

## Reading the Song of Songs

**The Superscription:** “The Song of songs, which is for/by/related to Solomon” (Song 1:1)

- Indicates the *context* in which the Song is to be read: A part of Israel’s *wisdom literature* [a tradition that has its origins with Solomon].

The [Song of Songs], along with the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, is related to Solomon as the source of Israel’s wisdom literature. As Moses is the source [though not the only author] of the Torah, and David is the source [though not the author] of the book of Psalms, so is Solomon the father of the wisdom tradition in Israel... The connection of the Song of Songs to Solomon in the Hebrew Bible sets these writings within the context of wisdom literature.” – Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*.

### Main Interpretations:

1. An allegory of Yahweh’s covenant relationship with Israel [Jewish Tradition]
2. An allegory of Christ’s relationship to the Church [Christian tradition]
3. A reflection on and celebration of the gift of love, sex, and relational intimacy.
  - a. Meditations on the beauty of human sexuality and marriage are a key part of biblical wisdom literature: Proverbs 5 is the anchor for the metaphors in the Song.  
Israel’s sages sought to understand through reflection the nature of the world and human experience in relation to the Creator... The Song is wisdom’s reflection on the joyful and mysterious nature of love between a man and a woman within marriage. – Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*.
  - b. 8:6-7 highlights the human experience under poetic exploration in the Song:  
*Love is as strong as death, its passion unyielding as the grave.  
It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.  
Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.  
If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.*
4. How many characters?
  - a. Two character drama: A love story about Solomon and a woman (the Shulamite).
  - b. Three character drama [this is the modern consensus interpretation]: a celebration of a maiden’s pure, spontaneous love for her rustic shepherd lover, over against the attempts of Solomon who seeks to win her for his royal harem.
    - (1) The “Lover” (male) [a shepherd: 1:7-8]
    - (2) The “Beloved” (female): [in love with the shepherd 1:8-13; taken into Solomon’s court: 6:8-7:1, looking for her lover: 7:9-13 onward]
    - (3) Solomon: The ‘intruder’ (mentioned in 1:5; 3:6-11, 8:10-12), always portrayed negatively
      - 3:6-11: Solomon appears with opulence and wealth
      - 8:10-12: The maiden appears to be rejecting Solomon’s bride price of 200 shekels, saving her ‘vineyard’ for the one she loves.

### Themes in the Song

1. The couple is engaged, and thrilled with the prospect of their sexual union. The ‘foreplay’ always ends in expectation, not fulfillment: 1:12-2:7, 3:1-5, 7:9b-8:4
2. Celebration of physical attraction: The “let me count the ways” lists: 4:1-7, 5:10-16, 6:4-7, 7:1-9
3. The Song contributes to the larger biblical metaphor of God as a Lover pursuing his bride:

