

SongOfSolomon 19-12-19a

Okay, we're going to try again. You can tell how blessed we are to have a good engineer, usually, when we're having our broadcast. This is December the 19th, 2019.

Looks like it's working now, which is gratifying. And we're starting a new study tonight in the book of the Song of Songs, Song of Solomon, also known as Canticles. And I'm going to give a brief introduction.

We have already prayed. Feel free to pray while I'm launching into my introduction. But this book has been controversial and much discussed because it, in some quarters, can be viewed as very explicit poetry.

Its canonicity has been questioned both by the folks who put together the Old Testament and in the Christian church. It's been subject to a variety of different kinds of interpretation. So what we're going to do at the beginning is just look at the first few verses in your New King James.

If you've found it in your Bible between Ecclesiastes and the book of Isaiah, you will see the Song of Solomon, as it is called here in our translation. Chapter one begins, the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's. Then you see that it is labeled the Shulamite.

This is not in the Hebrew text. This is helpful annotation in our English text to mark places where this particular version sees a change of speaker. So the Shulamite is the woman in view in this romantic poetry.

And she says, let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth for your love is better than wine and so on. And then you'll notice down in the middle of verse four, it says the daughters of Jerusalem, they are going to speak as something of a Greek chorus in this view. And then the Shulamite returns, the daughters of Jerusalem return.

And then the Shulamite speaks again. And you see down above verse seven, it says she's addressing her beloved. And then in verse eight, you have the beloved himself speaking.

So this gives you an inkling of one of the primary issues in reading and interpreting this book is to try to understand who is speaking. First of all. Secondly, does this book have a structure at all? And if so, what is that structure? Thirdly, what is its purpose? And fourthly, in the light of that and linked with the purpose is how do you interpret it? So let me give you just a summary.

This information can be found in almost any introduction to the book of the ways that this book has been understood and that you might have heard it referred to in the past. Methods of interpretation really began in ancient Israel with an allegorical interpretation. As you read through this book, if you have any familiarity with it at all, you know that there is something going on between a man and a woman.

And in some cases, people see two men. There may be Solomon and a shepherd lover. And then there is this virgin bride.

In some interpretations, there are two people involved, others three. And then of course, you have this chorus who will speak up from time to time. So in the earliest view by ancient Jewish interpreters, you will find this in Midrash, they see it as allegorical.

And the allegorical interpretation dominated in Judaism and in early Christianity for most of the last 2,000 years. And this sees it as an allegory where the man element is God and the woman element is Israel. And that this is the ideal relationship that should exist between God and Israel.

You have other cases where God is indeed referencing himself as the husband and she is a wife. We've seen this in our prophetic studies. But in most of those cases, it's kind of a negative picture because she is the wife who strays.

And you have the picture of Gomer going away and being brought back by the prophet. And this is quite the opposite. And so they have to see it as an idealized sort of view.

And because of that, there are some problems with the allegorical interpretation. The church took this over. Patty, can you turn this fan off? I'm getting a whirling star behind me and I think it's probably distracting.

It's the chain. So the church substitutes Christ for God and the church for Israel. And so this is thought to be an allegory of the ideal situation between Christ and the church.

And in Revelation, you have the idea that Revelation 21 and following that the church is the bride of Christ. And so that is seen there. But there are problems with the allegorical view in that the text itself doesn't suggest that.

It doesn't invite us to see it as an allegory. And the main reason people tend to resort to an allegory is because there's some difficulty with the text itself. There's no real reason to take that view.

The one thing you can say is the struggle to try to interpret it as an allegory indicates that they were already treating it as scripture and that they wouldn't have bothered to try that struggle if it wasn't already recognized as scripture and they were wrestling with how best to understand it. This is what I've heard. Maybe you heard this when you were in church that the shepherd lover and the bride or Solomon and the bride or whoever you see this as being, it's a picture of Christ in the church and it's an idea of marital love.

Well, the Israelites did the same thing before the church came along. They just saw it as God and Israel. So the second way that it's often been interpreted is that it's dramatic, that the interpretation takes two forms, either that it is Solomon and a woman, one of the gals that he

ends up marrying as a part of his wives and concubines, and another, in other words, that there are two characters and the other that there are three.

And the reason is that parts of this book seem to be all about intimacy and closeness and expectation and here you are, I admire you and there you are and you admire me. But then there's somebody that leaves and they go away and where is he? I can't find him. And you interrogate the watchman.

And there's also a little bit of tension. And so some have interpreted to mean that here's a gal that has a shepherd lover, somebody that's of her own class and that she's kind of promised to, but Solomon comes in and wants to add her to his harem and she has to fight him off and go back to the shepherd lover. So this is sort of the dramatic view.

And I was reading one article that said, according to the three character view, the girl rejects Solomon's attempts to win her and remains true to her pastoral swain. And this, you know, we don't call people swain anymore, but this shepherd guy, that's her true love is the swain. And so when they see it in two views, the two character interpretation, um, this is just a picture of marital love.

And, um, the, uh, the other view, the three character view is of loyalty, where there's this pull to be taken away, but love overcomes the draw of riches and living in the palace and so on. But there's a lot of difficulties with that. As with the first, there's no evidence that it was intended to be taken as a drama of that nature.

Uh, and there's no plot, uh, to carry you along. It's not like a parable that there's, there's not a thread of development or movement toward a culmination and so on. Um, and in order to get it to work that way, you really have to kind of rearrange the parts and it becomes a bit fragmented.

And, uh, you end up having in the three character view, you have Solomon as kind of a villain, and yet it is the song of Solomon. So you have to kind of think of it as song of bad Solomon, uh, which doesn't really suggest. Um, a third view is that it was liturgical and that it was some Canaanite poetry that was repurposed and adopted and used with, uh, the feast of unleavened bread and the feast of booths.

And in Jewish tradition, uh, this book and portions of it were read at both of those feasts. And because it is celebratory and, uh, full of images of agriculture, uh, unleavened bread, you know, around the time of first fruits and then booths with the branches and fullness of the harvest and so on, uh, it just seemed apropos. And so it was sort of repurposed, uh, but, uh, in favor of that, it is said that Baal was the Canaanite fertility God and, and is described in the Baal cult as a shepherd.

And so this guy being a shepherd is evidence that some people see that this was repurposed Canaanite poetry, but, um, there are a lot of problems with that. And, uh, you, you just can't really

think that Canaanite stuff is going to be, uh, sort of shoehorned in and become a canonical biblical book. Now you can see where pagan stuff has been brought into our Easter and Christmas, uh, holidays, eggs, bunnies, maples, trees, you know, these things, but we don't have an Easter bunny book in our new Testament.

We don't, uh, uh, think that that has happened in our Bible either. The fourth view is that it is lyrical, that it is, uh, love songs. And, and the technical term is, uh, epithelium.

And I won't, you'll never hear me say that again, but it's a word that means it's love poetry. And, uh, I personally think that, that this is the best way to take it. I think it is the way that it is intended.

And so, uh, this brings us to the purpose and to the interpretation. This is poetry and it is talking about romantic love. I believe it is talking about proper romantic love.

There is propriety. There is, um, a sense of decorum. There are plenty of allusions here, but it, they're done carefully.

There is entendre. There is, uh, in the old movies, if somebody was going to have an intimate moment with somebody else, uh, you would see them walk together, looking lovingly in each other's eyes and a door would shut and you can fill in the rest with your imagination that it doesn't hit the screen. And that's really how the song of Solomon is and properly understood in its historical and cultural context.

It is very chaste. It is, uh, it is forthright without being crude. And people have tried to read more into it than is said, but we're going to see that in the context of the ancient near East, uh, certainly sensibilities were different in that day and things that we might find a bit forthright were not so in that day.

And by God's standard, it is inspired. It has a message for us. And it's really a wonderful tribute to, uh, the institution of marriage and it is all about marriage.

Um, I am going to freely reference a, uh, view that was taken about 35 years ago. I have canvassed commentaries looking for someone who, uh, and there's just lots and lots of different viewpoints and, and seas of ink that have been spilled on this book. But I finally found someone who has caught the same impression of it that I do and, and helpfully provided some insights that I had not seen.

And, uh, it's, uh, it becomes clear, especially, uh, with, with help that, uh, that, that this is, is actually a, uh, a sequence of 14 songs. When you see a change of speaker, when you see a shift in subject matter, when there is a change of scene, uh, this marks a new song. And so what I'd like to do is, is first of all suggest, and I will give you the, the, uh, structure in detail, uh, as we go through, but it is a collection of 14 songs.

And, uh, I am going to, uh, use pretty much the labeling that, uh, the author used in this

commentary, because I like it and I can't improve on it. His name is Goulder, G O U L D E R M D Goulder. And he published this commentary back in 1984.

And, uh, that was the year that the world was supposed to end. Uh, unfortunately for us, we're not in glory. We're still here.

So, uh, he published this. And so what I want to do here, this is going to be our roadmap. This is going to be our guideline.

And I have checked this out for myself and it, it follows the excavations that I had done. It, it matches it and actually enhances it a bit. So I really like it.

So what we're going to see is 14 songs. Now pop quiz question. What is our favorite structural device in all of scripture? It is the chiasm.

And guess what? There is a chiasm here in the song of Solomon. This is one of the reasons I know that this 14 song construction is correct because it is perfectly chiastic loosely, but perfectly in that we're not going to find quite the tight comparison that we saw in some of the Psalms or that we've seen in other chiasms, but thematically, uh, it, it is, it's kind of like the Psalms where sometimes you have a synonymous distic, a two line thing that restates. And in many of our chiasms, the lines that, that are linked by the chiastic structure say the same thing in slightly different words.

Other times they are complimentary where one of them informs and illuminates and fleshes out the other. This is the kind of chiasm that the song of Solomon is. So what I want to do so that if you'd like to read and start kind of doing your own, uh, analysis of this, I'm going to give you the, the 14 song structure here.

And, and bear with me if you want to just write this down. Um, the first song is chapter one verses one through eight, and it is called the arrival. Here's the, here's the big picture.

There is a shepherd princess. She's nomadic. She's if not Bedouin, perhaps Arabic, or she lives out on the land.

We're going to see very quickly that there is an allusion to her outdoor life with the animals. And she loves it out there. She's a country girl and she really likes it.

Yet she is noble. She has a noble family, and this is not necessarily nobility of the formal construction. It's nobility of character.

It's nobility of family. It's nobility of values. And she is a very, uh, admirable girl of the outdoors.

So she has caught the attention of King Solomon. And just to answer the question right up front, I am of the two person persuasion. Uh, I don't think that there's Solomon as a bad guy and a

shepherd lover is a good guy.

Solomon is going to be the guy that is alluded to by some of these things that seem to suggest a, uh, a third individual. And I'll explain why it is that way when we get there. So chapter one, verses one through eight, this is the arrival of this, of this desirable girl in the vicinity of Solomon's court.

One, one through eight. The second song is going to be chapter one, verse nine through chapter two, verse seven, one nine through two seven. And you can call this the audience and explain what that is when we get there.

The arrival, the audience, one nine through two seven. The third song is going to be the courtship. This is the, uh, wonderful time of attraction and fascination and, uh, bedazzlement.

Many of us have been through this phase and survived it, uh, in various states of array or disarray, but this is the courtship. This is chapter two, verse eight through verse 17 to eight through 17 is the courtship. The fourth song we'll call in the night.

And we're going to really have fun when we get to this one in the night. Uh, chapter three, verses one through five in the night, uh, chapter five or song five is chapter three, verses six through 11, the fifth song, chapter three, six through 11. This is the procession.

If you're not able to get all these down, I will put a structural outline in the folder that we make for this new study and you can get it there. So if, if I, if, if I lose you just hang tight and within the next couple of days, it'll be there. Uh, but so that that's five out of the 14 now one, one through eight, one nine through two seven is the second one.

The courtship is two eight through 17. The fourth is in the night chapter three, verses one through five. The song is the procession, uh, chapter three, verses six through 11.

The sixth song is the wedding. Notice that this courtship has proceeded happily to a wedding chapter four, verses one through seven chapter four, verses one through seven. This is the wedding.

Now, how many songs did I say there were 14 I've given you six. So number seven is going to be halfway through. And we would expect in a chiasm that what is at the center would be the most important part, right? And sure enough at the seventh song, this is chapter four, verse eight through chapter five, verse one.

And this is the consummation. This is the consummation of the marriage chapter four, verses eight through chapter five, verse one chapter eight is, I'm sorry, song eight. I'm going to bedevil myself.

If I can't keep my songs in my chapter straight, the eighth song where we're going to start coming out of the chiasm. Now the eighth song is chapter five, verse two through nine, chapter five, verse

two through nine. This is a knock at the door, a knock at the door.

That's song eight. The ninth song is a lover lost and found. This is sort of a panicky moment for the bride.

And by the way, um, I didn't mention this earlier, but one of the great clues to interpreting the song of Solomon is to understand that this entire set of 14 songs, this book as a whole is from the bride's point of view. This is, if there was ever a book in the Bible for a woman, you can look at Ruth. You can look at Esther and you look at the song of Solomon.

This is told it's presented from the bride's point of view, from the girl's point of view, takes her from the point where a fellow exhibits interest through courtship to marriage consummation. And now we're coming back out in sort of an aftermath. Eighth song is a knock at the door chapter five, verses two through nine.

The ninth is a lover lost and found chapter five, verse 10 through chapter six, verse three, lover lost and found five, 10 through six, three, five more to go. Number 10, the 10th song. This is what we used to say in school.

You're O A O you are my O A O my one and only. And that's the name of the 10th song, the one and only this is chapter six, verse four through six, 12, six, four through 12 is the 10th song. The 11th song is called the dance.

This is chapter seven, verses one through 10. The dance three more to go. The 12th song is a night in the country, a night in the country.

This is seven, 11 to eight, four. I know this is a bit tedious for me to give you this now, but you will thank me later. A night in the country, the 12th song, seven, 11 through eight, four.

Uh, if you have good eyes, you will have already seen something in these, in these titles, or you will, when you get a chance to look at when I finished giving them to you. So a night in the country, 12th song, seven, 11 through eight, four 13th song loves demand, loves demand. This is eight, five through 10.

And the final song, song 14 is the queen, the queen, eight, 11 through 14, eight, 11 through 14. As a final note of introduction, I just want to, uh, give you a little bit of a side note that I found very interesting as I was researching this, because as with Esther, you wonder how can you have a canonical book that not only does not mention God, but if we are not going to see it as an allegory where God is pictured as the, the groom or the shepherd lover or somebody, and Christ is not pictured as the groom or the shepherd lover in it, then where is God? And, uh, I did not, uh, find this out when we studied the book of Esther. Uh, but I found it out oddly studying the, the song of songs, but, uh, the Lord does appear in Esther twice.

And it's really, for me, it's really cool because after our study in the Psalms, you remember, uh,

the acrostic Psalms where the letters of the alphabet came through. Unbeknownst to me, somebody has figured out that, uh, the Tetragrammaton Yahweh appears in acrostic form in Esther twice. It's an acrostic form, meaning, uh, for example, the first one is in Esther.

Both of them are in Esther chapter five. Esther five, four is the first one. Esther five, four, Esther replied, if the King is so inclined, let the King and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.

That's Esther five, four. And you would think, well, it's just a, a verse in the story. Esther replied, if the King is so inclined, let, you know, what is your request? And she says, if the King is so inclined, let the King and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.

Well, um, the words in Hebrew, may the King and Haman come this day. If you take the first letter of each of those words, it is Yahweh. The first letter of each word, of course, you're reading in Hebrew, right to left.

So as you read along, you have the covenant name of God, Yahweh in Esther five, four. The second acrostic is seven verses later, Esther five, 13, actually, I think that's nine verses later, Esther five, verse 13, that verse, when you read it in your English, yet all of this fails to satisfy me. So long as I have to see Mordecai, the Jew sitting at the King's gate.

In the first verse, you have Esther speaking in the second one, you have Haman speaking. This is Haman talking. All of this does not satisfy as long as I have to see Mordecai, the Jew sitting at the King's gate.

Well, in that verse, the words, yet all of this does not satisfy in Hebrew. You take the last letter of each of those words, and it is Yahweh reading left to right. It's at the end of the words, and it's backward.

And these are deliberate acrostics, I certainly feel. In the first one, Esther is talking, and God is at work in her and through her to bring about the deliverance of the people. In the second one, Haman and his hatred for Mordecai, and through Mordecai, the people in general, with whom he's going to eventually try to achieve an extermination through the decree, he's going to be undone.

And so you have the Lord, the Lord's name in reverse in his words. And God is working, even, you know, all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. So it does appear, if you choose to accept it, that the Lord is right there in the middle of the book, once in Esther's speech, and nine verses later, three times three in Haman's speech, and he is intrinsic to that story.

Well, and that's an illustration of the fact that God is intrinsic in this poetic expression of marital love that we're going to be studying in this great book. Well, we are going to pause here and take

our break. And when we come back, we'll start looking at how and why this book addresses this particular topic.

And by discerning what its purpose is and what its goal is, then as we move through the text, it is going to yield its treasures to us in a wonderful fashion. But let's pause here and take our break.