

Author - STEVEN R. DOUGLAS 2017

THE HOLY BIBLE NKJV REFERENCE GUIDE

OLD TESTAMENT

BOOK 22

SONG OF SOLOMON



The Judgement of Solomon by Raphael

SUMMARY

The Song of Solomon is a series of lyrical poems organized as a lengthy dialogue between a young woman and her lover. A third party, or chorus, occasionally addresses the lovers.

The first poem is spoken by the young maiden, who longs to be near her lover and enjoy his kisses. She explains that she has a dark complexion because her family sends her to work in the vineyards. She searches for her lover, comparing him to a wandering shepherd, and the chorus encourages her to follow the flocks to his tent.

The lovers lie on a couch together. The man praises the beauty of his beloved, comparing her to a young mare and comparing her eyes to doves' eyes. He describes verdant and fertile surroundings. The maiden calls herself a rose and a lily, covered by the shade of her beloved, a fruit tree.

She compares her beloved to a lively gazelle that arrives to take her away during spring when the plants are budding. The maiden boasts that the man now pastures his flocks of sheep among her lilies. She warns other women, "the daughters of Jerusalem," not to fall in love too early.

While in bed, the maiden dreams that she is searching the city streets for her lover and that she finds him and takes him home. She envisions a lavish wedding procession, in which her happy bridegroom appears as King Solomon.

The man speaks, comparing each part of the maiden's body to animals and precious objects. He calls for her to come down from the mountain peaks to be with him. With intense yearning, he characterizes her as an enclosed "garden" full of ripe foliage and a flowing fountain.

The maiden bids the wind to blow on her garden and invites the man into the garden. The man dines in the garden and calls for their friends to celebrate with the lovers. In another dream, the maiden hears her lover knocking at her door late one night, but he disappears. Again, she roams the streets, but this time the city guards accost the maiden.

She asks the "daughters of Jerusalem" to help her find her lover. The chorus asks her to describe the young man, and she compares each part of his body to precious metals, jewels, and animals.

The two find each other in the garden. The man continues to praise each part of the maiden's body. He bids her to dance and likens her to a palm tree with breasts like fruit. The maiden invites her lover to the fields and villages, promising to give him her love among the blossoming vineyards.

She wishes that he were her brother so that people would not comment about their open displays of affection. She urges him to "seal" his heart with her love, for love is strong. The maiden thinks back on her earlier chastity but is glad she has lost it peacefully "in his eyes".

The man says that, while King Solomon may have many vineyards, he is happy with his one vineyard, the maiden.

SUMMARY Continued

The Song of Solomon is also called “The Song of Songs,” suggesting that it is the greatest of all songs. The first title implies that King Solomon composed the collection of love poems, but Solomon’s name was probably added at a later date by the song’s editors, perhaps because of references within the text to the wise and prolific king.

This attribution to Solomon led to the book’s inclusion in the Hebrew Bible and later, Christian versions of the Old Testament. Early Hebrew and Christian scholars long maintained that the love story is an allegory of God’s love for humankind, or of the intensity of divine love within the human heart. However, it is undeniable that the song celebrates not only human love but also the sensuous and mystical quality of erotic desire.

Modern scholars see similarities between The Song of Solomon and other ancient Near-Eastern stories in which the fertility of the earth depends upon the sexual encounter of a male and female deity.

Although the biblical maiden and her lover themselves do not affect the fertility of the land, there are numerous parallels between the fertile vegetation of their surroundings and the success of their romance. The lovers recline on a green couch, whose color suggests a connection with nature.

The song also explicitly compares the man and woman to vegetation: the woman is a flower and the man is a fruit tree. Images of plants and frolicking animals are symbols of life, and as such they are metaphors for the procreative act of human sexual relations.

The song’s references to spring and the budding of plants further emphasize the budding of romantic arousal. The couple always celebrates their love in such verdant environments—in the wilderness, the vineyard, or the garden. It is in the city, where plants do not grow and the city guards are brutal, that the maiden searches for her lover but cannot find him.

The man’s comparison of the maiden to a “garden locked” and “fountain sealed” establishes the relationship between chastity and femininity. The image of an enclosed garden is a metaphor for female virginity that is frequently repeated in later medieval and Renaissance literature.

In the Song of Solomon, the closed garden suggests that the girl is chaste and unsullied. The man’s dining in the garden implies that the two have consummated their relationship, and his invitation to the chorus to celebrate this event with feasting further indicates the completion of this rite of passage.

Later, the two walk in a vineyard, and the girl remembers her earlier virginity when she was cursed to labor in the vineyard instead of enjoying it. Her memory while in the vineyard suggests the bittersweet nature of the loss of innocence.

The garden motif is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden in Genesis, where Adam and Eve enjoy God’s creation prior to the emergence of human wickedness. The parallels to Eden in The Song of Solomon suggest that the celebration of human sensuality is, itself, a good and not a wicked thing.

SUMMARY Continued

The maiden and her lover, however, must enjoy their love within the boundaries and confines of gardens and fields. This limitation on the enjoyment of their sexual behavior is in keeping with the ongoing biblical theme that there are ethical requirements for enjoying God's promises—for Adam and Eve to remain in the garden of Eden and for the Israelites to dwell in the promised land.

NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 1:6** Do not look upon me, because I am dark, Because the sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; They made me the keeper of the vineyards, But my own vineyard I have not kept.
- 5:10** The Shulamite My beloved is white and ruddy, Chief among ten thousand.
- 5:11** His head is like the finest gold; His locks are wavy, And black as a raven.
- 5:12** His eyes are like doves By the rivers of waters, Washed with milk, And fitly set.
- 5:13** His cheeks are like a bed of spices, Banks of scented herbs. His lips are lilies, Dripping liquid myrrh.
- 5:14** His hands are rods of gold Set with beryl. His body is carved ivory Inlaid with sapphires.
- 5:15** His legs are pillars of marble Set on bases of fine gold. His countenance is like Lebanon, Excellent as the cedars.
- 5:16** His mouth is most sweet, Yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, And this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!
- 6:8** There are sixty queens And eighty concubines, And virgins without number.
- 6:9** My dove, my perfect one, Is the only one, The only one of her mother, The favorite of the one who bore her. The daughters saw her And called her blessed, The queens and the concubines, And they praised her.
- 7:1** The Beloved How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter! The curves of your thighs are like jewels, The work of the hands of a skillful workman.
- 7:2** Your navel is a rounded goblet; It lacks no blended beverage. Your waist is a heap of wheat Set about with lilies.
- 7:3** Your two breasts are like two fawns, Twins of a gazelle.
- 7:4** Your neck is like an ivory tower, Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon By the gate of Bath Rabbim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon Which looks toward Damascus.
- 7:5** Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel, And the hair of your head is like purple; A king is held captive by your tresses.
- 7:6** How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights!
- 7:7** This stature of yours is like a palm tree, And your breasts like its clusters.
- 7:8** I said, "I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches." Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine, The fragrance of your breath like apples,
- 8:6** The Shulamite to Her Beloved Set me as a seal upon your heart, As a seal upon your arm; For love is as strong as death, Jealousy as cruel as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame.

BIBLE TIMELINE

950 BC

Solomon's Song of Songs

Songs 1 - 8

MAP REFERENCES

