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The Song of Solomon

Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go till I had brought him to my mother's house, to the room of the one who conceived me. Song of Solomon 3:4

How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead. Song of Solomon 4:1

The Song of Solomon Key verses: 3:4; 4:1; 8:6-7

Key personalities: Solomon, Shulamite girl

Timeline, about 970- 930 B.C. During the time of the early Israelites, the areas were ruled by the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Dorians, and the Assyrians were coming up, the Iron Age is at hand, and bronze is still in the majority of weapons and farming tools. Hinduism's main writings--the Vedic texts--are being formed; China becomes more unified and develops organized armies while massive earthquakes destroy most of the cities in the Mediterranean.

The Book of Song of Solomon, sometimes called the *Song of Songs* (superlative referring to the greater song) or *Canticles* (Latin, for "song") because the ecstatic rhyme and poetry are like a series of wedding songs to his favorite wife. This was probably written before Ecclesiastes. Like Ecclesiastes, it is a set of didactic instructions, the morals of real life, and the discovery of the more that God has for us. Its author is Solomon, and it is an autobiographical opus about Solomon, who had hundreds of wives and many more concubines; however, he had only the love of one woman and the joys and tribulations of true love. This is a book on how intimacy and love works best and is effectual in the covenant of marriage. This is also about the tensions in relationships and the discovery of what is important and what is not--how love can be emotional and our relationships irrational, yet true love is greater than the lust of human desire and failed experiences.

Theme: This is also the only Book in the Bible that has love for its main theme, with deep affection and romance written in poetry, further cementing this theme. One of the themes is God's love of His Chosen People that points us to Christ's love for His Bride, the Church.

Key Happening: A look at the Book of Love

Most people go to the Song of Solomon with confusion and see it as humor rather than instructions about real love. The imagery is set in an ancient agrarian culture that sees beauty in the land and herds of animals. These were (and are) very important, and it makes sense to compare one's love to things of such import. Yet, we can learn a lot from the *Song of Solomon*; it has the language of a love song or poetry. You may not fully understand the language, and your mind may fixate on *how beautiful can a flock of goats be!*? Just remember, in the Hellenistic culture, these images were beautiful.

Many scholars see this book as a collection of various love poetry, either written by, and/or collected by Solomon. This poetry expresses an intimate expression of true love to one's love of his life—Solomon to his love, a humble maiden, a Shulamite girl. It chronicles his adventure of love, through all of the joys and tribulations of courtship, to marriage. Jewish tradition sees this book as God's love for Israel, while Christians, through the centuries, saw this as God's love for the church.

- **Shulamite girl.** A woman of beauty both inward and outward who was able to attract the attention of a king who had the enormous resources of hundreds of the best women from around the world. The Shulamite girl was from humble means, the daughter of a vineyard keeper (the name refers to her home town). The rest of Solomon's wives were part of political arrangements; the women had separate housing, and he had concubines (basically slave girls) but a heart for one (Gen. 38:14-15; 1 Kings 1:3-15; 2:17-22; Song of Sol. 5:9; 6:1, 13).

This book gives us sensual romance without the smut, by being respectful to women by using metaphors for even more excitement than sexual word play. This points us to the importance and wonder of a commitment of love that lasts. It tells us that real love is in the relationship and not the fantasy and ecstasy. As God's love lasts for us, our love must last for our spouse in the sanctity of marital love. This book does not shy away from the difficulties and realities of love and commitment, which makes for us an even more wondrous example from which to learn.

The Song of Solomon's application precepts for us:

1. **Respect and honor the divine institution of marriage.** It is not to be taken lightly or for granted. It is not something that is temporary until something or someone better comes along. It is the uniting of one man and one woman in love, a romance that lasts, even through the difficult times. Solomon started out in this mindset and practice, but eventually succumbed to hundreds of wives and concubines. All he could think of was this one woman and the regret in all of the mistakes he made!
2. **This book translates to us a model for dating.** It is an example on how we can be better at dating. We need to look at the person for whom they really are, and seek them because of that, rather than for lusting or for physical pleasures, which will only hide the real person.
3. **This book translates to us a model for marriage.** The stable love for one person is far superior to the lust and love of a thousand! Thus, the willingness and commitment to make it work, regardless of the ups and downs of life, are worth it when we value, respect, and cherish each other. No lust, or satisfaction of that lust, is better than the love of the person God brings you! We gain the insight of the importance of marriage's staying power and sacredness.
4. **We all have a deep need for personal attention.** Real romance woos, cares, shares, values; this is the love in action through understanding, forgiving, listening, and protecting while being cultivated and nurtured over time with real commitment.
5. **Sex is designed for a proper place and time.** God made sex. In and of itself, sex is not evil or bad. However, it has the potential for great destruction. Outside of God's design, sex becomes damaging, evil, brutal. Outside of God's design, sex distorts real love and causes conflict-ridden relationships, disillusionment, and hurt.
6. **Sex is not evil.** Sex is not just for the promulgation of our gene pool, nor is it to be feared when it is in the confines of a relationship between a loving husband and wife. A lot of misguided Christians, especially in the Victorian period, saw the abuses of sex, and they overreacted to say it is always evil unless you use it just to have children. This stance is not based in Scripture, but is rooted in ignorance and apprehension. Sex is to be embraced and exercised. We are called to romance our spouse.

The Song of Solomon gives us a good model for dating and marriage with the attitude of romance and getting to know the real person without the pretensions and games that create distrust and hurt! If a marriage is defiled, it sets us up for all kinds of problems. Communication, trust, and relationship-building becomes difficult or is lost altogether. This is not because God has unattainable standards, but because He knows what works, what is best, and what we should avoid (Hebrews 13:4).

The Bible calls us to purity within marriage. When we get too physical and do not set up standards for ourselves, we allow ourselves to be tricked into false intimacy. Thus, the real romance becomes skewed and lost, and our wonder, our real excitement—what is best—becomes defiled. That is why God wants us righteous with our current and future relationships, so when we are married, we will have a more solid marriage that will last, grow, and be much happier and joyful for us. Remember, God is the author of sexuality. In addition, He desires the expression of exclusive intimacy to be between a husband and wife. Adultery and premarital sex will ruin our current and future relationships.

The Song of Solomon tells us that romance and attraction build over time. Older couples in a growing relationship with Christ say their love has increased over the years—not decreased!

A Book about sex? The Song of Solomon is not a book on sex; however, it does contain a theology of sexuality. Its purpose, intent, and warnings against the misuse of sex are evident and portrayed with a beautiful picture of true love and intimacy. The Bible does tell us about sex, and it is not information that is out of touch, archaic, or irrelevant; rather, this information is timeless because relationships are timeless! The same frustrations and struggles have existed since Adam and Eve bit into the apple. What the people in the Bible went through, we go through. Whatever we go through, those who come after will also experience. And, since God is the Creator and Sustainer, we know that He has a better way for us, even on the subject of sex. This way can be found from the precepts of His Word!

Sex is a Bond. God's calls us to fullness in marriage; He lets us know that sex is sacred and meant for a specific unity and purpose. Submission from the husband out of love and from the wife by respect is important and meant for one person in the context of a unity that equals the sex life God meant for us, which is the best for us. A symbiotic love relationship is taught so that as a man loves a woman, she respects him because of his love for her. This submission is a love in itself that becomes as "*one flesh*." Literally, it means our souls are tied together. This means the union of sex is to be between a man and a woman who are committed to each other for life in the covenant of marriage. This becomes a union from the Greek syntax, a union that should not be broken. So, our union with our spouse is meant to be a permanent as well as an intimate bond (Eph. 2:4-7; 5:21-32).

What the Bible Says About Sex and Romance: Proverbs 6:25-29; Matthew 5: 27-32; 19:4; Romans 1: 27; 8; Ephesians 4:19-24; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 John 2:16-17

- Sex is a Bond: Genesis 2:24-25; 34:1-3, 8; Proverbs 5:15 -22; Romans 8:12-17; 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20; 7:3-5; 2 Corinthians 10:5-6; Ephesians 1:3; 2:4-10; 5:30-32; Colossians 3:1-4; Hebrews 13:4
- Knowing That God Made Me: Genesis 2; Matthew 19:4
- Sex: Genesis 2:24; Exodus 20: 14; 17; Job 31:1; Proverbs 5:15- 21; 6:25-29; Song of Solomon; Matthew 5: 27-28; 19:5; John 14: 21-24; Ephesians 5:23-33; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9; Ephesians 4:19; 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:7-12
- God's Standards: Ruth 4:8-10; 1 Peter 3:7-12
- Lust: Proverbs 6:25-29; Job 31:1; Matthew 5: 27-32; 19:4; Romans 1: 27; 8:12-17; Ephesians 1:3; 2:4-10; 4:19-24; Colossians 3:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 John 2:16-17
- Marriage: 1 Corinthians 7:1-7; Ephesians 5:22-33

God considers unity in relationships as exceptionally sacred and important—nothing to mess around with! If you do not take this seriously, you will be full of regret, guilt, and remorse for the actions caused and inflicted upon others. People begin to wonder why sex lives with their spouses is not like it was when they were first messing around. The reason for this is simple: messing around messed it up. Sex forms a bond with another being, and if that person is not your spouse, that bond is formed anyway and stays with you for life—you are now bonded with someone who was never meant for you. This steals the sacredness from the person it was meant for! Yes, there is forgiveness, healing, and God's grace; but, the consequences may remain, including disease and brokenness that takes a significant amount of work to overcome—if it can be overcome.

Key Takeaway: We are called to a Christ-centered relationship! Allow the precepts of this neglected book from God's Word to motivate you on the importance of romance, commitment, and the value of a lasting and growing relationship. Allow this book to warn you of the mistake and regret that Solomon made by not following his own wise advice. Do not be the person who looks back at his or her life with shame and regret. Yes, God will forgive; but, why put yourself in that position? Be committed, be romantic, and be the Christian who loves and values and is loved and esteemed (Prov. 5:23; Song of Sol. 2:8)!

The foreshadow of Jesus Christ? The Song of Solomon is the model of God's love for Israel and the Church. We follow this model in both the preparation for marriage and in marriage when we have proper union. It has the core elements of redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace--all of which Christ the Bridegroom did for us. It tells us how the relationship between a husband and wife should be! Remember, God sees marriage and the church as sacred institutions. This is also an illustration that as followers of Christ, we have a profound friendship with Him; we are His servants, protectors, and heralds. When we acknowledge this sacredness, we develop a more vigorous respect for and a response to motivate, encourage, and foster its development and care. When we view it as archaic, we demean the real value, power, and importance of sex, thus creating all kinds of problems down the line (Song of Sol. John 3:22-36)!

Questions to Ponder

1. How would you put your wedding vows to song?
2. What does the Book of Song of Solomon teach you about relationships? Sex? Romance? What was your takeaway?
3. How does the world see intimacy and love? Why do they not see that it is only effectual in the covenant of marriage?
4. Why do people, including many Christians, give up on godly values and cave in to desperation and desire when it comes to dating and even marriage?
5. Why do some of God's redeemed just strut their way through life in hurt and confusion over romance?
6. What have you learned about dating in your life experience? Compare that to the Song of Solomon.
7. God sees marriage and the church as sacred institutions. What happens when we do not?
8. What happens when we give up or are just seeking someone—anyone--and choose not to follow God's precepts?
9. What can the church do to help people looking for love to *get it*?
10. What can the church do to help people in dysfunctional relationships and not pass those dysfunctions on to their children, and so on, and so on?
11. How can you make your marriage be wonderful, romantic and solid?
12. How can you prevent yourself and other from being statistics, imprisoned in a stifling world of chaos, when God has such a better plan for you?