

PART FOUR - THE SONG OF SOLOMON - THE WRITER HIMSELF

The Song was written by King Solomon himself. Some people have assumed that Solomon was also the bridegroom in the poem because of passages like 1:4; 1:12; 4:6-11; 6:8; and 8:11,12. Clearly Solomon was in the background but none on these passages identify him as the bridegroom. What we know of the life of Solomon surely makes it unthinkable that he could be the young shepherd the poem describes. It seems appropriate to take a more careful look at the life of Solomon to find a final answer to the question but at the same time to see what we can learn, good and bad, from his remarkable life.

David, Solomon's father, was a beautiful example of a man of God, most of the time. The Lord described him as 'A man after my heart, who will do all my will.'(Acts 13:22) Because we are justified by faith this is how the Lord remembered David as He does all of us who trust Him. But there were times when David did his own thing, sometimes with disastrous consequences. In Deut.17:17 before ever the Israelites had a king, the Lord instructed future kings not to multiply horses, wives or silver and gold for themselves. The purity of their marriages was to be an example to their people. II Sam.3:2-5 list the wives and some of the sons of David. David's marital problems had started with a political marriage to Michal, the daughter of King Saul. She loved him but there is no indication that he loved her and most important, there is no mention of him asking God whether she was His idea.(I Sam.18:20-28) Not surprisingly therefore the marriage did not go well, they separated and she married someone else. Later when he was king, David compelled Michal to return to him, presumably to protect his image as a man.(II Sam.3:13) It still did not work out because Michal despised David when he was excited about God's blessing on him.(II Sam.6:20) Things went from bad to worse in David's family life as he added more wives and girl friends once he was in power. All this makes David's affair with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his loyal friends, and his arranged murder of her husband, all too easy to understand.(II Sam.11) The fruit of that affair was a baby who died but soon Bathsheba was pregnant again and the result was Solomon.(II Sam.12:24)

Solomon grew up in an affluent but turbulent family with many step-mothers and half brothers and sisters. Jealousy and conflict even to the point of rape, murder and treason were no surprise.(II Sam.13-19; I Kings.1) As David grew older the pressing question became, "who would succeed him?" Solomon was far from being the eldest but he was the son of David's favourite wife to whom he had long promised that her son would be his successor.(I Kings 1:11-21) The Lord confirmed in David's heart that Solomon was His choice. David's final challenge before his death was to make sure that Solomon became the next king which he did by having him crowned even before David had died. David's last words were to his son urging him to be strong in the Lord and faithful to His word. He warned him of some trouble makers with whom he would need to deal urgently.(I Kings 2:1-9)

Chapter three begins with Solomon's first recorded mistake in marrying the daughter of a heathen king, just as his father David had married a king's daughter who did not love the Lord. The other hint of problems to come was in the mention of him 'walking in the statutes of His father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places'. Too easily he was led by the unwise example of the behaviour of those around him. This would have devastating consequences in future years. Despite this the Lord appeared to him and asked him how he wanted to be blessed. Solomon chose wisdom to govern well, just as we too can ask God for wisdom.(James 1:5) The Lord promised much

more beside, because knowing the wisdom of God is the secret of all other blessing. There follows a brilliant example of the wisdom of Solomon in unravelling the mysteries of human behaviour.

Chapter four shows Solomon applying his wisdom to the business of government administration, and the benefit which flowed to the people of Israel when they were wisely governed. Equally his wisdom was expressed in proverbs and songs of which the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon were only a small part. Like his father David who wrote most of the Psalms, Solomon had a wonderful gift as a writer. It was his wisdom rather than his material possessions which attracted people from far and wide.

Chapter eleven is the tragic end of an otherwise inspiring story. As Solomon had accumulated horses, chariots and gold, so he now began to collect wives, hundreds of them! His wisdom shown in so many other areas, seems never to have been applied in this one aspect of his life. As with each of us, there was one vulnerable place in his life where the Devil seemed to be able to tempt him successfully again and again. Having made this mistake just once in marrying Pharaoh's daughter, it was so much easier to make it again. Almost certainly his father's example of multiple marriages had made him blind to the danger of this course of action. Deut.17:17 had spelled out this danger especially for kings, yet both of them, otherwise so open to the word of God, had missed it. His wives turned his heart to their gods so that all he had done in teaching the people and building the temple for the worship of God was undermined. In the book of Proverbs Solomon had some great wisdom about marriage to the wife of God's choice which he never applied to himself. Having warned him over and over, the Lord now told him how his unfaithfulness would result in most of the kingdom being taken from his descendants. His enemies were growing and awaiting their opportunity. Jeroboam was the most dangerous and would take much of the kingdom from Solomon's son and successor, Rehoboam, in later years.

After completing these notes my conclusions regarding my initial questions are as follows. Did Solomon write this book? Yes. 1:1 says so. Is Solomon the bridegroom in the song? No. His repetitive adultery would have made a mockery of his song if he applied it to himself? When did he write the song? Probably at the end of his life when the Lord brought him back into faith and forgiveness. It was then the dream of how his romantic life could have been, and how it can be for others who trust the Lord instead of family example and inner urges. Will we meet Solomon in heaven? Yes, of course because he was born again and the Lord will never desert or forsake us however big a mess we make later.(Heb.13:5) Great news!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION REGARDING SOLOMON AS THE WRITER OF HIS SONG.

1. How did Solomon's birth and upbringing shape his own conduct as a man and as a leader? What were his strengths and his weaknesses? How does the same happen in our lives? Is failure inevitable if we have a dysfunctional family life as a child? If not, why not?
2. How was offering sacrifices on high places an early warning of danger in Solomon's life? What does this kind of behaviour represent in our lives? Why does it undermine the stability of our marriages?
3. What part could Solomon's material and political success have had in his personal problems?
4. Finally does the message of the Song of Solomon give clues as to what may have been happening in Solomon's heart and mind as he got older? How could he even as an old man have listened to his own message and been rescued from disaster? Why did the Holy Spirit inspire him to write the Song of Solomon?