

Review: Argument for Literal Interpretation: Critique of Introduction to SOS in Archaeological Study Bible: Allegory cf. Analogy; Music as a Teaching Aid

NIV Archaeological Study Bible: An Illustrated Walk through Biblical History and Culture. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1032:

Cultural Facts and Highlights. The Song's purpose has been debated. For most of the history of its interpretation, it was treated as an allegory. Jewish reviewers, for the most part, saw it as a symbolic recounting of the history of Israel, with the male singer representing God and the female singer symbolizing Israel. Some medieval Jewish interpreters saw it as an allegory of philosophy, while Christians have taken it as an analogy of the love of Christ for the church or as symbolic of the love relationship between the human soul and God. Some Roman Catholic interpreters claimed that Mary was the central figure of the allegory. Since each of these conjectures was guided only by the theological presuppositions and imagination of the interpreter (and no two allegorical interpretations are alike), and since nothing in the text suggests that it is to be understood as an allegory, very few hold to this explanation today.

More recently, some have claimed that the Song is a drama about the mutual love between Solomon and a young woman, a variation being that it concerns Solomon's failed attempt to woo a woman who was in love with a shepherd. These interpretations, however, are now widely viewed to be forced upon the text. For such explanations to work, readers must supply an enormous amount of detail not included in the Song. Also, there is no analogy for such literature in the ancient Near East.

Today, many view the Song as simple love poetry. This work in fact has close analogies with Egyptian love poetry written during the centuries prior to the age of Solomon. It seems clear that the Song was meant specifically to celebrate the love between a husband and a wife. It is "love poetry," but it has a far more sublime message than that of Egypt or of any other particular land or era.

As You Read. Try not to dwell on the interpretation of the book's story line or on possible, beneath-the-surface meanings. Taking as a given that the Song celebrates marital love, glean what you can from its passages—avoiding the temptation to read too much into the sometimes awkward imagery, at least from our twenty-first century perspective.

12. This summary is correct in its warning against an allegorical interpretation of the book. Those who attempt this approach really do come up with "their own interpretations" because of the "theological presuppositions and imagination" they bring to their study of the book.
13. It is asserted by the article that "nothing in the text suggests that it is to be understood as an allegory" and that "very few hold to this explanation today."
14. If then it is determined that allegory is out then what is the approach that best interprets the book? It is suggested that analogies by Jews and Christians are also suspect. But the book does not mention God, Messiah, or any substitute references to them. Yet Song of Songs is contained in the canon of Scripture.
15. Consequently, it must be assumed that its message is designed to convey both spiritual and temporal information to believers who read it. Since the Old Testament often illustrates the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage then it is legitimate for Jewish theologians to find the events in the Song analogous to this.
16. Further, since the New Testament clearly indicates that the relationship between husband and wife is analogous to the relationship between Christ and his church its theologians may legitimately view the Song in this context.
17. However, when this is recognized by the writer as the approach used by those who interpret the book literally then it is denounced because the theologian "must supply an enormous amount of detail not included in the Song. Also, there is no analogy for such literature in the ancient Near East."

18. Literal interpretation must include isagogics in order to understand the culture, traditions, and customs of the time in which the book was written. No “detail” should be arbitrarily “supplied” outside what isagogics permit. In other words, the historical period dictates that the interpretation is harmonious with the cultural-social milieu of the author and his readers including customs and practices.
19. But it also must be remembered that the book is inspired by the Holy Spirit Who is the real author of the book. Solomon is the human writer who functions under the principles of inspiration:

The Holy Spirit communicated to human authors (like Solomon) God's complete and coherent message. The human writers of Scripture so wrote that, without waiving their human intelligence, their vocabulary, their personal feelings, their literary style, their personality, or individuality, God's complete message to man was permanently recorded with perfect accuracy in the original languages of Scripture.
20. Since the Holy Spirit is the Author and Solomon writes through inspiration then Solomon is free to utilize the literary techniques that were well known prior to his writing the Song. He is known to have had close ties with the Egyptian people and because of his contributions to the Old Testament he is obviously well read and thus we may conclude that he could have borrowed from the Egyptian style of poetic writings.
21. It is agreed by the writer that the Song is a musical drama and its subject is marital love. This does not mean that the actors in the play must be married at the time of the events described. In fact, to interpret it as a literal exposé by Solomon of his futile attempts to woo the Shulammitte discourages the theologian from delving into too much “beneath the surface meanings.”
22. It is affirmed that the Song is “love poetry” yet “far more sublime” than that produced by Egyptian writers. This is a given when it is remembered that the real author is the Holy Spirit who utilizes Solomon’s experience with the Shulammitte to demonstrate true love in the right man-right woman relationship and use it to illustrate the harmonious rapport that is the divine desire between the believer and Christ.
23. Therefore, Solomon is the perfect antagonist who plays the part of Lucifer who as a paramour, both literally and figuratively, seeks to woo believers away from their loyalty to Christ and enlist them as emissaries for his nefarious schemes.
24. Once Solomon recovered from reversionism he wrote his most famous song as a mea culpa for his period of sewing wild oats and his attempt to involve the innocent Shulammitte in his antics.
25. Solomon was a genius in so many ways and in his wisdom chose the medium of music to relate his experiences with the Shulammitte. I have used opera as a teaching aid but this is an obvious anachronism. Opera was not introduced until the late sixteenth century when it was begun as a form of entertainment in the courts of Italian aristocracy.
26. The texts of operas are sung. The singing and stage action are usually supported by instrumental accompaniment and many feature instrumental interludes called *intermezzi*.
27. If we were to define Solomon’s Song with the vocabulary of modern opera it would be a *grand opera* where the entire text is sung accompanied by lavish sets and costumes, huge choruses, and brilliant vocal sections including arias and recitativo.
28. Music was a large part of Hebrew culture especially during the reign of David when his son Solomon was obviously trained in its theory, instruments, and applications.
29. The importance of music in Hebrew culture gives us insight into Solomon’s knowledge of the subject and his liberal use of the medium. We noted this from an article in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956, 3:2095-96). [MD02-202/2102-3]

30. David was an extremely talented instrumentalist and of course he is the author of many of the Psalms. Internal evidence attributes at least 44 Psalms to David. As many as 75 could have come from his pen. It can even be suggested that David was the general editor of all 150.
31. David's exposure, education, and involvement in music can be derived from the academics of the united monarchy of Israel, details of which we noted from *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs: How the People of the Bible Really Lived* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, 209-10). [ibid., 2103]
32. Solomon as crown prince was surely educated in all the arts as well as academics. We learn from 1 Kings 4:32 that he was prolific in poetry, writing 3,000 proverbs, and in music, composing 1,005 songs.
33. The title to the book "Song of Songs" infers that this composition was the best of the lot. And thus it is not beyond reason to approach this book as if it were an opera. It was not, but it does serve as an effective teaching aid.
34. The operatic format makes it easy to divide the Song into acts and to assign parts to each individual singer. We are able to distinguish scenes, identify the "performers" who take part in each, and more efficiently follow the Shulammitte's vacillations between real-time exchanges with Solomon and flights of fantasy and imagination with her Shepherd.
35. In the context of grand opera, Solomon is cast as the antagonist who is portrayed as a paramour: someone who woos. The Shulammitte is the protagonist cast as a damsel in distress. And coming to her aid is her hero, the Shepherd, who rescues her from the clutches of the paramour.
36. In Act III, the Shulammitte finds herself in Solomon's palace surrounded by his body guards, intimidated by his "daughters of Jerusalem," observed by his staff and attendants. In addition, Solomon has the advantages of his position and power at his disposal. This is a perfect description of Lucifer's rulership of Planet Earth.
37. The Evil One has his myriad armies of demons and, in addition, his co-opted emissaries of the human species equipped with every asset conceivable in the field of propaganda, duplicity, and deception. Solomon, like Lucifer, is confident that he has supreme advantage while ensconced on his own turf.
38. The Shulammitte represents the Church which is considered by Lucifer to be a hostile force and each of its members an alien in his territory. Every effort is made by him to prevent people from joining the insurgents and, if they should do so through faith alone in Christ alone, to prevent them from growing spiritually. Those who do make the advance come under intense pressures from the world because of their faith.
39. The Shulammitte portrays a believer who has made the advance to esprit-de-corps love with the Shepherd-in-Chief, Jesus Christ. She takes her stand based on integrity, devotion, loyalty, and trust.
40. The Shepherd represents Jesus Christ who will deliver the Church from its warfare with evil at the Rapture.
41. In the meantime, the Shulammitte must withstand the assaults hurled at her by means of Solomon's pick-up lines which resume with machine-gun rapidity beginning with chapter 4. He begins the chapter with an aria interrupted only twice by the Shulammitte over the course of its 16 verses.
42. We now are prepared to commence with the longest act of the opera: Act III includes Song of Solomon 4:1 through 7:9, a length of 54 verses.