

## Song of Songs Introduction

### **TITLE**

The title comes from the first two words of the book in Hebrew are ***sir hassirim*** (“song songs”)

- This is the same Hebrew word used twice, but the difference is the first one is singular (***sir***) and the second one is plural (***hassirim***).
- The repeated word makes the phrase a superlative, which means it is greater than any other possible level. In the English superlatives are typically formed with the suffix **-est** (e.g. *strongest, tallest*) or by using the word **most** (*most ancient, most talented*).
- Two other examples in the Hebrew text are:
  - Exodus 29:37 – “Holy of Holies”
  - Deuteronomy 10:14 – “heaven of heavens”
  - Genesis 9:25 - “servant of servants”
  - Ecclesiastes 1:2 – “utterly meaningless”
- Thus, this book could be titled “The Best Song” or “The Song at the Top of the Charts”
  - In fact Luther’s German translation and all German translations since call this book Hoheleid which means “the best song.”

Other titles that are used include:

- Song of Solomon
  - Comes from the subscript that follows the first two words:
    - ***sir hassirim ser lislomoh***
    - The subscript is made of ser and a preposition (***le***) attached to Solomon’s name (***slomoh***)
    - The preposition ***le*** can mean:
      - To...
      - By...
      - Concerning....
      - Or, be referring to the book “Song of Songs” as “Solomonic” in character along with other Solomonic writings: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and other wisdom literature.
- Canticles
  - Comes from the Latin Vulgate’s title of this book ***Canticum Canticorum*** which again means, Song of Songs.

### **Megillot Scrolls**

- Megillot Scrolls are five books associated with a Jewish feast.
- Ruth
- Lamentations –
- Ecclesiastes –
- Esther –
- Song of Songs – is read on the eighth day of Passover. The association with Song of Songs with Passover is likely due to the allegorical approach to the book that began after the return from exile. One allegorical approach is to begin the Song associated with the Exodus and continue until the Messiah comes.

### **Authorship**

- Tradition always connects the Song of Songs with Solomon either as the writer or the one to whom the song was dedicated to by a court musician.

- The tradition of the Rabbis is that Solomon wrote three works during his life:
  - Song of Songs in his youth
  - Proverbs in his middle age
  - Ecclesiastes as an old man
- Defense for Solomon as the author of Song of Songs:
  - The Song refers to wealth and international trade which match the reign of Solomon
  - The natural way to read the superscript could be argued is "...by Solomon"
  - Solomon was known for "love" and/or sex
  - 1 Kings 4:29-34 refers to Solomon's writing and says "his songs numbered a thousand and five."
- Rejection of Solomon's authorship:
  1. Some would say too much of the language and words are from the Persian and Greek period. But, this is not a solid argument:
    - We do not know the necessary details of how the Hebrew language developed.
    - The old concept that the Song had Aramaic phrases, which is said to have entered the Hebrew culture during the exile, was proven wrong with the discovery of Aramaic dated around 1000 BC. Even David had contact with the Aramaic according to 2 Samuel 8:5-8.
    - It is possible that our Hebrew text had been updated over the 1,000 year period between Solomon and the Masoretic Text which developed around 200-400 AD (our earliest fragment is 900 AD)
  2. The topic of the Song is that of a one-woman man and a one-man woman. This is not Solomon's experience.
  3. Solomon is mentioned by name in only three verses, and he is NOT the one writing or talking.
    - a. 1:3 – Solomon's tents are described
    - b. 3:6-11 – Solomon's wedding is described
    - c. 8:11-12 – Solomon is ridiculed for buying love. (A set of verses most likely not written by Solomon.)
  4. All of the Wisdom books may have had multiple authors referred to as "the wise men" (Proverbs :22:17; 24:23; 30:1; 31:1; 1:1; 10:1; 25:1 and Ecclesiastes written by Qohelet)

## Diversity of opinions for interpretation:

1. Allegory
2. Typology - Solomon typifies Christ, etc. This view makes this a historical account with eschatological fulfillment
3. Drama involving two main characters (man and woman)
4. Drama involving three main characters (king, woman, shepherd)
5. Collection of Syrian weddings songs where the groom is the king and the bride is his queen
6. Anthology of disconnected songs celebrating human love

## Allegory

- Jewish tradition supported by the Mishnah, Talmud and Targum
- Church leaders followed (Hyppolytus, Origen, Jerome, Athanasius, Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux)
- 1:5-6 – “dark skin” refers to church’s sin, but the beauty refers to spiritual position in Christ.
- 2:12 – The cooing of the doves is the apostles preaching
- 5:1 – is the Lord’s Supper
- 4:5 and 7:8 – the woman’s breasts are:
  - The church from which we feed
  - The Old and the New Testaments
  - The twin concepts: Love your God and Love your Neighbor
  - The blood and the water
  - The inner man and the outer man
- The wine is the written Torah and the milk from the breasts is the oral Torah
- The wine is good teaching of the Law and Prophets and the milk from the breasts is the teaching of the Bridegroom (Jesus)
- Reasons to leave allegory
  - The church lost its authority to force the allegorical view with the coming of the renaissance and enlightenment
  - This Song of Songs matches the Egyptian love poems written during the days of Solomon. Also, Mesopotamia and Ugarit have similar songs/poems.
  - The language and style is similar to Arab weddings throughout history
  - Modern world has a new appreciation for the body and more free to stare sexuality in the face without calling it sin.
  - Man is not only a soul or a spirit, but man is also a physical body created by God.

## Drama

- But, this type of drama was unknown in Israel
- There are NO acts or scenes like a drama.
- Drama Idea #1, Some see a progression that include:
  - Courtship – 1:2-3:5
  - Wedding – 3:6-5:1
  - Marriage Bed – 5:2-8:4
  - Mature statement about love – 8:8-14
- Drama Idea #2
  - 1:1-2:7 – Bride longs for lover. They meet.
  - 2:8-3:11 – love grows and the girl praises each man
  - 4:1-5:1 – the man praises the girl
  - 5:2-6:3 – man disappears and girls longs for him
  - 6:4-8:14 – lover returns in splendor and marries the girl
- Drama Idea #3, Solomon incognito

- King Solomon loves a girl in the northlands
- Solomon goes undercover as a shepherd and wins her love
- Solomon returns to Jerusalem to get his chariot and rides out revealing himself as the king to the girl
- The girl and Solomon get married and celebrate love.

### **An Anthology of love poems**

- **an-thol-o-gy** /an'THäləjē/ - noun – a published collection of poems or other pieces of writing.
- An **anthology** is a collection of literary works chosen by the compiler. It may be a collection of poems, short stories, plays, songs, or excerpts.
- Problems that challenge the Anthology approach:
  - Same characters throughout the book
  - Similar expressions and figures of speech throughout book: wine, perfumes, cheeks, eyes, does, teeth, daughters of Jerusalem, gazelle, Lebanon
  - Peculiar Hebrew grammar
  - Progression of the subject matter: Courtship – Wedding – Consummation

An Anthological Breakdown of the potential poems/songs collected in Song of Songs:

## **Song of Songs – Lyrical Breakdown of Collected Poems**

(adapted from NICOT's commentary on Song of Songs by Tremper Longman III)

- Poem One – 1:2-4, The Woman's Pursuit
- Poem Two – 1:5-6, Dark, yet Beautiful
- Poem Three – 1:7-8, Invitation #1
- Poem Four – 1:9-11, A Beautiful Mare
- Poem Five – 1:12-14, Fragrances
- Poem Six – 1:15-17, Outdoors
- Poem Seven – 2:1-7, Flowers and Trees
- Poem Eight – 2:8-17, Springtime
- Poem Nine – 3:1-5, Seeking #1
- Poem Ten – 3:6-11, Description of a Royal Wedding Procession
- Poem Eleven – 4:1-7, Man's Description of the Woman
- Poem Twelve – 4:8-9, Invitation #2
- Poem Thirteen – 4:10-5:1, Eating in the "Garden"
- Poem Fourteen – 5:2-6:3, Seeking #2
- Poem Fifteen – 6:4-10, Awesome as an Army under Banners
- Poem Sixteen – 6:11-12, A Surprise in the Nut Grove
- Poem Seventeen – 6:13-7:10, Description of the Dancing Shulammitte
- Poem Eighteen – 7:11-13, I Will Give You My Love
- Poem Nineteen – 8:1-4, Desiring Love
- Poem Twenty – 8:5-7, The Seal
- Poem Twenty-one – 8:8-10, Protecting the Sister
- Poem Twenty-two – 8:11-12, Who Owns this Vineyard
- Poem Twenty-three – 8:13-14, Be Like a Gazelle

# Song of Songs – verse by verse comments

## Superscription

1:1

- Equal to the title page of a printed book providing the author, the genre, date and subject
- This is also seen in Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 1:1-3; Nahum 1:1
- There is no mention of God and no mention of any message from God

Two lines:

### 1. *Sir hassirim*

- a. As in “vanity of vanities, Eccl. 1:2; “holy of holies”, Exod. 29:37; “heaven of heavens”, Deut. 10:14; “servant of servants”, Gen. 9:25

### 2. *Ser lis lomoh* = “which concerns Solomon” (or, “of Solomon”, “to Solomon”, “by Solomon”)

## Poem One – 1:2-4, The Woman’s Pursuit

- The song begins in the midst of a relationship and in the midst of a conversation with a rush of words.
- The woman is the initiator in this verse and throughout the song. The woman speaks 53% of the time and the man speaks 39% of the time, but mostly *ABOUT* the woman. This is NOT characteristic of the way the church or religion portrays the role of women. There is NO support for the male dominance over female role.
- The characters are not presented as historical people
- The poem may not carry a narrative.
- It seems to simply be expressing the emotions and desires of love between a man and a woman

1:2

- The woman does NOT say “I will kiss him”, but instead she gives him suggestions – “let him kiss me.”
- Kissing is compared to drinking wine in the way the wine can intoxicate and kissing can arouse. The result is the man is lightheaded.

1:3

- Men wore aromatic oils that gave their bodies fragrance like colognes do today.
- The man’s name is his reputation which is good.
- The woman’s excellent choice of a man is confirmed by the other woman impression of him.
- “maidens” or “young women” is from *lamot* which indicates sexual ripeness without an opinion of having sexual experience or being virgin.

1:4

- “King” has been understood to be a reference to:
  - God (for Israel)
  - Jesus (for Christian)
  - Solomon
  - the name a lover or bride would call her man...to the woman he is the most excellent, powerful man and worthy of honor. (later she calls him a shepherd, another term of love)
- “let us hurry!” is from the verb *rus* (meaning “run”)...this is another invitation for him to hurry to be with her

- “bedroom” is from **heder** which is a private place. She is asking him to take her into his bedroom for sexual intimacy. It is difficult to see this a pre-wedding activity if a person is reading this song as a narrative or a drama.
  - **Heder** is used in other OT stories: Samson and Delilah, Jud. 15:1; David and Abishag, 1 Kings 15:1; Joel 2:16, “Let the bridegroom leave his **heder** and the bride her chamber (**huppa**)”
- Once they are in the heder celebration breaks out. These words, “We rejoice and delight” may NOT be the third part (chorus), but is still the woman speaking to the man in third person.

**Poem Two – 1:5-6, Dark, yet Beautiful**

1:5

1:6

**Poem Three – 1:7-8, Invitation #1**

1:7

1:8

**Poem Four – 1:9-11, A Beautiful Mare**

1:9

1:10

1:11