

## ***SESSION 1: Introduction to the Song of Solomon***

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. In session 1 and 2, the focus is to equip your understanding by giving information about the context and principles of interpretation. The next 18 sessions, will be primarily targeting the heart to supply inspiration.
- B. In this session, I'll provide a road map to help bring understanding to the big picture. We will also look at some introductory principles of how to interpret this SONG.

### **II. INTERPRETATION**

There are many interpretations of this SONG. However, we are addressing the two main ones. Each one has several applications that are distinct. I have found each of these approaches to be valid and edifying. The Lord's creative abilities are manifest in this SONG as it speaks on many levels of interpretation with perfect insight revealed at each level. Do not limit God's genius in this SONG.

- A. Natural interpretation— This school of thought depicts a literal human love story between King Solomon and his Bride, the Shulamite. It is a natural love story based on biblical principles written to honor and inspire deeper love within marriage. It is a wonderful love story that gives symbolic principles on the beauty of married love. There are many excellent commentaries written from this point of view.
  - 1. The natural interpretation has become very popular in the last hundred years. For the previous 2800 years (since Solomon approx. 900BC) there were only a few commentaries written on this particular interpretation. I believe it to be a very powerful and valid interpretation.

2. There are two basic story lines when viewing the book as a natural love story.
    - a. The most popular one depicts a young maiden wooed by the handsome and rich King Solomon. He progressively wins her heart through out the story.
    - b. The other main approach to the natural interpretation is of a godly young maiden who deeply loves a poor young shepherd in her hometown. One day the great King Solomon was passing by her vineyard and noticed her extraordinary beauty. He then sought to win her from her loyalty to the poor shepherd. She remains loyal to the poor shepherd boy even in the temptations that come from the presence of King Solomon's wealth and power.
  3. My friend, Jack Deere, wrote a lengthy commentary on the SONG as a natural love story for his doctoral statement when he was in seminary. It is powerful.
- B. Allegorical interpretation—a story that is totally symbolic without any historical facts as its basis. Natural details of facts are not important. For instance, a very popular allegory is the Chronicles of Narnia or “The Wizard of Oz”. An allegory is purely fictional.
1. This view says Solomon was writing a love song to describe spiritual truth about the love relationship with the coming Messiah.
  2. This is the most common interpretation for the 1900 years of church history and the 2800 years since Solomon first wrote it (this includes the rabbinical tradition).
  3. The bible itself affirms the use of allegorical interpretations.
- In Galatians 4, Paul allegorically speaks of things that happened with Hagar and Sarah. There are several other references in the bible to allegorical interpretation.

- C. Allegorical interpretations are important and helpful as long as we only use them to illustrate a truth that is powerfully established throughout the entirety of New Testament scripture. Allegories should be used to illustrate a truth or to make a truth more colorful and easier to grasp.
  - 1. Allegorical interpretations should illustrate truths that are solidly revealed from Matthew to Revelation, especially in the Pauline epistles. My desire is to root each of the truths of this allegory into solid Pauline revelation.
  - 2. We refuse to make our primary interpretation of the scripture allegorical.
    - a. The early church fathers made this common mistake for many years.
    - b. A primarily allegorical approach to scripture could be likened to a ship lost at sea without the secure anchors of historic apostolic doctrine.
- D. I believe this love poem express the emotions related to an actual romance that took place in Solomon's life. However, we will pursue the allegorical interpretation in this study.
- E. More commentaries have been written on the Song of Solomon throughout church history than any other book in the Bible, except the book of Romans. It was one of the most prominent books for many different seasons throughout church history.
  - 1. Song of Solomon was especially prominent in the medieval times from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century.
  - 2. However, in the last 100 years there has not been much written on the Song of Solomon. The focus during this time has been on the natural relationship between the husband and his wife, a very powerful interpretation.
  - 3. My prayer is that the Lord is going to revive this book in a special way in the generation that He returns.

- F. Do not be narrow in thinking that the only valid insight into scripture is the one you are familiar with. Worship Jesus throughout this book and do not get a wrong spirit towards others who disagree.
1. Do not allow any divisiveness to enter your heart toward those with an entirely different interpretation of this unique song of love.
  2. A negative attitude is contradictory to the spirit and purpose of this book, which is to produce love. Sadly, some who have been touched in the arena of devotion while enjoying this book have then turned around and become critical of others.
  3. It is important to embrace what God is saying in this book in a way that brings honor to others who see it differently.
- G. I recommend this SONG as one of your favorite hobbies. This SONG is my hobby. It's not only my calling, it is a personal holy recreation.
1. I have about 140 commentaries on this SONG. I have been collecting them from all over the world. Reading them has expanded my understanding. You need to be aware that there are many and various interpretations to this SONG.
  2. I will be referring a number of times to what the scholars say. I'm pulling from any number of different commentaries when I allude to these references.

**III. THE ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION: 3 COMMON APPROACHES**

- A. There are many allegorical interpretations that cover vast and even strange topics. Some of them are wild heresies. However, there are 3 common ways to apply the allegorical teaching that magnifies the Lord.
- B. First, the relationship between God as the Bridegroom, and natural Israel as the Bride is clearly taught in the Old Testament (Jer. 2:2; Hos. 2:16-20; Ez. 16:8-14, 20-21, 32, 38; Is. 54:5-6). This is how Old Testament believers interpreted this book, finding encouragement in knowing God's deep bridal love for Israel.
  - 1. Some Jewish rabbis, even to this day, interpret the SONG in an allegorical way. Some rabbis interpret it from a messianic point of view without understanding the person of Jesus.
    - a. The Jewish rabbis believed in God and they wrote strictly from the point of view of the Bride being natural Israel. They have written some insightful material. This song was written about 900 years B. C.; therefore, for nearly 3,000 years Jewish rabbis have been interpreting this book as Yahweh, the heavenly Bridegroom, in love with Israel as the Bride.
    - b. By far Israel's most significant interpretation of the SONG was allegorical. There was not much written about it from the view of the natural marriage relationship. There are several older commentaries written by rabbis still in existence that are very helpful. These have survived hundreds of generations due to the Jewish tradition that they are almost as important as Scripture. It is a fascinating study.
  - 2. There is going to be a great revival spirit on natural Israel. The Holy Spirit is going to release a tremendous measure of the power of God to bring Israel to Jesus. My prayer and conviction is that God is going to use the book of Song of Solomon as a part of his strategy to gather harvest.

- C. Second, the relationship between Jesus and the corporate church of Christ (Rev. 19:7-9, 21:9; Eph. 5:23-25; 2 Cor. 11:1-2).
1. One common allegorical interpretation of the SONG is to see the Bride as the universal church throughout all history and within each generation that has “made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7).
    - a. Many Catholic commentaries take this interpretation of the corporate Bride.
    - b. I ascribe to this idea of the Bride of Christ as the universal church throughout all of history.
  2. This has been used mostly from the early church to about the 16th century by the Catholic Church. They interpreted the SONG mostly through the view of the Bride as the corporate body of Christ. Admittedly a few have focused on the individual believer, but most spoke of the corporate church.
- D. Third, the relationship between Jesus and the individual believers describing the progression of spiritual development to maturity.
- E. The focus of this study is to interpret the book as an allegorical love song between Jesus and the individual believer as His bride. This approach offers practical spiritual insight for our personal lives as we relate to growing in personal passion for Jesus.
- F. As a word of caution, it is important to understand that some groups interpret the Bride as a very small and spiritually elite remnant within the larger body of Christ. I do not believe this for a number of reasons. I believe the Bride is the whole church. In heaven, all believers are mature in love. Some will press in more on this side of eternity, but on the other side of eternity the Holy Spirit will bring His work to full completion.
- G. Our approach to this study.
- I believe that each of the mentioned views warrant careful study and application. However, in this particular study our focus will be on principles that aid individuals in a progression of passion for Jesus.

**IV. 4 REASONS WHY ALL BELIEVERS ARE INCLUDED IN THE BRIDE**

A. First, the maturity of the bride is the fruit of Jesus' prayer.

*"And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." John 17:26*

1. Jesus is interceding for a people to love Him like the Father loves Him. The reality and maturity of the Bride is based significantly upon Jesus' intercession and the Father's zeal for Jesus. It's based secondarily on our response of commitment.
2. It is an issue of God's power more than ours. The main issue is that the Father promised His son that weak humans would be anointed by the Spirit to such a degree that they would voluntarily come fully to Him, to love Him in a supernatural way.
3. Jesus based His intercession on the will of the Father.

B. Second, the power of full revelation in heaven transforms the Bride. His unveiled glory in heaven is a successful agent of transformation to the redeemed heart.

*... we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2)*

1. This unveiling of His glory sometimes called the 'Beautific Vision' or the 'Vision of the Beauty of God'; it is another guarantee of the bridal transformation of all believers in eternity. To encounter God's beauty is to be changed.
2. All believers in heaven will see this splendor of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - a. Seeing Him is what changes us to be like Him. All of us will be unusually dedicated on that day because all of us will see Him in His fullness.
  - b. It is really about how powerful He is, not about how powerful we are.

- C. Third, it is the ravished heart of God that insures the bride's destiny. This is a very significant phrase.

*You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace. Song 4:9*

1. His ravished heart embraces whosoever will voluntarily say yes to the grace of God.
  2. He's ravished. His heart is utterly delighted over broken, fallen people.
  3. He is not more ravished and enthralled by only one group within the body of Christ over another.
  4. God's heart is ravished for everyone that names His Son's name, not just for those who are spiritually mature during their brief time on the earth. The bridal reality is a prominent eternal reality whose implications are significantly greater than our abilities to reach spiritual fullness during our brief stay on the earth. For example, if a man's five-year-old child makes a mistake one afternoon, the father is not tempted to exclude him from his entire inheritance that is awaiting him after he reaches adulthood.
- D. Fourth, in heaven there will be only one people, not 2 different classes of believers. Jesus prayed that His people would all be unified like the Father and the Son. I believe that all the unity prayers in the Scripture will be answered and there will be one people fully unified forever.
- "That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." John 17:21*
- E. I encourage you not to be offended by the "remnant bride" groups that are isolated in the body of Christ. Some of these groups have retreated to the hills and wait for Jesus' return.

1. We need to rejoice that they believe in the Bride and are pursuing Jesus with all their heart. I do not focus on the fact that they believe they are the only ones who are the Bride.
2. We must all make sure that we do not personally fall prey to what has been called "bride pride." However, do not be distracted by little groups that feel like they are the elite group of the elect Bride. They misunderstand the nature of how Jesus redeems broken people.



- F. WARNING - When we are preoccupied in seeking to measure our spiritual earthly attainment of maturity then we become distracted from Jesus. This is a common distraction that is inevitable among groups believing and seeking to be “the elite bridal remnant”.
- G. A working definition of the Bride is mature bridal partnership or simply spiritual maturity. Everyone will have a mature bridal relationship in heaven. However, our goal is to live like the Bride before heaven. We call this spiritual maturity.
  - 1. We pray devotional prayers to love like the bride loves while still living on this side of eternity. We will all love like the bride in heaven but many want to love like the bride of Christ **now** because that is our ultimate destiny. This is the spiritual genetics of every born again person.
  - 2. We will come into the fullness of marriage to Jesus. This cannot be stopped. God is fully committed to it. However, it is God’s desire for that bridal partnership to actually begin now.

**V. THE HOLY SPIRIT EXALTS JESUS IN THE SONG OF SONGS (JN. 17:26)**

- A. I am aware of the extreme imbalances of the allegorical interpretations of the scripture that have sometimes been reckless throughout church history. However, in this study I believe the Holy Spirit is talking significantly about Jesus and His Bride.
  - 1. The Holy Spirit is filled with desire and longing for the Person of Jesus. Jesus is on His heart in all that the Holy Spirit does. It seems inconceivable to me for the Holy Spirit to write a book in the Bible without Jesus being the predominant theme on His heart. Jesus is everywhere from Genesis to Revelation. In all that He does, the Holy Spirit desires to capture our hearts for Jesus (Jn. 16:14).
  - 2. Jesus spoke of Himself from all the Scriptures to the disciples on the Emmaus road. He expounded the things concerning Him from all the Prophets, beginning with Moses. (Luke 24:27) I take the word “all” literally, implying that He went through each of the 39 books of the Old Testament and spoke to the disciples of Himself.

- B. We believe the Holy Spirit inspired all of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). He has a fierce loyalty and jealousy for people to be filled with love for Jesus (Jn. 16:14; 17:26).
  - 1. He loves Jesus passionately. The little that I know the Spirit, I know that He is focused on glorifying Jesus.
  - 2. I think even a fundamental understanding of the person of the Holy Spirit would lead you to the conviction that everything He writes is focused ultimately on inspiring the human heart to love Jesus Christ. I believe He can have other levels of interpretation and meaning, but He is always aiming at the human heart to fill it with passion for Jesus.
- C. The Holy Spirit has an intense friendship with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit loves Him. They are both members of the uncreated Godhead just like the Father is. Thus, they have been together from eternity past. The depth of their love goes on and on. The Holy Spirit's friendship with Jesus is a powerful reality that I wish He would tell us more about. He has a mysterious and deep friendship with Jesus. It has existed from eternity. It is eternal in depth and infinite in duration.

## **VI. THREE MAIN CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK**

- A. King Solomon is depicted in the allegorical interpretation as a type of the triumphant resurrected Jesus Christ who is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Jesus is the real king. Solomon is only the type.
  - 1. Solomon as the author of the SONG. This song was probably written before Solomon's spiritual decline (1 Kings 11:3-4). Therefore approximate date of the writing of this book might be 900-950 BC.
  - 2. In Solomon's early years as king of Israel, he had a fresh and dynamic walk with God.
    - a. This can be seen in part when God visited him in a dream and tested him. The Lord said, "Ask anything you want." He asked for wisdom and the Lord gave him a supernatural impartation of wisdom. (1 Kings 3). He pleased the Lord with his response in the dream and it resulted in Solomon receiving the greatest measure of wisdom that God has ever imparted to a person.
    - b. I believe this beautiful song came out of this unique supernatural impartation of wisdom. This most glorious Song was written in the wake of that visitation. The wisdom of God was reigning in his soul.

- c. Solomon may have had some insight into the spiritual realities hidden by the Holy Spirit in this love song. Nevertheless, I do not believe that he understood the fullness of this song as it applied to Jesus and His Bride.
- B. The Shulamite woman is depicted as a type or a picture of the Bride of Christ who eventually experiences full spiritual maturity.
  - 1. She is introduced as a young maiden who becomes the mature Bride. At first we will refer to her as the maiden, and later as the Bride. She becomes a bride as she becomes spiritually mature. This transition is recorded in the middle of the SONG (4:8). She starts off in the book as an immature maiden. She is fervent, but she is immature. By the end of the book she is the mature Bride who is full of glory.
  - 2. The name Shulamite is mentioned only one time in the SONG (6:13). Shunam was a very small city in Israel located several miles north of Jezreel. The maiden lived in the city of Shunam, therefore she is called the Shulamite.
- C. The “daughters of Jerusalem” are a group that appears regularly throughout the SONG. They are never clearly identified or defined. However, when we study what they say and do throughout the SONG, we learn that they love Jesus, yet never attain to the same degree of intimacy and maturity as the Bride. They are most characterized by a spiritual dullness and passivity and yet they clearly possess an inquisitive and sincere spirit to seek Jesus. They often ask questions and ponder what it is that makes the bride so fervent.
  - 1. This group seems to refer to those who are genuinely born again. They love the King in a sincere yet immature way. At times they even want to be near Him. However they are usually depicting some degree of spiritual dullness and passivity. Therefore they seem to personify the condition of immature believers in a general way. I would not feel comfortable about naming a class of Christians in the church as the ‘daughters of Jerusalem’. Rather, they personify a spiritual condition instead being an actual group of believers.
  - 2. Many commentators throughout church history agree with this position. They also make the logical deduction that the ‘daughters’ represent a spiritual condition of those who love God yet are hindered by spiritual passivity and dullness. (Eph. 4:13-16).

3. These daughters of Jerusalem regularly look to the Bride. They see her as beautiful and as possessing the fragrance of Christ. They want to be with her.

### **VII. MY PERSONAL MANDATE AND JOURNEY WITH THE SONG**

#### **A. Why this SONG is so important to me**

1. In July 1988 the Lord spoke to me in an unusual way during a personal time of prayer as the Holy Spirit was especially quickening John 17:26 to my heart. The Lord revealed Himself by the audible voice of God. The practical implication of the message was that He would establish the truths of Song of Solomon 8:6-7 in the church across the world in this generation.
2. The Lord has made it clear to me that the focus of my ministry for the rest of my life would be along the themes of Song of Solomon 8:6-7. This includes such themes as restoring the first commandment to first place and the revelation of the beauty of the Bridegroom and Bride.
3. I believe that others will be called by the Lord to this same ministry focus. Some will walk in this call for a season of this public ministry and others for the rest of their life. Do not expect to receive this from another person because only the Lord himself can communicate this to your heart. You do not need a mystical audible voice experience to receive a sense of commission to this ministry focus.

#### **B. My First Response**

1. Confused
2. Perplexed
3. Hesitant

#### **C. My Second Response**

1. My assumption - this calling was good because it came from God
2. A diligent study of the SONG without much initial understanding or enjoyment.

D. My Third Response

1. Great delight
2. Much enthusiasm to challenge others to make the SONG a priority in their personal lives.

**VIII. COMPARING ECCLESIASTES AND SONG OF SONGS**

- A. Solomon wrote 3 books in the Old Testament: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Ecclesiastes was written to reveal the vanity of vanities of life under the sun or under the natural arena (life without obedience to God). Ecclesiastes stresses how impossible it is to be truly satisfied with even the most desirable external circumstances. Thus, the book speaks of the endless wanderings of man who can not find rest apart from God. Ecclesiastes targets the mind that grows in practical understanding of life. Song of Solomon targets the heart that grows in passionate intimacy with God.
- B. Song of Solomon reveals the true joy of life that can be attained without any regard to external circumstances. It highlights how meaningful and full life is when our one consuming passion is to love and know the glorious Lord Jesus. This is the only place of true satisfaction. If Ecclesiastes is properly understood it leads us to the awakened fervency that begins the journey of Song 1:5. Ecclesiastes is in many ways a vital preparation for Song of Solomon because it is difficult to fervently seek the fullness of life in Jesus without understanding how futile life is outside of Jesus.
1. Ecclesiastes speaks of life without rest and fulfillment based on worldly experience, knowledge, and self-assertion. Song of Solomon speaks of entering rest and total fulfillment through humility, submission and the divine impartation of love.
  2. Ecclesiastes speaks of pursuing the best things found in earthly life, while Song of Solomon speaks of pursuing the best things found in heavenly life.
  3. The message of Ecclesiastes says, “No matter how good the circumstances are, if you are not seeking to love God with a whole heart, your heart is still empty. The message of Ecclesiastes is life does not work if you are not living in the truths of Song of Solomon.
- C. Nothing earthly can fully satisfy the human spirit because we are created to be in relationship with the heavenly Bridegroom. You will never ever taste the deepest things of life unless you are in the pursuit of the God of Song of Solomon.”
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- D.** The Jewish fathers in ancient times were known to relate the 3 books of Solomon to the temple of Solomon.
1. They related the book of Proverbs to the outer court of Solomon's temple.
  2. They related the book of Ecclesiastes to the inner court of Solomon's temple.
  3. They related the SONG to the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple

**IX. THE CANTICLES**

- A.** The Song of Songs is sometimes referred to as the Canticles. The Latin noun "canticum" means "a song". Canticles mean a series of songs.
- B.** The Latin Vulgate was a very popular translation of the Bible written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Jerome translated it into Latin so that the common people could understand scripture.
- C.** You may be reading an older commentary and see the term "canticles." For many generations canticles were simply called the Song of Solomon.
- D.** Here are some common ways to use the SONG as a reference. Any of the following references may be rightfully used: Cant. 4:9 or Song 4:9 or SS 4:9 or SOS 4:9.