

# Prophecy In Song

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Judaism breaks the Old Testament down into three major sections: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings or Psalms (see Luke 24:44). As an organizational tool, this division of books works well, but it has also served to restrict Bible students to a narrow view of the material in these sections. For instance, some are slow to notice law in the Prophets, wisdom in the Law, prophecy in the Writings and so on.

On the other hand, commentators have always noted the prophetic character of many of the Psalms. Psalm 22 is obviously prophetic of Christ's suffering and death. Psalm 118 predicts Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem just before He was crucified (Matthew 21:9). Other chapters and verses in the Psalms are also seen as prophetic of Christ's ministry or the work of the church.

But what about some of the other books of the Writings? These include Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel and the two books of Chronicles. The book of Daniel is certainly prophetic, but the others are considered as historic books or poetry and wisdom literature. Do they have any prophetic significance?

Specifically, how about the Song of Songs, also called the Song of Solomon or Canticles? This book has had many different interpretations, but few, if any, have been prophetic. Many see it as an allegory or an opera-like drama. The current trend regards the Song of Songs as simply a collection of love songs upon which religious people put spiritual meanings.

Is this all it is? Would God name a book that was merely love poetry "Song of Songs"? A literal translation would be "The Best of Songs" or "The Most Sublime of Songs." So here is a book, it appears, that is more than meets the eye.

Is there a prophetic level? Yes, but it is not obvious, nor would the "Christians" of this world generally accept it as such. Without the proper understanding of true church history and end-time prophecy, we would not accept it either.

## **The Characters**

Though the scenes of the book take place in an atmosphere of romantic and even sexual encounters, this is only the first and most obvious level of understanding. On other levels, Jewish rabbis allegorize God and Israel from its poetry, and Christians see Christ and His Bride, the church. As an instruction manual regarding the intimacy of the relationship between God and the Christian, the Song of Songs is without peer.

Any understanding of the Song of Songs, however, must begin with the book's characters. A young woman, a shepherdess, called the Shulamite in some Bible versions, has fallen in love with a man, whom she calls "my beloved." Some think this man is Solomon, a king; others say he is a shepherd. Some go so far as to say there are two men vying for the Shulamite's affections. In addition, the daughters of Jerusalem act as a chorus, commenting on and reacting to the words of the Shulamite. Her brothers may also have a few lines (Song 2:15; 8:8-9).

In Christian circles, the Shulamite and the Beloved are easily identified as types of the church and Christ. The daughters of Jerusalem and the Shulamite's brothers are harder to pinpoint as specific groups of people, but we can deduce a general identification from Song of Songs 2:2-3:

[The Beloved]  
Like a lily among thorns,  
So is my love among the  
daughters.

[The Shulamite]  
Like an apple tree among the  
trees of the woods,  
So is my beloved among the  
sons.

In contrast to the Shulamite, the "daughters" are compared to "thorns." The Beloved is similarly contrasted with the "sons" (see Song 1:6), who are like "the trees of the woods." Thorns are obviously negative symbols (see Matthew 13:7, 22), but "the trees of the woods" does not seem to be. A better translation would be "the wild wood," and thus, it becomes another negative type.

Thus, the daughters and the sons are opposites to the main characters. If the Shulamite is a type of the true church, the daughters are false "Christian" churches that Christ will not even consider as suitable brides (see Song 6:8-9; Ezekiel 16:44-46; Revelation 17:5). Some think they are simply the unconverted.

If the Beloved is a type of Christ, the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-16), the sons are false shepherds or hirelings, who abuse the church (see Song 1:6; Ezekiel 34; Acts 20:28-31). Some believe they stand for the leaders or governments of men. Remember, though, these are *general* interpretations, so we should check the context of each section to refine the meaning.

It is not necessary to assign a particular identity to every character, image or symbol in the book. Because of our unfamiliarity with the language and setting of the Song of Songs, this would be highly speculative and tedious. Generally, if we grasp the sense of a section, the symbolism falls into place on its own, or other scriptures explain it more plainly.

## **The Subject**

We do not know for sure if the book is arranged chronologically or just in short, timeless vignettes. Some say that certain sections are dreams or flashbacks to previous scenes. However, a basic story can be seen in the flow of the text.

Song of Songs opens with the Shulamite in the blush of first love; it is so new to her that she must ask where her Beloved works (Song 1:7). The couple is separated, and each yearns to be reunited. The Beloved asks her to come away with him (Song 2:10), and the Shulamite seeks and finds him in the city (Song 3:2-4). Later, again separated, she looks for him again, only to be beaten by the city watchmen (Song 5:6-7). In the end, after praising each other's beauty and constancy, they are together again, and the Shulamite proclaims that "love is as strong as death" (Song 8:6).

However we arrange the various parts, the main story concerns the courtship of the Shulamite and the Beloved. In most of the book's verses, they vividly praise the other's excellence and express their deepest feelings. This human sexual imagery, rather than being erotic, simply pictures the depth of love and pleasure in a Christian's relationship with God. In a sense, the sexual union of man and wife is the closest human parallel to God's relationship with us.

Jesus Himself endorses this concept in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they may *know* You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." This knowledge of God is intimate, similar to the relationship between a man and his wife (see Genesis 4:1; Luke 1:34). The apostle Paul calls the church's relationship with Christ, likened to a marriage partnership, "a great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32). Later, John is shown that the church is indeed the Bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7-9).

## Parables

Therefore, the Song of Songs may best be considered as a parable, a form of teaching that Jesus employed so frequently in His ministry. A parable is a story drawn from everyday life that illustrates godly principles to those who are able to understand (Matthew 13:10-17). As we see from such parables as the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30) and the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24) among others, they often have prophetic overtones. Sometimes they predict general attitudes and trends, but at other times they are more specific as to time, place and participants.

In the main, Song of Songs is general, describing the ups and downs that a Christian (and the church as a body) experiences over a lifelong relationship with God. A few sections, though, seem rather specific to the church's present condition as Christ's return draws ever closer.

Two such sections, known as the book's "dream sequences," bear a striking resemblance to one of Christ's well-known parables, the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). These three parables involve women sleeping while waiting for the Bridegroom. While the Parable of the Ten Virgins treats the women's subsequent actions together, the Song of Songs divides them into separate parables.

The first dream sequence (Song 3:1-5) shows the Shulamite in bed, and even in her dreams she seeks the Beloved (verse 1). Her love for him is so consuming that she constantly looks for him everywhere. When she awakens in the dead of night, she goes out into the city to look for him (verse 2). She goes down every street, into every square, without finding him. She asks the policemen strolling their beats if they have seen him (verse 5), but when they give her no help, she continues her search and immediately finds him (verse 4). She is so overjoyed—and so fearful of losing him again—that she clutches him tightly and refuses to let him go until she brings him back to her mother's house where they will be married. Since her relationship with the Beloved is so wonderful, she advises the other young women to make certain they are truly ready for the experience before they commit to a relationship of their own (verse 5; see Luke 14:26-33).

The second dream sequence (Song 5:2-8) is more tragic. Again, the Shulamite sleeps, but she is still somewhat aware of her surroundings (verse 2). The Beloved knocks on the door and beckons her to let him in. She, however, complains that she has just bathed and undressed for bed (see Revelation 3:17), and she does not want to dirty herself again (verse 3). When she sees him trying to open the door

himself, though it is locked from inside (verse 4), she relents and gets out of bed (verse 5). When she finally unbolts and opens the door, the Beloved is gone (verse 6)! Due to her lethargy and unwillingness, he had turned away in disappointment to feed his flock (see Song 6:2).

Distraught, she belatedly rushes out to find him. She calls his name, but he does not hear or respond. Again, she encounters the policemen, but instead of helping her in her search, they beat her, wound her and take her veil (verse 7). Forlorn, the Shulamite pleads with the other young women to tell her Beloved, if they find him first, to return to her and heal her lovesickness (verse 8).

### **The Fulfillment**

What an incredible prophecy of the church of God today! Part of the church woke up from slumber with the strength and commitment to seek the Bridegroom high and low. These people were strong enough to overcome and pass by the problems they encountered out in the world. Before He had to knock on the door in judgment, these Christians have found Christ again and refuse to let Him go! They will not allow a separation to occur again!

Unfortunately, others have awakened more slowly, with much less strength and resolve. Though Christ knocks at the door, they have made excuses for refusing to invite Him in (see Revelation 3:20). Our Savior struggles to force the door, but it must be opened from inside. Disappointed, He must turn away and sustain those who have already responded.

Even in the last hour, however, a chance to repent still remains, but the return to God will be frightening and painful. This evil world will attack with bloodthirsty cruelty any weakness it sees. Rent, spent and defiled, these Christians who must endure the Tribulation—and possibly martyrdom—can rekindle their love for Christ. But, oh, at what a price!

Let this be a warning! The time for our Lord and Savior's return is close, and we cannot afford to ignore the knock at the door! We must cast off the comfortable, clean and secure bedclothes of our cozy lifestyles and gird ourselves to "seek the LORD while He may be found" (Isaiah 55:6)!