

## Bible Study: Song of Songs or Song of Solomon (Canticles)

**Introduction:** This little book is not easy to interpret. There seems to be a number of views taken and therefore difficulty in finding out what God is saying. Nevertheless, whatever the problems there are in understanding this book, God had a purpose in including this book in the scriptures. The name of God is not found in this book.

The song has been written by King Solomon, writer of 1005 songs (**1 Kings ch4:32**). It has revealed to us what pure love should be between a man and a woman without any lust being expressed. There is an intimate relationship being shown by two people in love with each other. The Jewish rabbis say this is a very holy book calling it the Holy of Holies. It is a very sensual book where all five senses have been touched – smell, sight, touch, taste and hearing. It has been suggested by a prominent bible teacher that this song of Solomon was written to the wife of God's choice for him (See **Song of Songs ch6:8-9**).

There are several interpretations shown below:

- 1) The song reveals the love of Christ for his Church where Solomon is a type of Christ and the Shulamite woman is a type of church. This view shows the song to be an allegory.
- 2) Another view is to see this book as a protest against marital infidelity and unfaithfulness. There are two lovers; one being Solomon who approaches the Shulamite woman to woo her to become one of his wives but the Shulamite woman is not interested. She remains faithful to her shepherd lover. She does not want to be one of many wives to the polygamist King Solomon who eventually had 1000 wives (700 wives and 300 concubines – **1 Kings ch11:3**)! The setting shows references to a city and a palace as well as a rural setting to a shepherd. This song shows faithful love as God intended. God's order was monogamy not polygamy.
- 3) The Shulamite woman typifies the believing remnant of the nation of Israel in a day yet to come when the entire nation will be saved. Solomon is a type of Jesus Christ. There will be fellowship between the faithful believing remnant of Israel who have looked upon him (Jesus Christ) whom they have pierced and mourn for him as one mourning for an only son (**Zechariah ch12:10**). There will be pure love between Jesus Christ and his own people Israel when he returns to be King of the Jews in a Messianic Millennial reign of 1000 years on the earth (**Rev ch20:1-6**).
- 4) A fourth view which is popular today is to see the book as a means of encouragement to know true love and purity within the bond of holy matrimony. In the world there is much exploitation of sex without married love. This is a possible option and fits in well with **Genesis ch1:27** and **ch2:20-24**.

Whatever view is taken the Song of Songs has been used by believing couples on their wedding night to strengthen marriage.

It is helpful to read **Psalms 45** which is a song of love. This psalm may help you in the interpretation of the Song of Songs.

### Outline of the Song of Songs

In different versions of the bible the song is divided up into sections. This may well be helpful in what we need to know about the song. In the Revised Authorised Version there are sections with headings whilst the Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible shows the song divided into six songs. Both these versions have been put together to give a possible way of outlining this song as seen below. It is not the only way to look at this song in outline form.

**Chapter 1:1:** Title: The Song of Songs which is Solomon's.

**Chapter 1:2-2:7** First Song: The Banquet.

**Chapter 2:8-3:5** Second Song: (a) The beloved's request **ch2:8-17**.

(b) A troubled night **ch3:1-5**.

**Chapter 3:6-5:1** Third Song: The coming of Solomon.

**Chapter 5:2-6:3** Fourth Song: The Shulamite's troubled evening.

**Chapter 6:4-8:4** Fifth Song: (a) Praise of the Shulamite's beauty.

(b) Expression of praise.

**Chapter 8:5-14** Sixth Song: Love renewed in Lebanon.

Another outline has been put together by William MacDonald in his Bible Believers Commentary P921. He takes the view that Solomon has tried to woo the Shulamite women to become one of his wives, but she refuses. She is faithful to her shepherd lover and goes off to their country village to be married and to live there happily ever after. This is how it appears:

- 1) Title (**ch1:1**)
- 2) The Shulamite in Solomon's court thinks of her absent shepherd lover and tells the court ladies about him and about herself (**ch1:2-8**).
- 3) Solomon woos the Shulamite maiden but she is deaf to his flattery (**ch1:9-2:6**).
- 4) The maiden's charge to the daughters of Jerusalem (**ch2:7**).
- 5) The Shulamite reminisces about a visit from her shepherd lover, interrupted by orders from her brothers to get to work (**ch2:8-17**).
- 6) The maiden dreams of a rendezvous with her beloved (**ch3:1-4**).
- 7) Repetition of charge to daughters of Jerusalem (**ch3:5**).
- 8) Solomon's procession arrives at Jerusalem (**ch3:6-11**).
- 9) Again, Solomon seeks to win the maiden, but she is impervious to his charms (**ch4:1-6**).
- 10) The young shepherd arrives and appeals to the maiden to leave Jerusalem for the home they have planned in the country, and she expresses her willingness (**ch4:7-5:1**).
- 11) The Shulamite recalls a disturbing dream in which she missed seeing him because of her lethargy (**ch5:2-8**).
- 12) On inquiry by the court ladies, she extols the beauties of her beloved, making them want to see him too (**ch5:9-6:3**).
- 13) Solomon renews his amorous appeals (**ch6:4-10**).
- 14) She explains to the court ladies the unexpected way in which she was brought to the palace (**ch6:11-13**).
- 15) Solomon's final approach proves to be in vain (**ch7:1-10**).
- 16) She converses with her shepherd lover who has arrived to take her away (**ch7:11-8:2**).
- 17) Final charge to the daughters of Jerusalem (**ch8:3-4**).
- 18) The couple arrive in their country village, exchange their vows, and live happily ever after (**ch8:5-14**).

Some versions of the bible such as the New King James Version show us who is speaking as shown below.

- 1) Shulamite (Identity known from Song of Songs ch6:13).  
See **ch1:2-4a; ch1:4c; ch1:4e-7; ch1:12-14; ch1:16-2:1; ch2:3-14; ch2:16-3:11; ch4:16; ch5:2-8; ch5:10-16; ch6:2-3; ch11-12; ch6:13b; ch7:9b-8:4; ch8:6-7; Ch8:10-12; ch8:14**.
- 2) The daughters of Jerusalem. See **ch1:4b; ch1:4d; ch1:11; ch5:9; ch6:1**.
- 3) The beloved (Could be Solomon and the shepherd lover and hence two men rather than one). See **ch1:8-10; ch1:15; ch2:2; ch4:1-15; ch5:1; ch6:4-10; ch6:13b (with friends); ch7:1-9a; ch8:13**.
- 4) Brothers of the Shulamite. See **ch2:15; ch8:8-9**.
- 5) A relative. See **ch8:5**.

The following words are significant in the Song of Songs:

- 1) Love: See **ch1:2,3,4(twice),9,15; ch2:2,4,5,7,10,13; ch3:5,10; ch4:1,7,10(twice); ch5:2,8; ch6:4; ch7:6; ch8:4,6,7(twice)**. This word is used 27 times which is more than in any other book in the Old Testament. See also "loves" in **ch7:12** and "loveth" in **ch1:7; ch3:1,2,3,4**.
- 2) Beloved: See **ch1:14,16; ch2:3,8,9,10,16,17; ch4:16; ch5:1,2,4,5,6,8,9(twice),10,16; ch6:1(twice),2,3; ch7:9,11,13; ch8:5,14**. This word is used 28 times in this book which is more than in any other books of the bible.
- 3) The name, Solomon: See **ch1:1,5; ch3:7,9,11; ch8:11,12**.

## Questions on the Songs of Songs

The following questions have been put together to help bible students to think through the text and to come to a better understanding of this book which does not appear easy to interpret. However, if we are diligent in seeking the Lord to understand this book he will give further revelation if we persevere in studying the text. It is recommended where you can to have a small home group to work through all or some of the questions together. It is helpful to read the text through at least once and even better several times prior to a small group bible study. In this way everyone can bring a contribution to what they understand from the text.

**Q1)** Read **Psalm 45** and discuss whether it is helpful in interpreting the Song of Songs.

**Q2)** Looking carefully at the text, what evidence is shown that the beloved could

be: a) Soloman: Read **ch3:6-11; ch4:1-15; ch5:1; ch6:4-10.**

b) The shepherd lover: Read **ch1:7,8,14; ch2:16; ch6:2-3; ch7:11-13.**

**Q3)** What do we know about the Shulamite woman?

Read **ch1:5-6; ch6:11; ch7:11-12.**

**Q4)** Do you think the Shulamite woman has been brought to the palace of Soloman to become one of his harem (set of wives and concubines).

**Q5)** Show verses that reveal the setting at a palace and in a city.

Read **ch1:4,12; ch2:4-5; ch3:1-3; ch5:6-8.**

**Q6)** If Soloman is a lover of the Shulamite who tried unsuccessfully to woo her, is it true to say he found her to be of exception quality above all his wives? Read **ch6:8-9.**

**Q7)** Show the evidence for a rural setting. Read **ch2:3; ch7:11-13.**

**Q8)** What can we learn about the vineyard mentioned several times in the text?

Read **ch1:6; ch2:13,15; ch6:11; ch7:12; ch8:8,11-12.**

**Q9)** Find verses that show evidence of the senses being used – smell, touch, taste, sight and hearing. Read **ch1:3,12-15; ch2:6; ch4:12-15; ch5:13; ch8:13.**

**Q10)** What idioms (expressions of language) are used in the Songs of Songs?

Read **ch1:14-15; ch2:1-2,14; ch4:1-5; ch5:11-15; ch6:5-7; ch8:14.**

**Q11)** Is there a spiritual lesson to be learnt from **ch5:2-8** where the Shulamite woman has a dream of a missed opportunity for fellowship with her beloved?

**Q12)** What does **ch1:7** and **ch3:5** show about love? You should study different versions of the bible. The New King James Version says: "Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases". What would have happened if Israel had done what **ch1:7** and **ch3:5** said?

**Q13)** Discuss the love between the Shulamite woman and her lover. Do these scriptures show us the intimacy all believers should have with the Lord?

Read **ch1:2,15; ch2:2,4,10,16; ch3:1-4; ch4:7-10; ch5:6-8; ch6:3; ch7:6,10.**

**Q14)** What could be the message of the Song of Songs? Is it an appeal for monogamy and faithfulness to the God-given ideal of love and marriage?

Copyright: Richard A. Peacock 2012

*Under the terms of this copyright readers are permitted and encouraged to replicate and distribute this material so long as the original authorship is acknowledged and is accepted that the author is not liable for any damage incurred by such activities nor is he liable for the conduct, the doctrinal stance or financial affairs of those parties engaged in those activities.*