

Song of Songs

Title:

Author:

“Because he was rumored to have married hundreds of wives, many traditions inspired by Solomon’s presumed vast knowledge about romance and matters of the heart no doubt emerged over the centuries. Song of Songs was likely one such composition. Attributing the love poems to Solomon probably represents an attempt by the scribes to associate his work with the wisest and most notorious king in Israel’s history¹.”

Voices:

Main Voice:

Second Voice:

Other Voices:

What’s unique about Song of Songs?

¹ New Interpreters Commentary

Outline

Superscription 1:1 “Solomon’s Song of Songs”

Introduction 1:2-6

Dialogue between Lovers 1:7-2:7

Reminiscence 2:8-17

Loss and Discovery 3:1-5

Solomon’s Wedding Processional 3:6-11

Dialogue between Lovers 4:1-5:1

Dialogue between the Woman and the Daughters 5:2-6:3

Dialogue between Lovers 6:4-12

A dialogue 7:1-8:4

Appendixes 8:5-14²

Working through the Text

FOUR QUESTIONS

Why is this in the Bible?

² New Jerome Biblical Commentary

The mutuality and fidelity between lovers, the sensuousness of their relationship, their devotion to each other, clearly emerge from “The Song.” It is widely held that the sages of Israel are responsible for its preservation and transmission because they recognized a sound expression of the values of human love³.

There’s a passage in the book of First Corinthians where one of the writers of the Bible addresses this worldview. He confronts his audience with a challenge: Can they live for a higher purpose than just fulfilling their urges? He then claims that their bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God.” This is provocative language. A temple was a holy place, a place where the gods lived, a place where heaven and earth met. The writer specifically uses this image to challenge them with the idea that a human isn’t just a collection of urges and needs but is a being whom God resides in. He’s trying to elevate their thinking, to change their perspective, to open their eyes to a higher view of what it means to be a human. He’s asking them to consider that there’s more to life than the next fix⁴.

What is celebrated about love?

Our ability to love is the very quality that makes us most like God. We learn that it means to go to extraordinary lengths to reclaim our lovers. The search for a lover reminds those of us who read this poem with theological eyes how very precious love is⁵.

³ New Interpreters Commentary

⁴ *Sex God*, Rob Bell

⁵ New Interpreters Commentary

By luring those of us who are married into reliving our wedding day, and by enticing those not married to imagine that day, Song of Songs reminds us of what it means to pledge to live one's life with only one other individual. A man and a woman pledge to submit to each other and to expose his or her wounded self to each other for scrutiny and healing. We promise to allow our two lives to be melded into one brand new life together. The man and woman in Song of Songs remind us of how much passion, enthusiasm and utter idealism it takes to believe such things are even possible⁶.

How do we interpret this text?

“Currently scholarly opinion holds that the literal sense of “The Song” is the expression of human sexual love... However, one would not want to argue that the literal historical sense exhausts the meaning of “The Song.” Modern hermeneutical theory recognizes that any text has an afterlife, that it acquires meaning as it lives on in the community that treasures it. This does not mean a revival of the allegorical approach. Rather, it recognizes another dimension to human love - it shares somehow in divine love⁷.

What does it affirm?

Human love is nothing apart from _____.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. I John 4:7-10

⁶ New Interpreters Commentary

⁷ New Interpreters Commentary

Faith is a _____ that is sustained by _____.

Marriage is an apt metaphor for capturing the divine-human relationship because it captures best all the vicissitudes of trying to live faithfully and spontaneously with the Other. It is the closest bond possible for two human beings, one that teaches both partners lessons about grace, forgiveness, constancy, submission, and love... But this one glimpse into the protagonist's fantasy also reminds us of how preposterous, how unthinkable, how supernatural is the actual union that takes place, often years after the ceremony is over, when passion fades and true love a chance to emerge⁸.

Marriage itself is about something bigger than _____.

⁸ New Interpreters Commentary