

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY CHARLOTTE

*'ROYAL MATRIMONY: THE THEME OF KINGSHIP IN THE BOOK OF
SONG OF SONGS AS AN APOLOGETIC TO SOLOMON'*

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The Song of Songs is the subject of no little debate among Bible scholars today. Commentators are generally united in saying that it is a beautiful redemptive poem about love, but the consensus ends there.¹ Debates proliferate over its authorship, date, use of imagery, role and number of characters in the book and overall purpose. The interpreter is left to sift through the perplexing and multi-faceted perspectives on the book. This essay hopes to clear up some of this fog by focusing on one major theme: royal kingship. I propose that the Song is a redemptive love poem which also functions as an apologetic work written with Solomon in mind. It is a defense of faithful, monogamous marital love both to Israel and, especially, to Solomon. To establish this premise, I will discuss a proposed apologetic model that is used in the Song, how this relates to the royal theme, the implications of this apologetic reading on how we date the book, and lastly discern its purpose, author, and how this apologetic speaks to us pastorally and Christologically today.

An Apologetic Model

A big question, as we investigate this royal theme, is how Solomon can be portrayed in both a positive and negative light. Some commentators see him as a manipulative, domineering king who wants to seduce the Shulamite girl into his harem,² while others take him to be the author of the book, and the ideal king and lover.³ Still others see him in a negative light, but whose royal traits are appropriated positively by the woman in praise of

¹ Athalya Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 63–64; Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1995), 299–300; Iain W. Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, Mich: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 2001), 247; Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 5.

² See e.g. Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 246.

³ James M. Hamilton, *Song of Songs: A Biblical-Theological, Allegorical, Christological Interpretation*, Focus on the Bible Commentary Series (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, U.K: Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2015), 43; Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary*, 4th Century ed. edition. (Leicester, England ; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: IVP Academic, 1994), 619.

her beloved.⁴ I identify with the final view. However, I hope to show how Scripture utilizes an apologetic methodology which accounts for both praising and condemnatory language in respect to Solomon. This apologetic method has been coined ‘subversive fulfilment’.

In the beginning, God created all human beings who were made for relationship with Him as His image bearers (Gen. 1:26-31, 5:21-24). However, despite everyone knowing this deep down and daily creation proclaiming who He is (Psalm 19), since the fall we turn to sin, idols and associated debasing pleasures (Rom. 1:18-32).⁵ Yet we cannot utterly suppress the knowledge of God (Romans 1:18-20). The good pleasures of life: weather, crops, friends, beauty- all point us beyond themselves to the great Giver and delighter our souls were made for: God. Idols do not produce the great pleasures we think they do (Acts 14:15-18). Our hearts do not find rest in idols and transient pleasures. They their rest in Him.⁶ Idols and sin claim to give us the desires of our hearts, but they only have an appeal because they offer us something only God can devlier on (Is. 36:13-20). Therefore, the longings of our hearts for God are hinted at even as we are drawn into a pursuit of idols. This longing is what the biblical writers seek to bring out and commend. Yet at the same time, idols only bring death, since they are not God, and cannot save or bring our hearts’ desires (Is. 44:6-20, Hos. 8:4, Jer. 2:13, 27-28). In confronting idols the Bible thus commend the desires idols claim to bring, while also critiquing the idols as destructive counterfeits of God.⁷ We see this practically at work in Acts 17:16-32. Paul is distressed at the Athenian idols (v.16), but commends their spirit of worship, as they are seeking in some way a god they do not know.

⁴ See e.g. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 5-6.

⁵ Ted Turnau, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2012), 62–63.

⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Reprint edition. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Engl: Penguin, 1970), 21; Turnau, *Popologetics*, 46-48.

⁷ For more on this, see Timothy J. Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009), xi–xxvi.

Paul exposes the deception they are under and points to the true and living God they long for: Christ Jesus (vv. 24-31). Paul also in 1 Cor. 1:18-25 connects with the Jewish and Greek desires for wisdom and by pointing to Christ as the true wisdom and power of God. At the same time, he subverts their current idolatrous devotion to seeking wisdom and power apart from Christ.⁸

Therefore, the biblical apologetic brings out the elements of grace in people's idolatrous worship, but also undermines the destructive frauds idols are. It then shows how the gospel acts to subvert these idols, while also fulfilling the deep desires they show in people. In the Song, we see the same method applied. Beauty, mutual affirmation, glory, and power are held up as ideal in the royal imagery used throughout the song. Solomon though, as he turned away from God to idols and a multitude of lovers (1 Kings 11), sought beauty, glory, affirmation and power in the wrong places. The Song therefore holds up these grand ideals and appropriates them to covenantal monogamous marriage. This is the gold standard that Solomon's heart longs for in his sinful idolatry, and the Song thus commends marriage and confronts his current sinful ways. Yet the Song also points beyond covenantal marriage to the greatest desire of Solomon: for God and the gospel. In capturing Solomon's heart for marriage once more, the author hopes to lead Solomon back to God. God is the one who will fulfil his ultimate desire for glory, intimacy, affirmation and power, of which marriage is a picture.

⁸ While this apologetic method comes from a variety of sources as footnoted above, the best explanation of from Strange, *Their Rock*, 237-73.

Commending Solomon

Song of Songs 3:6-11 is the most explicit royal passage in the Song. Interpreters have differed on Solomon's role in the passage. Some see this as a mythological event or historical marriage rite that is recorded.⁹ However, I tend to agree with Longman who sees this as not a historical or mythological description, but rather a poetic one. The grand royal language and opulence associated with Solomon are used to describe the wonder of covenantal love and marriage.¹⁰ This is done to emphasize the greater and genuine beauty and grandeur of marriage to Solomon, subverting his polygamy and the pretense of grandeur and royalty that goes with it (1 Kings 11:1-8).

In v. 6, one's attention is seized by the speaker crying out: 'who is this coming up from the wilderness?' The speaker is the woman, given that she is talking previously (3:1-5), and also is the one who characteristically admonishes the daughters of Jerusalem/Zion at the end of her speeches (3:5, 11, c.f. 2:7, 5:8, 5:16, 8:4).¹¹ We are drawn by sight and smell, as columns of smoke elicit perfumes of myrrh and frankincense.¹² These are exotic and

⁹ In the mythological view, it is not Solomon in view, but Shulman, who is being brought to the Temple as a marriage rite. This is done based on connecting Ex. 13:21-22 and the pillar of smoke with the smoke of v. 6. However, this textual connection is tenuous and is reading far too many mythological ideas into the text and making far too much of a connection with Solomon. For a good rebuttal to this, see Longman, *Song of Songs*, 132. Others extricate his name, seeing it a verb 'shalom', meaning something like 'consummation gift', but given the mention of 'king' (vv. 9, 11) in the passage, this is unlikely. G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 1st edition. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 109; Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, Hermeneia--a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 151. Some again see this a real historical event, a wedding associated with Solomon. Again, see Longman for a rebuttal to this view: Longman, *Song of Songs*, 132.

¹⁰ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 133.

¹¹ J. Cheryl Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 1st ed., The Old Testament Library (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 150; Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2005), 122; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 135. Contra Murphy, who is uncertain whether it is the man, woman or both who speak, though he admits that the daughters of Zion and Jerusalem are the same, addressed previously by the woman. See Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 150-151.

¹² Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 142.

luxurious scents brought from Arabia.¹³ The reference to merchants evoke the far reaching attraction of Israel in Solomon's day, making it a hub of trade, intrigue and wealth (1 Kings 10:14-15).¹⁴ This is a place even Queen of Sheba came to see the glories of Solomon's kingdom and Lord (1 Kings 10:1-10).¹⁵

Intoxicated by this luxurious scene, we learn in v. 7 that it is Solomon's palanquin. Confusion has arisen among commentators to the identity the one in the carriage, largely due to some translations taking v.6 מַה to mean 'what', when 'who' is the best translation.¹⁶ Some commentators though see the young girl as the one coming up in the carriage. Yet given the context that the girl is speaking still, it is most logical to take the answer as Solomon.¹⁷ Verse 7 describes the palanquin, but the focus is clearly on its occupant and owner: Solomon.¹⁸

Verses 7-8 accentuate the might and glory of Solomon by describing his train and mode of

¹³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 135; Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 146. Provan makes much here of the use of smoke, as it ascends, given the sacrificial associations of the word in Hebrew. He oddly separates 3:1-5 from 3:6-11, saying that the former is about the intimate relationship of two poor lovers, while the latter is about Solomon coming to coerce the woman to love her, interpreting the smoke as Solomon's sacrificial love conquests in his trail. However, there is a clear connection between the two passages and speakers (3:5, 11), and as a clear note of praise about Solomon as we will see throughout this passage. Provan is reading far too much into one word to support his exclusively negative view throughout the book. When we see that the Song consists of 2 rather than 3 characters, as Solomon is used as a figure of the male lover, not as a real person, we will avoid such a mistaken reading. See Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 298-300, 303-5. See similarly Miles V. Van Pelt, "Song of Solomon," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016), 434-35.

¹⁴ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 109.

¹⁵ Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary*, 1st Fortress Press ed., Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 126.

¹⁶ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 107.

¹⁷ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 135; Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 143, 145-6. One reason for this is 6:10 and 8:5 as posing similar questions and both suppose the answer of 'the young woman'. Yet these commentators woefully separate v. 6 from v. 7, when in fact, one feeds into the other. See Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 107-9; Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs*, BST (Leicester, England: Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 1994), 148. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 149. Another reason to take it as the woman is that the demonstrative pronoun is feminine in v. 6. Yet Solomon is clearly the focus of the passage, and the pronoun may be referring to the palanquin, a feminine word. See Hess, *Song of Songs*, 116, 118; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 125-6.

¹⁸ Francis Brown et al., *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 641. Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 143, 145; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 135.

transport.¹⁹ The word translated litter/palanquin/carriage (רֶמְנִיָּה), can mean a bed, couch or chair.²⁰ Yet here and in other contexts (1 Sam. 19:15, 2 Sam. 3:31) it is portable and used by kings or close associates.²¹ This royal association of the English word palanquin best describes the wealth and power associated with its possessor.²² The parallel word in v. 9 is אֶפְרַיִם which is a hapax, which some commentators suppose may come from a Greek word.²³ Either way, the carriage is well decorated and ornate, fitting of Solomon's stature. The might of the king is such that his bodyguard encompasses 60 well-trained men, ready to fend off foe, twice as much as the 30 elite soldiers David had (v. 7-8, 2 Sam. 23:18-19, 23)!²⁴ 60 is a common value used to denote the completeness of Solomon's temple, provisions, tribute and royal entourage (1 Kings 6:2, 4:22, 10:14, Song 6:8).²⁵ We are then told that Solomon made his ornate carriage in v. 9, or more likely had it made for him and inlaid by others (v. 10).²⁶ The cedars of Lebanon echo the glories of Solomon's house and Temple in Jerusalem, since it was the most high quality wood available. Such brilliant building materials display the wonder of His kingdom (v. 9, c.f. 1 Kings 4:33, 5:6, 9, 13-18, 7:2,

¹⁹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 135.

²⁰ Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 131, Contra Provan, who thinks it can only refer to a 'bed'. See Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 302.

²¹ Brown et al., *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 641-2; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 136; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 109; Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 147; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 130. Provan suggests that words like 'post' in v. 10 must refer to stationary pillars and that the verb הִצַּיַן (inlaid) in its noun form is always used in contexts that describe a paved floor or palace. However, there is nothing in the description to indicate that posts and inner decorations could not be used for decorating things that could move as well, especially given the fact that v. 6 describes the object as moving closer to the speaker. Only when we artificially separate v. 6 from the rest of the passage can this interpretation become conceivable. See Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 300-1.

²² Longman, *Song of Songs*, 126.

²³ From the Greek φορεῖον. Ludwig, Kohler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Study ed. (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001), 79. Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 148; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 130.

²⁴ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 126; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 110; Hess, *Song of Songs*, 119-120; Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 302. Provan though thinks these who guard the king ensure he can have sexual conquests, whereas it is better to take this military language as showing the might of the king, and by inference, the great defender that the woman sees in her beloved. See Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 302-3.

²⁵ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 119.

²⁶ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 136.

10:17, 21).²⁷ Our eyes are further entranced by Solomon's royal luxuries in v. 10, as his carriage is said to be made of silver, gold and purple. Purple was particularly rare and only associated with kings (Esther 1:6, 8:15). The Phoenicians were the only ones who could make it, deriving it from the pigment of rare murex shellfish.²⁸ Again our minds are drawn back into the brilliance of Solomon's royal reign through these materials (1 Kings 6:20-35, 10:14-29).²⁹ His glories are such that women decorated the seat for Solomon with love. Some commentators think that this word אהבה must not be 'love' but some other precious material or stone, and thus the word needs emendation.³⁰ It is best, as Longman says, to take this as meaning 'love', since the Hebrew describes the love that men and women share for each other, and the LXX also translates this as 'love'.³¹ This encapsulates the love the craftswomen have for Solomon, delightfully inlaying his carriage.³²

The spectacle of Solomon is such that the daughters of Jerusalem are called by the woman to look upon him in v. 11, in his crown and glory, a symbol of his royalty, on his wedding day.³³ This is unlikely recalling a historical wedding of Solomon's, nor is it indicative of a Near Eastern tradition that men and women wore crowns on their wedding day.³⁴ The woman is instead extolling her bridegroom through the magnificent figure of

²⁷ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 127; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 111; Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 301.

²⁸ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 137-8; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 112; Hess, *Song of Songs*, 121-2.

²⁹ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 121.

³⁰ See Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 149-150; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 149.

³¹ Gerhard Wallis, Jan Bergman, and A. O. Haldar, "'Ahabh,'" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Revised edition. (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, 15 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), I:13.

³² Longman, *Song of Songs*, 138; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 112. Carr does suggest that love-making scenes are engraved on the carriage, given similar Ugarit samples of beds. However, this is an unnecessary suggestion to make, given that the subjective nature of the making of the carriage is in view, not what the women put on the carriage. Keel tentatively entertains this notion as well but is less sure. See Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 133-4.

³³ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 122.

³⁴ Carr notwithstanding. See Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 113. Contra Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 136; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 152.

Solomon.³⁵ She is imagining her love and her wedding day in the grandest of royal terms, given all the epithets and markers of the greatest king in her audience's minds: Solomon.³⁶ This both confirms the grandness of Solomon's reign, while also displaying to her audience in v. 11 that her bridegroom is the real glorious one. He fulfils her dreams and he delights to leave his mother (v. 11, Gen. 2:24) to be joined with her. They might be ordinary lovers, but their covenant faithful love is as grand and as beautiful as anything that Solomon's kingdom could boast of. The author shows there is a royal magnificence in monogamous covenant love. As Solomon was mighty, royal, rich and alluring, so is the woman's betrothed in her eyes. People of Solomon's day reading this may have wondered how Solomon could be praised so much, but the author's point is to show that the glory Solomon pursues in his pleasures and idolatry is found in the single-minded devotion this couple have for one another in marriage.³⁷ It thus aims to fulfil his and everyone's hearts' desires for such a beautiful exclusive marital love.

We also see this commending language that evokes and exalts Solomon elsewhere in the Song. Song of Songs 1:2-4 is the best example of this. In v. 4, the king is the man the woman wants. Yet again, though, the woman uses the royal imagery of Solomon to communicate the superlative nature of her relationship with her betrothed. She wants him to kiss her, because his love is better than wine (v. 2). Twice she mentions anointing oils in v. 3 to praise his aroma and aura. Such oils call to mind the anointing of David and Solomon. The language of having a great name parallels the Davidic covenant (1 Sam. 16, Kings 1:39, 2

³⁵ Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 140-1; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 136.

³⁶ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 136-7, 139. Exum proves that the lovers are here imagining their future consummation and are not married yet. See Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 144; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 152.

³⁷ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 108; Hess, *Song of Songs*, 123-4.

Sam. 7:9).³⁸ The intimacy of him bringing her to his chambers (v. 4, c.f. Song 2:4), and the extravagant title she gives him as king shows that the author wants to draw on the great imagery of royalty to bring it down to an ordinary marital covenant relationship.³⁹ In her eyes, he the most powerful king, worthy of highest honor.⁴⁰ Exuberant praise is also echoed by the daughters of Jerusalem, who fawn over the lover's renowned character, much like they do later with him in the picture of Solomon (3:9, 11).⁴¹ This royal praise is juxtaposed with the ordinary way of life the lovers seem to have in vv. 5-7, as references are made to their rural lives and their shepherding flock(s?) (v. 6-7). The woman beautifully combines the rural poverty of Kedar with the luxury of Solomon's palace curtains (1 Kings 7:1-12, 10:14-29).⁴² Thus there is glory in the ordinary, an allure, an intimacy and beauty wrapped up in the exclusive covenant relationship of common lovers. This should entice Solomon who is pursuing glory and pleasure in the pseudo-glorious pleasures of court.

We might also finally mention a handful of other passages that touch on the royal theme. The metaphor of Pharaoh's chariots in 1:9 clearly calls to mind Solomon's recruiting of horses from Egypt and his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kings 3:1, 11:1).⁴³ This imagery though no longer recalls the ungodly aspects of Solomon's reign, in his gathering of wives, wealth and power for himself (Deut. 17:15-17, 1 Kings 10:23-29, 11:2-4). Instead, the royal imagery is redeemed used to praise the ordinary woman here, as part of a monogamous godly marriage. Both lovers use royal language to describe each other's beauty in an intimate

³⁸ Hamilton, *Song of Songs*, 41-43.

³⁹ Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 140, 143.

⁴⁰ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 92. Provan is mistaken here to separate the persons addressed in v. 4 picturing Solomon as having her in his chambers, though she wants to run away with her lover. It seems most plain to see her address her lover throughout. See Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 266.

⁴¹ Dianne Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, First Edition edition., Berit Olam (Collegeville, Minn: Michael Glazier, 2001), 12.

⁴² Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 45.

⁴³ Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, 64.

way. The same language of 3:6-11 (gold, spices, myrrh, cedars of Lebanon) comes up repeatedly, whereby the lovers praise each other and the surroundings in royal terms (Song 1:17, 4:10, 14-15, 5:10-16, 7:4-5). Therefore, we can see that royal language is used as an apologetic for ordinary faithful marriage.

Critiquing Solomon

As the Song commends the good of Solomon's reign and glory, it also critiques him sharply. This makes sense if the author wishes to critique Solomon for the idolatry and immorality he is currently engrossed in. In Song 6:8-9 the author conjures up a great and ever-increasing number of queens, concubines and virgins ('sixty...eighty...without number!').⁴⁴ Though not mentioned by name, the great number of and wives and concubines Solomon had (1 Kings 11:3) clearly allude to his lifestyle.⁴⁵ The man speaking here concludes that he does not need this vast variety of lovers. His lover and wife is the only one, his only 'dove' (v. 9) and even those in court praise her metaphorically.⁴⁶ An interesting parallel exists between this passage and 1 Sam. 12:2-3. Here, Nathan rebukes David for having many wives, yet seizing Ahab's 'only ewe'. When compared, we can detect in these verses an almost prophetic critique of Solomon's many women.⁴⁷ They cannot hold a candle to what the lovers have with each other. This is a subtle call to Solomon to abandon his idolatrous polygamy and enjoy marriage as it was made, as real joy, intimacy and satisfaction is there.

⁴⁴ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, 78.

⁴⁵ Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 218.

⁴⁶ Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 219-20; Contra Van Pelt, "Song of Solomon," 435, who sees Solomon as speaking her to the woman to lure her back into the harem. This seems odd that Solomon would single her out given his plethora of lovers.

⁴⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, 219.

The song also ends with an explicit critique of Solomon, as the author again shows up the alleged power, glory and love that Solomon claims to have outside of God's way. In 8:11-12, Solomon is contrasted as in 6:8-10 with the speaker's single loved one, this time the woman speaking. She compares Solomon's vineyard with her own.⁴⁸ Keel suggests that Baal-Hammon probably is translated the 'Lord of tumult,' and may not be a geographical place, but that rather it is an oblique reference to Solomon's huge harem. It may also refer to the god Baal he was led to through them (1 Kings 11:3).⁴⁹ There is some uncertainty as to how to interpret this metaphor. The metaphor of vineyards and gardens is used in the song to illustrate the lovers' bodies, and both are said to possess the other's body by chapter 5, after marriage (4:12-5:1, 6:11-12, 7:11-13).⁵⁰ Therefore, the keepers of Solomon's vineyard (who are the harem) are his eunuchs, and these eunuchs are paid to guard them (c.f. Esther 2:14-15). Solomon essentially buys and sells his lovers. He is seemingly well-endowed with money and women. But the female speaker has chosen the better portion. She has her own husband and her husband's body for herself.⁵¹ Solomon and his tenants can keep their 1200 and their vast wealth.⁵² But though there might be financial profit from his sexual escapades, money cannot buy him love (Song 8:7).⁵³ She has true riches, glory and intimacy unknown Solomon in covenant marriage. Therefore, we see that the Song both captures the royal glory

⁴⁸ Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 281; Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 143. I disagree with Keel and Bergant that it is the man speaking here, as this artificially separates v. 10 from v. 11-12; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, 103; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 281. See Longman, *Song of Songs*, 218.

⁴⁹ Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 281-2; Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 370. Carr notes that the geographical location is uncertain. See Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 173-4.

⁵⁰ Paul J. Griffiths, *Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), xxxvi. An implication of the above study is also that the poem is clearly not a series of poems but is one singular song (1:1), extolling the love of a couple as they move from their betrothal to marriage and beyond, forming an apologetic throughout. Contra Longman *Song of Songs*, 131-2.

⁵¹ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, 173; Contra Hamilton, who sees here Solomon invited to take the thousand, that is, her fruit and her. Solomon is seen in this interpretation still as the idealized king, and she is giving up her vineyard to him. However, there is a clear contrast between Solomon's vineyard, and 'the thousand' it brings, and her very own. See Hamilton, *Song of Songs*, 143-4.

⁵² Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 371.

⁵³ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, 103; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 220.

of Solomon's reign and shows how, in his sexual immorality, he forsakes the real majesty of monogamous marriage.⁵⁴

Date

Several scholars argue for a late date to the book. The use of the Greek loan word in 3:11, for example, may indicate a late date, as well as other possible later Persian loanwords.⁵⁵ Some argue also that Solomon's era was not unique in having exotic trade and building materials. Other later kings had these networks, and a vast international trade was common after the exile, within the Persian empire.⁵⁶ To account for Solomon's name, the author may be drawing on a past tradition of Solomonic love poems to compile this text, or a later editor assigned Solomon's name make the Song part of the wisdom corpus.⁵⁷ However, appeals to later language is at best inconclusive, and if Solomon's trade links were vast, it might be no surprise that loan words came in early into Hebrew.⁵⁸ Updates in the language could also account for loan words adopted into the text.⁵⁹ Secondly, Solomon is clearly addressed in the book, not just in 1:1, but his presence and reign pervade throughout the entire song.⁶⁰ This makes sense if the book is partly an apologetic work to Solomon, and dated during the end of his reign.⁶¹ I would tentatively suggest then, that if we take

⁵⁴ Similarly, Van Pelt, "Song of Solomon," 435-6.

⁵⁵ Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 131; Athalya Brenner, "Aromatics and Perfumes in the Song of Songs," *J. Study Old Testam.* 8.25 (1983): 76-79.

⁵⁶ Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 236-7.

⁵⁷ Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, 64-5; Gledhill, *The Message of the Song*, 22, 24-5.

⁵⁸ Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*, Pbk. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2010), 395; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 5.

⁵⁹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 5.

⁶⁰ Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books*, 393; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 3.

⁶¹ Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books*, 394.

Ecclesiastes to be a critique of Solomon's view of wisdom after 1 Kings 11, that the Song functions as a critique of his view of love after the same time.^{62,63}

Author and Purpose

It is clear from the above that Solomon is rebuffed heavily. Owing to how Solomon is castigated in the book, Solomon cannot have authored the Song.⁶⁴ Yet the references to grand urban life, description of the royal court and references to the daughters of Jerusalem only make sense if he is somehow the object and apologetic focus of the poem.⁶⁵ The royal imagery serves both to extol and eviscerate him.⁶⁶ This imagery buttresses the message of the book as that of redeeming love and marriage. Elsewhere the book uses imagery of the garden to do this as well. It is in these places that the couple's love-making takes place. The language conjures up a return to Eden, depicting a redeemed covenant marriage, as man and woman return to the garden to enjoy each other without shame (Gen. 2:25, Song. 2:3-13, 4:12-5:1, 5:2-6:3, 6:11, 7:10-13, 8:13-14). It makes sense that the author would write defending true marriage since King Solomon was falling in this area to the detriment of the kingdom.⁶⁷ The author wants to sing of the glories of marriage once more in a culture so toxically affected by Solomon. Both he and the people need to be won over by this song to extol again the majesty of marriage, and God's way and law. This model thus helps us clear

⁶² See Belcher Ecclesiastes, 439-456. Contra Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books*, 392, who suggests that Solomon is extolled for his love poetry and thus connected to wisdom literature in this title.

⁶³ Richard Belcher Jr., "Ecclesiastes," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016), 444, 453-54.

⁶⁴ Contra Hamilton, *Song of Songs*, 43 and Wenham et al., *New Bible Commentary*, 619. The book is not about Solomon in his youth either, before his descent into lust and polygamy as the Biblical text is silent on this period, if any happened. His first marriage seems to be only to Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kings 3:1) and his legacy with women is spelt out fully in 1 Kings 11. See Longman, *Song of Songs*, 3.

⁶⁵ Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, 64.

⁶⁶ Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 298.

⁶⁷ Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 299; Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 247.

up Solomon's role in a book that bears his name and shadow, while accounting for the impossibility of him authoring it (Song 1:1).⁶⁸

Christological and pastoral implications

Where is true glory, might, affirmation and intimacy found? That is a massive question for our culture today. The Song extols the marriage of two simple Israelites as glorious while showing up the false idol of easy polygamous, self-serving love, equated with royalty and might in Solomon's reign. Today, marriage needs to be proclaimed as excellent in the same way as the Song, to be held in honor by all (1 Cor. 7:1-5, Heb. 13:14). Men and women today are deceived in thinking that they, like Solomon, will find more pleasure in acquiring multiple lovers all around them than being devoted to one in marriage. Our culture prizes this sexual promiscuity in the form of pornography, erotic novels, and 'sleeping around'. 'Affairs' are deemed more exciting than marriage and a Christian sexual ethic is increasingly scoffed at in our culture. Yet the Song functions as an apologetic to show up the false promises offered by the idol of sex. The reality is that they promise intimacy, power and glory, but leave us empty, ashamed and alone. The Song offers Solomon and us something better: unashamed, awesome and intimate love. Marriage itself is not perfect, even the Song shows there are troubles and conflicts in it (Song 2:15, 5:2-8)! But exclusive marriage is where real glory lies.

Yet, in calling Solomon to revere marriage, the Song calls him to return faithfully to the God who married his people, exclusively, gloriously and wholly (Ezek. 16:6-14). All

⁶⁸ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 3, 6. I have neglected to discuss whether a woman authored the book or not, seeing as Longman put it, such arguments seem superfluous and assume theories of literature that insist upon female authorship when she is the primary speaker in the book. Nobody knows the exact identity of the author. Men have an interest in women subjects also and love. See Longman, *Song of Songs*, 8-9.

human marriages are imperfect, even in the Song. But they picture of the greater relationship our hearts yearn for: this exclusive loving covenant relationship with God. The great news of the gospel is that Christ offers that to us all through faith. Though He was God and King, robed with glory, He was not beheld as a great king, like the bridegroom of the song (Song. 1:2-4, 3:6-11). Instead He was mocked, beaten, rejected and crucified (Mark 15:23-32). He was crowned with thorns, mockingly made to wear purple (Song 3:10, John 19:1-3).⁶⁹ But on the cross, His heart was joyous as He was, in that, marrying us (Song 3:10-11, Heb. 12:1-2). Through Christ's death for His people, He joins Himself with us, cleanses us of our sin, crowns us with glory and assure us of His eternal exclusive love (Eph. 5:25-27, Rev. 5:9-10, 21:1-4). Our idolatry and love of other loves only brings death, but Christ brings us life through His great love for us. He saves us from our self-serving sin and wins our hearts thorough His sacrificial love. His devotion causes us to reciprocate to Him and to those around us, especially to our spouses if we are married (Eph. 5:28-33. 1 John 4:19-21). Thus, the Song does not merely exalt marriage, but looks forward to Christ, the one in whom no other love can compare (Rom. 8:36-39).⁷⁰

⁶⁹ J. Robert Wright, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 1st edition. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2005), 9:330. Throughout this essay I have refrained from sharing much on the Fathers or Reformers views, given their allegorical interpretations, but they are helpful here in seeing how the royal theme points to Christ.

⁷⁰ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 300.

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