

SONG OF SONGS

GOD STATEMENT FOR SONG OF SONGS: THE GOD WHO OVERSEES MALE-FEMALE

_____ (a)

The title of this book comes from the first verse in the Hebrew text which is literally “Song of Songs.” The Hebrew expresses a superlative like “vanity of vanities” (Eccl 1:2) and “holy of holies” (Ex 29:37). The title means, then, that this song is the _____ (b) song of all. So, what does “the greatest song of all” refer to? _____ (c). The love between a man and a woman, as God intended it to be, is “the greatest song of all.”

AUTHORSHIP

So, who wrote the Song of Songs? _____ (d) is still the most common answer. After all, the first verse reads, “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.” (Song 1:1). The Hebrew expression, however, doesn’t demand that Solomon wrote it, and there are significant reasons to question the idea that he wrote it. First, he’s only mentioned three times in the text and always in the third person (Song 1:3; 3:6-11; 8:11-12), so it doesn’t most naturally read like he wrote it. Second, in one of those texts Solomon is portrayed _____ (e); he’s presented as one whose relationships are just business ventures. It’s doubtful that he would characterize himself this way. And, finally, the book extols an _____ (f), _____ (g) relationship, and Solomon was a _____ (h). So, the bottom line on who wrote the Song of Songs is “we can’t say for sure, but the ultimate author is God Himself.”

ALLEGORY VS. LITERAL

Historically there have been two primary ways in which the Songs of Songs has been read by Jews and Christians: (1) as a text that concerns love and sexuality between a _____ (i) and a _____ (j), or (2) as a text about the relationship between _____ (k) and _____ (l). These two ways of reading the Song of Songs have commonly been referred to as the “_____ (m) interpretation” and the “_____ (n) interpretation.”

For centuries the allegorical interpretation was the dominate view for the simple reason that people believed the content, if read literally, would be _____ (o). Many people felt that the frank and intimate expressions of love in the Song of Songs were at odds with what they thought the rest of the Bible taught.

Fortunately, almost no one interprets the Song of Songs allegorically now. There are several reasons the allegorical interpretation has been _____ (p), but I'll just mention two. First, there is nothing in the book that hints of a meaning other than the plain, natural, straightforward meaning of a loving, romantic, physical relationship between a husband and a wife. Second, Christians, thankfully, finally came to the realization that sexual love and intimacy as God intended it to be is not _____ (q) or less than _____ (r).

LOVE STORY OR LOVE POEMS?

Although the literal—or natural—interpretation is now the standard way of understanding the Song of Songs, there are a couple different ways to approach the book. Some believe it tells a _____ (s) with a plot (usually called the “_____ (t) interpretation”). Others believe it's a collection of love _____ (u), similar to what is found in the book of Psalms, but these are romantic and erotic poems. I take the latter position, that it's a collection of love poems rather than a story.

But while I don't believe there is an ongoing, unfolding plot in the book, the poems are not random and completely _____ (v). The poems are collected in a way that sets up an ongoing dialogue between two intimate lovers. _____ (w) exists between the characters, and there is a _____ (x) of several images, metaphors, and refrains (like “I belong to my beloved, and my beloved belongs to me” (Song 2:16; 6:3; 7:10)).

Let's talk about the characters depicted in these poems. Even though the Song has no overarching story or plot, the characters depicted in the poems have a consistent persona. The most dominant voice heard in the Song is the young _____ (y). She speaks more often than the man, and she often initiates the dialogue. The man describes her as “beautiful” (e.g., Song 1:8; 4:1-7), but she perceives her own beauty with more humility (Song 1:5-6). He calls her by various terms of endearment including “my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one” (Song 5:2).

The next most prominent person is the young _____ (z). The most common term the young woman uses to describe him is “lover” (Song

1:13-14). He is, in her eyes, handsome and charming (Song 1:6), and to her he is “a king” (Song 1:4, 12; 7:5) and “a shepherd” (Song 1:7).

There is a group of _____ (aa) who also play a role in the Song. They are variously referred to as the maidens (Song 1:3), the daughters of Jerusalem (Song 1:5), and the daughters of Zion (Song 3:11). These women appear to be city girls who are young and naïve about matters of love and romance. Sometimes the young woman must instruct them in the ways of love and intimacy (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Sometimes they serve as a sounding board for the young woman to launch into a description of her lover (Song 5:9-16).

Finally, members of the young woman’s _____ (bb) play a minor role in the poems. Mention is made of her brothers (Song 1:5-6; 8:8-9) who “guard” her (i.e., overprotect her) in the absence of her father. Her mother is usually mentioned in contexts dealing with sexuality (Song 3:4; 6:9; 8:1).

THE THEOLOGY OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Some may ask, “What is a book like the Song of Songs doing in the Bible?” The proper response is, “Imagine the Bible without it.” As a collection of love poems, the Song of Songs primarily applies to a very important aspect of our humanity: _____ (cc) and _____ (dd). Without the Song of Songs, God’s people would be left with few words about the sexual aspect of our _____ (ee). Without the Song of Songs, the few words about human sexuality in the Bible would be almost exclusively negative—the passages which condemn sexual immorality.

Unfortunately, the topic of human sexuality has been _____ (ff) to many Christians throughout history. In their lives it was rarely spoken about openly, and it was almost never discussed in the context of Christian _____ (gg). Even today, unfortunately, it is the one book in the Bible that is generally avoided in the Bible class rotation.

Sexuality, though, is a major aspect of human _____ (hh) and the human _____ (ii), and God in His wisdom has spoken through the Song of Songs to encourage us—as well as warn us—about the power of love and sexuality in our lives. God is interested in us as whole people, so in the Song of Songs He affirms that sexual love is His _____ (jj) for us and that it’s a _____ (kk) idea.

Some have noted that the poems don’t explicitly connect sexual intimacy with _____ (ll). So, the issue of the relationship between these lovers is often raised. In other words, *are they* _____ (mm)?

To answer that question, we must remember that the Song of Songs exists in the broader _____(nn) of the Bible. And in the context of the Bible as a whole, the intimacies described between a man and a woman must be understood within the bounds of _____(oo). In the Old Testament, sexual intercourse was strictly forbidden outside the context of marriage (Lev 18-19; Deut 5:18). It's in this biblical context that the Song of Songs is deeply embedded. However, we must keep in mind that the book is a collection of love poems. In some of those poems, then, the couple is probably courting, while in others, the intimacies reach an intensity that the Bible teaches is only appropriate in the context of marriage. So, in a nutshell, when the couple is clearly relishing their sexual intimacy, they are _____(pp).

Once we understand the Song of Songs as celebrating human love and sexuality, we can begin to put it in the context of the Bible as a whole. Let's go back to the Garden of Eden. The last line of Scripture that describes the perfect world before the Fall is this: "*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed*" (Gen 2:25). In the Garden, Adam and Eve experienced total _____(qq) and complete vulnerability toward one another in the area of their _____(rr) ("nakedness"). However, that changed after the Fall. By the next chapter, they cover themselves with fig leaves, seeking refuge from the gaze of each other (Gen 3:7). No longer are Adam and Eve naked and feeling no shame. The _____(ss) intimacy they shared in the Garden was gone.

It is with this background in Genesis 2-3 that we understand the Song of Songs. The Song speaks to the _____(tt) of human sexuality. It speaks to the _____(uu) of intimacy. In the Song we read about the two lovers in the garden, and they are naked and feeling no shame. They enter into sexual intimacy as partners, each freely giving themselves for one another _____(vv) and _____(ww). In the Song of Songs, then, God shows us what He intended from the _____(xx) for man and woman in the area of love and sexuality.

Keep in mind that the Song of Songs is a part of Wisdom Literature which is, in many ways, a guide to _____(yy) and _____(zz) behavior in this life. Wisdom Literature counsels wise _____(aaa). The Song of Songs, then, must be understood as a type of love that God counsels every married couple to _____(bbb). It is a guide for "wise _____(ccc)."

To sum it up, I like how LaGard Smith puts it in the Introduction to the Song of Songs in *The Daily Bible*: "*The song reflects the feelings of a lover and his beloved . . . Despite language which is unusually graphic and sensual in description, there is no hint of improper lust. . . . On its face, the Song of Songs is a beautiful and striking statement about*

human love. It suggests that all of life, including human sexuality, is holy because God has created it. There is in the song a celebration of life simply for its own beauty and experience.”

LESSONS FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

- Human sexuality is a _____(ddd) for God’s people to enjoy to the absolute fullest. God takes great joy in the passionate romantic love between a husband and a wife.
- It teaches us that a _____(eee) and _____(fff) of sexual expression is nothing to be _____(ggg) of. In the Song, neither the man nor the woman is ever embarrassed about the desire for sexual expression with the other.
- A husband and wife are _____(hhh) God when they love and enjoy each other sexually. The Song passionately reveals God’s will for that special relationship between a man and a woman.
- Wise lovers share their verbal _____(iii) of each other. The more _____(jjj) that comes, the more security and confidence grows.
- It shows that _____(kkk) and _____(lll) are not incompatible. Paul actually has to deal with this in 1 Corinthians 7 as some are suggesting that sexual abstinence is spiritually superior.
- Love isn’t about unbridled _____(mmm). It’s about a relationship that develops and grows (Song 8:6-7).
- There will always be _____(nnn) that stand in the way of a relationship. We must always be aware of _____(ooo) to our marriage and protect our marriage from these.
- The best love—emotionally and physically—is found in an exclusive, committed relationship (i.e., _____(ppp)).

KEY PASSAGES FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

- Song of Songs 1:2
- Song of Songs 2:1-7
- Song of Songs 4:9-11
- Song of Songs 7:10-12
- Song of Songs 8:6-7

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY

[a] SEXUALITY	[ss] perfect
[b] greatest	[tt] redemption
[c] LOVE	[uu] healing
[d] Solomon	[vv] physically
[e] negatively	[ww] emotionally
[f] exclusive	[xx] beginning
[g] committed	[yy] healthy
[h] womanizer	[zz] happy
[i] man	[aaa] living
[j] woman	[bbb] emulate
[k] God	[ccc] loving
[l] humanity	[ddd] gift
[m] literal	[eee] desire
[n] allegorical	[fff] pursuit
[o] obscene	[ggg] ashamed
[p] rejected	[hhh] honoring
[q] indecent	[iii] admiration
[r] holy	[jjj] praise
[s] story	[kkk] sexuality
[t] dramatic	[lll] spirituality
[u] poems	[mmm] lust
[v] disconnected	[nnn] obstacles
[w] Continuity	[ooo] threats
[x] repetition	[ppp] marriage
[y] woman	
[z] man	
[aa] women	
[bb] family	
[cc] love	
[dd] sexuality	
[ee] nature	
[ff] taboo	
[gg] fellowship	
[hh] nature	
[ii] experience	
[jj] idea	
[kk] great	
[ll] marriage	
[mm] married	
[nn] context	
[oo] marriage	
[pp] married	
[qq] harmony	
[rr] sexuality	