

Wisdom in Song of Songs

What is Song of Songs?

- A ballad about human romance, written in the style of ANE lyric poetry
- It is lyric wisdom
- There are 2 titles used for the book:
 - Song of Songs: denoting that its superiority over other songs
 - Song of Solomon: reflecting the tradition that claims Solomon as the author
 - Or 'Songs' for short
- How does a love song fit into the category of wisdom? And why is it in the Bible at all?
 - First, because it is associated with Solomon (1:1; 3:6-11; 8:11-12) whose name in Israel is synonymous with wisdom
 - Second, it deals explicitly with a category of wisdom found in Proverbs: the 'wise choice' of marital and sexual fidelity

God's Design

- God created human beings to be, in part, sexual in their nature
 - This is true even before the Fall
- The Fall corrupted this dimension of our humanity
- God's intent was for sexual love to be a constant source of joy and blessing in monogamous marriage
- Because of human sin, it is often a means of selfish personal gratification involving all kinds of lusts and exploitations
- However, Songs presents a celebration of true romance to God's glory in keeping with His original design

Interpretational Issues

- Because of our discomfort with human sexuality, some have gone to great lengths to see in the book some hidden meaning that makes it more 'spiritual' in nature
- They would see in it allegorical 'love songs' depicting God's love for Israel, as was used by the Prophets on occasion (Isa. 5:1-7; Hos. 2:2-15)
- In the era of the Church Fathers (2nd-6th century AD), Songs was seen allegorically as Christ's love for the Church
 - An early church council (AD 550) forbade any other interpretation
 - Thus, this view is still held by many people
- However, these interpretations fail to read the book for what it primarily is:
 - A beautiful portrait of human love between a man and woman
 - Including their attraction toward one another (see Songs 4:1-4)

The Language of Love

- This is the language of a man's adoration of his love one in which he compares features of her appearance to beautiful images in life
 - He is not talking about things that are strictly similar in appearance, but things that are similarly impressive visually

- The prophetic ‘love songs’ do not share the intimate details of desire seen in Songs
 - The dream of the beloved (5:2-6)
- There are other expressions of love as well:
 - Statements of the ardor of love (e.g. 1:2-4)
 - Advice & challenge from observers of the romance (e.g. 1:8; 5:9)
 - Romantic invitations from the man to the woman, and vice versa (e.g. 7:11-13; 8:13)
 - Purposely exaggerated boasts about the greatness of the woman by the man, and vice versa (e.g. 2:8-9)
 - The need to resist temptation to be unfaithfully attracted to anyone else (e.g. 6:8-9)
 - A declaration that a lover’s attraction can be even stronger than the splendor of so great a king as Solomon himself (e.g. 3:6-11; 8:11-12)
- All of these are cast in the form of musical poetry celebrating human love in a monogamous relationship as God’s good gift

Final Considerations

1. Try to appreciate the overall ethical context of Songs
 - Monogamous, heterosexual marriage was the proper context for sexual activity according to God’s revelation
 - Unfaithfulness is the antithesis of the book
2. Be aware of the genre of Songs
 - Its closest parallels are the love poetry of the Prophets & ANE
 - Which is rooted in marriage
 - These songs were sung routinely at wedding banquets
 - They had great meaning for those who sung them
3. Read Songs as suggesting godly choices, not merely describing them
 - Much like Proverbs, Songs carry truth as suggestions and generalizations, rather than precise statements of universal fact
4. Be aware that Songs focuses on very different values from those of modern culture
 - Songs focus on:
 - Romance over sex
 - Selflessness over self-indulgence
 - Faithfulness over desire
 - Romance as for all of marriage, not simply premarital