to her.

She agrees. And then he disappears and he shows up again. He's the king He's dressed up like the king.

But she recognizes, oh, he's the shepherd I fell in love with. So he was able to win her over, disguised as a peasant shepherd, when he was really the king in disguise. But once she's fallen in love with him, she's not intimidated by him anymore when he comes back revealing himself as the king.

Now, it's kind of easy to see parallels there to Christ. And in the church, because God in the Old Testament was rather intimidating. But he comes in a humble form as one of us at our level and wins our hearts.

We love him because he first loved us. He dies for us. He wins us over.

Then he disappears again. He goes away. But when he returns in all of his regal glory, we'll be, of course, we'll recognize him as the same king, the same shepherd who was among us in humble attire.

And so some people feel this is the backstory. And I kind of, frankly, I kind of like that story. It's got a little more imagination to it, but it can be seen to work.

See, the book is put together sort of like a jigsaw puzzle. It's made up of seven idylls. What's an idyll? It's spelled I-D-Y-L.

I-D-Y-L. An idyll is a poem of a certain sort. It's a short song in a pastoral setting, sort of like a hillside natural setting, which has basically a romantic theme.

Okay, it's kind of a romantic song set to a nature-y kind of pastoral setting. That's what an idyll is. This book is made up of seven idylls.

And each one is like an act in the play. Each one is a different setting than the others. I mean, some of them are the same as others, but they're not sequential.

They are not set up in chronological order, which makes it confusing. It's more like each of them is like a card in a deck, and they get shuffled a little bit. You can get them into the proper order, but you're not going to find them in that order.

And it's sort of like, you know, there are certain movies you'll see that actually start at a certain point in the story, and then they flash back. And they tell early parts, and sometimes they flash forward, back, and then they flash back to another previous thing. And that's kind of how I think this book is constructed.

I think it starts at the wedding. The first idyll is chapter 1, verse 1, through chapter 2, verse 7. And it ends with this statement, which is found three other times in the book. The last two lines of this idyll are, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases.

Now, you might have a translation that says, do not stir my love until she pleases or until he pleases. Some of them say, don't stir up my love until she pleases, which would simply be the guy's being considerate of my wife's asleep. Don't wake her up.

Let her sleep in. Let her sleep as long as she wants. But almost all commentators agree that this is not talking about my beloved, but love itself.

Don't stir up love prematurely. Let it come at its natural pace. Don't force it.

That's actually what most commentators and this translation suggests. Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases, until it naturally tends to arise. Now, this statement is found three different places.

And it ends the first idyll. The first idyll is from the beginning of the book until chapter 2, verse 7, and it ends with that. And then the next one is chapter 2, verse 8, through chapter 3, verse 5. And you'll see it ends with the same words.

Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases. Now, they don't all end that way, but the first two do. The third idyll is chapter 3, verse 6 through 5.1. And then the fourth one is 5.2 to 6.3. The fifth one is from 6.4 to 7.10. The sixth one is from 7.11 to 8.4. And then the last one is just the last 10 verses of chapter 8, verses 5 through 14.

Now, each of these has its own setting. And I'd like to suggest the following order. Now, this is like pieces of a puzzle.

And they're not in chronological order, but the story can be pieced together from them. The beginning, the first idyll, chapter 1, verse 1 through 2, 7, is the bride and the groom on the wedding day. And they are at the feast.

And they're talking about how much they love each other, how beautiful they think the other one is, and so forth. They're celebrating their wedding. But the second one, from chapter 2, verse 8 to 3, 5, goes back.

And the bride is reminiscing about the courtship, the time when she first met him. And he was in the guise of a shepherd rather than as the king. You'll notice in chapter 2, verse 8, the voice of my beloved.

Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountain, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall.

He's looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice. My beloved spoke and said to me, rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone.

The flowers appear, and the birds are singing, and everything's wonderful. Let's go out and frolic on the hillsides, essentially. And yet her brothers speak up in verse 16.

Hey, come on, we've got work to do. There's foxes in the region. You can go chase them down.

So in a sense, she's not entirely free to run off with this guy. But he's intriguing. She's drawn to him.

And she says in verse 16, my beloved is mine, and I'm his. He feeds his flock among the lilies. And she speaks to him and says, until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Aether.

And then she talked about chapter 3, verse 1 through 5 is still part of this. And she talked about how she was sleeping or waking. It's hard to tell.

She seems to have had a dream. And she got up and said, I'm going to go looking for my guy. And she found him.

And she hung on to him. And she said, I'm going to take you home to my mother's house and have my way with you, basically. And then she says at the end of that, I charge you, oh daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the does of the field, do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

And that's the end of that. The third one is recalling the time when he came back and proposed to her. So it jumps from the courtship when he was a shepherd to him being in the form of a king again.

And he's coming back after she's fallen in love with him and proposing to her as himself, as the king's follower. Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders. Behold, it's Solomon's couch with 60 valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel.

They all hold swords, being experts in war and so forth and so on. And so he speaks to her in chapter four and calls for her to show herself and come be with him. And he talks about how much he's in love with her in very flowing terms.

And this goes on through chapter five, verse one, which ends, I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey.

I have drunk my wine with my milk. Now there is some possibility that this has sexual references because she talks about herself as a garden that has never been entered. But she invites him to enter her garden.

And so he says, that's what I'm here for, basically. And that ends that idyll. Chapter five, verse two to chapter six, verse three is then the fourth one.

And this is where she kind of just shares a dream that she had, that troubled her at the time that he was missing. This would go back to after he had courted her as a shepherd. She does not yet know who he is.

He has, of course, disappeared, probably go back to Jerusalem to run the country for a while. So he's not courting her every, you know, 24-7 all the time. He's got other work to do, but she doesn't know about that.

All she knows is he's not there anymore. And she has a troubling dream of him at her door after she's gone to bed. And he's knocking on the door, wants to come in.

She says, I'm already in bed, my feet are washed, I'll get them dirty if I get out of bed. I take my clothes off, I'm not going to get up and put them back on again. And then she

changes her mind and gets up and he's gone.

Yeah, snooze you lose. And so, you know, he's gone. And she goes looking for him in the streets, trying to find him.

And this is a bad dream after all. She doesn't find him, but she gets abused by the night watchman and stuff like that. Just roughed up, not sexually abused.

And so we have this dream that she shares about that time, which probably reflects the confusion she has about his strange and unexplained disappearance. Now, chapter 6, verse 4 through 7, 10, then it's his time to talk. It's the king's time to talk about how he feels about her.

And this is simply him musing on how beautiful she is, how special she is, how perfect she is, how awesome. And he uses all these metaphors for her, which, again, we might have trouble appreciating some of them, because they are taken from an agricultural setting where her eyes are likened to doves, her breasts are likened to two deer, fawns. Her neck is like a tower of David or whatever.

And so, we would not consider these the most flattering ways to speak, but it was, apparently it was. Solomon knew. He knew how to win the ladies.

So that's how he talked about it. And so this whole idyll is simply him, you know, meditating on how lovely she is. Then the sixth idyll is chapter 7, verse 11, through chapter 8, verse 4. And there, it's the bride who's talking about how she's kind of homesick.

I mean, she's living in the palace now. She's the queen. But she kind of misses the old farm.

She kind of misses the venue. She's thinking that she'd like to go back and visit, not leave her husband, not be done with the marriage, but just kind of wish she could go back and see the old homestead and the brothers, show off what she's become to her brothers, who are so grateful for God. And so she talks about that.

And then at the very end, chapter 8, verses 5 through 14, are the last of these. And they actually, apparently, do go back to Lebanon, where she came from, to the vineyard. And they kind of renew their vows, or they reaffirm their love for each other, and so forth.

So she mentions in that particular place that she has a little problem with jealousy. As a woman might, who had to share her husband with 999 other men, other women, excuse me, no men as far as we know, but women. If a woman has to share her husband with 999 other women, she might have her moments of jealousy.

And she does talk about this in verse 6 of chapter 8, set me as a seal upon your heart, as

a seal upon your arm, for love is as strong as death, and jealousy as cool as the grave. She's talking to him. It's flames or flames of fire, a most vehement flame.

Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it, if a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised. And so she's apparently asking him to reaffirm how special she is to him, because she's kind of, just set me as a seal upon your heart, is basically saying, I want to hear you say those things about how I am in your heart, like you used to talk. And then, of course, in verse 8 and 9, when she's, I think, remembering, with irony, how her brothers had despaired of being able to find her a husband, because she was so flat-chested, apparently, as I say, a late developer.

But then she describes herself now, verse 10, I am a wall, my breasts are like towers, then I became in his eyes as one who found peace. Solomon, head of vineyard, talks about this vineyard where it was that she had worked, when she met him at Silphid. And so, I mean, there's, the poetry wanders all over the place, but the idea is trying to figure out how any part of it relates to any other part.

So my suggestion is, the first idyll is at the wedding, the second one recalls the courtship, the third one recalls him revealing himself and proposing to her as the king, and then the fourth one, she talks about this dream she had when he disappeared, then the next one is the king talking about her, and then at the very end, the last two are about her missing the old life of the rural life, instead of the single life she now had in the palace, wanting to go back, and they do, they go back and apparently renew their vows there. And so that's the story, it would appear. Now, that may not be the story, because it's not at all self-explanatory.

It's more like a story that's imposed as a temper on this poetry. But we can say there are these separate acts, they do not appear to be in chronological order, or else if they are, they make no sense, really, whatever. And so it does seem to be a story in movements and pieces that are shuffled, the assumption being that whoever were the original readers were supposed to know how this story went, and therefore they would know where things go.

Just like, as I said, if you watch a movie where it starts out at one point, it flashes back to an earlier part of the story, then moves ahead and backwards and so forth. Usually, it's done in such a way that the viewer is supposed to be able to follow and know what happens when, in what order. I'm assuming the readers of Solomon and Solomon were supposed to know that too, though it's not at all clear to us how they would know that, unless it was a true story and they knew the fact.

If Solomon really did have this kind of courtship with one of the women he married, then that would probably be public knowledge in the kingdom, and therefore it might be totally understandable. But there's much we don't know, and which we will never know for sure as we read the book. But it's worth reading.

It gets a little mushy, it gets a little heated at times. At times you might feel like you're invading somebody's privacy, but they asked you to. The book was written for readers to read.

So, it perhaps most edifying way to look at it is to see it as a celebration of pure passion between a married couple, on the one hand, which itself is a type of picture of the ecstasy that is intended to be experienced by Christ and his bride, and possibly, especially after the king returns in full regalia and takes the bride to himself. In the meantime, the shepherd is strangely away, but the king will return. And that would be how I understand the story behind this book.

And so we end with that.