

The Message of the Old Testament

A Book-by-Book Study

Song of Solomon

Song of Solomon: Background and Introduction

1:1---The Song of Songs which is Solomon's

The meaning of this verse is not certain. It may mean that this is a song by Solomon, about Solomon, or it could even mean that this is a song presented in the honor of Solomon. For that reason we should regard this book as of unknown authorship but probably written under the reign of or during the life of Solomon. These elements do not affect interpreting the book.

Song of Solomon follows Proverbs and Ruth in the canonical order of the Hebrew Bible. The Song carries forward matters which emerge in the three books. Paul House writes,

Throughout Proverbs love for one's wife and avoidance of wicked women are emphasized repeatedly. The book concludes with a long and challenging description of a virtuous _____ who fears the Lord and serves family and community flawlessly (Proverbs 31:10-31). Ruth depicts not one but two virtuous women who love Yahweh, love one another and serve their community. Boaz proves his wisdom by marrying Ruth and caring for Naomi. Song of Solomon completes the cycle begun in Proverbs 31. If Proverbs 31 highlights sound advice on seeking a suitable mate and Ruth demonstrates the way God brings the righteous together for marriage, then Song of Solomon illustrates free and passionate love between a man and a woman." (Old Testament Theology, 464)

Interpreters have taken various _____ to understanding the book. Some approach it as an allegory and some as typology. But in that it is included among the books of wisdom literature, Song of Solomon appears to be intended as a very _____ book of wisdom addressing specifically the nature of human love in relation to God. It is the type of love God counsels every couple to emulate.

Song of Solomon: Outline

- I. The Couple Declares Their Love (1:2-2:7)
- II. The Couple Strongly Desires One Another (2:8-3:5)
- III. The Couple Commits to One Another in Marriage (3:6-5:1)
- IV. The Couple Is Unwilling to Accept Separation Patiently (5:2-6:3)
- V. The Couple Extols One Another's Virtues (6:4-8:4)
- VI. The Couple's Commitment Is Permanent (8:5-14)

The Message of the Song of Solomon

The Couple Declares Their Love

1:2-3a---Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine; your anointing oils are fragrant; your name is oil poured out.

7---tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock . . .

1:8-9---If you do not know, O most beautiful of women, follow in the tracks of the flock . . . I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots.

2:2---As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women.

2:3---As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow , and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

The Couple Strongly Desires One Another

2:8-14---

3:1-4---

This couple believe life is _____ when lived in one another's presence or even when imagining themselves _____. The absence of the beloved is the chief barrier to happiness in life, as far as they are concerned. (House, 466)

The Couple Commits to One Another in Marriage

3:9-11---You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

The Couple Is Unwilling to Accept Separation Patiently

5:2-5---

The Couple Extols One Another's Virtues

He adores her.

6:4-6---

She will gladly love and be loved.

7:10-13---

The Couple's Commitment Is Permanent

A pledge of permanence _____ the couple's love. "Love must amount to a seal on the heart, be as strong as death, as unquenchable as an everlasting flame and cherished more than wealth." (House,468)

8:6-7---

In the context of the Bible as a whole, this book addresses the matters of marriage and sexuality in such a way to demonstrate divine approval and affirmation of God's making humans male and female with the capacity and drive for intimate relationships. The context for this intimacy is within the union of man and wife. In the marriage context it is good to delight and enjoy relational intimacy and physical intimacy. Such delight becomes a living illustration of God's love for his people. Sin wrecks the union and the intimacy.

Ecclesiastes

Background and Introduction

Title. A strange title: Ecclesiastes. It means “The Teacher” or “The Preacher” Qoheleth in Hebrew; ekklēsiastēs in Greek (someone who addresses an assembly).

Author. In light of the book’s anonymity and the difficulty in using linguistic evidence to establish its date of composition, it is best simply to recognize that some interpreters have concluded the author was Solomon, while others think it was some other writer later than Solomon. Regardless, the book claims that its wisdom ultimately comes from the “one Shepherd.” (ESV Study Bible, Introduction to Ecclesiastes).

Wisdom. As one of the books of wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes engages with the nature of human existence much as does the book of Job. Here it is not _____ associated with _____ but a sense of meaninglessness associated with _____.

Outline

- I. Prologue: All is Vanity (1:1-11)
- II. Monologue: Musings about life, God, and death (1:12-12:8)
- III. Epilogue: Fear God (12:9-14)

The Message of the Book

What is Vanity (meaningless)?

1:1-11

The introduction makes the point that nothing is new and nothing changes. People labor seemingly to no purpose. Generations come and go and all continues as it did. Existence seems to be stuck in a rut. Everything just seems to continue on just like it did. Thus all the energy expended is to no _____. Everything is meaningless.

► Some obvious things that are meaningless:

5:7a— _____ and running off at the mouth
For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity.

6:9---Unsettled desires

Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this is also vanity and a striving after wind.

7:6---laughter of _____

For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this is also vanity.

8:14---injustice

There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are _____ people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the _____, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

► Some less obvious things that are meaningless:

2:1— _____
I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity.

2:2-11---

► Some good things that are meaningless:

1:16-17— _____
I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.

11:10---Youth and Vigor
youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

5:10---Work and the _____ it brings
He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

Why is everything meaningless?

A clue

1:11---There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.

If you are forgotten when you are gone then what use is it? Not even those to come will be remembered. The Teacher "looks out upon generations still unborn, envisions their lives and deaths, and then contemplates the forgetfulness of still later generations. In the same way the physical vastness of the universe can make people feel displaced, insignificant, and finally _____, so the Teacher perceives the vastness of time swallowing up any meaning that could be found in the miniscule spans of our lives." (Dever, 537)

2:13-16---The same _____ overtakes all people

3:18-20---The same fate overtakes people as _____

So what?

1:14---I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

The _____ to understanding the message of the book of Ecclesiastes is the phrase, "under the sun." It occurs _____ times in this the book. To view things "under the sun" is to look at them from an exclusively earthy perspective. It is to look at life _____ from God. Looking at life this way leads to but one conclusion: Everything is vanity; all is meaningless!

But there is more. Dever writes, "There is more to life than what we find under the sun, and God has not made us to be _____ with this world alone. As the Teacher says, 'God has "set eternity" in our hearts' (3:11). Yes our lives are lived out under the sun, but our hearts' desires stretch infinitely beyond the horizon. Eternity goes beyond the sphere of what is under this sun." (Dever, 542)

Life viewed from the perspective of this world is vanity. What makes life meaningful is the fact that it is actually to be viewed from the perspective of God. After all, life is lived before Him.

12:13-14---The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Dever writes,

It is because God the Author will finally evaluate what we do that life has _____. In the same way that a book cannot read itself, you and I cannot give meaning to our own lives. We were created by someone bigger than us, for his purposes and for his ends. _____ from him can we learn meaning and truth." (Dever, 542)

The message of Ecclesiastes is how to live above depression in a very depressing world. And the answer is to look at life from the perspective of _____.

12:1---Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say "I have no pleasure in them."