

### PART THREE – THE SONG OF SOLOMON AND THE REST OF SCRIPTURE

According to Paul in II Tim.3:16,17 'all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.' How does the Song of Solomon help this process? Jesus explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection 'the things concerning Himself in all the scriptures.' What did He show them from the Song of Solomon about Himself which caused their hearts to burn within them? (Lk.24:27,32)

The book seems to stand apart from the rest of the Old Testament in that it is not quoted by any of the other Old Testament writers. Nor does it refer to the stories from the creation, the fall, the exodus from Egypt, the lives of the judges, the prophets or the kings, through to the exile in Babylon and Judah's final return. The only clue is in the mention of Solomon himself as the writer and a shadowy figure in the background. Even this is a challenge because of what we know about the disaster of Solomon's own romantic life.(I Kgs.11) Did he read his own book? Interestingly the same could be said about the book of Proverbs. He demonstrated superb, God given wisdom on many aspects of life, including marriage, but then he could make such a spectacular disaster of his own marriage! To answer the question we raised at the beginning of this study. Could the bridegroom be Solomon himself? The answer by now should be obvious. The bridegroom in the Song only ever had one love. Solomon had many. The Song therefore is not the story of Solomon's own romance but his wistful dream of how he wishes he had kept himself for the one of God's choice alone. Perhaps that is part of the point of the book. Listen to what I teach; don't look at how I live.

The same difficulty arises when we look in the New Testament where again there is no obvious reference to the story of the Song of Solomon or quote from it by Jesus or any of the other writers. Where then does the book fit into the revelation of Jesus Christ and His message promising transformation in our lives? The only apparent answer is in the image of the bridegroom and the bride in their courtship, marriage and ongoing love for each other.

Jesus and His disciples attended a wedding, described in John chapter 2:1-11. The only part He played on this occasion was in miraculously ensuring that the wedding guests did not go thirsty. The guests are the chorus in the Song. Jesus used invitations to a wedding reception on another occasion to explain our unique privilege in being invited to the heavenly wedding between Christ and His church. He warned of the terrible consequence of ignoring the invitation or of turning up to the reception on our terms rather than God's. It is only those who know they are unworthy who finally get to share in the event.(Matt.22:1-14)

Paul picked up the same image of marriage on earth as intended to illustrate the love between Christ and His church. Wives are asked to submit to their husbands, and some modern wives grumble about this, not apparently noticing that their husbands are called upon to go much further in their love by being willing to die for their wives, as Jesus did for His church.(Eph.5:22-33) The great climax of history in which we are all invited to share is the marriage of Christ and His church.(Rev.21:2-9) Before we stood at the altar and said 'Yes' to Jesus there will have been a process of courtship in which by many means He showed His love for us and urged us to trust Him. The Song could be seen as demonstrating that beautiful process by which He won our love to be consummated in an eternity with Him.

The Old Testament also uses marriage as a way of describing God's love for and commitment to His people,(Isa.62:5) though sadly the point most often made is about Israel, the bride, being unfaithful. All too often the human examples of marriage are of failure. There are two examples of real love leading to marriage in the stories of Isaac and Rebecca,(Gen.24) and of Boaz and Ruth.(Ruth 1-4) The most powerful Old Testament message about marriage and its meaning is in the story of Hosea and Gomer. They start well as Man did with God in the Garden of Eden but rapidly fail as Gomer goes from adultery to being a harlot and finally to being a slave. Hosea redeems his wife, now a slave for sale in the market, and takes her home to be his wife again. Jesus redeemed us as slaves of sin, (Rom.6:12-23) by paying the price of His own life and taking us again to be not slaves but His wife.(Hos.1-3)

In coming to earth Jesus reached out in love to us and continues to do so. The Song demonstrates the depth and consistency of His feeling for us in rich poetic language. But we too as the bride are invited to respond to Him alone, passionately and forever. Will we do so? Our human courtships and marriages are intended to mirror this heavenly love affair. Will we let them?

#### FINAL ASSIGNMENT ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Write a screenplay to present the message of this book to a teenage audience who are under pressure from the world they live in regard to this aspect of their lives and so miss out on God's best. But use the story first and foremost to encourage them to seek the best in Christ's romance in reaching out to win us to Him alone.