

## 11.05.2019 THE ROYAL LOVE SONG

*Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm;  
For love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave;  
Its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Song of Solomon 8:6*

This week we study love in marriage as depicted in the Song of Solomon. Solomon wrote 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32) but this beautiful song is called the 'Song of songs' (Chapter 1: 1) which is also the Hebrew title of the book because it is the most exquisite song that Solomon wrote.

Historically, this poem depicts the courting and wedding of a shepherdess by King Solomon and joys and heartaches of wedded love.

Allegorically, it pictures Israel as God's espoused bride (see Hosea 2:19, 20) and the Church as the bride of Christ. As human life finds its highest fulfilment in the love of man and woman, so spiritual life finds its highest fulfilment in the love of God for His people and Christ for His Church.

*"We see our Saviours face on every page of the Bible, but here we see His heart and feel His love to us." Spurgeon*

Our focus this week is on the literal meaning of this poem which conveys the joy and intimacy of love within a committed marriage covenant. It is a celebration of the nature of humanity—male and female created in God's image for mutual support and enjoyment.

The various scenes in the book exalt the joys of love in courtship and marriage and teach that physical beauty and sexuality in marriage should not be despised as unspiritual and carnal. It offers a proper perspective of human love and avoids the extremes of lust and asceticism. Human sexuality is part of God's creation with its related desires and pleasures and in this poem God has provided us with a guide to a pure sexual relationship between husband and wife. Thus the Song is a positive endorsement by God of marital love in all its physical and emotional beauty. It explores the dimensions of the relationship between two lovers: attraction, desire, companionship, pleasure, union, separation, faithfulness and praise.

	<b>THE SONG UNION and</b>	<b>OF SOLOMON COMMUNION</b>	
<b>THE COURTSHIP</b> (Falling in love) 1:2-3:5	<b>THE WEDDING</b> (United in love) 3:6 – 5:1	<b>THE MATURING</b> (Struggling and 5:2 -8:14	<b>MARRIAGE</b> Growing in love)
Fostering of Love	Fulfilment of Love	Frustration of Love	Faithfulness of Love
Falling in Love	United in Love	Divided in Love	Devoted in Love
<b>CULTIVATING LOVE....</b>		<b>ACCLAIMING LOVE...</b>	
Courtship before the marriage	Procession for the marriage and consummation of the marriage.	The Honeymoon is over! 5:2 – 6:13	The Marriage Deepens Love Matures 7:1 – 8:14
Chief Speaker: The Bride	Chief Speaker: The Bridegroom	Chief Speaker: Both	Chief Speaker: Both

- Table from: Song of Solomon commentaries: [www.preceptaustin.org](http://www.preceptaustin.org)

Ultimately, this poem tells us that love in marriage is mutual, it is exclusive, it is total and it is beautiful.

**The Beginning of Love: 1:2- 5:1**

Falling in Love: 1:2 -3:5

In these passages are recollections of the courtship: the bride's longing for affection before the wedding (1:2-8), expressions of mutual love (1:9-2:7), a springtime visit from the bridegroom to the bride's home (2:8-17).

### United in Love: 3:6-5:1

The ornate wedding procession is described in 3:6-11. The bridegroom praises his bride with a wonderful set of metaphors and similes in 4:1-15, beginning with the words, *"Behold, you are fair my love! Behold, you are fair!"* Her virginity is compared to *'a garden enclosed'* (4:12) and the marriage is consummated when the garden is entered (4:16-5:1).

*And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2:22-25*

Note the threefold use of the word 'flesh'. *"Flesh of my flesh...one flesh"*

**Marriage is more than a union. It is a kind of reunion. It is the union of 2 persons who originally were one, then separated (the rib removed from Adam), and now in the sexual union of marriage come together again.**

Paul refers to this passage in Ephesians 5:25-33 and likens it to Christ's relationship to the Church. Where the First Man, Adam failed, the Second Man, Christ Jesus, became flesh and reconciled a separated people unto God by His death. And from His body, through His sleeping and awaking has been created a Bride - a Bride who is loved and kept and perfected by her Heavenly Spouse. In Ephesians 5, Paul tells redeemed men and women that their marriages must bear the likeness of the heavenly.

For Reflection: Considering the above, do we recognise why God is so opposed to adultery and illicit sexual relationships? See also 1 Corinthians 6:15-20.

### **The Maturing of Love: 5:2-8:14**

#### Struggling in Love: 5:2- 6:13

Sometime after the wedding the bride has a dream which troubles her. Her husband is away and when he comes to her door, she answers too late and he is gone (5:2-6:3). She panics and searches for him late at night in Jerusalem.

On his return, her husband assures her of his love and praises her beauty (6:4-13).

Counsel to a Newly Wedded Pair—My Dear Brother and Sister: You have united in a lifelong covenant. Your education in married life has begun. The first year of married life is a year of experience, a year in which husband and wife learn each other's different traits of character, as a child learns lessons in school. In this, the first year of your married life, let there be no chapters that will mar your future happiness. *EGW: Adventist Home. p 102*

#### Growing in Love: the deepening and maturing of love (6:14 -8:14)

The mutual love and admiration for each other is expressed in 7:1-10.

The wife now persuades her husband to return with her to her home in the country (7:11-8:4). Their journey and deepening relationship is described in 8:5-7. Their love will stand secure against jealousy or circumstances. At her homecoming, the wife reflects on her brothers' care for her when she was young. She remains a virtuous wife...*'I am a wall' 8:10.*

The song concludes with a duet: a dual invitation of the bride (the Shulamite) and the bridegroom (the Beloved).

***The Beloved:***

*You who dwell in the gardens, the companions listen for your voice— let me hear it!*

***The Shulamite:***

*Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices.*

The divine love emanating from Christ never destroys human love, but includes it. By it human love is refined and purified, elevated and ennobled. Human love can never bear its precious fruit until it is united with the Divine nature, and trained to grow heavenward. Jesus wants to see happy marriages, happy firesides. The warmth of true friendship and the love that binds the hearts of husband and wife are a foretaste of heaven.

God has ordained that there should be perfect love and harmony between those who enter into the marriage relation. Let bride and bridegroom, in the presence of the heavenly universe, pledge themselves to love each other as God has ordained they should. Let no draught of unkindness chill the atmosphere of love which should surround them. The wife is to respect and reverence her husband, and the husband is to love and cherish his wife. As the priest of the household, the husband and father should bind his wife and children to his heart. The wife should feel that the large affections of her husband sustain her before her children are born, and after their birth he should co-operate with her in the management of the little ones, who should be wisely, tenderly, and lovingly educated.

The family relationship should be sanctifying in its influence. Christian homes, established and conducted in accordance with God's plan, are a wonderful help in forming Christian character. Families here should be a symbol of the great family above. Parents and children should unite in offering loving service to Him who alone can keep human love pure and noble. *EGW: Bible Echo: 4.9.1899 (also Adventist Home. p. 99)*

**Song of Solomon as Allegory:**

While the poem was meant to be taken literally with its theme of marital love and sexuality (a Jew was only allowed to read it once he was 30 years of age), nevertheless we see Christ in every book of the Bible and so also in this book. In the Old Testament, Israel is regarded as the Bride of Jehovah (Yahweh).

*For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. Isaiah 54:5*

*"And it shall be, in that day," Says the LORD, "that you will call Me 'My Husband,' and no longer call Me 'My Master'... "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving-kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD." Hosea 2:16, 19, 20*

In the New Testament, the Church (spiritual Israel) is seen as the Bride of Christ.

*I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:2*

Leaving the dependency and nurture of childhood into the maturity of partnership, so also does God want our relationship with Him to grow and mature into partnership and intimacy through the Spirit of His Son (1 Corinthians 13:11; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Hebrews 5:13,14- 6:1; Song of Solomon 2:16; 8:6,7).

Christ, the Lamb has betrothed Himself to us. He is the Church's heavenly Husband. He will come again to receive His Bride unto Himself. All heaven will rejoice in that glad Day:

*"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." Revelation 19:7*

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## **Additional Notes on Marriage and Sexuality in the Song of Songs by Christian Commentators:**

If we grant that it (the Song of songs) is inspired, what then are its lessons? Why do we have it in Holy Scripture? Many of the Jewish teachers thought of it simply as designed of God to give a right apprehension of conjugal love. They thought of it as the glorification of the bliss of wedded life, and if we conceived of it from no higher standpoint than this, it would mean that it had a right to a place in the canon. Wedded life in Israel represented the very highest and fullest and deepest affection at a time when, in the nations surrounding Israel, woman was looked upon as a mere chattel, as a slave, or as the object of man's pleasure to be discarded when and as he pleased. But it was otherwise in Israel. The Jewish home was a place where love and tenderness reigned, and no doubt this little book had a great deal to do with lifting it to that glorious height. *HA Ironsides*

The Bible teaches us of a creation that is good and of a sexuality that is a hallowed aspect of what is good (Gen. 1). It knows that sexuality is touched by sin and damaged, as are all aspects of creation; but redemption, biblically, is not about escape from createdness. It is about the restoration of the image of God in human beings (as well as the renewal of all creation); such restoration involves, at least on this side of eternity, the restoration of sexuality and sexual expression as it should be under God.

There is no justification, then, for thinking that Christian living must necessarily be ascetic living or that ascetic living is somehow more spiritual than living that is not ascetic. God made everything good—and it remains good, even though marred by sin. Sexual expression remains good in itself, even though touched by sin (whether committed by us or upon us). *Iain Provan*

The Song fills a necessary vacuum in the Scriptures because it endorses sex and celebrates it beyond all expectation. Although abuse is possible and to be avoided, sex is not inherently evil, nor is it limited to a procreative function. Instead, sex enables an experience of love whose intensity has no parallel in this cosmos and serves as a signpost to point to the greater love that lies beyond it. *Richard Hess*

In contrast to the tendency to treat sexuality as intrinsically vile and the antithesis to holiness, the Song of Songs presents sexual love as a thing of great beauty and an activity that enriches human life. The Song teaches that love and sex are good. *Duane Garrett*

Song of Songs does not prescribe rules for human sexual life or even explicitly speak of them (with one significant exception), but this does not mean that there is no moral outlook pervading the text. The sexuality of the Song is monogamous and heterosexual. This is not imposing a bourgeois Protestant morality on the Song. In reality, heterosexual monogamy is the foundation for all of the Song's celebration.

The sexuality of the Song is heterosexual; a "gay reading" of the Song is the most violent kind of an imposition of extrinsic values on the Song. Not only are the central lovers in the Song male and female, but it is understood that this is the outlook of the community at large. At the beginning of the Song, when the splendours of the man's love are being praised, the woman responds that the girls "rightly" love the man (Song 1:3–4).

This love is monogamous in nature. The woman is to the man "my sister, my companion, my bride" (e.g., Song 5:1). She is the lotus blossom; all other women are thorns (Song 2:2). *Duane Garrett*

### Reflections of Christ in the Song of Solomon:

In Ecclesiastes, we learn that without Christ we cannot be satisfied, even if we possess the whole world. In the Song of Solomon, we learn that if we turn from the world and set our affections on Christ, we cannot fathom the infinite preciousness of His love. *JV McGee*

"The song of songs, which is Solomon's." But why call this precious little book, "The Song of Songs"? Just because it is Solomon's, or rather, Christ's, who will in due time be King in Jerusalem, in true Solomon glory. On the same principle He is called "King of kings, and Lord of lords." Pre-eminence in all things is His. There are many sweet songs in scripture. Moses, Miriam and her maidens, Deborah, and David, all sang sweetly of the Lord's goodness. It is said of Solomon himself that "his songs were a thousand and five"; but this one he styles "The Song of Songs." It far surpassed them all. It

is the deep melody of hearts filled with holy love, and finding their supreme delight in its full and free expression. "We love him because he first loved us." Oh! to be able at all times to sing the song of the Saviour's love, with the heart and with the understanding also. *Andrew Miller*

The first verse says, "The Song of songs, which is Solomon's." Solomon wrote a thousand five songs (1 Kings 4:32). Of all his songs, this is the best and most precious one. Consequently, it is called the "Song of songs." The inner sanctuary is the Holy of Holies. The Lord Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the Song of songs. The book of Ecclesiastes speaks of vanity of vanities, whereas this book is the Song of songs.

This Song is in contrast with Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes speaks of an unsettled life, but this Song speaks of the rest after being unsettled. Ecclesiastes tells us that man cannot be satisfied with knowledge, but this Song tells us that man can only be satisfied by love. Ecclesiastes tells us about the pursuit under the sun, but this Song tells us about the pursuit of Christ. In Ecclesiastes the object that is being sought after is a wrong one, and the way is the wrong way. The result is vanity of vanities. In the Song of songs the object that is being sought after is the right one, and the way is the right way. The result is the right end. *Watchman Nee: the Song of Songs*

But down through the centuries, the more spiritually minded in Israel saw a deeper meaning in this Song of Solomon; they recognized the design of God to set forth the mutual love subsisting between the Lord God and Israel. Again and again, in other scriptures, the Lord God is likened to a bridegroom, Israel to His chosen bride, and so the spiritual in Israel, in the years before Christ, came to look at the Song in this way. They called it "the Book of Communion." It is the book that sets forth the Lord God and His people in blessed and happy communion. And then all through the Christian centuries those who have had an insight into spiritual truth have thought of it from two standpoints. First, as typifying the wondrous relationship that subsists between Christ and the Church, the glowing heart, the enraptured spirit of our blessed Lord revealing Himself to His redeemed people as her Bridegroom and her Head, and the Church's glad response. And then, looking at it from a moral standpoint, as setting forth the relationship between an individual soul and Christ, how many a devoted saint has exclaimed with gladness, "Oh, I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me." *HA Ironsides*

*"Oh, I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved's mine,  
He brings a poor vile sinner into His house of wine;  
I stand upon His merit, I know no safer stand,  
Not even where glory dwelleth, in Immanuel's land."* *Samuel Rutherford.*

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