

Review: Song of Solomon Act II: Solomon's Entourage Enters Jerusalem; Act III: the King & the Shulammite at the Palace; Argument for Literal Interpretation

Song of Solomon: Act II (3:6-11)

Scene: A gate of entry into Jerusalem.

Jerusalem Guard [JG]; Bystanders (BS1, BS2, BS3, BS4)

Solomon's chariot and retinue, including the Shulammite and the Daughters of Jerusalem, arrive at a gate entering into the capital city of Jerusalem. Their approach, arrival, and entry into the city are described by a sentry and four observers.

Song of Solomon 3:6 - [JG] "What is this coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all scented powders of the merchant?"

3:7 - [BS1] "Behold, it is the traveling couch of Solomon; sixty mighty men around it, of the mighty men of Israel."

3:8 - [BS2] "All of them are wielders of the sword, expert in war; each man has his sword at his side, guarding against the terrors of the night."

3:9 - [BS3] "King Solomon has made for himself a sedan chair from the timber of Lebanon."

3:10 - [BS3] "He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, and its seat of purple fabric, with its interior lovingly fitted out by the daughters of Jerusalem."

3:11 - [BS4] "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of his gladness of heart."

Song of Solomon: Act III (4:1 – 7:9)

Scene: Solomon's palace in Jerusalem.

Shulammite Woman [SW]; King Solomon [KS]; Daughters of Jerusalem [DJ]; Jealous Queen [JQ]; Shepherd Lover [SL]

Solomon intensifies his efforts to woo the Shulammite with pick-up lines. She remains occupied with her Shepherd Lover. The Shepherd executes his plan to extract the Shulammite from the palace.

1. In this act we will observe Solomon in Stud Muffin Overdrive. There will be some biblical principles that we can extract from what he has to say to the Shulammite but they will be of a negative nature instead of positive.
2. Solomon is a terrible lover although he assumes himself to be quite the ladies' man. He has accumulated over a thousand women into his harem. But no truly great lover can manage an entire division of women, just one—the right one.
3. The only way Solomon could keep them under control was by a system of soft tyranny: do what you are told, respond when I aggress, and otherwise stay out of the way.
4. Solomon is a very famous man. He is among the greatest kings of Israel and the worst kings of Israel. He was cursed by the prophecy that his kingdom would be divided which was fulfilled during the reign of his son Rehoboam.
5. He is a great believer who failed prosperity testing and as a result lost personal glory at the expense of material glory.

6. Nevertheless, he recovered from his mistakes and regained a relationship with the Lord so that under the enduement of the Holy Spirit he was able to write three books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, and two psalms: Psalm 72 and 127.
7. But as we encounter him in Act III we find him at his smarmy best—the antagonist with his pick-up lines versus the Shulammite with her problem-solving devices.
8. I have twelve commentaries on Song of Solomon. Not one considers the Shepherd to be the Shulammite's right man. Some have Solomon and the Shepherd as the same person. This would mean that the Shulammite is schizophrenic. On the one hand she rejects Solomon's advances while on the other she expresses her love for the Shepherd.
9. In addition to my twelve pretty-much-useless Song of Solomon commentaries (my reason for having them is for isagogics, not for exegesis or interpretation) there is the *Scofield Study Bible* that I highly recommend for its footnotes.
10. There is a major exception. Scofield is as confused on Song of Solomon as are the other twelve I've consulted. He also places Solomon in the role of the Shulammite's right man.
11. Since our first run through of the introduction to Act III, I have come into the possession of a new Bible and its "Introduction to Song of Songs" contains this paragraph:

NIV Archaeological Study Bible: An Illustrated Walk through Biblical History and Culture. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1032:

Cultural Facts and Highlights. The Song's purpose has been debated. For most of the history of its interpretation, it was treated as an allegory. Jewish reviewers, for the most part, saw it as a symbolic recounting of the history of Israel, with the male singer representing God and the female singer symbolizing Israel. Some medieval Jewish interpreters saw it as an allegory of philosophy, while Christians have taken it as an analogy of the love of Christ for the church or as symbolic of the love relationship between the human soul and God. Some Roman Catholic interpreters claimed that Mary was the central figure of the allegory. Since each of these conjectures was guided only by the theological presuppositions and imagination of the interpreter (and no two allegorical interpretations are alike), and since nothing in the text suggests that it is to be understood as an allegory, very few hold to this explanation today.

More recently, some have claimed that the Song is a drama about the mutual love between Solomon and a young woman, a variation being that it concerns Solomon's failed attempt to woo a woman who was in love with a shepherd. These interpretations, however, are now widely viewed to be forced upon the text. For such explanations to work, readers must supply an enormous amount of detail not included in the Song. Also, there is no analogy for such literature in the ancient Near East.

Today, many view the Song as simple love poetry. This work in fact has close analogies with Egyptian love poetry written during the centuries prior to the age of Solomon. It seems clear that the Song was meant specifically to celebrate the love between a husband and a wife. It is "love poetry," but it has a far more sublime message than that of Egypt or of any other particular land or era.

As You Read. Try not to dwell on the interpretation of the book's story line or on possible, beneath-the-surface meanings. Taking as a given that the Song celebrates marital love, glean what you can from its passages—avoiding the temptation to read too much into the sometimes awkward imagery, at least from our twenty-first century perspective.

12. This summary is correct in its warning against an allegorical interpretation of the book. Those who attempt this approach really do come up with "their own interpretations" because of the "theological presuppositions and imagination" they bring to their study of the book.
13. It is asserted by the article that "nothing in the text suggests that it is to be understood as an allegory" and that "very few hold to this explanation today."

14. If then it is determined that allegory is out then what is the approach that best interprets the book? It is suggested that analogies by Jews and Christians are also suspect. But the book does not mention God, Messiah, or any substitute references to them. Yet Song of Songs is contained in the canon of Scripture.
15. Consequently, it must be assumed that its message is designed to convey both spiritual and temporal information to believers who read it. Since the Old Testament often illustrates the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage then it is legitimate for Jewish theologians to find the events in the Song analogous to this.
16. Further, since the New Testament clearly indicates that the relationship between husband and wife is analogous to the relationship between Christ and his church its theologians may legitimately view the Song in this context.
17. However, when this is recognized by the writer as the approach used by those who interpret the book literally then it is denounced because the theologian “must supply an enormous amount of detail not included in the Song. Also, there is no analogy for such literature in the ancient Near East.”
18. Literal interpretation must include isagogics in order to understand the culture, traditions, and customs of the time in which the book was written. No “detail” should be arbitrarily “supplied” outside what isagogics permit. In other words, the historical period dictates that the interpretation is harmonious with the cultural-social milieu of the author and his readers including customs and practices.
19. But it also must be remembered that the book is inspired by the Holy Spirit Who is the real author of the book. Solomon is the human writer who functions under the principles of inspiration:

The Holy Spirit communicated to human authors (like Solomon) God's complete and coherent message. The human writers of Scripture so wrote that, without waiving their human intelligence, their vocabulary, their personal feelings, their literary style, their personality, or individuality, God's complete message to man was permanently recorded with perfect accuracy in the original languages of Scripture.
20. Since the Holy Spirit is the Author and Solomon writes through inspiration then Solomon is free to utilize the literary techniques that were well known prior to his writing the Song. He is known to have had close ties with the Egyptian people and because of his contributions to the Old Testament he is obviously well read and thus we may conclude that he could have borrowed from the Egyptian style of poetic writings.