

Session 1 Introduction to Studying the Song: Why and How? Additional Study Materials

I. ANSWERS TO THE FILL-IN THE BLANKS FOR THIS SESSION

One of the greatest needs in the body of Christ today is to understand JESUS' LOVE.

I highlight two distinctives that are emphasized in the Song—God's EMOTIONS for His people and the FIRST COMMANDMENT. By being students of God's emotions, we will see more of God's love.

The Song sets forth in a poetic way some of the key principles that we need to grow in LOVE AND PARTNERSHIP with Jesus.

It sets forth principles that honor the BEAUTY OF LOVE WITHIN MARRIAGE.

This view employs a symbolic interpretation of the Song to emphasize the Lord's relationship with His people as THE BRIDEGROOM KING.

Jesus spoke of Himself to the disciples on the Emmaus road from ALL THE SCRIPTURES.

Jesus is return for a Church established in her BRIDAL IDENTITY before Him (Rev. 22:17).

The essence of the message of the Bride of Christ is the revelation of Jesus' beauty, His emotions for us, His commitments to SHARE His heart, throne, secrets, and beauty with us as our Bridegroom King...

King Solomon: in the spiritual interpretation King Solomon is a picture of the triumphant Christ as THE BRIDEGROOM KING who possesses all power and yet is filled with affection for His people.

Shulamite maiden: in the spiritual interpretation the Shulamite is a picture of the BRIDE OF CHRIST.

Daughters of Jerusalem: in the spiritual interpretation they speak of sincere yet SPIRITUALLY IMMATURE believers.

The watchman: in the spiritual interpretation they represent SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP.

The first four chapters of the Song focus on the **Bride's** INHERITANCE in Christ.

The last four chapters of the Song focus on **Jesus'** INHERITANCE in the Bride.

I define two general categories of truth related to meditating on the Word. The first category is related to truths that exhort us "TO BELIEVE" something about God and/or His Promises.

The second category is related to truths that exhort us "TO OBEY" God's Word.

Solomon was a prolific songwriter, writing 1005 Songs (1 Kings 4:32).

The Word of God proceeds FROM GOD'S MOUTH.

Kiss of the Word: This refers to encountering the Word in a way that reveals God's LOVE AND EMOTIONS FOR US.

God calls us to pray the prayer of faith that He might release THE HIGHEST THINGS in His heart to us.

The Spirit's first PRIORITY AND EMPHASIS in the Church and in every believer's life is to cultivate love for Jesus.

II. STATEMENTS FROM LEADERS ABOUT THE SONG

A. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

*“Has He spoken to you? Has He said to you, ‘As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters?’ Has He ever said to you, whispered to you, ‘My beloved is Mine?’” **Read the Song of Solomon and see how the Bridegroom expresses His feeling to his Bride, His love.** How lightly we skip over these great statements so that we may argue about our pet ideas and theories! In one sense the whole object of being a Christian is that you may know the love of Jesus Christ, His personal love to you; that He may tell you in unmistakable language that He loves you, that He has given Himself for you, that He has loved you with ‘an everlasting love’. He does this through the Holy Spirit... What do we know of these secret intimations? Read the lives of the saints throughout the centuries and you will find that they all know about this. They have known Him to come to them and speak to them, and love them, and tell them that He loves them. He embraces them and surrounds them, and lets them know, more certainly than they know anything else, that He loves them with all the intensity of His divine Being. It is because we are married to Him that He does this.” (An Exposition of Chapter 7.1-8.4; the Law, Its Functions and Limits. Banner of Truth, pp.60-61)*

B. C. H. Spurgeon

*“The true believer who has lived near to his Master will find this book to be a mass, not of gold merely, for all God's Word is this, but a mass of diamonds sparkling with brightness; and all things thou canst conceive are not to be compared with it for its matchless worth. If I must prefer one book above another, I would prefer some books of the Bible for doctrine, some for experience, some for example, some for teaching, but **let me prefer this book above all others for fellowship and communion.** When the Christian is nearest to heaven, this is the book he takes with him.” (The Most Holy Place. Christian Focus Publications)*

C. J. Hudson Taylor

Few portions of the Word will help the devout student more in the pursuit of this all-important “knowledge of God” than the too-much neglected “Song of Solomon.” Like other portions of the Word of God, this book has its difficulties. But so have all the works of God...In Solomon, the bridegroom king...we have a type of our LORD, the true Prince of peace, in His coming reign...Can a study of the book which helps us to understand these mysteries of grace and love be other than most profitable? (Union and Communion, Introduction)

D. George Whitefield

*...Solomon's Song contains a dialogue betwixt Christ and his Church. The church had been commending Christ, had been telling what a glorious and blessed Savior He was (Song 5:10-16); and after she has done this, she did glory in the character, and her heart is so full of love to Christ, of being so nearly related to him, that, with humbleness of mind, she is obliged to cry out **“This is my Beloved”**(Song 5:16). There is a peculiar emphasis to be put on this. Was there ever a friend like Him! She calls on all to admire Him. I hope 'tis from a sense of love on my own soul, that I recommend the Lord Jesus Christ to to be your Friend: For 'tis the Lord Jesus Christ that is here called a Friend! O happy men and women that can say, Christ is our Friend! I think I feel at present something of that which the Church felt when she cried our, “This is my Beloved.”(Christ Our Friend. quintapress.macmate.me/PDF_Books/Christ_Our_Friend.pdf)*

E. John Wesley

*The most excellent of all songs. And so this might well be called, whether you consider the author of it, who was a great prince, and the wisest of all mortal men; or the subject of it, which is not Solomon, but a greater than Solomon, **even Christ, and His marriage with the church**; or the matter of it, which is most lofty, containing in it the noblest of all the mysteries contained either in the Old or the New Testament; most pious and pathetic, breathing forth the hottest flames of love between Christ and His people, most sweet and comfortable, and **useful to all that read it with serious and Christian eyes.***

(Notes on the Song of Solomon. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-the-song-of-solomon/>)

F. John Gill (Puritan theologian who preached 122 sermons in 1724 on the Song of Solomon.)

“...the subject of this Song...is Christ, the true Solomon, of whom Solomon was an eminent type...the transcendent glories and excellencies of His person; His inexpressible love unto, care of, and concern for His church and people, together with the nearness of access unto and sweet communion and fellowship with Himself, which He indulges them with, are here particularly expressed and set forth, so that it may be called the Song of Songs.” (An Exposition of the Song of Solomon. Sovereign Grace Publishers)

G. Matthew Henry

“This book is a Divine allegory, which represents the love between Christ and His church of true believers, under figures taken from the relation and affection that subsist between a bridegroom and his espoused bride; an emblem often employed in Scripture, as describing the nearest, firmest, and most sure relation...” (A Commentary upon the Holy Bible: Job to Salomon’s song, Volume 3, p. 499.)

H. Charles Finney

“...it seemed as if my soul was wedded to Christ, in a sense in which I had never had any thought or conception of before. The language of the Song of Solomon was as natural to me as my breath...I not only had all the freshness of my first love, but a vast accession to it. Indeed, the Lord lifted me so much above anything that I had ever experienced before.” (They Found the Secret. Zondervan Publications)

III. A NOTE ON ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

When we read the Bible, it is important to know how to interpret what we are reading in a way that honors and upholds what the Lord intended. First, we are to understand that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible includes several genres (types) of literature; for example, narrative, history, wisdom, poetry, parables, and epistles (letters). Scripture also uses allegory, figures of speech, similes, and metaphors, in addition to literal language. Thus it is essential that we use the correct interpretation for each genre and passage of Scripture. For example, the Lord is called our “fortress” several times in the Old Testament, but it would not be helpful to interpret this literally. The Lord is not a literal physical fortress, but the context of the surrounding text and the rest of Scripture help us interpret the meaning correctly. It is clearly a metaphor meaning that the

Lord is our strength, protection, and safety, as seen in Psalm 18: “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust (Ps. 18:2).

Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation that help us understand the Bible. There are various principles of interpretation, including the historical-grammatical interpretation and allegorical interpretation.

I strongly encourage the use of the **historical-grammatical interpretation** of Scripture; that is, seeking to understand the “literal” interpretation of a biblical passage in its plain meaning, by taking it at its face value. We do this by understanding the historical and cultural context; the people, things, and events described; the linguistic context; and by seeing how the author originally intended the passage to be understood.

At IHOPU we approach the Scripture in this way unless the text clearly indicates otherwise (see Jn. 15:1-6; 1 Cor. 9:9-10; 10:4; Gal. 4:24; Eph. 5:31-32; Heb. 11:19; Rev. 11:8; cf. Isa. 5:1-7; Ezek. 16; Dan. 7:2-8, 16; Hos. 2:1-14).

By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he...offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (Heb. 11:17-19)

The apostle Paul, on rare occasions, gave an allegorical interpretation of an Old Testament passage (1 Cor. 9:9-10; 10:4; Gal. 4:24; Eph. 5:31-32). Allegorical interpretation attributes a spiritual or symbolic meaning to a particular passage, as Paul does with Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians 5.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:31-32)

An allegory is a story with symbolic meaning, a literary form in which people or objects symbolically represent truths. The purpose and value of an allegory is to illustrate truths to make them easier to understand. In 1 Corinthians 9:9-10, Paul used an allegorical interpretation of the “muzzled ox” (Deut. 25:4) to apply to the full-time workers in the gospel receiving finances. An example of a popular allegory is C. S. Lewis’ series *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Allegorical interpretations of Scripture can be helpful when used to illustrate truths that are clearly established throughout the New Testament. For example, Paul’s use of the Hagar–Sarah story is described as “symbolic” by the NKJV, as “figurative” by the NIV, and as an allegory by the NASB.

²³But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴which things are symbolic [“figurative” in NIV; “allegorically speaking” in NASB]. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—²⁵for this Hagar is Mount Sinai...and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is...²⁶but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. (Gal. 4:23-26)

Galatians 4:23-26 seems to be “figurative” (typology) rather than an “allegory.” However, in terms of interpreting the Scripture, the practical differences between a passage being interpreted in a symbolic, figurative, and typological way or as an allegory are minimal.

Paul’s use of allegory differed greatly from Alexandrian allegory, which originated in the School of Alexandria in Egypt. Philo (20 BC–AD 50), Origen (AD 185–254), and Chrysostom (AD 347–407) were proponents of the Alexandrian school of interpretation, which often ignored the historical context and the plain sense meaning of a text.

Allegorical interpretation was rejected by scholars in the Protestant Reformation. They saw danger in the so-called fourfold sense of Scripture that had been commonly used by some of the Alexandrian scholars. The danger was in seeking to reveal hidden mysteries in the text, which went far beyond what the author intended.

I exercise great caution when using the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, because so many have wandered off with reckless interpretations. As a rule, I do not teach Scripture using allegorical interpretation. The primary exception I make to this rule is with the Song of Solomon, because of my commitment to see Jesus in every book of the Bible.

The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of all Scripture, and He came to glorify Jesus (Jn. 16:14; 2 Tim. 3:16). I cannot imagine the Holy Spirit inspiring a book in the Bible that does not ultimately magnify Jesus by inspiring people to love and obey Him more.

I am not alone in interpreting the Song of Solomon as an allegorical portrayal of the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church. The vast majority of commentaries through church history have interpreted the Song of Solomon this way; we note that Augustine, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Matthew Henry, Hudson Taylor, Charles Spurgeon and many others saw the allegory in the Song.

During the twentieth century, a shift occurred, as more and more commentators taught the Song of Solomon strictly as a love poem depicting the glory of married love between a man and a woman, without mentioning Christ. They present the book from the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. I strongly affirm the beauty and holiness of marital intimacy, and I believe that King Solomon had this in mind when he wrote this Song. Therefore, I value this interpretation of the Song. Nevertheless, as I believe that we should also see Jesus in every book of the Bible, so I also uphold the allegorical interpretation of this book.

We must refuse all sensual overtones in interpreting the Song of Solomon allegorically and in our understanding of the Bride of Christ message. Jesus is not our lover or boyfriend; such a concept is inappropriate and irreverent. We do not go on “dates” with Jesus. Receiving the “kiss of God’s Word” in Song 1:2 has absolutely nothing to do with physically kissing God. It speaks of the Word of God touching our heart by the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes believers as betrothed, or “engaged,” to Jesus in this age (2 Cor. 11:2). The consummation of the marriage between Christ and His Church is in the age to come when we see Him face to face. The essence of the message of the Bride of Christ and of the Song of Solomon is the revelation of Jesus’ beauty, His emotions for us, and His commitment to share His heart, throne, secrets, and beauty with us as our Bridegroom King, and of our response of wholehearted love and obedience to His will.

Jesus introduced the bridal perspective of the kingdom by referring to Himself as a bridegroom—“But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and they they will fast” (Mt. 9:15). In the parable of the wedding feast, He added to this concept of the Church as His Bride by comparing the kingdom to His Father arranging a marriage for Him (Mt. 22:2). The theme of the Bride of Christ occurs throughout the New Testament (Mt. 25:1-46; Jn. 3:29; Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2). Finally, at the end of the age, Jesus will return in response to the Church crying out to Him in her bridal identity—“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’” (Rev. 22:17).

My hope is that the allegorical perspective of Solomon’s great love song will encourage you in your pursuit of the first commandment to love and obey Jesus with all your heart (Mt. 22:37).

More additional Study Materials to come soon.