

Hymns: 51 Love Lifted Me 54 Oh, How I Love Jesus
Psalm 136:1-9; 23-26 NIV Psalm 127

February is almost here. What's the big holiday in February? That's right, Valentine's Day. Are you ready? The past few years we looked at some sweethearts in the Bible. Today, we're going to continue with that theme but this time cover territory that we had to pass over previously.

How many of you have heard of the game show "Name that Tune"? It was on the air in the '50s '70s, and '80s. I found it fascinating how people could name a tune after so few notes. I thought it would be fun to do something similar today, but rather than use tunes, I'll just give you clues. Your task is to raise your hand when you know what book of the Bible the clues point to. In the process, you should learn a few things about this unique portion of scripture.

Can anyone guess the book without any clues? Don't say it yet. Here's how we will do it. When you **think** you know, raise your hand like this, and when you are **sure** you know raise your hand like this. If you are unable to raise your hand, just say "I think I know" or "I know." Okay, here we go:

1. This book of the Bible contains no mention of God in any form.
2. It's quoted by no other book in the Old or New Testament.
3. Verses from it appear frequently in greeting cards.
4. This book contains approximately 2700 words or about eleven pages of a normal book. That's five pages in my Bible. Based on word count (the King James Version has 783,137) this is about 0.3% of the Bible.
5. It contains 117 verses arranged into 8 chapters.
6. The Bible can be seen as containing law, history, wisdom, poetry, prophesy, and letters. This book is classified as *poetry*.
7. It was written at approximately 950 B.C. placing it in the Old Testament.
8. Here are some frequently used words taken from the book:
 - love 26 of 310 or 8% – 28 times more frequently
 - fair 11 of 53 or 21% – 70 times higher usage
 - beloved 32 of 112 or 26% – 87 times higher frequency
 - breasts 8 of 27 or 30% – 100 times more frequent
 - Shulamite 2 of 2

Name that tune.

Who said it is "a *riddle wrapped* in a mystery inside an *enigma*" ?

Winston Churchill

What was he describing?

Russia

In some ways *The Song of Solomon* qualifies for that same kind of classification. Tucked away in the poetic / wisdom section just before the prophets, *The Song of Solomon* occupies a unique place in the Bible and really among all literature.

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* offers this insight:

p. 1009

Scholars differ widely on the structure of the Song, its unity or lack of it, the nature of its metaphors, and the nature of the love extolled by the Song. In short, almost every verse has been the subject of lively debate by the Song's interpreters. Probably no other book of the Bible has such a variegated tapestry of interpretation.

John MacArthur, "The Rape of Solomon's Song"

*Its whole point is gently, subtly, and elegantly to express the emotional and physical intimacy of marital love -- in a language suitable for **any** audience.*

I tend to agree with John MacArthur. Still, the book is difficult to understand. As a result, you've probably heard very few sermons on it. But it's in the Bible, and God has a message there for us. Too often so-called *Bible scholars* get lost in the allegory and typology **theories** of the book and lose (or in some cases evade) the basic meaning of the text. We will not do that.

This gets back to the *purpose* of the Bible. To me, the Song of Solomon with its poetic description of romantic love **fits perfectly** with the theme of the Bible. As a refresher, here's what I said two years ago about that:

*What's the theme of the Bible? The Bible is **God's love letter to man** and it's centered around the person of Jesus Christ. Within its pages God reveals to us **Himself and His plan for man**. It's the revelation of God to man and the revelation of man from God. John 3:16 is the most frequently quoted verse in the Bible. It has been called both "the most famous verse of the Bible" as well as "the Gospel in a nutshell." begins "For God so **loved** the world...."*

What could be more appropriate then, than to include a **love song** expressing **romantic love** inside and **in the heart of** (by the way) God's **great love letter** to man?

What makes the Song of Solomon difficult to understand? Here are some points to consider:

It's poetry written in another language – Hebrew. Hebrew is very compact. It had to be. When it was written, on stone, clay tablets, and even papyrus, space was at a premium. Ancient Hebrew omitted spaces between words and sentences, and also omitted vowels, punctuation, and capitalization. The good news is your Bible takes care of those *little* details for you.

Still, poetry translated from one language to another and from one culture to another is bound to lose some of its original *feel* and *meaning*. But the Song of Solomon has even more work for us to do. We're told that because it was written before the Jews had any concept of a dramatic play, it could not be arranged in that form.

But when I read it, and trust me, I've been through it many, many times, it feels very much like a play. It has characters speaking to one another and scenes. The problem is: unlike a script for a play, there are no notes describing the characters, the setting, the divisions into acts or scenes, and not even any direct indication of who is speaking. On top of that, the musical score associated with it has not been preserved.

Perhaps you remember from your school days Cliff Notes and Monarch Notes. Those were the crutches we turned to when faced with the daunting challenge of understanding the works of the likes of William Shakespeare. Those aids provided things like a description of the author, character summaries, cultural facts, pointers to ancient idioms, themes, interpretations, etc.

Today, we'll try to get started with some of those facts so perhaps next time, we can concentrate on the story. We'll start **by** looking at the two main characters.

The author of the book and one of the main characters is Solomon. Who is Solomon? Here's an overview and refresher:

He was the son and second child of David and Bathsheba (I Kings 1:13).

His name means *peace* or *well being* – it's no coincidence that the very familiar greeting among the Jews – can anyone tell us what that word is? – sounds very similar to Solomon's name.

He was given another name, *Jedediah*, by the prophet Nathan (II Samuel 12:24-25).

He occupies a place in the kingly line of Christ through Joseph. You may recall the last time we got together we rehearsed through that line relating to the legal right Christ possessed to the throne.

He was the third king of Israel (after Saul and David) and last of the unified kingdom.

Reigned 40 years (II Chronicles 9:30). Those were the glory days of Israel.

You may recall, as a boy or young man, the new king prayed for wisdom – God gave him wisdom, peace, and prosperity (I Kings 3:5-14)

*[5] ... the LORD appeared to Solomon **in a dream** by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.*

[the new king Solomon replies:]

*[7] ... **I am but a little child**: I know not how to go out or come in.*

*[9] Give therefore thy servant **an understanding heart** to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad...*

[10] And the speech pleased the Lord,

[then the Lord says:]

*[12] Behold, I **have** done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee **a wise and an understanding heart**; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.*

*[13] And I **have** also given thee that **which thou hast not asked**, both **riches**, and **honour**: so that **there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee** all thy days.*

Solomon was a master builder. He built the temple (I Kings 5-6) and his palace (I Kings 7).

Chapter 5

[10] So Hiram [king of Tyre] gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire.

[12] And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together.

Chapter 6

[1] ..., in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, ...he began to build the house of the LORD.

In verse 38 we're told it took him seven years to build it.

Solomon also spent 13 years building his palace using cedars from Lebanon (I Kings 7).

He dedicated the temple with a lengthy and godly prayer:

I Kings 8

[22] And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:

[23] And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, ...

[54] ...when Solomon had made an end of praying ..., he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.

[55] And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying,

[56] Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise...

[60] That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else.

Wrote 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs (I Kings 4:32)

Had 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3)

He demonstrated his wisdom in judging between two women who disputed over a baby (I Kings 3:16-28). Solomon ordered his guard to cut the child in two and give a half to each. As they were about to execute the king's order, the real mother jumped in and pleaded that he give the baby to the other woman. At that point, Solomon knew who the real mother was and gave her child to her – all without genetic testing by the way.

Married Pharaoh's daughter (I Kings 3:1)

Was visited by the Queen of Sheba who had heard of his great wisdom and came bearing gifts desiring to sit at his feet and learn from him. (I Kings 10:1-13)

Built a mighty military:

- 1400 chariots (II Chronicles 1:14)

- 12,000 horsemen
- 4000 horse stalls (II Chronicles 9:25)

Received gifts (I Kings 10:10) and tribute (I Kings 4:21)

Amassed great wealth (I Kings 9)

Fell into idolatry

Lost favor from God who delayed judgment of Israel until his death for his father David's sake (I Kings 11:11-12)

He authored Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, two Psalms (72, 127), Song of Solomon.

That was a whirlwind view and tour of the person, life, and character of Solomon. What about that other main character? – the Shulamite Woman.

All of the information we have describing her comes from the Song of Solomon itself.

1:5 black (darkened by the sun), but lovely

1:6 her brothers made her work out in the sun. She was unable to attend to her appearance.

1:8 She's the fairest (or most beautiful) of women.

2:2 She's a lilly among thorns compared to the daughters of Jerusalem. She really stood out.

4:7 She's without blemish.

4:8 It says Solomon took her from Lebanon.

4:12; 8:10 She remained a virgin until married.

5:1 She is the spouse of Solomon.

6:9 She's the only daughter and favorite child of her mother.

Queens and concubines praised her and as we learned, there were a multitude of them in Solomon's court.

And finally,

8:1 she wished that she could publicly kiss her beloved. She had a desire to express her love more openly than her culture permitted.

This short list of facts doesn't do her justice. It's her **heart** that really defines her. We won't get to much of that until next time, but to give you a taste of what this book is about, let's kick things off with just few verses:

The first verse identifies it as the song (singular) of songs of Solomon.

Chapter 1 (Woman)

[2] Let him **kiss me** with the **kisses of his mouth**: for **thy love** is better than wine.

[3] Because of the savour of thy good ointments **thy name** is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the **virgins love thee**.

[4] **Draw me**, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me **into his chambers**:

Our story starts right off with passion of the Shulamite for Solomon.

Now, here are a few more summary verses: first from the man, and then from the woman:

Chapter 4 (Man)

[7] Thou art **all fair, my love**; there is **no spot** in thee.

Chapter 5 (Woman)

[16] *His mouth is **most sweet**: yea, he is **altogether lovely**. This is **my beloved**, and this is **my friend**, O daughters of Jerusalem.*

Chapter 2

[16] ***My beloved is mine, and I am his.***

We'll get into the details of this story next time, but we have to cut it off here for today.

Application

Our Bible text is a song of two lovers. In this book of just 117 verses, the woman had about 55 positive expressions describing her beloved and the man had about 74 positives describing his love. In comparison, the woman had zero negative things to say about her beloved and the man had zero negatives to say about his love.

Words of praise, love, and affection **build up** a spouse and **strengthen** a marriage, but discouraging words, words of criticism, and unkind things **tear down** both your spouse and the **very fiber** of your marriage relationship – or any other relationship for that matter. Oh that we could learn from this *precious* book in God's word!

Romans 12

[10] *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; ...*

How much more should Christian husbands and wives encourage and honor one another in the fear of God.

Benediction

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.
(Revelation 1:5b-6)

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