

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Love Supreme

Song of Solomon 4:8 – 5:1a

Key verse: “Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits” (Song of Solomon 4:16).

Erotic love poem or a metaphor of God’s love for humanity?

The Song of Solomon, with its sexy descriptions of love between a man and a woman, has sometimes been “too hot” for the Church to accept at face value. So, this book has at times been interpreted entirely as a metaphorical description of God’s love for Israel and/or Christ’s love for the Church.

In our own sexually liberated era, interpreters have been more ready to see the Song of Solomon as a depiction of romantic, sexual human love. As the pendulum of interpretation has swung this way, some interpreters have denied any metaphorical, spiritual meaning.

The truth is best found in the middle. On one hand, the Song of Solomon is a celebration of the love between a man a woman—in all its sexual, emotional, and spiritual fullness. For example, 4:12-16 describes the delights of romantic love in terms of a garden of delights. The “choice fruits” of this garden (v. 13) describe all the charms of the beloved. Though the language is clearly sexual, the love described in the Song of Solomon is not promiscuous. Verse 12, for example, describes the beloved as “a garden locked up...a spring enclosed...a sealed fountain.” These words are metaphors for virginity or else for an exclusive sexual relationship between the man and woman.

Considering the history of interpretation, it is good that this book can now be read and interpreted in this way. If the Church is to hold to its historic, Biblical position of “chastity in singleness and fidelity in marriage,” it is important also to frankly celebrate the goodness of sexuality as expressed within the boundaries God intends for it. This erotic love poem is a clear expression of the Biblical truth that God invented sex and wants sex to be celebrated and enjoyed within the bonds of marriage.

At the same time, the Song of Solomon should rightly be seen as pointing metaphorically to the relationship between God and humanity and between Christ and the Church. In the Bible, the marriage relationship is often viewed as mirroring the ideal divine-human relationship. Here are a few examples:

Isaiah 62:5 says, “...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.”

In Ephesians 5:25-32, the loving relationship between husband and wife is seen as a “great mystery” that mirrors the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Revelation 21 describes the marriage of heaven and earth that will occur when Christ returns: “And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

Faithful, romantic, sexual love within the boundaries of the marriage covenant provides a beautiful picture of the love of God for humanity and of Christ for the Church. The Song of Solomon is best read as a love poem that both celebrates the beauty of sex and love in marriage *and* mirrors the ideal divine-human relationship.

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