

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON FOR GROUP OR PERSONAL STUDY.

### PART ONE – CHAPTERS 1-3 – THE EARLY COURTSHIP

It is always best to start the study of a new Bible book by reading it right through. And then read it again! Put aside anything else you have heard said or read about the Song of Solomon and let God speak to your heart. It is obviously a beautiful love song between a bridegroom and a bride with occasional backing from a chorus who encourage them both. We can imagine it being sung at a wedding with the rest of the bridal party joining in at times.

What is a love song doing in the Bible? Particularly one which is obviously so passionate! Where do such feelings fit into a church service? They should be absolutely central to our worship. Remember, God is love.(I Jn.4:16) But what kind of love? The love of God is a love far above our normal uses of the word to describe the feeling between a man and a woman, a parent and a child or a friend and a friend. God's love is about giving, and giving, and giving, endlessly, limitlessly, totally, without any demand for return.(Jn.3:16) But does that mean it has nothing to do with the other three kinds of love? On the contrary it is the secret of making the other loves work. God's love in and through us is what makes married love, family love and friendship work because it is unconditional, demanding nothing in return. It triumphs over being let down, and rebuffed. It keeps going and growing regardless of response.

The theme of the Song then is of the love between those who are soon to be married. The text is a dialogue between the man and the woman each expressing in beautiful, colourful language their thoughts and feelings about the other and their hopes and plans for the future of their relationship. Many of us know the unclouded joy of the time of courtship when all seems perfect and forever. The great question is - how long will this last? Will it weaken and become compromised by the experience of real life? Sometimes this can happen as fast as for Jacob who discovered on the morning after his wedding that he had made a great mistake and married the wrong sister.(Gen.29:25) The problem between Jacob and Leah was that she had pretended to be someone else. How many of us have pretended to be Superman or Superwoman to impress? One of the wonderful consequences of knowing the love of God is that we do not have to impress anyone because we know that God is pleased with us because of Jesus, and nothing else matters.(Matt.17:5)

There are so many obvious questions about the Song of Solomon – did King Solomon really write it? Is he the bridegroom? What about all his other wives and concubines? If he is not the bridegroom why does he occasionally get mentioned in the Song? I propose we leave these questions aside for the moment and begin by exploring the book itself.

The first step in appreciating the Song is to work out who is speaking in each section. Some translations offer their answer in the margin but always check for yourself. This is generally a matter of commonsense. If the passage says 'may he kiss...'(1:2) it is the bride speaking. When we read, 'most beautiful among women...'(1:8) it must be the bridegroom's contribution. 'We will rejoice...' (1:4) means the chorus have joined in.

In chapter one the couple first express their feelings and reveal something about themselves and each other. The bride is dark-skinned and beautiful. Perhaps because of this she suffered rejection from her brothers and was sent by them to care for the vineyards, but she has not done it. The bridegroom is a shepherd but as yet she does not know where. She also shepherds goats and is invited to come and find him. He thinks she is beautiful and he likes the ornaments she wears. The chorus are happy to help with more decorations for the bride.

### QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER ONE

1. What so far is the basis of attraction between the couple?
2. What place do perfume and jewellery play in a romantic relationship?
3. What is the role of the king in this chapter?

In chapter two the couple continue to compliment one another. She hopes she is a beautiful flower in his eyes.(2:1) He responds by not only agreeing but by contrasting the beauty of his bride with the thorny girls who surround her. This could have got him into trouble with the bridesmaids!(2:2) She goes a step further and pictures him as one delicious apple tree in a fruitless forest of young men. This conviction of the uniqueness of our partner-to-be is the starting point for true love and needs to continue for the rest of our lives. God's love can keep it this way. The bridegroom's banquet hall is presumably where the wedding is to take place. She looks forward not only to the wedding but to being fed with his love alone.(2:3-6) She is asleep dreaming of the wedding to come so the bridegroom does not want her wakened till she is ready. True love allows the other one to dream.(2:7) She pictures him coming for her, leaping over the hills like a young stag, and now peeping through her window, inviting her to join him in exploring the beautiful spring which is awaiting them both.(2:8-13) He is admiring her lovely body and voice which he will soon enjoy in the privacy of their marriage. Again God's love keeps this view of the other one fresh and unique.(2:14) The chorus warn of the predators who can ruin our best intentions.(2:15) The bride-to-be commits to him alone and looks forward to his response.(2:16,17)

#### QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER TWO

1. What is the place of poetic language in courtship? Is it unspiritual to speak to each other in such romantic language?
2. Why is it important to listen to each other's dreams for the future? How can we keep those dreams alive and growing?
3. What kinds of foxes can ruin a beautiful love affair? How can we protect our relationship against such attack? How can we support other couples against the same threats?

In chapter three the bride-to-be continues to dream of her soon-husband to the point where she cannot sleep and has to go looking for him. At first her search is unsuccessful. The night watchmen have not seen him. At last she finds him and holds him tight. She takes him home to her mother's room.(3:1-4) Again he tells the bridesmaids not to waken his beloved – so perhaps her search of the streets of the city was all in her dreams.(3:5) Once again King Solomon comes into the story travelling in his sedan chair and surrounded by his elite guards. Solomon may have been every girl's dream and so perhaps a distraction to young brides shortly to marry shepherd boys. At this time he was the ultimate movie star who would have featured in many women's magazines! Could he be the fox who might ruin the vineyard?

#### QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER THREE

1. In what sense should we search for the man or woman of our dreams? Will we find him or her?
2. What part might the girl's mother have played in the developing relationship at this point?
3. How can the idolising of good looking celebrities undermine a lifelong romance?